

All-Party Parliamentary Group for Education Inquiry Call for Evidence: Do schools prepare young people for their future careers?

PSHE Association submission, June 2016

Background on the PSHE Association

1. The PSHE Association is the leading national body for personal, social, health and economic (PSHE) education in England, providing advice and support to a network of over 12,000 teachers and other professionals working in schools nationwide.
2. PSHE education is a non-statutory curriculum subject which covers the knowledge, skills and attributes pupils need to develop in order to keep themselves healthy and safe and to prepare them for life and work in modern Britain. PSHE education can be used by schools to develop employability skills and raise aspirations in the context of wider learning aimed to equip pupils for the modern world. Evidence shows that well-delivered PSHE programmes have an impact on both academic attainment and non-academic outcomes for pupils, boosting their life chances and supporting their preparation for the world of work.
3. We would be very happy to provide further detail on this submission if needed. For further information, please contact Joe Hayman, PSHE Association Chief Executive: 32-36 Loman Street, London, SE1 0EH, 020 7922 7952; joe@pshe-association.org.uk

Overview

4. It is crucial that the education system promotes youth employment by equipping pupils with the range of skills that employers have said they would like schools to develop. As the Committee is aware the Confederation of British Industry's (CBI) last Education and Skills Survey stated that, "The [education] system must change, with more focus on developing the aptitudes and attributes that set young people up for success in both work and life – which matter much more to employers when recruiting than academic results alone".
5. We can add to this a growing body of evidence to show the importance of social and emotional skills (often termed 'non-cognitive' or 'soft' skills) to boosting attainment and employability and improving life chances and wider social mobility. PSHE education offers an ideal context in which to deliver a planned programme that actively develops a range of social and emotional skills. At the same time, PSHE education can also address pupils' career aspirations, ensuring that they pursue the right career paths for them and are not held back by low aspirations.
6. Due to the reducing time given to PSHE education in schools, not all pupils are being adequately prepared for their future careers, and opportunities to boost their aspirations and life chances and to prepare them for the workplace are being missed. By making PSHE education a statutory subject, we could ensure that all pupils have an equal opportunity to develop the skills, attitudes and attributes that they need for the world of work, a move which surveys show would be hugely popular with pupils, parents and business leaders.

What should our schools focus on in order to prepare young people for the future?

7. It is crucial that schools prepare pupils for the world of work, developing the knowledge, skills and attributes which are shown to support academic performance, employability and future life chances – with a particular focus on the most disadvantaged pupils.
8. While the Government has rightly emphasised the importance of academic attainment to future success, we must ensure that this does not come at the expense of an education that develops the social and emotional skills which are vital for career success and broader life chances. PSHE education provides an ideal context in which to develop these social and emotional skills which have been shown to impact attainment, employability, life chances and social mobility.
9. The [Confederation of British Industry](#) (CBI), the [British Chambers of Commerce](#), the [Federation of Small Businesses](#) and the [Institute of Directors](#) have all called for an education system that provides school-leavers with skills such as communication, team working and managing risk; and a [CBI-backed study](#) suggests these skills [could make a £109bn contribution to the UK economy over the next five years](#).
10. Nobel Prize-winning economist [James Heckman](#) has long argued for the impact of such skills on academic attainment and employability. A [review of the evidence](#) by Heckman and others concludes that these skills are ‘malleable’ well into adolescence (and comparatively more so than cognitive skills), with teachers playing a measurable role in their development (in other words, they aren’t just ‘caught’, they can be ‘taught’). Research suggests that the kind of classroom-based learning delivered through PSHE education can develop such skills: research reviews from the [Department for Education](#) and the [Education Endowment Foundation](#) have concluded that there is strong evidence that these programmes have a significant impact on attitudes, skills and long-term outcomes.
11. Social and emotional skills are particularly important for the least disadvantaged pupils. The [Social Mobility and Child Poverty Commission](#) recommends ‘*purposive*’ action to develop these non-academic skills and attributes to tackle intergenerational disadvantage. [More recent research](#) from the Commission into non-educational barriers to top jobs demonstrates how important social and emotional skills are to employers, and how disadvantaged pupils have fewer opportunities to develop these skills, meaning there is a strong social mobility case for action.
12. With a substantial body of research suggesting that social and emotional skills have a positive impact on academic attainment, employability and social mobility, we believe that schools should make these skills a key focus. While social and emotional skills can be practised across all subjects, [Department for Education](#) research highlights how important PSHE education can be in developing these skills. The recently-published PSHE Association [character curriculum planning toolkit](#), produced under a Department for Education grant, shows how skill-building can be integrated into schools’ PSHE programmes.
13. In addition, PSHE education lessons can support careers education, helping to raise pupils’ career aspirations, challenge stereotypes and peer pressure. This can help to reduce inequalities in the workforce, for example by ensuring that young women do not feel put off from studying STEM subjects or considering certain career paths that are perceived to be ‘for men’. Evidence suggests that these societal expectations can become engrained [from a young age](#) with research suggesting that children as young as four show gender bias in terms of the jobs they are willing to consider. Our [work with Siemens](#) on careers teaching resources for primary age pupils shows how these issues

could be tackled as part of schools' PSHE programmes from an early age.

Who should be responsible for ensuring that young people develop soft, financial and entrepreneurial skills?

