

A curriculum for life

The case for statutory Personal, Social, Health and Economic (PSHE) education

“There is much more to be done by the Government to deliver ‘a curriculum for life’. By making PSHE education a statutory entitlement, with an expectation that schools will incorporate local issues of key importance to their pupils, we believe that schools would re-prioritise PSHE education and retain the flexibility to meet pupils’ needs.”

Young People’s Select Committee *Curriculum for Life* report, January 2014

“PSHE education requires improvement and the situation appears to have worsened. This would not be tolerated in other subjects. We accept the argument that statutory status is needed. The statutory requirement should have minimal prescription of content to ensure schools have flexibility to respond to local needs and priorities.”

Commons Education Committee *Life Lessons* report, February 2015

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Executive summary

"I've recently been told Key Stage 3 PSHE will go to people who have space on their timetable and not those who have had training. I've also been told I don't have a budget for next year."

"PSHE should be central to what we do, but instead it is on the periphery and taught by teaching assistants while the teachers do their planning for other lessons."

"If PSHE was to become compulsory it would raise its profile among staff and pupils. At present it is often seen as a timetable-filler which creates an 'It's just PSHE' mentality."

Today's pupils are growing up in a rapidly changing world, full of opportunities but with few guarantees. PSHE education is the curriculum subject which prepares pupils for life and work in this changing world. There is strong evidence that, when delivered by trained teachers in line with best practice, this 'curriculum for life' is popular with parents, and helps children and young people to stay safe online and offline, to enjoy better physical and emotional health, to develop character and resilience, to achieve academically and to improve their employment prospects.

Yet this potential is unfulfilled: Ofsted's most recent report on PSHE education, tellingly entitled *Not Yet Good Enough*, highlighted the need for major improvements and suggested that lack of teacher confidence means that the subject is not taught rigorously, with topics such as mental health and safe use of technology left out of the curriculum altogether by many schools. The report suggests that millions of pupils miss out each year on high-quality lessons which prepare them for life and work, while the Commons Education Committee has suggested that the picture is 'deteriorating'.

Non-statutory status is at the root of these problems. 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. Statutory status for PSHE education at all key stages would ensure that teachers are given the necessary resources, training and curriculum time to realise the subject's potential and meet the needs of their pupils, a vastly preferable alternative to maintaining an inadequate status quo.

Statutory status for PSHE education is supported by 92% of pupils, 91% of parents, 88% of teachers and 85% of business leaders, as well as over 100 expert organisations and a host of leading Parliamentarians from across the political spectrum, including the Commons Education Committee and the Home Affairs Committee and the chairs of Commons Health, Women and Equalities and Business, Innovation and Skills Committees. PSHE pedagogy is currently being strengthened through major, evidence-based development programmes and robust safeguards exist to ensure provision is appropriate for pupils of all ages and supported by parents.

This document sets out the case for statutory status for PSHE education, drawing on the views of parents, teachers and pupils in particular. Throughout the document we make reference to a 'curriculum for life', the term the Members of the Youth Parliament have used when calling improvements in PSHE provision. It is time for their voices to be heard.

1. Introduction

Today's school pupils are growing up in a rapidly changing world, full of huge opportunities but with few guarantees and many risks and anxieties too. While some risk-taking behaviours, such as substance misuse, appear to be in decline, [other risks are emerging](#), particularly in relation to pupils' mental health, relationships and their safety, both online and offline.¹ PSHE education is the school subject which addresses personal safety, including online, and mental health and prepares pupils for life and work in a changing world. As set out in this document, there is huge demand for this kind of 'curriculum for life' from pupils, parents and business leaders.

PSHE pedagogy

PSHE education covers core knowledge relating to issues such as online and offline safety, relationships, healthy lifestyles and careers, taught in a way which is appropriate to the age and maturity of pupils. The subject is tied together by the development of the key life skills and attributes – often termed 'character' – which pupils need to thrive both in their youth and in adult life. These key skills and characteristics – such as self-management, empathy, critical thinking, communication, resilience, teamwork and negotiation – are crucial for success in pupils' personal professional and academic success, and the PSHE Association is currently developing resources for schools funded by the Department for Education's character education grant programme to help schools place even greater emphasis on them.

The PSHE Association's [Programme of Study for PSHE education](#)² sets out how schools should link their PSHE provision to Citizenship, Religious Education and other subjects to create a 'curriculum for life' for their pupils. It shows how schools should tailor their provision using local data, engagement with parents and community leaders and consultation with pupils. This means that while the pedagogy of PSHE education should remain the same wherever the subject is taught, the issues covered and the way the timetable is arranged will be based on local circumstances and therefore varies from school to school and from key stage to key stage.

