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## Written evidence to Education Select Committee Inquiry on Personal, Social, Health and Economic education and Sex and Relationship Education in schools

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### Introduction to Teenage Cancer Trust

Teenage Cancer Trust is the only UK charity dedicated to improving the quality of life and outcomes for young people with cancer.

Cancer is the most common cause of non-accidental death in young people, and five-year survival rates remain lower in teenagers than in children<sup>1</sup>. Through our own research and working with our partners in the NHS, across the UK governments, and organisations both nationally and internationally, we strive to improve outcomes for young people.

We have been supporting and advocating for young people with cancer for over 20 years. We fund and build specialist units in NHS hospitals and provide dedicated staff, bringing young people together so they can be treated by teenage cancer experts in the best place for them.

Our Education and Advocacy team deliver a pioneering education programme throughout the UK. The programme is delivered in schools, colleges and universities for free, and aims to remove the stigma of cancer and demystify the disease by including discussions on the signs and symptoms of cancer, its treatment, healthy living and the emotional support issues surrounding the disease.

### Executive summary

- PSHE education provides the opportunity for young people to develop critical life skills, but is taught variably. Making PSHE education statutory would give it the equal footing other subjects have and help to ensure it's taught and taught well.
- PSHE education provides the best opportunity to explore and understand complex issues such as cancer. Teaching young people about cancer is important because it accounts for the largest numbers of deaths from disease in young people<sup>2</sup> and is a disease more than 1 in 3 people will have in their lifetime<sup>3</sup>.

<sup>1</sup> Cancer Research UK (2013), *Cancer Stats Report: Teenage and young adult cancer*

<sup>2</sup> Cancer Research UK (2013), *Cancer Stats Report: Teenage and young adult cancer*

<sup>3</sup> Sasieni PD, Shelton J, Ormiston-Smith N, et al.(2011) What is the lifetime risk of developing cancer?: The effect of adjusting for multiple primaries. Br J Cancer, 105(3): p. 460-5

## Whether PSHE ought to be statutory, either as part of the National Curriculum or through some other means of entitlement

1. PSHE education provides pupils with an opportunity to broaden their life skills which will keep them healthy and able to thrive in society. These skills are critical to personal development and should not be considered a side subject for schools. There is evidence from organisations such as NICE that this type of education can have long term impacts<sup>4</sup>.
2. However, our experience of going into secondary schools to deliver free cancer education as part of PSHE education has shown us how highly variable it is. This includes how it's taught and the level of importance given in curriculum planning. Schools that we work with regularly ask us back time and again, but getting into other schools can be difficult and not always successful meaning they miss out on this education.
3. This experience is backed up by Ofsted's review of PSHE education<sup>5</sup> which showed that in 40% of schools it required improvement or was inadequate, and that teaching improvement was required in 38% of secondary schools because subject-specific training and support were too often inadequate.
4. Making PSHE education statutory will mean that every young person will get the PSHE education they need and that schools and the Government put it on equal footing with other subjects and provide more training and access to specialists.
5. From our perspective, it is particularly important that PSHE education has an impact on improving health and health awareness, which in turn can help to improve academic performance and social skills<sup>6</sup>. The most recent report from the Chief Medical Officer also highlights the link between PSHE education and public health '*by building resilience and wellbeing*'<sup>7</sup>.
6. The importance of health as part of PSHE education is reinforced by the Department for Education guidance<sup>8</sup> which states that '*we expect schools to use their PSHE education programme to equip pupils with a sound understanding of risk and with the knowledge and skills necessary to make safe and informed decisions*' as well as '*the importance of physical activity and diet for a healthy lifestyle*'.

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<sup>4</sup> NICE, 2012, Review of Personal, Social, Health and Economics education:

<http://www.nice.org.uk/nicemedia/live/11673/59913/59913.pdf>

<sup>5</sup> Ofsted, 2012, Not yet good enough: personal, social, health and economic education in schools

<sup>6</sup> NICE, 2012, Review of Personal, Social, Health and Economics education:

<http://www.nice.org.uk/nicemedia/live/11673/59913/59913.pdf>

<sup>7</sup> CMO's Annual Report (2012) 'Our Children Deserve Better' <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/chief-medical-officers-annual-report-2012-our-children-deserve-better-prevention-pays/cmos-annual-report-2012-our-children-deserve-better-cmos-summary-as-a-web-page>

<sup>8</sup> Department for Education, 2013, Personal, Social, Health and Economics education guidance

7. Every day seven young people are diagnosed with cancer and these can be some of the most rare and aggressive forms of cancer. Greater awareness of the signs and symptoms of cancer supports a swift diagnosis and potentially reducing the intensity and duration of treatment. PSHE education provides the best opportunity to explore and understand complex issues such as cancer.
8. A study by carried out by the University of Stirling<sup>9</sup>, on behalf of Teenage Cancer Trust, in 2011 to assess teenage cancer awareness (where students completed a validated questionnaire (Cancer Awareness Measure [CAM]<sup>10</sup> adapted for teenagers) found that half of all teenagers did not know the most common cancer in children or teenagers. The study also found that over three-quarters (77%) of teenagers recognised more cancer warning signs after a one hour school-based presentation about cancer (delivered by the Teenage Cancer Trust) and that they talked about cancer with their parents and siblings after the presentation.
9. We believe it's vital that young people are given information on how to spot the early signs of cancer, as well the importance of taking responsibility for their own health and wellbeing to make safe and informed decisions about their lifestyle choices. Talking about cancer is a subject that helps to raise many issues covered by PSHE education including sensitive issues such as bullying, smoking, healthy eating, fertility, relationships.
10. This is highlighted by a teacher at Uppingham School who said: "I think this topic is an essential part of PSHE, it is one of the subjects deemed to be a sensitive issue so often not covered in schools."
11. Statutory PSHE education in schools that includes cancer will not only benefit young people but is also an effective method of getting information about cancer to their families and other members of the public.

## **Recommendations**

12. PSHE is made a statutory subject in order to guarantee provision.
13. Education about cancer forms a core part of statutory PSHE education to improve health awareness, life chances and educational attainment.

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<sup>9</sup> University of Stirling (2011), *Teenage Cancer Awareness Study*

<sup>10</sup> Cancer Research UK (CRUK) (2011) *Cancer Awareness Measure Toolkit* London, CRUK.