13. While we recognise that this must be a shared responsibility across public institutions, employers, communities and families, as an education charity our focus is on schools, which we believe have a significant role to play in developing key social and emotional skills.
14. It is clear that young people and parents believe schools should equip pupils for life beyond the school gates. 'A curriculum for life' has been voted a priority campaign two years in a row by the [UK Youth Parliament](#), and was again voted among the top two issues by almost one million young people in 2015. A YouGov survey has shown that [92% of young people](#) who receive PSHE education believe that it should be an entitlement for all pupils. Recent surveys have also shown that statutory status for PSHE education is supported by [91% of parents](#), and leading [parent representative bodies](#) such as the National Governors Association and PTA UK (the national body for parent-teacher associations).
15. According to a [2014 survey conducted by YouGov on behalf of the PSHE Association](#), only one third of employers believe that schools are adequately equipping pupils with the skills they need for the world of work and 85% of business leaders support statutory status for PSHE education as a means to deliver these skills.
16. As mentioned above, it is important that government and Ofsted support schools to provide this learning. At present there is an imbalance in school accountability, with accountability driving a false economy in which schools focus on academic subjects to the detriment both of pupils' broader development and their attainment (since, as the evidence above shows, the development of social and emotional skills aids academic attainment). We believe that the best way to encourage schools to focus on developing social and emotional skills alongside their critical work on academic attainment would be to make PSHE education statutory (see below).

Should schools play a role in developing skills, or should subject knowledge be prioritised? Do education providers have the resources to prepare young people for the workforce?

17. We have chosen to address these questions together because we believe that this imbalance creates a challenging situation for teachers and schools, discouraging them from investing in resources, including teacher training, high quality teaching materials, and adequate curriculum time. Despite the Government's commitment to 'character education', which overlaps significantly with social and emotional skills, current accountability frameworks incentivise schools to focus on subject knowledge often to the exclusion of skill development.
18. Subject knowledge and skill development should not be seen as conflicting priorities. Research into social and emotional learning programmes, which focus on skills such as self-management, decision-making and relationship-building, have shown that they improve academic attainment ([Durlak et al](#)). An evaluation of the [UK Resilience Programme](#), which was mainly delivered through PSHE classes, found that pupils

eligible for free school meals and those performing below the national average in maths and English saw the greatest improvements in their attainment and attendance. Social and emotional learning programmes of the type delivered through PSHE education are recommended by the [Education Endowment Foundation](#) as a means to boost the attainment of disadvantaged pupils.

19. Instead, the challenge is to achieve balance between subject knowledge and preparation for the workforce, so that one can adequately support the other. At the moment, DfE [workforce data](#) suggests that schools are significantly reducing their provision of non-academic subjects which risks unbalancing children's education and undermining the mutual reinforcement which can go on between academic and non-academic subjects. The situation of PSHE education is, as set out below, a good exemplar.
20. At present, there is an imbalance in expectations on schools, with no requirement for state schools to deliver PSHE education. Despite the importance of these skills to pupils of all backgrounds, at present only independent schools are expected to deliver PSHE education as standard. A 2013 Ofsted report into current PSHE provision, tellingly entitled *Not Yet Good Enough*, suggested that provision required improvement in at least 40% of schools, with lessons too often delivered by teachers with insufficient training and curriculum time. This means that teachers may choose not to teach more sensitive issues; are less able to identify high-quality resources or adapt them to the needs of their pupils; or lack the time to deliver a comprehensive and developmental programme.
21. The [Commons Education Committee](#) has suggested that this position may be 'deteriorating'; an assessment supported by recent research. Department for Education [school workforce data](#) suggests a decline in teaching, while the [PSHE Association annual survey](#) in 2014, suggested that provision had decreased in more than two-thirds of local authority areas. We believe that these trends are continuing.
22. These trends limit schools' ability to achieve outcomes relating to careers and financial education, with moves to deliver PSHE education through tutor periods or off-timetable 'drop down days' reducing the potential time and resources available for the subject. Even in cases where PSHE is taught regularly by schools they are often delivered by untrained teachers or external speakers, who will often leave the more sensitive parts of the curriculum, such as topics like family debt, off the curriculum because of their lack of confidence in teaching the subject. As set out above, it is the most vulnerable and disadvantaged pupils who miss out most as a result of these trends, meaning that it is important that this learning is an entitlement for all.
23. While greater availability of low-cost high-quality training and resources would be welcome, we believe that the most substantial challenge lies in tackling the low status of the subject within schools. There is currently a lack of demand within schools for resources and training, which are perceived as costly or time-consuming, due to a lack of awareness within schools of the importance of and need to invest in their PSHE provision. Unless the status of the subject is raised, it is likely that the subject will continue to be delivered by untrained teachers, and increasingly in tutor time or in off-timetable 'drop-down days'. In other words, greater balance in expectations of schools is more important than more resources in a time when we know budgets locally and nationally are extremely tight.

Recommendations

24. We believe that all pupils – particularly the most disadvantaged – should leave education with the knowledge and skills they need to navigate school and working life.

In order to achieve this, we believe that one step government could take would be to ensure that all schools deliver PSHE education. This would ensure a space on the curriculum to develop skills and attributes needed to succeed in the world of work.

25. We recommend that PSHE education is made a statutory subject to protect it from being left off the school curriculum or delivered through tutor time or in off-timetable 'drop down days', and to encourage schools to invest in training for teachers, and high-quality resources. This would help to ensure that standards are raised to the level that we would expect for other curriculum subjects. Making PSHE a statutory subject would provide crucial balance in school accountability, prompting a commitment from schools to teaching non-academic skills and attributes alongside standards in academic subjects. With this change in place, we believe that the full potential of PSHE education could be achieved, boosting life chances and preparing pupils for life and work in modern Britain.