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DfE Call for Evidence: Relationships and Sex Education (RSE) and PSHE - Response from National Education Union

The National Education Union (NEU) stands up for the future of education by bringing together more than 450,000 teachers, lecturers, support staff and leaders working in maintained and independent schools and colleges across the UK.

Combining the expertise and experience of both the ATL and NUT, the National Education Union is the UK's largest education union. We are an effective and powerful voice – championing everyone who works in education.

The NEU welcomes the opportunity to submit evidence to the Department for Education Call for Evidence into the future of RSE and PSHE teaching in England. NEU members working in English schools were surveyed in January 2018 and their responses were used to inform the content of the submission.

1. Thinking about relationships education in primary schools, what do you believe are the three most important subject areas that should be taught for different age groups/key stages and why. Please include any considerations or evidence which informed your choices.

The National Education Union (NEU) believes that the curriculum should deliver three broad outcomes: **Understanding the Body, Understanding Relationships, Staying Safe.**

The NEU supports the Sex Education Forum's 12 principles for RSE.

A 2018 survey of NEU members found that over 90% of respondents believe that the Relationships curriculum must include the following topics: Puberty, Menstruation, Correct Terminology for Body Parts (including genitalia), Appropriate and Inappropriate Touch, Online Safety and Privacy, and what to do if you feel unsafe. Although the legislation reserves "sex" content for secondary schools, we believe that there is broad consensus around the importance of delivering these specific topics during primary school. We believe it is unacceptable for a child to experience their first period before they have learnt about menstruation. Children understanding their own body, rights, and how to report abuse is a vital safeguarding tool.

We welcome the Government's commitment to equality and diversity and anticipate guidance that outlines an expectation for inclusion to be "built in" to the curriculum. Resources must promote respect and appreciation for a diverse range of families and relationships, reflect ethnic diversity, be culturally relevant and LGBT+ inclusive, reflect a range of beliefs, disabilities and ages and be fully accessible to all learners. Emphasis should be placed on characteristics of healthy, happy and respectful relationships, appreciating individual difference, knowing how to identify and challenge harmful stereotypes and accessing support if children experience bullying and violence.

The NEU believes that RSE should form part of statutory PSHE.

2. Thinking about relationships and sex education in secondary schools, what do you believe are the three most important subject areas that should be taught for different age groups/key stages and why. Please include any considerations or evidence which informed your choices.

The RSE curriculum in secondary schools should deliver three broad outcomes for pupils:
Understanding Sexuality and Healthy Relationships, Sexual Health, Staying Safe.

The content included should build on the areas covered in the primary curriculum, using a spiral-curriculum approach. This content should be accessible to all learners, be LGBT+ inclusive and include: Human Reproduction and Sexual and Reproductive Rights, Sexuality, Sexual Health, Contraception, Healthy Relationships, Consent, Gender-Based Violence, Gender Identity, Pornography, Sexting, Online and Offline Safety, knowing where to get help and advice. The guidance should support schools to maintain a balance between sex positivity with the importance of staying safe. The NEU believes that RSE should form part of a statutory PSHE curriculum.

For it to be a success, education professionals must feel confident delivering the curriculum. A Relationships and Sex Education curriculum that meets the needs of young people in the 21st Century must be ambitious and include topics that some professionals may find challenging to deliver. It is vital that these more challenging topics are taught well as omitting them can contribute to stigma and shame and may leave young people without support. A 2018 survey of NEU members found that just 28% of participants feel confident that their school will be ready to deliver statutory RSE in September 2019 and 91% of respondents believe that the Government must provide additional funding to support the implementation of the reform. Statutory guidance must be accompanied with a comprehensive and well-funded package of support for schools.

3. Are there important aspects of ensuring safe online relationships that would not otherwise be covered in wider Relationships Education and Relationships and Sex Education, or as part of the computing curriculum?

We welcome the commitment to include online safety in the RSE curriculum which should be supported by the computing curriculum. Areas such as Privacy, Mobile Technology, sharing and publishing sexual content should be included as well as how to be responsible and respectful online. Prescribing content in fine detail would be problematic due to the fast-paced nature of technological developments. The NEU believes that ensuring education professionals have access to high quality resources and relevant training will be essential, especially with regards to the fluid landscape surrounding online safety.

Evidence shows that children of primary school age encounter pornography, have access to technology, such as tablets, over which inappropriate images could be shared, and have social media accounts, despite age restrictions. Staying safe online should be introduced in the primary phase and developed in the Secondary curriculum.

The NEU also believes that the statutory guidance should make provisions for pupils to have input into the design of the RSE curriculum, to ensure that emerging topics can be included swiftly through the curriculum and it is responsive to pupil need. In order for such an arrangement to work, schools will need to feel empowered to implement a whole school approach to RSE and PSHE, in which specific timetabled lessons sit alongside cross curricula consideration of core content and themes and that the whole school ethos supports the development of confident and reflective young people. The Government should highlight case studies of good practice to support schools implementing the reform.

