

Written submissions

Phase two of the Review of Relationships and Sexuality  
Education

## Written Submissions

Written submissions are an important part of the NCCA's consultation process. During the second phase of consultation, the NCCA received 42 written submissions in total, 38 of which are available for publication.

## Aighneachtaí Scríofa

Is cuid thábhachtach de phróiseas comhairliúcháin an CNCM iad na haighneachtaí scríofa. Le linn an dara chéim den chomhairliúcháin fuair an CNCM 42 aighneacht scríofa ar fad. Fuaireamar cead 38 díobh siúd a chuir ar fáil san fhoilseachán seo.

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# The Abortion Rights Campaign

# Review of Relationships and Sexuality Education (RSE)

At the request of the Minister for Education and Skills, a major review of RSE in primary and post-primary schools was undertaken from June 2018 to March 2019. The review examined the experience of teaching and learning in RSE including; the curriculum, the approach to learning, the supports needed, and ways to improve the experience of RSE for students. Engagement in the review was considerable and signals the level of interest and concern people share in relation to this aspect of education. We are now engaging in consultation to ensure the findings and draft advice is reflective of the needs of students, schools, and parents.

In responding to the findings and draft advice on the future directions of RSE it is recommended that you read the draft report or the summary of the draft report both of which are available here <https://www.ncca.ie/en/updates-and-events/consultations/review-of-relationships-and-sexuality-education-rse>.

<b>Name</b>	
<b>Surname</b>	
<b>Position (if applicable)</b>	

<b>Organisation (if applicable)</b>	Abortion Rights Campaign
<b>Date</b>	25 October 2019
<b>Email</b>	[REDACTED]

[REDACTED] provide some brief background information on your organisation (if applicable).

The Abortion Rights Campaign is an all-volunteer grassroots movement for change. We advocate for free safe legal and local abortion on the island of Ireland.

Note: Please see our response to the last question. Thank you.

### **The approach**

Across all stakeholders, there was strong agreement that RSE needs to be more than information about biological aspects of growing up and sexual activity. It needs a holistic

approach that balances discussion about the risks and dangers associated with relationships and sexual activity with discussion about the positive, healthy and enjoyable aspects of relationships. A holistic approach can be understood as teaching and learning about the cognitive, emotional, physical and social aspects of relationships and sexuality. It aims to equip children and young people with knowledge, skills, attitudes and values that will empower them to: realise their health, wellbeing and dignity; develop respectful social and sexual relationships; consider how their choices affect their own wellbeing and that of others; and understand and ensure the protection of their rights throughout their lives.

**To what extent do you broadly agree/disagree with the proposed direction on the approach to RSE that has emerged from the review? Please tick your response in the box below.**

<b>Strongly Agree</b>	<b>Agree</b>	<b>Disagree</b>	<b>Strongly Disagree</b>

**What are the aspects of the proposed approach that you agree/disagree with?**

**What else is important when considering the approach for teaching SPHE/RSE in schools?**

### **The curriculum**

The Review highlighted the need to create a single integrated curriculum that sets out the learning for SPHE/RSE as one subject and incrementally provides continuity of experience from early childhood to post-primary. In the immediate term the NCCA will develop interim guidelines to support the current curriculum on how it can be approached in a more holistic way and provide clarity on how topics can be taught in an inclusive manner to incorporate current themes identified by the review.

**To what extent do you broadly agree/disagree with the need for a single integrated curriculum for SPHE/RSE? Please tick your response in the box below.**

<b>Strongly Agree</b>	<b>Agree</b>	<b>Disagree</b>	<b>Strongly Disagree</b>

**Please provide a reason for your level of agreement/disagreement.**

**What else do you consider important in relation to future curriculum development in SPHE/RSE?**

### **Creating the conditions for effective RSE**

The Review makes it clear that teachers need in-depth and sustained training and support in the area of SPHE/RSE. Consequently, access to professional development needs to be enhanced at pre-service and in-service levels. The Review also identified the need to take stock of current teaching and learning resources available in this area.

