



HM Government

**Government  
response to Youth  
Select Committee  
report on  
Curriculum for Life**

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## Introduction

The Youth Select Committee report on Curriculum for Life was published on 6 November 2013. The government welcomes the Committee's work on this important topic. We agree that schools play a critical role in supporting young people to develop the skills and knowledge for successful participation in adult life, and we welcome the debate on how that role is best supported. The government also values greatly the particular contribution that young people have made through the British Youth Council. The report includes recommendations for government, local authorities and schools and the government's response is as follows.

## **Recommendations 1-2: are young people equipped for life?**

**Recommendation 1. Schools play a critical role in supporting young people to develop the skills and knowledge that will help them in later life, such as personal finance, cultural awareness, sustainability and an understanding about sex and relationships. Their role is more than one of reinforcing knowledge learned elsewhere, because for some young people their school may be the only place they have to learn about these kinds of issues. (Paragraph 12)**

**Recommendation 2. Recent reviews of life skills education programmes in schools including Personal, Social, Health and Economic (PSHE) education, coupled with the evidence we received as part of this inquiry, paint a worrying picture. As a whole, life skills education in schools falls well short of its full potential, and specific programmes such as PSHE are not receiving the priority attention that young people and those involved in education tell us is needed. There is much more to be done by the government, local authorities and schools to deliver a “curriculum for life”. (Paragraph 19)**

### **Government response to recommendations 1-2**

1. We agree with the Committee’s recommendation that schools have a critical role in equipping young people for life. High quality teaching of these skills is essential, as part of a balanced and broadly based curriculum. The national curriculum, published in September 2013, includes strengthened expectations about the teaching of essential knowledge and skills for life, described at paragraphs 3-5 below. In the introduction to the national curriculum, we reaffirmed that Personal, Social, Health and Economic education (PSHE) can be used to develop teaching in essential life skills.
2. While PSHE is not a statutory subject, it is an important element of a school’s duty to promote children’s spiritual, moral, cultural, mental and physical development, and schools are inspected accordingly. PSHE supports and extend other subjects in the school curriculum, developing children’s resilience, confidence and ability to learn.
3. The government believes that schools are best-placed to understand their pupils’ needs and to tailor their curricula accordingly, including high quality PSHE. The PSHE Association have produced a programme of study as guidance for teachers, and provide wider support by highlighting resources developed by other expert organisations.

## **Recommendations 3-4: sex and relationships education**

**Recommendation 3. Sex and relationships education is an area which can impact greatly on the lives of young people and can have a significant effect on their future. The guidance to which schools are expected to have regard is now 13 years old. We believe that the notion of what is “age appropriate” has changed over this time, and that the need for education in and discussion of issues such as pornography, body image and online grooming and abuse is greater now than it was over a decade ago. (Paragraph 23)**

**Recommendation 4. We recommend that the government review and update its guidance on sex and relationships education before the new national curriculum framework comes into force to ensure that it is appropriate for today’s young people. This should be done in partnership with young people and expert organisations. (Paragraph 24)**

### **Government response to recommendations 3-4**

4. Sex and relationship education (SRE) is compulsory in maintained secondary schools, and the government emphasised this in its introduction to the new national curriculum. When teaching SRE, all schools (including academies through their funding agreements) must have regard to the Secretary of State’s guidance. Following the review of PSHE which concluded in March 2013, the government decided that the guidance continues to provide a sound framework on which schools can base their own provision, responding to their pupils’ specific needs and to current issues.
5. The Committee is right to emphasise the influence of digital technology in recent years, and how this affects children and young people. But we believe that the best way to help schools respond is through specialist professionals and experts who are providing up-to-date resources and advice on the effects of changing technologies. The PSHE Association is consulting on draft practical guidance on teaching about consent in relationships. On the risks identified that are associated with digital media, the Sex Education Forum has published resources for teachers, based on evidence about what works with different children. The Child Exploitation and Online Protection (CEOP) centre has published resources for teachers dealing with the issue of ‘sexting’. We will remain closely engaged with professionals, experts, and others, in this area, and will make sure that teachers have access to the support and advice they need.