4. How should schools effectively consult parents so they can make informed decisions that meet the needs of their child, including on the right to withdraw? For example, how often, on what issues and by what means?

The NEU believes that schools should actively engage parents about the content of RSE. The Government can support schools around managing this relationship by introducing clear and comprehensive statutory guidance which outlines specific learning outcomes for children and young people. Such guidance would enable schools to demonstrate to parents that schools are acting within a

national framework, supporting constructive dialogue about a school's individual approach. Schools should publish details of the RSE curriculum on their website and proactively offer opportunities for parents to discuss the content and resources.

The Government must consider carefully the details around the right to withdraw. Current guidance gives parents the right to withdraw up to the age of 18 in schools, and there are powerful arguments for lowering this to 16, 14 or removing it altogether. Given the importance of RSE, we are concerned that this right means not every child will have access to its full content. A key aim of RSE must be to ensure that children are equipped to stay safe, an entitlement which could be undermined by the right to withdraw. Schools must not be able to opt out of delivering the content included in statutory guidance, regardless of faith ethos.

For schools to feel confident engaging with and supporting parents on RSE, they will need access to high quality training and resources. The NEU believes that where schools are confident and informed on RSE, it will be easier to work alongside parents and secure their support for the curriculum.

5. Thinking about PSHE in primary schools, what do you believe are the three most important subject areas that should be taught and why? Please include your reasons for choosing each subject area or evidence to support your suggestions.

Given that PSHE contains four elements, the National Education Union (NEU) finds this question challenging. We believe that the DfE must introduce statutory PSHE, which could deliver the following three broad outcomes for pupils: **Health and Wellbeing, Relationships, Living in the Wider World.**

The PSHE Association has recommended that to be a success PSHE should be taught following a number of principles which the NEU supports:

PSHE should be taught regularly, with identifiable lessons on the timetable like other subjects.

PSHE is a whole subject which includes elements ranging from Relationships Education to Mental Health and Wellbeing, Online Safety, Financial Literacy, First Aid and CPR, and Employability Skills.

PSHE should be taught by trained teachers, PSHE should be covered in initial teacher education for primary teachers and teachers must have ongoing CPD opportunities to keep up to date.

PSHE should be taught in all schools, regardless of academy status and/or faith ethos.

PSHE should be taught to all pupils, from year 1 to leaving age.

There is a clear consensus and commitment for statutory PSHE across the education sector. In a 2018 survey of NEU members over 90% of respondents agreed that PSHE should have a clear position on the school curriculum and that RSE should form part of statutory PSHE. The RSE curriculum reform will fail if PSHE is not made statutory in 2019, as will other Government policy commitments around online safety and mental health teaching.

6. Thinking about PSHE in secondary schools, what do you believe are the three most important subject areas that should be taught and why? Please also include your reasons for choosing each subject or evidence to support your suggestions.

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PSHE should be taught by trained teachers, the DfE must consider PSHE coverage in teacher training routes and ensure teachers already in the system have ongoing access to CPD to keep up to date.

PSHE should be taught in all schools, regardless of academy status and/or faith ethos.

PSHE should be taught to all pupils, from year 1 to leaving age.

In the secondary context a key challenge surrounding PSHE is the status and position the subject is given within the school curriculum by senior leaders, Ofsted and the accountability regime. High stakes accountability, high workload and the English Baccalaureate agenda, already undermines its delivery. For example, over 60% of NEU members in a survey said staff confidence and a lack of curriculum time were potential barriers to successful implementation of PSHE and RSE. The Government must outline a strategy to address these concerns, alongside the introduction of statutory guidance.

7. How much flexibility do you think schools should have to meet the needs of individual pupils and to reflect the diversity of local communities and wider society in the content of PSHE lessons in schools?

The NEU believes that decisions around the flexibility of the PSHE curriculum should be guided by a rights and gender -equity based approach. The curriculum must first and foremost meet the needs of individual pupils, and use a learner-centered approach which responds to the lived experiences of pupils.

PSHE must be inclusive and accessible to every pupil with SEND. EHCPs could be used to support pupils with SEND to understand healthy relationships and sexuality.

PSHE must be relevant to every child, so LGBT+ inclusion must be built into the whole curriculum from the start of primary. The NEU believes that Section 28 has left a toxic legacy in some education institutions, it is hoped that this reform will help address this injustice.

PSHE should reflect and celebrate a diversity of cultures and family types and pupils. Schools with a faith ethos, should be encouraged to utilise the RE curriculum to explore doctrinal matters around content. Schools must not be able to opt out of delivering topics which are fundamental for ensuring children's health, wellbeing and dignity.

The curriculum must be sufficiently flexible to respond to the individual needs of pupils, such as those who display inappropriate sexual behaviours at school.

Access to high quality resources and training will be essential to ensure that education professionals are equipped and confident to deliver PSHE and RSE at a high standard. The DfE should consider issuing non-statutory guidance to schools around engaging external providers and identifying high quality resources.