**To what extent do you broadly agree/disagree with the Review's findings on the necessary conditions for effective SPHE/RSE? Please tick your response in the box below**

<b>Strongly Agree</b>	<b>Agree</b>	<b>Disagree</b>	<b>Strongly Disagree</b>

**Please provide a reason for your level of agreement/disagreement.**

**What else do you consider important in order to create the conditions for effective SPHE/RSE?**

### **Other considerations**

The Review concluded that comprehensive oversight and support for SPHE/RSE is required to meet the needs identified in the review process. The Review also found schools cannot do it alone and parents must be encouraged and supported in assuming their responsibility for their child's learning. In addition, it suggests that post-primary schools require further support and

guidance in planning for junior cycle wellbeing in order to enhance students' learning in SPHE/RSE.

**To what extent do you broadly agree/disagree that these are important considerations for SPHE/RSE?  
Please tick your response in the box below.**

<b>Strongly Agree</b>	<b>Agree</b>	<b>Disagree</b>	<b>Strongly Disagree</b>

**Please provide a reason for your level of agreement/disagreement.**

**Are there any other considerations that should be highlighted in the advice for SPHE/RSE?**

Since we made our original submission to the NCAA, Ireland changed its law on abortion. On January 1, 2019, legal abortion became available in Ireland. Students should be taught about abortion in an evidence-based non-judgmental manner as part of overall sexual health education.

The text of the law can be found here:

<http://www.irishstatutebook.ie/eli/2018/act/31/enacted/en/html>

The HSE's MyOptions helpline can be found here:

<https://www2.hse.ie/services/unplanned-pregnancy-support-services/my-options-free-phone-line.html>

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If you require further information related to data protection and [www.ncca.ie](http://www.ncca.ie) you can contact the NCCA's Data Protection Officer at [dpo@ncca.ie](mailto:dpo@ncca.ie)

## Alliance for Defence of Family and Marriage

# Review of Relationships and Sexuality Education (RSE)

At the request of the Minister for Education and Skills, a major review of RSE in primary and post-primary schools was undertaken from June 2018 to March 2019. The review examined the experience of teaching and learning in RSE including; the curriculum, the approach to learning, the supports needed, and ways to improve the experience of RSE for students. Engagement in the review was considerable and signals the level of interest and concern people share in relation to this aspect of education. We are now engaging in consultation to ensure the findings and draft advice is reflective of the needs of students, schools, and parents.

In responding to the findings and draft advice on the future directions of RSE it is recommended that you read the draft report or the summary of the draft report both of which are available here <https://www.ncca.ie/en/updates-and-events/consultations/review-of-relationships-and-sexuality-education-rse>.

<b>Name</b>	Séamas
<b>Surname</b>	de Barra
<b>Position (if applicable)</b>	Treasurer/Secretary
<b>Organisation (if applicable)</b>	ADFAM — Alliance for the Defence of Family and Marriage
<b>Date</b>	October 22, 2019
<b>Email</b>	

1) Please provide some brief background information on your organisation (if applicable).

ADFAM was founded in Spring 2014 in order, initially, to oppose the redefinition of 'marriage' that was attempted in the Marriage Equality Referendum, May 22, 2015. We have also taken part in the Abortion Referendum, May 25, 2018, urging a NO vote; in the Blasphemy Referendum October 24, 2018, urging a NO vote; and in the Divorce Referendum, May 24, 2019, urging a NO vote.

We made a Submission to the Citizens's Assembly on the 'Manner in which referenda are held', discussed at their weekend meeting of January 13–14, 2018.

Our main work is in alerting our contacts to upcoming legislation in Dáil Éireann, Seanad Éireann, or when it is discussed by Oireachtas Committees.