The current status of the subject

PSHE education is currently a non-statutory subject: schools do not have to teach it at any key stage, and when lessons are provided they are often not as rigorously planned or delivered as other subjects. The status of PSHE is different from all other subjects as it is neither part of the national curriculum – like subjects such as maths or science – nor part of the basic curriculum, like Religious Education. While assessment of pupil progress is a core part of PSHE pedagogy, it is usually undertaken informally by teachers or pupils themselves; PSHE education is not a formally examined subject.

The case for statutory status

As demonstrated in the next section, there is strong evidence that when delivered by teachers trained in the subject, in line with best practice principles, PSHE education can have a significant impact, both for individual pupils and for schools, families, communities and the wider economy. The document goes on to show that current provision is simply not good enough and sets out how statutory status for the subject would help to ensure that this potential is realised, bringing PSHE education into line with the high standards of rigour which are expected for all other subjects.

2. Evidence of the potential impact of PSHE education

When delivered by trained teachers in line with [best practice principles](#),³ PSHE education has huge potential to **help pupils to stay safe, promote their physical and emotional health and develop the character, resilience and skills they need to succeed academically and in the workplace**. Evidence for the impact of PSHE education is set out in more detail below.

Pupil safeguarding and healthy relationships

When pupils receive lessons on sex, consent and relationships, their first sexual activity is likely to occur later, and is more likely to be safe and consensual. They are also more likely to report relationship abuse and less likely to have unplanned pregnancies.

There is no question PSHE should be on every curriculum as it is at the frontline of child protection.

Peter Wanless, Chief Executive, NSPCC, August 2015

A key part of preventing child sexual exploitation is teaching young people how to spot the signs of grooming. It is vital the government prioritises lessons about healthy relationships.

Javed Khan, Chief Executive, Barnardo's, August 2015

PSHE education teaches pupils to challenge unhealthy and exploitative relationships, both to safeguard them from being abused and prevent them from engaging in abusive behaviours themselves. A series of [recent inquiries into high profile cases of child sexual exploitation \(CSE\)](#)⁴ have recommended that schools teach about subjects such as consent and healthy relationships to ensure that all children and young people know how to keep themselves and others safe.

PSHE education also teaches pupils about other issues which can contribute to exploitation, such as drug and alcohol misuse and online safety. The [report of the inquiry into CSE in Oxfordshire](#),⁵ for example, noted that the local authority had taken

steps to provide universal drug and alcohol education to secondary pupils, given the prevalence of these issues in local cases of CSE. The [National Crime Agency's CEOP Command](#)⁶ has noted that education on online exploitation 'most effectively sits within a PSHE programme' in which issues of communication and relationships are explored.

The evidence of the impact of this learning is significant. A [recent international Cochrane Study](#)⁷ suggests that when pupils receive lessons on sex and relationships, disclosures about abuse and exploitation increase significantly. Recent authoritative [surveys of sexual attitudes and lifestyles involving 15,000 British adults](#)⁸ suggest that those who cite school lessons as their main source of sex and relationships education were less likely to have first intercourse before age 16 and more likely to have used contraception and say that their decision to have sex was autonomous and that both partners were consenting. Those whose main source of information was school lessons were also less likely to have an unplanned pregnancy. These findings are backed by a series of international studies ([Kirby and Laris, 2009](#); [UNESCO, 2009](#); [NICE, 2010](#)⁹).

Statutory status for PSHE education is [backed](#) by the NSPCC, Barnardo's, The Children's Society, the Association of Independent Local Safeguarding Children Boards Chairs, the Association of Police and Crime Commissioners, the Children's Commissioner and many other child safety experts.¹⁰ It was also backed by the Commons [Home Affairs Committee](#) after its inquiry into female genital mutilation,¹¹ while a [Parliamentary Inquiry into preventing violence against women and girls](#)¹² stated that Britain would be better placed to meet its obligations under the Istanbul Convention on preventing violence against women and girls if PSHE was statutory.

Physical health and risk-taking behaviours

Educating pupils about their health reduces risk-taking behaviours and improves diet and exercise levels in line with Government efforts to reduce obesity. The emergency first aid component of PSHE education could also improve cardiac arrest survival rates.

There is strong evidence of the health impacts of the kind of learning provided by PSHE education: a recent [Cochrane Review](#)¹³ demonstrated that health education programmes like PSHE education, as part of a whole-school approach, can improve pupils' health behaviours, positively affecting their diet and lifestyle (in line with Government efforts to reduce obesity) and reducing substance misuse; it also showed promising results in relation to reducing bullying and violence. A [DfE review](#) of PSHE education provision¹⁴ also found a range of positive outcomes from PSHE provision, including improved attitudes to health, being able to deal with personal difficulties and improved behaviour. [A](#)

[Cochrane review of universal preventative programmes](#)¹⁵ shows that such programmes are connected with reductions in the use of alcohol, tobacco and cannabis by young people.