6. The new curriculum on computing means that for the first time, pupils aged 5-11 will be taught about online safety. In key stage 1, pupils will be taught to how to communicate safely, keeping personal information private. In key stage 2 they will be taught to respect individuals and intellectual property, and to use technology responsibly, securely and safely. A range of internet safety resources for pupils, teachers and parents are now available on the Safer Internet Centre<sup>1</sup> and on Childnet International<sup>2</sup> websites.

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<sup>1</sup> [www.saferinternet.org.uk](http://www.saferinternet.org.uk)

<sup>2</sup> [www.childnet.com](http://www.childnet.com)

## **Recommendations 5-7: PSHE**

**Recommendation 5.** We believe that, by retaining PSHE as a non-statutory element of the school curriculum, the government has missed an opportunity to reinforce the priority it places on life skills education, particularly when it relies on this programme to deliver important subjects, such as sex and relationships education. By making PSHE education a statutory entitlement in the national curriculum, with an expectation that schools will incorporate local issues of key importance to their pupil in place, we believe that schools would both re-prioritise PSHE and be able to retain the flexibility they need to meet pupils' needs. While we welcome the reference to PSHE education in the national curriculum framework for 2014, we remain to be convinced that this delivers the clear signal that is required about the importance of delivering a "curriculum for life". The government now needs to back up its statement on PSHE with strong leadership and should champion life skills education alongside more traditional academia. (Paragraph 33)

**Recommendation 6.** We recommend that the government publish a long term strategy for the promotion of PSHE education including milestones and targets for the improvement of PSHE education in schools. (Paragraph 34)

**Recommendation 7.** If, at the next Ofsted inspection, PSHE education is still "not yet good enough", we recommend that the government should make PSHE education a statutory entitlement in the national curriculum, and should include an expectation that schools will incorporate local issues of key importance to their pupils. (Paragraph 35)

## **Government response to recommendations 5-7**

7. As mentioned earlier, the government is committed to high quality, innovative and relevant PSHE which engages children and stimulates their active participation in discussions. It is part of the wider school curriculum which applies to all state-funded schools including academies and free schools. The school curriculum must be balanced and broadly based; must promote pupils' spiritual, moral, cultural, mental and physical development; and must prepare pupils for the opportunities, responsibilities and experiences of later life. As this covers a very broad range of

possible topics, the government's role is to enable, rather than direct, appropriate content for PSHE. It is also notable that international evidence supports our approach: among the characteristics of high-performing education systems that publish achievement data, a typical characteristic is high levels of autonomy over curricula. In this context, and in keeping with our approach to all subjects, we do not agree with the Committee's recommendation for a detailed strategy with milestones and targets.

8. We have set out why we consider that schools and teachers are best-placed to decide the content of PSHE. However, we are aware that some schools may find it useful to have access to advice and will therefore want to use the PSHE Association's suggested programme of study. The PSHE Association also continues to provide wider support by highlighting other sources of expertise, and by quality assuring resources produced by other organisations – further strengthening teachers' confidence when selecting appropriate materials. We have provided grant funding of £100k to the PSHE Association to undertake work advising schools in developing curricula and improving staff training.
9. While PSHE is not itself statutory, there are several important elements of good PSHE that are in the national curriculum. PSHE complements teaching in these areas. The science curriculum requires pupils to develop knowledge about drug safety, including the effects of drugs on their bodies, on behaviour, health and life processes. PSHE can also strengthen pupils' understanding of the importance of physical activity and diet – which is included in the national curriculum requirements for PE, science, and design and technology.
10. Citizenship education at key stages 3 and 4 now includes a clear focus on democracy, government, and how laws are made and upheld. It also teaches pupils to manage their money well and make sound financial decisions, making this a statutory requirement for the first time. The new mathematics programmes of study cover the knowledge and skills to help prepare young people for making sound financial decisions on matters such as mortgages and loans.
11. The new programmes of study for science include the core knowledge associated with sex and relationships, at each key stage. At key stage 3 (ages 11 to 14), there is now more detailed content on human reproduction, for example the structure and function of male and female reproductive systems. While focusing on the core science underpinning the process of reproduction, we also expect that teachers will cover topics such as sexual health, contraception and adolescence. Schools should also teach SRE, having regard to the Secretary of State's guidance as described at paragraph 3 above.
12. We welcome the Committee's contribution to the debate on how young people can develop life skills outside schools. The government's ambition, described in Positive