## The approach

Across all stakeholders, there was strong agreement that RSE needs to be more than information about biological aspects of growing up and sexual activity. It needs a holistic approach that balances discussion about the risks and dangers associated with relationships and sexual activity with discussion about the positive, healthy and enjoyable aspects of

relationships. A holistic approach can be understood as teaching and learning about the cognitive, emotional, physical and social aspects of relationships and sexuality. It aims to equip children and young people with knowledge, skills, attitudes and values that will empower them to: realise their health, wellbeing and dignity; develop respectful social and sexual relationships; consider how their choices affect their own wellbeing and that of others; and understand and ensure the protection of their rights throughout their lives.

**To what extent do you broadly agree/disagree with the proposed direction on the approach to RSE that has emerged from the review? Please tick your response in the box below.**

Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
			✓

**2) What are the aspects of the proposed approach that you agree/disagree with?**

The Report is too long — 95 pages. The views of various bodies are given. It is not indexed. It lacks transparency. Chapter 7, pp. 72–82, ‘Advice on future directions’ essentially amounts to the NCCA’s ‘Recommendations’. Why couldn’t you have used that word? The ‘Summary’, pp. 83–84, employs evasive language. The international treaties and instruments in Point 1 should be specified. ‘Inclusive’ in Point 2 should be defined. Topics highlighted by the Minister mentioned in Point 4 should be named. The bases for inviting/choosing agencies in Point 7 should be set out. It is admitted, apparently without embarrassment, that, regarding survey responses ‘The respondents were self-selecting and as such not representative’ [p. 9].

**3) What else is important when considering the approach for teaching SPHE/RSE in schools?**

Encouraging infants of 0 to 4 years of age to masturbate is perverse [as recommended in the World Health Report, *Standards in Sex Education in Europe* (2010) p. 38 — that publication is referred to in the NCCA Draft Report, p. 58]. Clearly the aim of that recommendation is to get children used to addictive behaviour from a very early age. The attempt at making Relationships and Sexuality Education mandatory/compulsory [NCCA Draft Report p. 73, footnotes 4, 5] would involve ignoring the Constitutional rights of the Family [Article 42]; and freedom of religion re education [Articles 44.2.4<sup>o</sup>, 44.2.5]. The concentration on consent [to sexual relations] in this ‘education’ [p. 5] assumes that most adolescents are mentally retarded. No alternative view is entertained on the efficacy of the approach of explicit sex education plus contraceptives/abortifacients in dealing with unexpected teenage pregnancy. I’m thinking of the work of the economist, Professor David Paton, of the University of Nottingham, England, see March 14, 2017, <http://washingtonpost.com/news/the-fix/wp/2016/05/04/abortion-rates-are>; and a recent study from the Center Disease Control and Prevention, USA, confirming that it is possible for adolescents to practise abstinence, and that a low rate of teenage pregnancy is associated with that [‘Sexual Intercourse Among High School Students – 29 States and U.S. Overall, 2005–2015’]. The approach adopted throughout to human nature in the Draft Report is pessimistic and deterministic. The age of consent in the Republic of Ireland is 17 years, but the

legality, in effect, of facilitating sexual activity by minors is not even considered. The false notion that sexual orientation is already set in stone in adolescence is accepted. No opposing views on same-sex attraction, and gender confusion, are examined — such as those of U.S. psychiatrist, Dr Richard Fitzgibbons MD, or Dutch psychologist, Dr Gerard van den Aardweg. Too much prominence is given to the views of ideologues of sexual libertinism. About 1.5% of the population are same-sex attracted. A smaller percentage claim to be of a sex other than that registered on their birth certificate.

### The curriculum

The Review highlighted the need to create a single integrated curriculum that sets out the learning for SPHE/RSE as one subject and incrementally provides continuity of experience from early childhood to post-primary. In the immediate term the NCCA will develop interim guidelines to support the current curriculum on how it can be approached in a more holistic way and provide clarity on how topics can be taught in an inclusive manner to incorporate current themes identified by the review.