A [British Medical Journal](#) editorial recommended statutory status for PSHE education as a means to improve pupil health,¹⁶ while the [Chief Medical Officer's 2012 Annual Report](#)¹⁷ states that '*PSHE at school is an important part of the way in which schools can contribute to improving resilience and health among children*'. Statutory status for PSHE education is [backed](#) by six medical royal colleges, the Faculty of Public Health and the Royal Society for Public Health.¹⁸

There is also good evidence to suggest that emergency life-saving skills programmes delivered through PSHE education could have a significant impact on survival rates from cardiac arrest. [In Norway, where first aid has been a compulsory part of the curriculum for decades, survival rates for cardiac arrest outside hospital are 52%; in the United Kingdom, that figure is 12%.](#)¹⁹

PSHE should be a routine part of all children's education

Chief Medical Officer, 2015

There should be a universal requirement for schools to teach age appropriate PSHE ... The evidence, along with the views of pupils, teachers and parents, supports this position

Public Health England, July 2014

The evidence shows that PSHE education can improve the physical and psychosocial well-being of pupils. A virtuous cycle can be achieved, whereby pupils with better health and well-being achieve better academically
PSHE Education: A Review of Impact and Effective Practice, DfE, 2015

Mental health

With Government placing increased emphasis on mental health, there is growing evidence that when delivered well, PSHE education can promote positive outcomes relating to emotional health, reduce stigma and help pupils learn where to go if they have mental health concerns. There are also real risks related to the delivery of lessons about mental health by untrained teachers, which statutory status could help to address.

Poor mental health is the key emerging risk for children and young people according to recent research ([SHEU, 2015](#); [Cabinet Office, 2015](#)). PSHE education is the school subject through which mental health is addressed, with three key areas of focus:

- promoting positive mental health among pupils through evidence-based programmes
- giving pupils information on where to go if they are worried about their own mental health or that of a friend or family member
- reducing mental health stigma by teaching about the issue openly and honestly.

In its 2015 *[Inquiry into Parity of Esteem for Mental Health](#)*,²⁰ the All Party Parliamentary Group on Mental Health recommended that '*mental health education should form a core part of the PSHE curriculum, to promote wellbeing and resilience in children and young people and prevent mental health problems developing*'. [Recent research](#)²¹ suggests that 93% of universal mental health programmes in schools are delivered through PSHE education, and statutory status for PSHE education is supported by leading bodies including the Royal College of Psychiatrists.

There is good evidence of the impact of this kind of learning. According to a [meta-analysis](#)²² of 75 studies on universal school-based social, emotional and/or behavioural programmes, these lessons could benefit pupils in seven outcome measures including social skills, antisocial behaviour, positive self-image, mental health, and prosocial behaviour. A [Cochrane Review of the Health Promoting Schools programme](#)²³ also identifies an impact on bullying.

While there is strong evidence of the potential positive impact of high-quality PSHE teaching on pupils' mental health, there is also clear evidence of the dangers of poorly taught lessons on the subject. There are particular risks in relation to lessons on eating disorders and self-harm which, when taught by inexperienced or untrained teachers, could prove 'instructive' to vulnerable students ([Knightsmith, 2015](#)²⁴). Due to its non-statutory status, responsibility for teaching PSHE education is often given to untrained, unprepared and inexperienced teachers – a highly risky situation that urgently needs to be addressed. Statutory status would ensure high-quality training in the subject for teachers and increase the number of lessons taught by more experienced teachers, reducing the risks and increasing the potential for positive impacts.

Building character and key skills for life and work

The non-academic skills and attributes acquired through PSHE education – often termed ‘character’ – have a positive impact on academic performance and life chances as well as being key to employability and social mobility.

Nobel Prize-winning economist [James Heckman](#) has long argued for the impact of non-cognitive skills on academic attainment and employability.²⁵ A [review of the evidence](#)²⁶ by Heckman and others concludes that these skills and attitudes are malleable into adolescence (and comparatively more so than cognitive skills), with teachers playing a measurable role in their development. Research suggests that the kind of classroom-based learning delivered through PSHE education can develop these social and emotional skills. Both the [Department for Education evidence review](#)²⁷ quoted above and an [Education Endowment Foundation research review](#)²⁸ have concluded that there is strong evidence that these programmes have a significant impact on attitudes, skills and emotional outcomes.

