

# Humanist Society Scotland submission of 1 February 2023

## PE1991/C: Develop an educational resource on abortion

I am writing to you today with regard to petition 1991, titled 'Develop an educational resource on abortion,' presented by Gemma Clark.

Humanist Society Scotland supports the petition's aim to ensure that students in Scottish schools receive accurate and meaningful education regarding abortion care.

Humanist Society Scotland believes that children and young adults have a right to a scientifically accurate education about medicine and the human body and should be able to access medically sound advice on pregnancy services.

Recently, we have been contacted by a variety of members raising concerns regarding the school visits of SPUC Scotland (Society for the Protection of Unborn Children Scotland), an openly anti-abortion organisation. As reported by the Herald<sup>1</sup>, members of this organisation have been visiting schools in at least eight different local authorities across Scotland, with 33 different visits to one specific school since 2017. The group has even visited primary schools to present oppositional 'education resources' relating to abortion.

SPUC's views on abortion are based on faith principles and perspectives. It is of course the right of a private organisation to hold such views. But the group is presenting its positions in schools as 'healthcare' advice in the context of PSE lessons. The materials they present are not supported by expert medical practitioners such as the Royal College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists. These materials rather reflect a faith-based perspective that would be better presented within the RE, RME, or RMPS strands of the curriculum.

We welcome giving students the chance to learn about differing perspectives on abortion and other health-related ethical issues such as

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<sup>1</sup> Herald (2022), Anti-abortion group has carried out dozens of school visits, [https://www.heraldsotland.com/business\\_hq/23198924.anti-abortion-group-carried-dozens-school-visits/](https://www.heraldsotland.com/business_hq/23198924.anti-abortion-group-carried-dozens-school-visits/)

assisted dying. Students should be able to consider different faith or belief-based positions alongside non-religious responses to ethical issues, and should be encouraged to develop critical thinking skills in response. But this kind of education is best delivered by appropriately trained and resourced RME/RMPS teachers. It is concerning that schools are conflating faith-based arguments with the kind of sound, evidenced, robust healthcare information that should be offered within PSE and healthcare lessons.

The vision of SPUC, as stated on their promotional materials, is: “A world where abortion is unthinkable.”<sup>2</sup> This is clearly in conflict with the Scottish Government submission (PE1991/A) to the committee on 24 January 2023, which holds that information should be objective and non-judgemental. In its submission, the Government states (emphasis ours): “Young people should experience learning which is **factual, objective** and enables them to make informed choices that promote and protect their own and others’ sexual health and wellbeing. Content should be delivered in a **non judgemental** manner, within a framework of sound values and an awareness of the law, including that on sexual behaviour.”

As an example of the organisation promoting non-factual information, SPUC currently host information on their YouTube channel which promotes the use of progesterone for ‘abortion reversal’<sup>3</sup>. The Royal College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists (RCOG), the Faculty of Sexual and Reproductive Healthcare (FSRH), the Royal College of Midwives (RCM), and the British Society of Abortion Care Providers (BSACP) have all condemned the promotion of such use of progesterone as having ‘no reputable evidence’ in use for ‘abortion reversal.’<sup>4</sup> Guidance from the National Institute for Health and Care Excellence (Nice) says in its recommendations for progesterone that it is ‘not applicable in other circumstances, such as after the use of mifepristone.’<sup>5</sup> A 2019 randomised control trial on the ‘reversal’ pill had to be stopped after 12 patients had used the pills because three of them suffered ‘severe’ haemorrhages and needed emergency care.<sup>6</sup> Indeed, it

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<sup>2</sup> Our Vision, About Us, What We Do, SPUC: <https://www.spuc.org.uk/About-Us/What-We-Do>

<sup>3</sup> Uplift: Episode 1 w/ Dr Dermot Kearney, SPUC Pro-Life YouTube, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=E5LYrsVuhYw>

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.rcog.org.uk/news/no-reputable-evidence-for-progesterone-use-in-abortion-reversal-say-medical-organisations/>

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.nice.org.uk/guidance/ng126/chapter/Rationale-and-impact>

<sup>6</sup> NPR (2019) Safety Problems Lead To Early End For Study Of 'Abortion Pill Reversal' <https://www.npr.org/sections/health-shots/2019/12/05/785262221/safety-problems-lead-to-early-end-for-study-of-abortion-pill-reversal>

was reported by The Times that Dr. Kearney, who is interviewed in the SPUC YouTube video, admitted that two patients he had prescribed progesterone as an abortion-reversal had to have blood transfusions after taking the drug.<sup>7</sup> Students and teachers should have access to non-biased, informative, and educational resources about pregnancy.

Furthermore, regarding the data provided in PE1991, carried out by the Educational Institute for Scotland in 2013, we find it unacceptable that, in the vast majority of schools, no specific evidence-based abortion-related resources are provided in the sexual-health curriculum.

We believe that the current situation could constitute a violation of Articles 3 and 17 of the UNCRC. These articles state that a lack of access to 'reliable information from a variety of sources' would not only breach children's rights but also have a detrimental effect on their education, livelihoods, and in some cases their health and wellbeing.

Humanist Society Scotland agrees with the petition that the Scottish Parliament should ask the Scottish Government, through appropriate agencies, to create a non-biased, health-focused educational resource around abortion and pregnancy-related services for PSE purposes.

We also urge the Parliament to ask the government to urgently review what material is being promoted by schools that does not meet the stated requirements in their submission to the committee. This review should result in clear guidance to schools where such material is more appropriate for discussions within RME/RMS curricula on ethics rather than within unbiased healthcare education.

I look forward to seeing the outcome of this petition.

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<sup>7</sup> Times (2022) Call to investigate doctor offering 'unethical' abortion reversal drug  
<https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/call-to-investigate-doctor-offering-unethical-abortion-reversal-drug-009wbw2mr>