To what extent do you broadly agree/disagree with the need for a single integrated curriculum for SPHE/RSE? Please tick your response in the box below.

Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
			✓

#### 4) Please provide a reason for your level of agreement/disagreement.

If delivered in schools at all, Relationships and Sexuality Education should be confined to one subject area. Spreading it all through the curriculum gives the message to impressionable children and teenagers that that is the only subject to which they should pay attention. A recent survey of 3<sup>rd</sup> level students found that a third of them are depressed. Without doubt, much of that depression is caused by societal pressure to get active sexually. It is also caused by tragedies that result from that concentration on sexuality, when they should be concentrating on getting their degrees and diplomas, with a view to getting gainful employment. A recent study from Australia has demonstrated that adolescence should be considered as lasting from the age of 10–24 years [Professor Susan Sawyer, *et al.*, *The Lancet Child and Adolescent Health*, (March 2018) pp. 223–228] Youth should be respected. A conscious effort should be made at banning the priming of adolescents for sexual consumerism.

**5) What else do you consider important in relation to future curriculum development in SPHE/RSE?**

**If Relationships and Sexuality Education is to be delivered at post–primary level at all, some good well–balanced material should be presented to the pupils, e.g. *Love and Responsibility* (Krakow 1960) by Archbishop Karol Wojtyła, later Pope John Paul II, and now Pope St. John Paul II. Most people using contraceptives/abortifacients, do so in profound ignorance of the biology of the female and male bodies — an age–appropriate basic course in Natural Family Planning/Fertility Care would educate them in essentials.**

### **Creating the conditions for effective RSE**

The Review makes it clear that teachers need in-depth and sustained training and support in the area of SPHE/RSE. Consequently, access to professional development needs to be enhanced at pre-service and in-service levels. The Review also identified the need to take stock of current teaching and learning resources available in this area.

**To what extent do you broadly agree/disagree with the Review’s findings on the necessary conditions for effective SPHE/RSE? Please tick your response in the box below**

<b>Strongly Agree</b>	<b>Agree</b>	<b>Disagree</b>	<b>Strongly Disagree</b>
			✓

**6) Please provide a reason for your level of agreement/disagreement.**

**One can’t teach maturity to minors. You can’t put an old head on young shoulders. No course, no primary degree, no master’s degree, will enable a teacher to teach maturity to minors. It is no business of anyone to attempt to teach minors how to experience sexual pleasure in their relationships. It is voyeuristic in the extreme. It is sexual abuse of minors. It surely must be illegal.**

**7) What else do you consider important in order to create the conditions for effective SPHE/RSE?**

**Adults are adults, and they shouldn’t allow immature minors — who may have problems of their own — to dictate to them on what is taught to minors. There are always some pupils in a post–primary class who are precocious in their sexual development – ‘the hard chaws’. They are the exception. Their advice should not be made the rule. Unfortunately, it is very frequently the case that sexually precocious teenagers have troubles in a number of areas. They may come from broken homes. They may have been physically or sexually abused, or raped, when younger. The abuse may be ongoing.**

**Pornography is at an epidemic level. Parents should be advised on how to block pornographic sites from the mobile/smartphones of their children and teenagers.**

### **Other considerations**

The Review concluded that comprehensive oversight and support for SPHE/RSE is required to meet the needs identified in the review process. The Review also found schools cannot do it alone and parents must be encouraged and supported in assuming their responsibility for their child's learning. In addition, it suggests that post-primary schools require further support and guidance in planning for junior cycle wellbeing in order to enhance students' learning in SPHE/RSE.

