

BHA BRIEFING: Review of Personal, Social, Health and Economics (PSHE) Education November 2011



Briefing from the British Humanist Association (BHA)

Until 30 November the Department for Education is running a Review of Personal, Social, Health and Economic (PSHE) Education, including Sex and Relationships Education (SRE), with the aim of improving its quality in state-funded schools.

The BHA has published its draft response to the Review at <http://tinyurl.com/BHAPSHE>, and there is [a summary of key points](#) below, together with more details about the consultation. We would like to encourage MPs and peers to also respond before the November 30 deadline.

In responding to the review, the BHA has worked closely with and through other groups such as the Sex Education Forum (SEF) and the PSHE Association. We have contributed to their responses, and have used their work to inform our own separate response.

We believe it is vital that every young person receives comprehensive, age-appropriate PSHE, including SRE, with no opt-outs for 'faith' schools.

Remit of the Review

The government has set out in the remit of the Review¹ that it *'has already ruled out making PSHE education as a whole a statutory subject within the National Curriculum. It will only propose making new elements of PSHE education statutory, if there is clear evidence of the benefit to pupils of doing so and if, within the National Curriculum review's consideration of the overall statutory burden on schools, it is practical to do so. The Government has no plans to change the law on sex education or parents' right to withdraw their child from sex education.'*

This is hugely disappointing, especially given that proposals under the previous government to make PSHE, including SRE, a part of the National Curriculum received widespread support including from all major parties, all PSHE and SRE practitioners as well as the Church of England and the Catholic Education Service for England and Wales.

However, given the strength of our belief in the importance of statutory SRE and the overwhelming level of support for this position in the last review, we have chosen in our response to call for SRE in its entirety to become statutory.

Responding to the Review

Many will be responding to this review making the case for better PSHE for young people – a case which is widely supported across the political spectrum and by experts, parents, teachers, and young people themselves. The government is particularly looking for evidence and experience, and there is a wealth of good evidence to support the case for teaching the subject to all pupils.

However, there is an increasingly vociferous political and religiously-motivated lobby which seeks to prevent any progress on PSHE and SRE particularly, even including seeking to prevent schools from teaching about the most basic knowledge of human reproduction. This lobby is spreading misinformation about what schools might have to teach if the subject became compulsory.

¹ <http://www.education.gov.uk/consultations/downloadableDocs/PSHE%20Remit%20-%20FINAL%20Version%20word.doc>

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We think it would be particularly effective for parliamentarians at this stage to impress on the government that all young people are entitled to excellent, comprehensive and objective SRE, whichever school they attend, and that many elements of PSHE and SRE (ideally the subject as a whole) should become compulsory parts of the revised curriculum.

Please do make your views known to the Secretary of State for Education.

You can also read the consultation document and respond to it online at <http://tinyurl.com/reviewofpshe>. Feel free to look at and use the BHA's draft response at <http://tinyurl.com/BHAPSHE> and our [summary of key points](#) in constructing your own response. You may also want to look at the Accord Coalition's response², and the Sex Education Forum's preliminary thoughts in their (now-concluded) survey³ (their final response will be published in due course). **You have until the 30 November to respond.**

What's the problem?

An important feature of PSHE is SRE, and the BHA is a long-term advocate⁴ of every young person being entitled to high quality, comprehensive and age-appropriate SRE, with no opt-outs for 'faith' schools. Research shows that the current arrangements for SRE, where schools are required only to teach the basics about human reproduction in science lessons, and about sexually transmitted infections, HIV and AIDS in PSHE, mean that the quality of the subject varies greatly from school to school. Furthermore, we have additional concerns about how SRE is taught in 'faith' schools, if it is taught at all. We know from our work on this subject that religious authorities are keen for state-funded 'faith' schools to be able to teach SRE from subjective, religious perspectives and this is something we oppose.

Our position on SRE: The BHA believes all children are entitled to high quality and comprehensive PSHE, including SRE, to help ensure that they can take more informed and responsible choices. Currently, the provision SRE is patchy, with the standards and scope of the subject matter varying widely across schools. We believe that PSHE, including SRE, should be compulsory, with no parental right of withdrawal, or the ability for schools to amend the way in which it is provided.

Summary of our response

As a member of the Sex Education Forum, the BHA has endorsed its response in our own.

In addition, we have called for the law requiring sex education to be taught in maintained secondary schools to be extended in the following ways:

- Currently, it is only a statutory requirement for maintained secondary schools to teach about sexually transmitted infections, and National Curriculum Science also requires them to teach about anatomy, puberty and the biological aspects of reproduction. We think pupils should also have an entitlement to unbiased information on contraception, STIs, abortion, sexual orientation, and the many forms of family relationship conducive to individual fulfilment and the stability of society

² The Accord Coalition is a wide coalition of organisations which includes religious groups, humanists, trade unions and human rights campaigners, seeking to promote schools that are inclusive of all religions and beliefs. The BHA is a founding member of Accord. You can read their response at <http://accordcoalition.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2011/11/PSHE-Response-Form-FINAL.doc>

³ <https://www.surveymonkey.com/s/VST8GZ3>

⁴ You can read more about our work on PSHE and SRE at <http://www.humanism.org.uk/campaigns/religion-and-schools/sex-and-relationships-education>

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- Academies and Free Schools do not have to teach any sex education. We believe the law should be amended to bring them into line with maintained schools. Amending funding agreements would also be welcome but less positive as this would miss the Academies already in existence
- It is important that SRE is age-appropriate; however, the BHA believes that there is absolutely a place for SRE in primary schools
- We believe the law should be extended to include relationships education, which is of equal importance to sex education

We also raise a number of specific points about the non-statutory frameworks and programmes of study and the guidance on sex and relationships education, including concerns about religion and belief, marriage and civil partnership and sexual orientation.

Finally, in terms of the role of pupils, parents, the school and other local interests in SRE, we emphasise that:

- We believe pupils come first, and that every young child has a right to high-quality, comprehensive sex and relationships education. Therefore, the parental opt-out from SRE should be removed.
- Schools and parents certainly often play a valuable role in supporting SRE, and this is to be welcomed and promoted. But we would be wary of giving them too much ability to influence the SRE policy and programme of the school, as some may seek to deny children aspects of SRE.
- We are concerned that considering local priorities is likely in practice to mean considering local religious priorities. We believe all children have an identical entitlement nationwide and do not see that local priorities should be taken into account.

About the BHA

The British Humanist Association (BHA) is the national charity working on behalf of non-religious people who seek to live ethical and fulfilling lives on the basis of reason and humanity. It is the largest organisation in the UK campaigning for an end to religious privilege and to discrimination based on religion or belief, and for a secular state.

The BHA is a member of the National Children's Bureau Sex Education Forum (SEF) and the Children's Rights Alliance for England. The BHA also sits on the SEF's policy working group, representing a humanist perspective to the policy and parliamentary work of the SEF.

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