

BHA BRIEFING: Lords Short Debate on PSHE

5 March 2013

**Briefing from the British Humanist Association (BHA):
House of Lords Short Debate on Personal, Social, Health and
Economic (PSHE) education**



We believe that PSHE, including Sex and Relationships Education (SRE), should be added to the national curriculum as a full and comprehensive subject, with no opt outs for 'faith' schools and no rights of withdrawal for parents. This is because we believe that every young person is entitled to high quality, comprehensive and age-appropriate education about a range of matters related to personal relationships and sexual health, in order that they can be best equipped to make fully informed decisions on matters including consent, safe sex and the advantages of delaying sex, but also know about sexually transmitted infections (STIs), abortion, sexual orientation, and the many forms of relationship conducive to individual fulfilment and the stability of society.

Currently, maintained schools are required to teach about anatomy, puberty and the biological aspects of reproduction as part of national curriculum science, and about STIs, HIV and AIDS as part of sex education. They must also have regard to ministerial guidance on sex education, including on inappropriate teaching materials and the importance of marriage. However, beyond that, they do not have to teach anything at all, and could choose to teach abstinence only-education until marriage. Evidence shows that such education is ineffective at getting young people to delay having sex; it just means that when they do have sex for the first time, it is less likely to be safe.¹ Academies and Free Schools must only have regard to the ministerial guidance; they do not have to teach about anatomy, puberty, reproduction, STIs, HIV or AIDS.

As we believe that every young person has a right to such fundamental information, we believe that every all should be entitled to full and comprehensive SRE, regardless of religious upbringing or type of school. As a consequence, schools and parents should not have any opt-outs from SRE. Parents certainly play a valuable role in supporting PSHE taught in schools, but this should not extend to a right to deny young people such fundamentally important knowledge, when all the evidence shows that that doing so will only lead to less safe behaviour.¹

In 2011 we responded to the PSHE Review. This can be read at <http://tinyurl.com/bhaphereview>.

Anti-abortion groups presenting misleading information in schools

Over the last year and a half, we have been working with Education For Choice (EFC) and others to highlight inappropriate teaching in schools by groups ideologically opposed to abortion. Groups such as the Society for the Protection of Unborn Children (SPUC), Lovewise and LIFE have been making un evidenced claims around abortion and contraception, including:

- Abortion causes breast cancer
- Abortion causes depression and suicide, as a result of 'post abortion trauma'
- The morning after pill can cause abortion
- Abortion causes infertility

None of these claims are supported by scientific evidence.²

¹ See the Sex Education Forum's briefing on abstinence-only education: http://www.ncb.org.uk/media/494613/forum_briefing_-_abstinence.pdf

² See the BHA's past comments on

- SPUC: <http://humanism.org.uk/2012/03/23/news-1009/>
- Lovewise: <http://humanism.org.uk/2012/07/20/news-1083/>

As a consequence of this, in April last year, we came together with twelve other organisations to sign a joint letter calling on Michael Gove to take action to prevent false claims being made in schools about abortion and contraception. In addition to EFC, other signatories included Brook, FPA, the International Planned Parenthood Federation, the National Union of Students, the National Union of Teachers and the Trades Union Congress.³

Last month, EFC published a new report, *Abortion Education in the UK: Failing our young people?* into the quality of education about abortion in the UK. The report highlighted these issues and also individual case studies of education received by young people, and made the following recommendations:

- *Education about abortion should be impartial, fact-based, inclusive, and non-stigmatising*
- *The Department for Education must be unequivocal in promoting evidence based teaching on abortion and signpost schools to at least one reputable source of information (e.g. Royal College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists)*
- *Head Teachers and school Governors must maintain an oversight of classroom practice and ensure that teaching and learning about abortion is factual, non-stigmatising and supports schools' equalities duties and diversity policies*
- *Teachers should commit to providing accurate, impartial information from reputable sources and signpost students to local sexual health services where they can get confidential advice*
- *Teachers should take measures to protect their students from images or information that may cause distress, are stigmatising or discriminatory; and should follow the Sex Education Forum guidance on external speakers*
- *Young people should be consulted on what they want and need to learn about in relation to pregnancy prevention, pregnancy decision-making and abortion.*

The BHA welcomes and endorses these recommendations, and would like to see the Government take further action to ensure their realisation.

The full report can be read at <http://www.brook.org.uk/professionals/about-brook/education-for-choice>.

About the BHA

The British Humanist Association (BHA) is the national charity working on behalf of non-religious people who seek to live ethical and fulfilling lives on the basis of reason and humanity. It is the largest organisation in the UK campaigning for an end to religious privilege and to discrimination based on religion or belief, and for a secular state.

The BHA has a long history of contributing towards and improving state education. We provide materials and advice to parents, governors, students, teachers and academics. We also work closely with others on wider equalities issues in a range of forums. The BHA is a member of the National Children's Bureau Sex Education Forum (SEF) and the Children's Rights Alliance for England.

For more details, information and evidence, contact the British Humanist Association:

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- LIFE: <http://humanism.org.uk/2012/07/26/news-1087/>

³ The letter and accompanying press release can be found at <http://humanism.org.uk/2012/04/28/news-1031/>