**To what extent do you broadly agree/disagree that these are important considerations for SPHE/RSE? Please tick your response in the box below.**

<b>Strongly Agree</b>	<b>Agree</b>	<b>Disagree</b>	<b>Strongly Disagree</b>
			✓

**8) Please provide a reason for your level of agreement/disagreement.**

**I read in the NCCA Draft Report [p. 31] that one third of parents are never consulted about Relationships and Sexuality Education. It was clear from the attitudes of some teachers [p. 52] that they are reluctant to inform parents about such courses. I know of a case where a mother was told about a once-off course very shortly before it was to take place, at a time when she didn't have a proper opportunity to complain about it . That happened in a South-Dublin Gaelscoil, a nominally Catholic school. A homosexualist group were invited into the school, in effect, to propagandize.**

**9) Are there any other considerations that should be highlighted in the advice for SPHE/RSE?**

**There is a variety of opinions on the issue of ethos in this Draft Report. A number of TDs and Senators [Seanad, September 25, 2019; Dáil, September 26, 2019] have urged the Minister to introduce legislation to over-rule school ethos, or characteristic spirit of the school, in the area of Relationships and Sexuality Education. That is just totalitarianism. Have we not learned enough from the horrors of totalitarian regimes all around the world in this regard? Let us resist this move to totalitarianism.**

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## Atheist Ireland

# Atheist Ireland

Submission on the NCCA Draft Report  
on the Review of Relationship and  
Sexuality Education (RSE) October 2019



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# 1. Executive Summary

## 1.1 Introduction to Atheist Ireland

Atheist Ireland is an advocacy group. We promote atheism and reason over superstition and supernaturalism, and we promote an ethical, secular society where the State does not support or finance or give special treatment to any religion.

Since being formed in late 2008, we have campaigned for a secular Irish Constitution, parliament, laws, government, and education and healthcare systems. We are partners in the dialogue process between the Government and religious and nonreligious bodies.

We have addressed various Oireachtas Committees, the Constitutional Convention, Citizens Assembly, United Nations Committees, the OSCE, Council of Europe bodies, and the Presidents of the European Union.

## 1.2 Failure of the NCCA to Uphold its Public Sector Duty

The NCCA has a duty under Section 42 of the Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission Act to 'protect the human rights of the persons to whom it provides services'. This Draft Report fails to do this, including by omission. The Draft Report explicitly accepts a human rights based approach as the foundation upon which it is building its findings, which we welcome. It states:

*"The approach to provision for RSE set out here is grounded in the rights and needs of children and young people as set out in numerous international human rights treaties and instruments that refer to the right to education and to the highest standard of health... These foundational agreements form the basis for comprehensive sexuality education in all countries that ascribe to upholding these rights."*

However, it does not follow through on the consequences of accepting this human rights based approach, and it fails to make recommendations that necessarily flow from this approach. Human rights are not worth the paper they are written on if no practical application is given to them. The European Court has stated that:

*"The Convention is intended to guarantee not rights that are theoretical or illusory but rights that are practical and effective" (ECHR Airey V Ireland)*

The Draft Report gives no practical application to the right of all students to objective RSE based on human rights principles, despite the fact that is the duty of the NCCA under Section 42 of the Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission Act 2014 to 'eliminate discrimination' and 'protect the human rights of the persons to whom it provides services'.

The NCCA seems to believe that its public sector duty does not oblige it to have regard to the practicalities on the ground of protecting human rights even though Section 41 (3)-(d) Education Act 1998 obliges the NCCA to have regard to the practicalities of any advice which it proposes to give to the Minister.

## 1.3 Religious Ethos and the Need to Change the Law

The Draft Report fails to recommend that school ethos should not be used to prevent students from exercising their human right to access objective sex education, a right that has been highlighted by the Minister for Education in the Dail in 2018; the Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission in 2015; the UN Human Rights Committee in 2014; Circular Letter 0037/2010; and the European Social Charter.

The Draft NCCA Report states that:

*“The review concludes that at this point school ethos cannot be separated out from other factors that influence the teaching of RSE.”*

If school ethos cannot be separated out from other factors that influence the teaching of RSE, then this means that the NCCA is suggesting that ‘school ethos’ takes precedence over the right of students to objective RSE based on human rights and in particular the European Social Charter.