The PSHE Association is currently working under funding from the Department for Education’s character education grant programme to redevelop the PSHE education curriculum to focus more on key skills and attributes. The revised curriculum is being trialled by 12 schools (both state and independent) and will be launched more widely in March 2016.

Academic success

There is strong evidence to suggest that the focus of PSHE education on health, wellbeing and key skills has the potential to significantly aid academic attainment.

The knock-on benefits of PSHE education in terms of academic achievement are significant: a group of leading academics in an editorial in the [British Medical Journal](#) recommended statutory status for PSHE education,²⁹ noting that *‘education and health are synergistic ... students in better health do better academically’*, and identifying countries such as Finland and Singapore which have better academic success than England and place a greater emphasis on pupil health. This finding is backed by a [DfE-commissioned report](#) which found that pupils with higher levels of emotional wellbeing have higher levels of academic success,³⁰ and is further emphasised by [Ofsted’s finding](#) that outstanding schools almost always have outstanding PSHE education.³¹

Research also suggests that programmes to build the non-cognitive skills set out above impact on pupil attainment, attendance and behaviour: [an analysis of over 200 social and emotional skills programmes](#)³² run in schools, predominantly delivered through PSHE education, demonstrated improved attitudes and behaviour in pupils and an 11% improvement in academic achievement. Similarly, a study of [emotional resilience programmes in 22 UK schools](#) found short-term improvement in attainment rates, particularly amongst those eligible for free school meals and pupils who had been performing at below national average in maths and English.³³ The [Education Endowment Foundation](#)³⁴ recommends such programmes as a way to improve literacy and numeracy amongst disadvantaged pupils.

Employability

A curriculum for life must include preparation for the world of work. The Confederation of British Industry (CBI), British Chambers of Commerce, Federation of Small Businesses and the Institute of Directors have all called for an education system that provides school-leavers with key skills and characteristics to thrive in the world of work. Studies suggest these skills could have a £100bn impact on the UK economy and PSHE education has the potential to be a key subject in which these skills are developed.

PSHE education gives pupils information on the world of work, challenges stereotypes about different careers and helps pupils to develop the skills they need to succeed in the workplace. As set out above, there is strong evidence that these skills can be developed through classroom-based activity such as PSHE education. The impact of improving employability skills in schools could be significant, not just for individual pupils but for the whole economy – according to a CBI-backed study, [such](#)

PSHE education provides an opportunity to provide or enhance skills such as perseverance, conflict resolution, emotional intelligence, self-management, self-respect, team work, locus of control, time and stress management.

PSHE Education: A Review of Impact and Effective Practice, DfE, 2015

[skills could make a £109bn contribution to the UK economy over the next five years.](#)³⁵

A [2011 study](#) showed that such skills are more important in determining life chances at age 30 than academic qualifications,³⁶ and businesses want them too. As [Neil Carberry, CBI Director for Employment and Skills](#), puts it: “the right attitudes and attributes in people such as resilience, respect, enthusiasm and creativity are just as important as academic and technical skills”.³⁷

The social mobility case for action to build employability skills

The [Social Mobility and Child Poverty Commission](#) recommends ‘purposive’ action to develop these non-academic skills and attributes to tackle intergenerational disadvantage.³⁸ [More recent research](#) from the Commission into non-educational barriers to top jobs demonstrates how important employability skills are to employers, and how disadvantaged pupils have fewer opportunities to develop these skills, meaning there is a strong social mobility case for action.³⁹ Independent schools, in which PSHE education is already an expectation, [place a much greater emphasis on the subject](#). 30% of the demand for training from the PSHE Association comes from the independent sector in spite of that sector serving just 7% of the population.

There is, therefore, an imperative for state schools to ensure that their pupils have the same opportunities to develop these crucial skills as their independent school counterparts. However, [PSHE Association research](#) shows that just one in three business leaders think schools are doing enough to equip pupils with skills for work.⁴⁰ [The CBI](#),⁴¹ the [British Chambers of Commerce](#),⁴² the [Institute of Directors](#)⁴³ and the [Federation of Small Businesses](#)⁴⁴ have also made this point. According to a PSHE Association/YouGov survey, [85% of business leaders](#) would support a move to statutory status for PSHE education to ensure that all pupils develop these key skills.⁴⁵ The PSHE Association is calling for education and business leaders to come together to develop and accredit a PSHE curriculum framework for schools to use which focuses on these skills, a move supported by 77% of business leaders according to the same YouGov survey.