for Youth<sup>3</sup>, is for all young people to have the skills and opportunities to fulfil their potential. We support the development of life skills through a variety of activities and programmes outside schools. National Citizen Service (NCS) is the flagship personal and social development programme for 16 and 17 year olds of all backgrounds, which has already benefitted 60,000 young people in England and Northern Ireland. The programme is designed to help young people build skills for work and life, take on new challenges and adventures, and contribute to their communities through social action. In 2013 NCS has delivered training and skills in many of the areas identified within the Youth Select Committee report, including sex and relationships, citizenship, democracy and voting, financial literacy and substance misuse, working with expert partners such as Brook, MyBnk, British Red Cross, St John Ambulance, Citizenship Foundation, FRANK and Young Enterprise.

13. Young people can also develop life skills through activities at youth centres including those provided by the MyPlace programme. The Cabinet Office is surveying local authorities to gather evidence on the range of young people's services and will use this data to support local authorities in meeting their statutory duty to secure sufficient services and activities to improve young people's well-being.

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<sup>3</sup> The government's shared vision for how all parts of society can work together to support families and young people, particularly those who are most disadvantaged or vulnerable (DfE-0133-2011)

## **Recommendation 8-12: pupil involvement**

**Recommendation 8.** It is disappointing that so few pupils responded to the government consultations on PSHE education and the national curriculum framework. The amount of evidence received from young people to this inquiry demonstrates that they are willing and eager to be involved. We understand that the Cabinet Office has begun to review whether its principles for consultation with young people are being met and we welcome this. (Paragraph 42)

**Recommendation 9.** We recommend that work is undertaken with the British Youth Council and other young people's groups to revise the structures in place to capture young people's views in consultations on matters of most direct concern to them. Each government department should be able to demonstrate that they have proactively consulted young people in consultations that they undertake. (Paragraph 43)

**Recommendation 10.** We recommend that all local authorities establish young people's forums to identify those elements of PSHE education which are important locally. This information should be fed to all schools in their area to support the implementation of their PSHE education programmes. (Paragraph 44)

**Recommendation 11.** Schools themselves have perhaps the most significant role to play in identifying the issues which are important to their pupils and we believe every school should be working with its young people to shape the school curriculum. There are a number of ways schools can do this, for example through student councils, surveys and focus groups. A combination of different methods might be required to ensure that the views of those with different needs are captured. (Paragraph 45)

**Recommendation 12.** We recommend that local authorities work with local councillors and local Members of Parliament to share good practice on consulting young people between schools in their area, and encourage the consultation of young people in shaping the school curriculum. We hope that Academies and Free Schools will participate in the sharing of this good practice. (Paragraph 46)

