

## Sex Education Forum response to Public Consultation on the Draft National Curriculum proposals

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**Contact:** Lucy Emmerson, Coordinator Sex Education Forum, 07808 105280 [lemmerson@ncb.org.uk](mailto:lemmerson@ncb.org.uk)

[The Sex Education Forum](#) (SEF), hosted by the National Children's Bureau, is the national authority in England on sex and relationships education (SRE).

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### Summary

The Sex Education Forum believes that the revised National Curriculum must ensure that ALL children and young people are entitled to a comprehensive and developmental programme of sex education through science.

The National Curriculum must give clear direction to schools to teach pupils about growing up and sex with honesty and confidence. It should also enable parents to understand what their children learn about their bodies. This would help fulfil the government ambition to promote an open and honest culture about sex and relationships as set out in the Framework for Sexual Health Improvement (March 2013).

The National Curriculum alone will not achieve all of this; the government should provide clear guidance to schools about their obligations to provide high quality sex and relationships education (SRE), in the context of PSHE, to meet the needs of their pupils.

### We recommend that:

The science curriculum adopts clear, open language and a positive tone for content relating to human reproduction, growth and sexual health. This is essential to make it clear to teachers, parents and pupils what will be taught. This means that:

- the term puberty should be used in primary science and the retrogressive note stating 'they should not be expected to understand how reproduction occurs' should be removed;
  - at KS3 the current content on sexual health and disease, contraception, and adolescence should be retained, and learning about hormones should be included.
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Because the only statutory requirement for primary school sex education is within National Curriculum science, it is essential for safeguarding and well-being that the programme of study makes clear that:

- children can name external genitalia at Key stage 1;
- and learn about puberty before it happens i.e. introducing the idea at Lower KS 2.

As there is no other requirement for primary SRE, science should reflect the current Sex and Relationship Education Guidance (DfEE 2000), which recommends that SRE:

- 'should ensure that both boys and girls know about puberty and how a baby is born.'

The role of SRE (as part of PSHE) in meeting the statutory requirement for schools to provide a broad and balanced curriculum, to promote moral, social, cultural and spiritual development and to promote pupil well-being and safeguarding should be made explicitly clear in the new National Curriculum framework.

The government retains and promotes the current PSHE framework at primary level, and the PSHE: Personal Wellbeing programme of study for secondary pupils.

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## **The Sex Education Forum response addresses the consultation questions 1, 3, 9 & 10.**

Question 1: Do you have any comments on the proposed aims for the National Curriculum as a whole as set out in the framework document?

Question 3: Do you have any comments on the content set out in the draft programmes of study?

Question 9: What impact - either positive or negative - will our proposals have on the 'protected characteristic' groups? (The protected characteristics cover disability, ethnicity, gender, sexual identity, gender identity, religion or belief and, for workforce issues, age)

Question 10: To what extent will the new National Curriculum make clear to parents what their children should be learning at each stage of their education?

Questions in 'Reform of the National Curriculum in England' published 7 February 2013  
<http://media.education.gov.uk/assets/files/pdf/n/national%20curriculum%20consultation%20document%20070213.pdf>

## Sex Education Forum response

### 1. Government commitment to high-quality sex and relationships education

The Sex Education Forum is very concerned that the National Curriculum proposals do not support the further development of PSHE or sex and relationships education (SRE). The government stated in the Schools White Paper 'The Importance of Teaching' (2010) that "Children need high-quality sex and relationships education so they can make wise and informed choices". The government has provided no information about its actions to fulfill this, with the exception of the announcement on 21 March 2013 that Ofsted and the PSHE Association will be tasked with sharing good practice and helping teachers. This is an insufficient response to the PSHE Review which took 2 years to reach an outcome and announces that PSHE will remain non-statutory and SRE guidance will not be updated.

The PSHE Review Outcome fails to respond to the evidence presented in the consultation, in which respondents to the Review placed relationships, then sex education top of the list of subjects that should be statutory, with citizenship (which is to remain statutory) bottom of that list.

In the recently published Framework for Sexual Health Improvement (DoH March 2013) the government announced their ambition that "All children and young people receive good-quality sex and relationship education at home, at school and in the community" and an ambition for society to "create an honest and open culture around sex and relationships". We would expect to see both ambitions reflected in the National Curriculum proposals. To modernize the language and tone of National Curriculum science we strongly recommend removing notes such as "they should not be expected to understand how reproduction occurs" and adding direct reference to naming external genitalia, puberty, hormones, contraception, adolescence and sexual health.