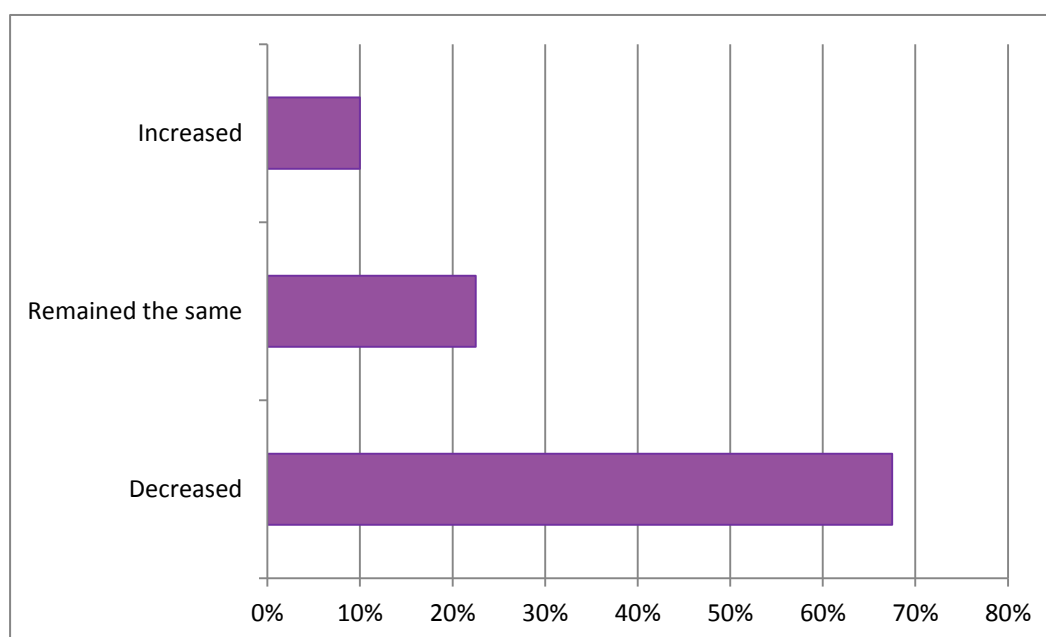
3. The state of current provision

As set out in the previous section, PSHE education, underpinned by a focus on key skills, attitudes and attributes, has huge potential in terms of pupil safety, pupil health, academic attainment and employability. This potential is not realised, however, with provision at all key stages ‘not good enough’ according to Ofsted.

In 2013, Ofsted published a report into current PSHE provision. Entitled *Not Yet Good Enough*,⁴⁶ the report suggested that while provision was outstanding in 20% of schools (almost all of which were schools rated outstanding by Ofsted in their most recent whole-school inspection), provision needed improvement in at least 40% of schools, with lessons too often delivered by teachers with insufficient training and curriculum time. As a result, key issues such as mental health and prevention of abuse were left off the curriculum altogether by some schools.

The [Commons Education Committee](#) has suggested that this position may be ‘deteriorating’,⁴⁷ an assessment backed up by recent research. Surveys from the NASUWT union suggested a reduction in planned provision of 11% in 2013 and 14% in 2014, while the [PSHE Association annual survey](#) in 2014, which took responses from 40 local authority leads working with over 4,000 schools covering all key stages, suggested that provision had decreased in more than two-thirds of areas in recent years.⁴⁸ These low standards are simply unacceptable.

Figure 1: Responses from local authority leads to the question ‘Has PSHE provision increased, decreased or remained the same in schools in your area in recent years?’



The impact of non-statutory status on pupils

While pupils overwhelmingly highlight the need for high-quality PSHE, they do not feel that provision is of a sufficiently high standard to give them the information they need

The impact of the trends set out above is directly felt by pupils. We know how important PSHE is to pupils (with 92% saying it should be an entitlement for all), yet according to [a recent report](#), only around 23% find lessons on emotional health quite or very useful⁴⁹. Just 43% of Year 6 pupils surveyed in the same report stated that teachers had talked to them about changes to the body as they grow up.

These findings are backed by the Health and Social Care Information Centre's 2015 report into [Smoking, Drinking and Drug Use among Young People in England](#).⁵⁰ This suggests that over 40% of pupils do not feel they get enough information in school on smoking, alcohol or drug use. A [2014 NUS survey](#) found that while young people think

that sex and relationships education (SRE) is crucial, just one third thought the SRE they themselves received was useful,⁵¹ while Girlguiding's 2015 [Girls' Attitudes Survey](#) found that fewer than half of young women had talked about mental health in lessons at school (44%).⁵²

Quotes from pupils who contributed to the UK Youth Parliament's Curriculum for Life inquiry

"My teachers often see PSHE as a time to set some easy work so they can mark work from other subjects or prepare the next lesson."

