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RESPONSE TO THE CHANGES TO THE TEACHING OF SEX & RELATIONSHIP EDUCATION AND PSHE CONSULTATION:

250 word limit per answer

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. Relationships in primary schools - what are the 3 most important areas:

There are many important areas that relationships education at the primary stage should cover. We believe three especially important ones are:

Safeguarding

It is vital that the subject should seek to ensure the safety and well-being of pupils and help protect them from neglect and abuse, including sexual. Addressing the Home Affairs Select Committee on June 12th, 2012, Sue Berelowitz, the then Deputy Children's Commissioner for England, gave a shocking testimony on the prevalence of sexual exploitation of children in England, which she claimed took place in every 'town, village and hamlet' in England (see <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/uknews/crime/9327534/Child-abuse-taking-place-in-every-town-village-and-hamlet-in-England.html>).

The subject should therefore include teaching about differences between safe and unsafe touching, that everyone has legally protected 'body rights' and where to go to for help and advice. Pupils having the confidence and vocabulary to report abuse requires them being taught correct terms for private parts.

Diversity

Pupils should be introduced to different kinds of family, so building familiarity and respect for the diversity that exists in society, as well as ensuring children's own circumstances are not stigmatised or ignored.

Relationships with others

More broadly, pupils should be able to value and make different kinds of relationships, be able to exercise choice, recognise and give consent, maintain boundaries and recognise types of bullying and how to challenge it.

We appreciate the contribution that experts can make and endorse the answers to questions 1 to 4 submitted by the Sex Education Forum.

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.

Relationships and sex education in secondary schools - what are the three most important subject areas:

Diversity

Homophobia and transphobia are found to blight many schools and to be consistently worse within the faith sector. The LGBT equality charity Stonewall issued its third five yearly report into the experience of LGBT pupils at British schools last June (available at http://www.stonewall.org.uk/sites/default/files/the_school_report_2017.pdf). It found of LGBT pupils in faith schools:

- 31% said staff never challenged homo, bi and transphobic language (compared to 22% of such pupils in non-faith schools)
- 57% reported that their school said homo and biphobic bullying was wrong, compared to 68% of LGBT pupils across all types schools as whole
- 29% reported that their school said transphobic bullying was wrong, compared to 41% of LGBT pupils across all types of school as a whole

Schools - regardless of their ethos - must be required to promote an acceptance of sexual diversity and transgendered people, so complementing the Government's commitment to stopping LGBT bullying and discrimination.

Sexual health

It is essential that Relationships and Sex Education (RSE) at all schools provides accurate and balanced information about contraception and abortion, including how to access birth control and sexual health services.

Respect and consent

Equality and respect must be reinforced and attitudes that lead to abuse, violence and sexual harassment challenged. Pupils should be able to actively communicate and recognise consent from others, including sexual consent. RSE must reflect the complex, changing world young people are growing up in. Pressing issues include sexual exploitation, online pornography and sexting.

3. We are particularly interested in understanding stakeholder views on Relationships Education and RSE which are specific to the digital context. 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?

Are there important aspects of ensuring safe online relationships that would not otherwise be covered in wider Relationships Education and Relationships and Sex Education:

By its nature, links could be made between many parts of Relationships Education and RSE with other parts of the school curriculum. However, it is important for both the status of the subject and ultimately for the quality of teaching that relevant topics - like ensuring safe online relationships - should normally be dealt with within Relationships Education and RSE (and by teachers trained to deliver it).

Issues like ensuring safe online relationships should be addressed in a context of dealing with wider issues related to the media. This should include schools challenging misleading or inappropriate messages in the media regarding relationships, gender, stereotyping and body image.

Just as accessing the internet can presents risks, so it can be a source of enrichment (including a possible source for information about relationships and sex) and a context where relationships take place. The subject should cover people's rights and responsibilities in a digital context, including legal facts, and differentiating between fact and opinion.

4. We are also interested in understanding more about how schools communicate with parents on Relationships Education and RSE and are able to make informed decisions that best meet the needs of their children. This includes a right to withdraw their child from sex education within the RSE subject but not from sex education in the national curriculum for science. 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?

Information about what is being taught and why can be regularly communicated to parents, such through letters or emails. Periodic feedback could be requested and after school sessions held to help explore the school's teaching. The school's Relationships Education or RSE policy could be amended or produced by a working party of Governors who may wish to further consult with parents. Reflection around parents' own experiences of sex education and their views on Relationships Education and RSE may lead to productive discussions where the school's teaching better complements and supports family's own teaching and guidance. The voice of pupils should also be listened to, and especially at the secondary stage, such as when a school's Relationships Education/ RSE policy is written or updated.