When the Secretary of State for Education announced the Review of the National Curriculum in 2011 he acknowledged that "often schools need more support and help in the way that they cover the important topics that are dealt with within PSHE education, including sex and relationships education". However no action has yet been taken to make sure schools can get this sort of support on a sustained basis. For example, the government has failed to make any funding available to support teachers specifically with SRE through the DfE Voluntary and Community Sector Grants Prospectus for 2013-14.

Carrying through the Conservatives' manifesto commitment to teach children about sexual consent, Theresa May announced an Action Plan to end violence against women and girls, with a focus on prevention (March 2011). She said: "The government commits to look at how all schools are able to follow good practice regarding the teaching of sexual consent". We are not aware of any systematic approach that has been taken to ensure good practice is identified and shared.

More than 18 months after the Action Plan was announced a parliamentary question raised this issue and Elizabeth Truss, MP replied: "Sexual consent is an important issue and my Department is committed to making the cross-government Violence Against Women and Girls (VAWG) Action Plan as powerful and effective as possible. We encourage all schools to address the topic of sexual consent in Personal, Social, Health and Economic (PSHE) education".

The government has acknowledged that schools need particular support on SRE and yet repeatedly advises that schools and teachers are best left to assess the needs of their pupils in relation to PSHE.

The Sex Education Forum fully supports the government's view that schools are well-placed to assess the needs of their pupils in relation to SRE. However we know through our contact with young people, and through the evidence provided by Ofsted, that many children are not receiving good quality SRE. For example 1 in 3 young people said their SRE was 'poor' or 'very poor' in a survey we carried out (Sex Education Forum, 2008). In a survey carried out by Brook (2011) around one in four young people said they don't get any SRE in school at all – of those that do, around a quarter (26%) say their SRE teacher isn't able to teach it well. The main reason that the quality of SRE remains poor is that teachers and schools are not getting the training or support they need.

It is therefore very disappointing that the National Curriculum proposals do nothing to address the need of schools for support on SRE or to improve the curriculum status of SRE or PSHE. We recommend that the role of PSHE in fulfilling the aims of the National Curriculum is made clear in the final version. We are pleased to see that human reproduction has a significant place within the new science curriculum. However we are very concerned that there is no direct reference to naming external genitalia, puberty, hormones, contraception, adolescence or sexual health.

It is also unclear how the government's commitment to a system-wide response to improve children and young people's health outcomes (DH, February 2013) is supported by the National Curriculum proposals. The proposed extension of the WHO Health Behaviour of School Aged Children Study to include questions to understand health education in schools is welcomed and yet we anticipate that it will reveal, yet again, that SRE is inadequate for too many children.

## **2. Making the curriculum clear to parents** (consultation question 10)

The proposed changes to the Science Curriculum obscure the message to parents about what their children will be learning about their bodies and growing up. For example, parents will not be clear as to whether or not their children have been taught the correct medical terms for external genitalia.

The majority of parents are very supportive of SRE. In a Mumsnet survey 98% of parents said that they are happy for their children to learn about sex and relationships at school (2011). Primary schools that have consulted parents about what they teach and when report to us that parents are usually very supportive of learning about puberty and the human body and in many cases parents have requested that puberty is introduced earlier.

**We therefore strongly recommend that the language used in the new National Curriculum is unambiguous and straightforward and includes reference to puberty, adolescence and naming external genitalia.**

## **3. Aims of the National Curriculum** (consultation question 1)

The Sex Education Forum believes that ultimately SRE (as part of PSHE) must be made a statutory subject within the National Curriculum in order to guarantee that every child receives good quality provision.

We welcome the retention of the requirement that schools offer a broad and balanced curriculum. It would be helpful if it was stated in the revised National Curriculum framework document that good PSHE is absolutely necessary to fulfill a school's requirement to offer a broad and balanced curriculum,

to promote the spiritual, moral, cultural and social (or spiritual, moral, cultural, mental and physical) development of pupils. This would then also be referenced in Ofsted guidance. **We also recommend that it is made clear that excellent PSHE is required to fulfill a school's duty to promote pupil well-being and to safeguard pupils.**

**The reference to 'experiences of life' in the current National Curriculum aims is helpful in that experiences are current and emergent and we recommend that this is retained.** This contrasts with the revised aim to prepare pupils for responsibilities and experiences **of later life**, as it misses the point that good education helps pupils cope with the real challenges they face on a daily basis (as well as preparing them for future choices).