"PSHE is not taken seriously enough by schools like mine. It should be compulsory."

"If the Government makes PSHE mandatory, children will be able to explore issues in a safe environment"

The view from teachers

The status of the subject is inextricably linked to the current low standards of PSHE provision by teachers. Comments from education professionals made through the PSHE Association annual survey 2015 paint a clear picture of teachers seeing the potential of PSHE education and being keen to raise standards but being held back by its non-statutory status.

"PSHE is undervalued and is often regarded as an easy unimportant lesson that can easily be dropped during busier periods such as Christmas play rehearsals or test revision."

"My school has always been committed to PSHE, but it has become increasingly difficult to fit it in. PSHE should be central to what we do, but instead it is on the periphery, taught by Higher Level Teaching Assistants when they cover PPA [planning, preparation and assessment] time."

"I've recently been told KS3 PSHE will go to people who have space on their timetable and not those who have had training. I've also been told I don't have a budget for next year."

"There is no consistency of staff and PSHE is used to balance school budgets by ensuring those teachers that have spare time on their timetable are put to teach PSHE."

"It is a subject that is more likely to be dropped/missed out in a week if other things come up because it isn't statutory."

4. The case for statutory status to improve provision

As set out in the previous section, PSHE education provision is not good enough in schools despite the importance of the issues it covers. Here we set out the case for statutory status in order to ensure that all pupils receive the ‘curriculum for life’ they deserve and all teachers are trained and supported to teach it to a high standard.

The links between non-statutory status and reduced quality of provision have been made by leading teacher unions including the [National Association of Head Teachers](#),⁵³ the [Association for Teachers and Lecturers](#),⁵⁴ [Voice](#),⁵⁵ the [National Union of Teachers](#)⁵⁶ and the [NAHT Edge](#),⁵⁷ as well as the [National Governors Association](#).⁵⁸ PSHE Association members working in schools directly link non-statutory status to a number of trends which limit the quality of provision, including:

- learning delivered through occasional off-timetable ‘drop-down’ days rather than regular timetabled lessons building learning week by week
- schools giving responsibility for PSHE lessons to teaching assistants or teachers with spare lessons, rather than teachers with training in the subject
- PSHE leads having fewer resources and lower status in schools than other subject leads/departments
- perhaps most worryingly, pupils believing that the subject is not valued by their school.

Initial teacher education, at present, places little emphasis on PSHE education, and the withdrawal of national funding for the PSHE CPD programme has meant that the number of teachers taking part in the programme [has fallen by 90%](#) since 2010.⁵⁹

The view from teachers

“I don’t understand why PSHE is not statutory but yet we are required to meet outcomes that only it can meet. I understand the reservations about having a nationally imposed programme but I don’t see why we can’t adopt a locally agreed syllabus.”

“If PSHE was to become compulsory it would raise its profile among staff and pupils. At present it is often seen as a timetable-filler which creates an ‘It’s just PSHE’ mentality.”

The view from teaching and education unions

It is time to make PSHE a statutory part of the curriculum. All children need and deserve this development, delivered at an appropriate time and age by confident and well-trained staff.

Russell Hobby, General Secretary, National Association of Head Teachers

Making PSHE statutory is the key to improving provision. At present PSHE has too little time in the curriculum, and is almost always accorded very low status and few resources in schools.

Christine Blower, General Secretary, National Union of Teachers

The introduction of statutory PSHE – something ATL has consistently campaigned for – would enable appropriate training for staff and more time during timetabled hours.

Mary Bousted, General Secretary, Association of Teachers and Lecturers

The view from the Commons Education Committee

In 2015, having examined the status of the subject in a thorough inquiry which took over 400 evidence submissions, the cross-party [Commons Education Committee](#) concluded:

'PSHE requires improvement in 40% of schools. The situation appears to have worsened over time ... this situation would not be tolerated in other subjects This must change, and we accept the argument that statutory status is needed for PSHE ... The statutory requirement should have minimal prescription to ensure that schools have flexibility to respond to local needs and priorities'

The implications of a move to statutory status on standards of provision are set out below.

The potential impact of statutory status

PSHE is the subject that prepares children for the rest of their lives yet it's often cut from the timetable to make space for other subjects. This is why statutory status is so important.

Julia Peters, Girlguiding Young Advocate

Statutory status for PSHE education would send a clear message to schools about the high standards which should be expected of the subject. As the only non-statutory, non-examined subject, PSHE education is uniquely vulnerable to falling off the curriculum. Statutory status would ensure that every pupil received regular PSHE education lessons from trained teachers.