Open, frank and regular communication between a school and parents should, in most cases, ensure that families do not feel the need to exercise the parental right of withdrawal. New guidance should make clear that one area where pupils must not be allowed to be withdrawn from is teaching related to safeguarding and prevention of abuse, including sexual. 1 in 20 children in the UK have been sexually abused (Radford, L. et al. [2011] Child abuse and neglect in the UK today. London: NSPCC).

More generally, we support the Government and Parliament in recasting 'Sex and Relationship Education' as 'Relationship and Sex Education'. It highlights an emphasis that

already exists in the provision of high quality SRE which some families may not otherwise appreciate.

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.

What do you believe are the three most important subject areas that should be taught and why:

We have already set out Relationships Education and RSE as has having a broad scope through our earlier answers. Ideally they should be taught within Personal, Social, Health and Economic Education (PSHE), which speaks in favour of PSHE also being made compulsory. We believe the Relationships component of PSHE is the most important, so therefore consider the subject areas already highlighted in response to question one are the most important areas for PSHE at the primary stage.

Despite its importance to the lives of pupils, PSHE suffers from having a low status compared to other subjects. One reason is because studying it does not directly lead to pupils obtaining qualifications and so does not contribute to school's league table performance. At the very least, Relationships Education, RSE and PSHE in state funded schools should be made accountable under a single inspection regime, to assist in upholding standards. The Government should also help boost the standing of the subject by promoting better initial teacher training and Continuing Professional Development for teachers of PSHE.

We appreciate the contributions that experts can make and endorse the answers submitted to questions 5 to 7 from the PSHE Association.

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 area or evidence to support your suggestions.

Thinking about PSHE in secondary schools, what do you believe are the three most important subject areas that should be taught and why?:

RSE should be delivered as part of a wider programme that gives pupils tools to be clear about personal boundaries and respecting those of others, resisting pressure, seeking help and challenge misleading and inappropriate messages in the media. It should also promote personal safety and respect both on and offline. However, as with our previous answer, we believe RSE is best delivered as part of PSHE and that RSE is PSHE's most important component. We therefore believe that the subject areas already highlighted in response to question two are the most important.

Further ways the Government can support RSE and PSHE include having the updated guidance require schools to provide appropriate timetabling for teaching the subject. This could be illustrated with models of good practice. Guidance should also reference the

Equality Act 2010 and Public Sector Equality Duty and set out how complying with these requirements can contribute to good PSHE.

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?

Schools do and should have autonomy to tailor their teaching to suit local and changing circumstances. Schools, including faith schools, should be able to cover a reasonable range of religious and cultural perspectives. But this must not come at the expense of pupils receiving core knowledge and in a factual and inclusive way.

There remains a risk from those who would wish schools to avoid topics such as birth control and accessing sexual health services and who would wish to make others conform to heteronormative notions of gender and sexual orientation. Currently some schools largely avoid RSE and these are often faith based. The situation must be avoided where schools provide more thorough RES, but start doing so in ways that undermine wider efforts to tackle discrimination and equality. Schools are after all captive environments and pupils (and sometimes staff) suffer a miserable experience due to issues like (as highlighted in question two) homo, bi and transphobia, along with other forms of harassment and bullying.

Very many religiously motivated and committed people believe children should be entitled to know how their body works, about risks they may face and where to obtain help, and that they should learn in non-prejudicial environment (<http://accordcoalition.org.uk/2017/07/12/interfaith-leaders-demand-sexual-health-information-for-children/>). Our coalition urges the Government to help ensure these outcomes via the new guidance by allowing schools to teach about different religious and cultural perspectives, but to require the teaching provided to be accurate, balanced and promote an acceptance of diversity.

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ENDS

About the Accord Coalition

Accord is a campaign coalition of civil society organisations, launched in 2008, that includes religious groups, humanists, teachers, trade unionists, educationalists and civil rights activists. Although Accord's supporters derive inspiration for their values from different sources, they are united in working together to ensure state funded schools respect and uphold civil rights and promote social cohesion, especially on the grounds of religion and belief. More information on its work and growing list of members and supporters can be found at <http://accordcoalition.org.uk/>.