**The Sex Education Forum recommends adoption of the National Curriculum review response by the PSHE Strategic Partners group (of which we are a member) as follows:**

- i. The word 'should' in paragraph 2.3 (*schools should make provision for personal, social, health and economic education*) should be replaced by the word 'must' (*schools must make provision for personal, social, health and economic education*) making the inclusion of PSHE education in the school curriculum a statutory requirement.
- ii. PSHE education provision should be more explicitly linked to schools achieving the requirements set out in the NC for schools to *provide a curriculum that is broadly based and balanced and which:*
  - *promotes the spiritual, moral, cultural, mental and physical development of pupils at the school and of society, and*
  - *prepares pupils at the school for the opportunities, responsibilities and experiences of later life.*

The reference to PSHE education could read: *"Schools should make provision for personal, social, health and economic education, alongside their statutory provision, in order to meet these requirements"*.

- iii. The requirement to provide a curriculum that is broadly based and balanced and which:
  - *promotes the spiritual, moral, cultural, mental and physical development of pupils at the school and of society, and*
  - *prepares pupils at the school for the opportunities, responsibilities and experiences of later life.*

should be given a much higher profile in the Ofsted framework so that schools are held accountable for implementing it. PSHE education should be more explicitly linked in the framework to implementation of these curriculum requirements.

The statement *'All schools must publish their school curriculum by subject and academic year online'* (paragraph 2.2) is welcomed. It is suggested that 'including their provision for PSHE education' be added to this.

The current requirement for schools to provide **sex education** does not take account of the urgent need for **relationships education** to be provided alongside sex education. It would help to address this by making overall PSHE education – which includes sex and relationships education – a requirement.

We think it is unhelpful to change the wording from "The school curriculum should aim to promote pupils' spiritual, moral, **social** and cultural development and prepare all pupils for the opportunities, responsibilities and experiences of life" to "promotes the spiritual, moral, cultural, **mental** and **physical** development of pupils at the school and of **society**, and prepares pupils at the school for the opportunities, responsibilities and experiences of later life". The removal of 'social' development is a serious loss as this is the focus for learning to get along with and understand each other as friends, peers and fellow citizens. **We recommend that the original wording is retained.**

#### **4. Science Programme of Study at Key Stages 1, 2 & 3** (consultation question 3)

The Sex Education Forum notes that the science curriculum is the only statutory element of sex education in primary schools and therefore the only route to guarantee that children learn essential basic information about their bodies, human reproduction and the physical changes of puberty. It is therefore important that it covers the basic facts that children must learn before transfer to secondary school.

We responded to the version of the new Science Curriculum proposed in September 2012 and the version proposed now (February 2013) is similar. Therefore our comments as per this statement [http://ncb.org.uk/media/813330/nc\\_primary\\_science\\_consultation\\_sef\\_response.pdf](http://ncb.org.uk/media/813330/nc_primary_science_consultation_sef_response.pdf) still stand and are repeated below.

We welcome the greater detail about reproductive processes, variation and inheritance in the new draft programmes of study compared to the current primary science curriculum. However we feel that certain areas should be strengthened to bring the curriculum in line with the current Sex and Relationship Education Guidance (DfEE 2000), which recommends that SRE:

'should ensure that both boys and girls know about puberty and how a baby is born.'

It also states that SRE should ensure that all children:

'are able to name parts of the body and describe how their bodies work; can protect themselves and ask for help and support; and are prepared for puberty'....'All children, including those who develop earlier than the average, need to know about puberty before they experience the onset of physical changes.'

**We recommend that primary science should ensure that both boys and girls know about puberty before they experience the onset of physical changes and know how a baby is born, in line with the current SRE guidance.**

**We recommend that the government retains and promotes the current PSHE framework at primary level, and the PSHE: Personal Wellbeing programme of study for secondary pupils.** These offer a comprehensive framework for PSHE which schools can use to ensure that they develop their own broad and balanced curricula. After 13 years they will need some updating but they do set out clearly what schools should be expected to provide to promote their pupils' personal and social development.

#### **Relationships education**

The science programme of study for primary pupils carries a significant part of the biological aspects of sex and relationships education. It does not address relationships or the social, emotional, cultural and moral dimensions of development. These are currently part of the PSHE framework. Given the Outcome of the PSHE Review the PSHE framework will remain non-statutory, which is very disappointing and means that it is essential to get the science curriculum right.