Maintaining flexibility for schools

A statutory entitlement to PSHE education would be fully compatible with flexibility for teachers to continue to tailor their PSHE provision to the needs of their pupils (based on local data, consultation with pupils, parents and communities) and freedom for heads to be able to fit the PSHE curriculum into their timetable arrangements and ensure teaching is in line with the school's ethos. While not dictating the content of lessons to schools, statutory status would provide clarity that PSHE is a subject which needs to be held to the same high standards as other subjects, taught through regular lessons in adequate curriculum time by trained teachers.

Wider benefits

Statutory status would send a message to the whole education community, including teacher training providers, that the subject should be prioritised. It would also bring the statutory curriculum into step with government aims to deliver positive outcomes on mental health, obesity, employability, character, British values, preventing radicalisation and, crucially, safeguarding. At present, the expectation is that schools should achieve these outcomes but the subject through which they can be achieved is non-statutory, a confusing position for schools.

Finally, statutory status would provide crucial balance in school accountability: ministers have raised the stakes in terms of performance in academic subjects, driving for higher standards for all pupils. If this isn't balanced by raised expectations for PSHE education, standards of provision will continue to drop. Statutory status would ensure that lessons were taught with greater rigour by trained teachers, in line with expectations for other subjects.

5. Support for statutory status

Support for statutory status from respected public figures, expert bodies, business leaders, teachers, parents and children and young people continues to build.

Public support for statutory PSHE education

Statutory status for PSHE education is supported by:

- **Pupils:** [92% of young people](#) who have received PSHE lessons say that all pupils should receive them.⁶⁰ The UK Youth Parliament has made '*a curriculum for life*' a campaign priority for four years in a row, with [almost 970,000 young people](#) taking part in the process in 2015.⁶¹ Statutory status is backed by leading youth bodies including Girlguiding, the National Union of Students, the British Youth Council and UK Youth.
- **Parents:** [91% of parents](#) say that all schools should teach PSHE education.⁶² Statutory status is supported by leading parent bodies including [Mumsnet, PTA UK and the National Governors Association](#).⁶³
- **Teachers:** [an NUT survey](#) showed that 88% of its members want PSHE to be statutory⁶⁴ and teaching unions [NUT, NAHT, NAHT Edge, Voice and ATL](#) have all called for statutory status.
- **Business leaders:** [85% of business leaders](#) support statutory status according to a recent YouGov survey undertaken on behalf of the PSHE Association.⁶⁵

Political support for statutory status

As set out above, the cross-party [Commons Education Committee](#) called in February for statutory status for PSHE education at all key stages.⁶⁶ This echoed an earlier call for statutory status from the [Home Affairs Committee](#) after its inquiry into the prevention of female genital mutilation in June 2014,⁶⁷ while the [Parliamentary inquiry into the UK's efforts to prevent violence against women and girls](#) stated that Britain would be better placed to meet its obligations to prevent gender-based violence if PSHE education was statutory.⁶⁸

The fact that three cross-party committees have been so supportive of PSHE education reflects a wider political consensus on the subject. Statutory PSHE education is [backed by senior figures and former Ministers from across the political spectrum](#),⁶⁹ while [a ten minute rule motion on statutory status](#),⁷⁰ debated in the Commons in July 2015, was carried with a majority of 183 in favour to 44 against. MPs from all sides of the House of Commons voted in favour of the motion. [A September 2015 study by the Dods public affairs agency](#) supported this finding, suggesting that 73% of MPs support statutory status for PSHE education and just 14% of MPs oppose it.

Experts calling for statutory status

The campaign for statutory status is backed by over 100 expert bodies including six royal medical colleges, two royal societies, five leading teaching and education unions, the NSPCC, Barnardo's, the British Red Cross, the Children's Society, the Association of Police and Crime Commissioners and many others (a full list is available on the [PSHE Association website](#))⁷¹. [Public Health England](#) has also called for a universal requirement for schools to teach PSHE.⁷²

6. Key principles for statutory PSHE

As set out above, there is a strong consensus behind the notion of a ‘curriculum for life’ for all pupils. This should be built on solid foundations and appropriate for all school settings, so the PSHE Association has developed a set of recommended principles to apply to statutory PSHE to ensure high standards of rigour, balance and parental involvement.

