UN Children’s Rights Concept Note submission

**About us:**

* Personal, social, health and economic (PSHE) education is a school subject in England that supports pupils to be healthy, safe and prepared for modern life. The PSHE education curriculum covers a range of pressing issues facing children and young people today, including those relating to relationships, mental and physical health, staying safe and aware online and offline, financial literacy and careers.
* The PSHE Association is the national body for PSHE education. A charity and membership organisation, the Association works to improve PSHE education standards by supporting a national network of teachers and schools with advice, training and support. Find out more at www.pshe-association.org.uk

**The role education systems must play**

* All children and young people should be educated to stay safe and flourish in the digital environment. This will involve both explicitly addressing topics specific to online life, and concepts which apply across the digital world and in real life – an increasingly porous divide.
* In England, the PSHE education curriculum[[1]](#endnote-1) fulfils this role. PSHE explicitly covers topics relevant to the digital environment, developing knowledge, skills and strategies related to areas including: privacy and protection of personal data; digital literacy including learning to be a critical consumer of information; strategies for staying safe online; online bullying and harassment; avoiding online fraud; online gambling; managing online presence and reputation.
* PSHE also develops cross-cutting skills and attributes that can be applied to various aspects of life. These include developing resilience, and an understanding of risk, rights and responsibilities – all relevant to the digital environment.
* PSHE education, and its equivalents in other countries, should play a central part in a more balanced approach to the curriculum. This is not to undermine the importance of attainment in core academic subjects (PSHE is proven to support rather than detract from such attainment[[2]](#endnote-2)) but to better prepare young people for the realities of the modern world and the challenges and opportunities they face.
* PSHE has traditionally suffered from second-tier status on the curriculum, resulting in little or no curriculum time, and varying quality, in many schools. However, the Government’s decision to make the health education and relationships education aspects compulsory from 2020 has potential to ensure better and more consistent provision.
* To be effective, this education needs to be delivered through regular lessons by trained teachers in all schools to all pupils.

**Making the digital environment more focussed on the rights of the child**

We support the work of 5Rights in this area, and introduction of the Age Appropriate Design Code[[3]](#endnote-3) currently being drafted by the Information Commissioner’s Office.

Technology companies must make significant improvements to the design of their services to protect children online. The digital space should be suited to the rights and needs of children by default, including:

* A high bar of privacy by default, concerning both data that is explicitly collected and processed (e.g. geolocation, personal details) and inferred data acquired from behaviour online.
* Strict limitations on technology that profiles children and young people for advertising and marketing purposes.
* Limiting the designed addictive capabilities of technologies accessible by children and young people.
* Clarity and if possible standardisation when it comes to privacy messaging and terms & conditions. These should be drafted in a child-friendly language that explicitly informs the user about the consequences of taking an action online that could affect their rights.

1. <https://www.pshe-association.org.uk/programmeofstudy> [↑](#endnote-ref-1)
2. <https://www.probonoeconomics.com/resources/pshe-association> [↑](#endnote-ref-2)
3. <https://ico.org.uk/media/about-the-ico/consultations/2614762/age-appropriate-design-code-for-public-consultation.pdf> [↑](#endnote-ref-3)