## Primary Science

**Naming external genitalia should be clearly included as part of naming basic parts of the body and understanding the differences between boys and girls.** The current NC science curriculum at key stage 1 says that pupils should be taught 'to recognise and compare the main external parts of humans and other animals'. In the new draft, the Guidance and notes to the year 1 PoS indicate that the basic parts of the body 'can include' followed by a list head, neck, arms, etc. The external genitalia are not included in the list. Schools and teachers will read this to mean that these names should not be taught. Schools which currently teach the correct names for external genitalia with the full knowledge and support of parents may self-censor in future, to the detriment of the pupils' learning and understanding. In practice some schools establish this language early on in nursery or reception classes to help children communicate and avoid confusion. They must be supported to continue doing so.

We recommend that either no body parts are listed or that the guidance and notes indicate that the naming of body parts should include the differences between boys and girls. At key stage 1 this would mean learning 'penis' and 'vulva' as a minimum, with further vocabulary added progressively at key stage 2.

Children need to learn the correct biological/medical names for the genitalia and reproductive organs. This is vital for safeguarding so that a child has language to describe the private parts of their body and to seek help if they are abused. Being open and honest about the words for genitalia will support girls at risk of Female Genital Mutilation (FGM). The summer holiday between leaving primary and starting secondary school is a risk period for girls at risk of FGM so this knowledge must come earlier.

It is also important that it is clear to parents that schools are using correct medical terms for external genitalia – the proposed new curriculum introduces ambiguity on this issue and will make communication with parents about what is being taught confusing.

**The term puberty should be used and it should be introduced before Year 6.** We believe that puberty must be explicitly included in the primary Science curriculum. The proposed new curriculum makes no mention of puberty, either at primary (or secondary) level which will result in many children not being taught about either the emotional or physical changes of puberty before they actually experience it. Some children start puberty aged 8 years old, and the average age is 11 (<http://www.nhs.uk/conditions/Puberty/Pages/Introduction.aspx>). Girls, in particular need to know about menstruation before they start their periods, and boys are curious about it too. If no information is given, or learning is too late girls suffer shame and fear. The questions children ask most often in the context of sex education concern the changes that will happen to them at puberty. See for example: <http://www.guardian.co.uk/society/2013/feb/19/sex-education-10-year-olds-want-know>

In Year 2 of the new Science Curriculum human growth is referred to and in the notes it says 'Growing into adults can include reference to baby, toddler, child, teenager, adult'. This can be used as a way of introducing learning about puberty. We recommend that in Lower Key Stage 2 (years 3-4) the idea be introduced that organisms change over their lifetime according to their life cycle and type of parental care e.g. egg, larva, pupa, imago in insects, contrasted with a longer period of babyhood in mammals including humans. This would enable the physical changes of puberty to be flagged up in a biological context around the time that pupils are beginning to be aware of them (and some may already be experiencing them).

There is another opportunity to look at puberty in Year 6 under 'describe the changes as humans develop from birth to old age' but this would be too late to introduce puberty and there is no remit given to focus more on puberty for example than physical aspects of old age - this fails to respond to the immediate developmental needs of pupils at that age.

**Reproduction should be introduced earlier – with no caveats to limit open discussion.** In the new curriculum there is a gap in learning about reproduction in lower Key Stage 2. While reproduction is mentioned in the notes to Year 2 in the new science curriculum: “ Pupils...should also be introduced to the process of reproduction and growth in animals”. The note (Year 2, new curriculum) also states 'they should not be expected to understand how reproduction occurs'. This note is unnecessary and unhelpful. Other aspects of the curriculum are not presented with a caveat of this kind and it would discourage teachers from providing honest and open answers to children's very natural questions about how babies are made.

There is a clear remit in the new curriculum to look in more detail at human reproduction in Year 6, but children will have questions about it before then. So the gap is in lower KS2. This could be addressed by including more information about life-cycles and the longer period of babyhood in mammals including humans as per the suggestion to introduce puberty above.

**We recommend that the Notes and Guidance indicate that pupils should know the basic outline of human conception and birth before the end of year 6 when they transfer to secondary school, in line with current Sex and Relationship Education Guidance (DfEE 2000).**

The inclusion of Evolution and Inheritance, and the differences between asexual and sexual reproduction in year 6 need pupils to understand that all organisms that reproduce sexually produce male and female sex cells and are often sexually dimorphic. **We recommend that these ideas are introduced earlier in the PoS, preferably beginning in key stage 1 where it is obvious that in humans there are differences between boys and girls. Primary school children should be familiar with the concept of egg and sperm.**

**Micro-organisms should be linked with the role of bacteria and viruses in causing disease and include basic information about HIV.** Following the single reference to micro-organisms in *All living things* in year 6, connection should be made with the role of bacteria and viruses in causing disease. This is an opportunity to provide basic information about what HIV is, how it is transmitted and how it can be prevented. Evidence shows that primary school children do have questions about HIV and AIDS at this age. It is essential that children leave primary school with this basic knowledge.

