

# E d u c a t i o n

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## Sex education made compulsory

Personal, Social and Health Education is to be made compulsory in English schools, the Government has announced. Reports from the Review of Sex and Relationships Education in Schools and the Advisory Group on Drug and Alcohol Education concluded that PSHE, which includes lessons on sex and relationships, drugs and alcohol, healthy lifestyles and money management, is vital for a healthy, rounded education. But ministers believe that, until now, teaching has been “patchy”, because many teachers are embarrassed to discuss topics such as sexuality in class. Schools Minister Jim Knight said: “Modern life is increasingly complex and we have a duty to equip our young people with the knowledge and skills to deal with it. We need structured classroom teaching ... Parents bring up children, not schools or governments, but schools can help guide them through the maze of issues and prepare them for the transition from child to adult.” He has asked secondary head Sir Alasdair Macdonald to report on how best to achieve this, taking into account the concerns of schools and parents. In primary schools, Sir Jim Rose will look at how PSHE lessons should best be delivered as part of his ongoing review of the curriculum.

The move was welcomed by the National Association for Personal and Social Education Advisors, Inspectors and Consultants, as well as the UK Youth Parliament. Katrina Mather, a 16-year-old member of the Youth Parliament, said: “Young people want to make healthy and informed decisions about sex and relationships, but until now, too many have been let down by the education system. The Government’s decision to listen to young people and ensure good quality sex and relationships education is a huge step forward and one that is supported by young people throughout the country.” According to the UK Youth Parliament, four out of ten young people say they received no relationship education at school.

### Reaction

Christine Blower, Acting general secretary of the NUT, said: “Sex and Relationships Education is important for all children and young people and should address all sensitive issues. However, there has just been a major review of the secondary curriculum and there is shortly to be a similar review in primary schools. Quite simply, space has to be made for personal, social and health education in the school day, and sufficient training and necessary specialist staff made available. When Citizenship was introduced, it was bolted onto the secondary curriculum and many schools are still struggling to include it today.”

Dr John Dunford, ASCL general secretary, said: “I regret that I have not been able to persuade the Secretary of State that PSHE should not be made a compulsory subject. All special interest groups believe that their subject is the most important and I was not therefore surprised that the drugs education group and the sex and relationships education group both urged Ed Balls to make PSHE compulsory.”

Chris Keates, general secretary of the NASUWT, said: “Every subject review undertaken comes not surprisingly to the conclusion that the subject is important, it is delivered to varying standards, that more specialist teachers and more training are needed. The only thing which changes in these reports is the name of the subject being reviewed. Reviewing PSHE was always going to spark a national focus on sex and relationships. The outcome of this predictably will be polarised positions rather than an informed debate.”

Alison Johnston of Voice said: “If we’re not careful, the focus in schools will move away from education towards child wellbeing ... Schools are expected to compensate for parental shortcomings and for the pressures adult society imposes on young people.”

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