## Government response to recommendations 8-12

14. The government agrees that the views of young people should be heard in the democratic process and in their local communities. We greatly appreciate the work of the young people on the Youth Select Committee – their commitment and ability demonstrates the valuable contribution young people can make to policy making.
15. In July 2013 responsibility for Youth Policy moved to the Cabinet Office, under the remit of the Minister for Civil Society, Nick Hurd. The government is committed to open policy making and has made it a priority to ensure young people, and charities and voluntary organisations representing youth views, can contribute to policy and decision making. The Civil Service Reform plan has also made clear the importance of open policy making – a collaborative approach with people most affected by a policy. We know that young people are keen to share their views, as demonstrated by record participation in the 2013 national Make Your Mark ballot<sup>4</sup>. The Cabinet Office is working with the British Youth Council, the NCS Trust and others to provide opportunities for young people to get involved in democratic processes and policy-making.
16. The Cabinet Office has now reviewed the Code of Practice on Consultation and, in November 2013, issued a revised set of principles. They are designed to help government departments and others to design and undertake consultations according to the specific requirements of each policy, including when and with whom to consult. In addition, the Compact, an agreement between the Government and the voluntary and community sector, provides an important mechanism which charities and voluntary youth groups should use to represent and advocate for youth interests and views.
17. Many local authorities use local youth councils, members of the youth parliament, and young mayors, to engage young people in decision making. However, this can vary as LAs are free to choose their approach. As mentioned earlier, the Cabinet Office is undertaking a survey of LA youth service provision that will also identify instances of good practice in policy consultation with young people. Examples will be shared with others to demonstrate the value of active involvement of young people in identifying and delivering local priorities.
18. Schools are encouraged to engage with young people (and parents) directly, to develop curricula and other activities in the school. Schools can do this in a number of ways, formal and informal, during the school day and at other times. We agree that it would be sensible for all schools, including academies and free schools, to share best practice. Academies and free schools are among the schools at the forefront of effective student engagement and we would like others to benefit from this sort of

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<sup>4</sup> [http://byc.org.uk/media/223666/byc\\_mym\\_results\\_2013\\_v9.pdf](http://byc.org.uk/media/223666/byc_mym_results_2013_v9.pdf)

innovation. Walton High in Milton Keynes, for example, has been commended by Ofsted for their PSHE provision which is central to the school's vision and ethos, and is regularly reviewed with students and parents. In their report on Rossett School, Yorkshire, Ofsted were impressed by the school's success in establishing a caring and cohesive community where difference is not 'tolerated' but celebrated, and where students are seen as capable of making a positive contribution to the school and wider community.

## **Recommendation 13-15: training for PSHE teachers**

**Recommendation 13.** The use of networks and the sharing of good practice are important for teachers to build on their learning. We welcome the Department for Education's continued funding for the PSHE Association to signpost schools to high quality teaching resources. We also note that the Department has asked Ofsted to gather examples of good practice in PSHE education and view this as a positive step towards improving the quality of PSHE education. (Paragraph 52)

**Recommendation 14.** PSHE teachers should be afforded the same standards of training and support as in any other subject. Hand in hand with the devolution of training funding to schools, sits the responsibility for ensuring that teachers are well trained and have the right skills to deliver for young people. We believe that schools will reap the rewards of well trained PSHE teachers through the development of more rounded pupils. (Paragraph 53)

**Recommendation 15.** We recommend that Local Authorities monitor the quality of PSHE provision in schools and encourage schools to undertake further training where necessary. Local Authorities should also encourage schools to nominate a named teacher in each school to champion PSHE education and identify training and development requirements. We hope that Academies and Free Schools, where they do not have a PSHE champion, will also take this recommendation into consideration. (Paragraph 54)

## **Government response to recommendations 13-15**

19. Schools should have a teacher or senior leader with responsibility for PSHE, with suitable training and expertise, and they should continue to draw on relevant up-to-date resources. Schools should also involve specialist organisations in provision of teaching on specific life skills, in response to pupils' needs.
20. The government sets the high level standards that all teachers must meet to become a qualified teacher, but the content of teacher training courses is for the relevant providing institutions. Trainees are required to meet the teacher standards, including a secure knowledge of relevant subject(s) and curriculum areas.