Best practice dictates that PSHE education should be:

- **Taught by teachers who have had training in the subject:** this means ensuring the subject is a key part of all initial teacher education routes and that there are high-quality CPD opportunities available for existing teachers.
- **Informed by a range of best practice models:** expert bodies and teacher unions should be consulted, taking full account of the need for sustainable workloads for teachers. The emphasis should be on improving quality of provision without increasing the burden on teachers or, necessarily, the number of teaching hours each week in every school (acknowledging that some schools give PSHE education time on the curriculum, but because teachers are not trained, the lessons are not as rigorous or effective as they could be).
- **Designed and delivered by teachers to meet their pupils and community’s needs,** with support from heads and senior leadership teams. This should include early consultation with parents and community leaders, and teaching which is in line with the ethos of the school. Any statutory provision for PSHE education must recognise the need for schools with a religious character to teach the subject in the context of the school’s foundation, while ensuring that lessons reflect a reasonable range of religious, cultural and other perspectives.
- **Taught in regular timetabled lessons** providing an opportunity for developmental learning, with clear cross-curricular links made with other subjects as part of a curriculum planned by the school. Curriculum content should be determined by schools using best practice guidance, local data and assessment of pupil need and relevant statutory duties in consultation with pupils, parents and community leaders. This localised approach, based on pupil need, parental consultation and the professional judgement of schools, is preferable to a rigid curriculum set nationally.
- **Balanced, factually-accurate and appropriate lessons:** learning in PSHE education should be balanced, factually accurate, always cover the law and a range of views and beliefs on a given issue, while being appropriate to the age and maturity of the pupils and respectful of their religious and cultural backgrounds.
- **Avoid a ‘parade of topics’ approach:** teaching resources produced by the PSHE Association under a Department for Education character education grant, recommends that rather than teaching a series of topics, schools should focus on key skills and characteristics they want pupils to develop. This approach is more rigorous than a topic-centred approach and makes better use of limited curriculum time.

As set out above, it is critical that parents are involved when a school’s PSHE curriculum is being developed. While there is widespread consensus amongst parents, governors and parent-teacher associations about the need for PSHE education, it is understandable that parents will want to ensure that a school’s programme is appropriate for their children. Ofsted has found no evidence of inappropriate teaching, but we should not be complacent and statutory duties are in place to ensure that schools engage parents as they develop their PSHE programme. Statutory status for PSHE education could be supported by enhanced statutory guidance for schools relating to parental involvement and more rigorous monitoring of provision by Ofsted.

7. Conclusion

There is an overwhelming demand for statutory PSHE education – from teachers, parents and young people themselves. It's important that school leaders and governors take PSHE seriously and improve their provision by investing in training for teachers and putting PSHE lessons on the school timetable. Statutory status will help ensure all of this happens.

Commons Education Committee, February 2015

Schools should ensure every pupil has the opportunity to develop and thrive. That can only happen if they are prepared with the right amount of time set aside for PSHE education. Young people are calling on the Government to do the right thing – ensure PSHE education is statutory as soon as possible.

Mita Desai, Chair, British Youth Council, June 2015

When delivered by trained teachers in consultation with communities, parents and pupils, PSHE education can contribute to a range of positive outcomes for children and young people: keeping them healthy and safe, both online and offline, improving their academic performance, preparing them for the workplace and building the character and resilience they will need to thrive in a changing world. There are significant potential social and economic benefits of this kind of education too, yet this potential can only be fulfilled by raising the status of the subject.

'It's only PSHE, it's not even statutory' is an all-too-common view in schools. This simply isn't good enough. Statutory status would send a clear message about the importance of a subject currently in the uniquely vulnerable position of being both non-statutory and non-examined. It would not only persuade schools but also the whole education system, including teacher training providers, that the subject should be at the core of learning. It would send a message to schools about parity of budgets and status for PSHE leads and it would bring statutory duties on schools into line with government ambitions to deliver positive outcomes on safeguarding and preparing children for life in modern Britain.

The government has raised the stakes in terms of school performance in academic subjects, and if this is not balanced by raised expectations for PSHE education, standards of provision will continue to be unacceptably low, leaving millions young people without the skills to thrive in the modern world. The Ofsted *Not Yet Good Enough* report was based on visits to schools in 2012. Three years later, evidence suggests that the position is deteriorating. Statutory status would arrest this decline and be a catalyst for positive change: initial teacher education providers, CPD providers, headteacher trainers, local authorities, academy chains and others would have to respond. The support for statutory status from such organisations demonstrates that the education system stands ready to respond to action from government.

The campaign for statutory status is supported not only by professional bodies but also by pupils, parents and teachers across the country. Teachers and parents are calling for a partnership between home and school to support pupils' personal and social development, while *'a curriculum for life'* has been a campaign priority for the UK Youth Parliament two years in a row, in a process involving hundreds of thousands of young people. 88% of teachers, 91% of parents and 92% of pupils who have received PSHE education believe that it should be an entitlement for all. It is time that these calls for a rigorous curriculum for life are finally heard.

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