

NUFFIELD COUNCIL ON BIOETHICS

Response to the Department for Education's consultation on changes to the teaching of sex and relationship education and PSHE

February 2018

Introduction

- 1 We very much welcome the opportunity to respond to the Department for Education's consultation on changes to the teaching of sex and relationship education and PSHE.
- 2 Our response draws from the recommendations and findings of our *cosmetic procedures: ethical issues* report, published last year. We have chosen to only respond to questions 5 and 6 of the consultation, highlighting in particular the **importance of incorporating evidence-based resources on body image into the PSHE curriculum.**

Response to questions 5 and 6

Q5. 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.

Q6. 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 or evidence to support your suggestions.

- 3 In our research, we found that young people are increasingly concerned about their appearance. While interest in physical appearance is universal with an extensive history, what distinguishes the 21st century from the past is the preoccupation and distress experienced as a result of the perceived gap between personal appearance and appearance ideals. Research into the causes of the rising levels of anxiety about appearance is still at a relatively early stage, but a number of links are being made with features of contemporary life, such as an exponential growth in social media, growth in 'self-monitoring' apps and games, and cultural shifts in how the body is perceived, amongst others.¹

¹ Nuffield Council on Bioethics (2017) *Cosmetic procedures: ethical issues*, see paragraphs 1.6 – 1.15.

- 4 Many of the appearance-related pressures that we found in our report are embedded in the technologies that are an increasingly important part of people's lives. It is crucial to help children and young people to deal with them robustly from an early age, alongside action to challenge at source those pressures that are particularly harmful or discriminatory.
- 5 **We recommend that the Department for Education act to ensure that all children and young people have access to evidence-based resources on body image, whether through PSHE (personal, social, health, and economic education) lessons or through other (compulsory) elements of the curriculum.²**
- 6 We would also encourage the Department to engage with the Be Real campaign³ regarding the importance of incorporating body image intervention materials into the PSHE curriculum.

Contact

Hugh Whittall
Director
Nuffield Council on Bioethics
hwhittall@nuffieldbioethics.org

² Nuffield Council on Bioethics (2017) *Cosmetic procedures: ethical issues*, recommendation 7.

³ <https://www.berealcampaign.co.uk/>