21. Schools decide how best to recruit and train teachers, including equipping teachers to deliver a curriculum rich in skills for life. It is for teachers themselves, in discussion with subject leaders and head teachers, to decide on their Continuous Professional Development (CPD). PSHE teachers could consider taking-up the training provided by the PSHE Association, and the Chartered Teacher of PSHE award. The Chartered Teacher process provides qualified teachers with the opportunity to evidence their practice against rigorous standards.
22. To support schools in deploying the best teachers, we are creating a national network of Teaching Schools to lead on training and development. The government encourages outstanding schools to apply to become teaching schools. Through their alliances, teaching schools identify and respond to the specific needs of each school, and together they can develop wider strategies to address any particular educational needs of young people in their local community.
23. Teaching school networks are supported by Specialist Leaders of Education (SLEs) who have the skills to provide specialist support to other schools. They understand what outstanding leadership practice in their area of expertise looks like and are skilled in helping other leaders to achieve it in their own context. Since Autumn 2011, over 2,500 SLEs have been designated, offering a range of specialisms to support learning. Eight teaching schools lead on Health and Wellbeing, including PSHE, and we expect more schools to take on this role in future.
24. Ofsted are the body responsible for monitoring and reporting on the quality of PSHE and citizenship education in schools. Local authorities support and develop life skills and citizenship through provision of other local services and programmes outside school, but it is for Ofsted to monitor progress in schools and to hold them accountable for their performance in terms of children's achievement and well-being.

## Recommendations 16-17: a multi-agency approach

**Recommendation 16. Programmes of PSHE and life skills education should be a partnership that is inclusive of parents and carers, local authorities, businesses and other organisations. We would like to see an increase in businesses, community organisations and local role models supporting the delivery of life skills education in schools. In doing so however, schools must ensure they are using reputable people and organisations. (Paragraph 57)**

**Recommendation 17. We recommend that the Department for Education assess the viability of implementing a “kite-mark” style scheme, to provide independent quality assurance for organisations and individuals who participate in PSHE education in schools. (Paragraph 58)**

### Government response to recommendations 16-17

25. We agree that all parts of society, including businesses, charities, community organisations, local authorities, parents, carers and families, have a role to play in supporting young people to develop skills to succeed in work and life, and to become rounded, responsible and active citizens. We highlight a few examples below.

The Cabinet Office has worked with corporate partners, and with young people, on the development of plotr<sup>5</sup> – the one-stop-shop for 11-24 year olds to obtain careers inspiration and guidance.

The LifeSkills programme, with Barclays, works with young people, teachers, schools and education institutions. Once a student completes the LifeSkills modules, teachers will match students with work experience opportunities online. LifeSkills aims to make 50,000 work experience opportunities available in 2013. Barclays will provide at least 6,000 opportunities and is encouraging businesses of all sizes across the UK to get involved. And by 2015, 1 million young people will have access to the skills they need to make the transition from education to work.

In Asda’s Community Life Programme, launched in 2012, each of their 592 stores adopts two local schools and provides mentoring, workplace visits and City and Guilds accredited work experience placements, to help students develop transferrable skills.

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<sup>5</sup> [www.plotr.co.uk](http://www.plotr.co.uk)

The Linklaters Learn for Work programme that inspires over 2,400 local young people each year from over 40 schools in the London Borough of Hackney. The programme includes a debating challenge across the borough at primary level, as well as citizenship and leadership training at secondary level.

26. The PSHE Association's remit is to support teachers in delivering the highest quality PSHE education to their pupils. That is why they only recommend their own resources or those they have quality assured to their membership. Applying for and acquiring the PSHE Association Quality Assurance Mark will inspire confidence among the professional community when choosing resources. The Association promotes quality assured resources to over 6,000 PSHE professionals, over 3,500 social media contacts, and almost 100,000 website visitors each year. We do not intend to introduce a Kite Mark scheme as this would represent unnecessary duplication of the PSHE Association quality mark.





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