## Secondary Science

**The word adolescence should be used – it is a key life-stage.** The 2007 Programme of Study for Key Stage 3 included specific reference to 'adolescence', 'fertilisation' and 'foetal development'. In the new curriculum it only states that pupils should learn "the effects of drugs (including as medicines as well as substance misuse) on behaviour, health and life processes such as conception, growth and development". This can still be an opportunity to teach about contraception and effect of drugs/substances on foetal development. However it is now made less obvious and the removal of the term 'adolescence' is a loss as there is still some learning to be completed about puberty at this age (and it may not even have begun in primary). It is also a good point to introduce the concept of the menstrual cycle as a vital sign for health that can be disrupted by stress, eating disorders and drugs.

There is a specific note in the new Key Stage 3 content advising that learning about the structure and function of the male and female reproductive system is 'without details of hormones'. This will prohibit teachers from explaining the hormonal systems that drive adolescence.

**Sexual health and contraception must be included in KS3 – otherwise it will be too late for some young people, especially the most vulnerable.** Specific reference to 'sexual health' has been removed from the proposed new Key Stage 3 science curriculum. The existing guidance states that the curriculum should provide opportunities for pupils to 'Consider how knowledge and understanding of science informs personal and collective decisions, including those on substance abuse and sexual health (defined as including includes issues related to contraception, pregnancy and disease)'. This statement has been removed and we recommend it is re-instated, or at least find another place to reference contraception, pregnancy and disease. **We recommend this statement is re-instated, or at least find another place to reference contraception, pregnancy and disease.**

Girls are offered the HPV vaccination in Year 8 and so all pupils (girls and boys) should have learnt about HPV and other STIs in the context of sexual health by this age.

**The advice to teach about reproductive systems at secondary level without details of hormones must be removed.** There is a specific note in the new Key Stage 3 content advising that learning about the structure and function of the male and female reproductive system is 'without details of hormones'. The implication is that information about contraception is not taught until Key Stage 4. We believe that this is too late to introduce learning about contraception for the first time. Key Stage 3 learning needs to be rooted in the concept of male and female fertility, to which hormones are integral. This would address the issue raised in the government Framework for Sexual Health Improvement that 'there is a poor understanding of fertility among young women, and this contributes to inconsistent contraceptive use'. **We recommend that 'hormones' is included as a topic at KS 3, and that it is linked to contraception.**

## **5. Impact on protected characteristics groups** (consultation question 9)

Children with certain 'protected characteristics' are at higher risk of sexual abuse and exploitation, for example disabled children and girls. Failure to teach these children the language to name external genitalia and about what happens in puberty and adolescence will further compound their risk.

Lesbian Gay Bisexual and Transgender (LGBT) young people must have visible provision within the National Curriculum as a whole (including science) and inclusive content that is not a bolt on. For example, language about human reproduction that refers to 'womb' 'sperm' and 'egg' as the vital components to making a baby supports inclusion. Information about assisted reproductive technologies

(including IVF) will support inclusion of children and young people who might identify as LGBT, children whose parents identify as LGBT and children conceived by assisted reproductive technologies.

We recommend that within science schools are encouraged to raise awareness of intersex and transgender identities and that there maybe a biological basis and a social basis to gender identity.

This could be included as part of 'how sex is determined in humans and other organisms' under 'Evolution, variation and genetics' in science. Care should be taken not to confuse intersex conditions in both human and animal kingdom with transgender identities.

**We recommend that schools are encouraged to raise awareness of gender variance within the science curriculum.**

### **About the Sex Education Forum:**

[The Sex Education Forum](http://www.sexeducationforum.org.uk), hosted by the National Children's Bureau, is the national authority on sex and relationships education (SRE) in England. It is a unique collaboration of over 90 member organisations and hundreds of practitioners with representatives from health, education, faith, disability and children's organisations. The Sex Education Forum believes that all children and young people have the right to good SRE. For a full list of members visit: <http://www.sexeducationforum.org.uk/about-us/list-of-members.aspx>

### **References**

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