It also means that the NCCA is suggesting that school ethos takes precedence over the policy of the Department of Education (Circular Letter 0037/2010) that all students have a right to objective RSE.

The only way that denominational Patron bodies will change their approach is if the law is changed to oblige them to reflect these human rights. The legal changes required include amending Sections 9(d), 15(2)(b) and 30(2)(b) of the Education Act, which have been identified as problems by the NCCA in 2017.

It is the duty of the NCCA under Section 42 of the Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission Act to ‘protect the human rights of the persons to whom it provides services’. It is therefore imperative that the NCCA does both of two things:

1. Describe what must be done in order for an objective RSE curriculum to be designed and delivered in a way that meets human rights standards; and
2. Acknowledge that the NCCA has not got the legal power to ensure that any revised curriculum on RSE is delivered according to human rights standards, and recommend that the law be changed to enable this to happen.

#### **1.4 The UNESCO Report Position on School Ethos**

The NCCA Draft Report says that it is working from the definition of Comprehensive Sexuality Education used in UNESCO’s ‘International Technical Guidance on Sexuality Education: an Evidence-informed Approach.’ This is:

*“A curriculum-based process of teaching and learning about the cognitive, emotional, physical and social aspects of relationships and sexuality. It aims to equip children and young people with knowledge, skills, attitudes and values that will empower them to: realise their health, wellbeing and dignity; develop respectful social and sexual relationships; consider how their choices affect their own wellbeing and that of others; and, understand and ensure the protection of their rights throughout their lives. (UNESCO, p.16 2018)”*

Given that choice of working definition, it makes sense to also work from the UNESCO conclusions on delivering effective programmes in the same Report. UNESCO concludes that the delivery of CSE is as important as its content. It also concludes that evidence shows that the delivery works best where the school ethos reflects the principles of the content.

*“When developing and delivering CSE, it is important to build on existing standards or guidelines, and to develop clear steps for its implementation and evaluation. Evidence is increasingly showing that the delivery of CSE is as important as the content.*

*Effective sexuality education must take place in a safe environment, where young people feel comfortable to participate and their privacy is respected, where they are protected from harassment and where the school ethos reflects the principles of the content (Pound et al., 2017).”*

Note the sequence here: UNESCO is saying that CSE delivery works best when the school ethos reflects the principles of the content, not when the principles of the content reflect the school ethos. Obviously we cannot suddenly change the ethos of denominational schools to reflect

objective RSE content, but we can move towards the UNESCO approach by preventing a religious ethos from influencing the delivery of this specific subject.

### **1.5 Religious Exemptions in Employment Equality Act**

The NCCA Draft Report fails to mention the religious exemption in the Employment Equality Act (Section 37) and the fact that teachers are legally obliged to uphold the ethos of the Patron. It is the Patron of the schools that set the ethos, and Boards of Management are legally obliged to uphold the ethos of the Patron (Section 15-2(b) Education Act).

If it is the public sector duty of the NCCA to eliminate discrimination and protect human rights, then surely any Draft Report should have referred specifically to the legal obstacles that prevent students from accessing the right to objective RSE based on human rights and in particular the European Social Charter.

The legal obligations of Boards of Management and teachers to uphold the ethos of the Patron would seem to be a priority issue that needed to be addressed given that it is these issues that prevent access to human rights based RSE.

The Draft Report concludes:

*“As part of ongoing development work in SPHE/RSE, the NCCA will work with schools to explore how an enabling understanding of school ethos can inform good practice in RSE across a range of contexts.”*

This discussion-based approach will not resolve the problem. The problem is not that Patrons of schools do not understand the issues involved. The problem is that most Patrons have a particular ideological position on the issue, and their position denies students their human right to objective sex education.

No amount of ongoing development work with schools exploring “an enabling understanding of school ethos” will change the fact that teachers are subject to Section 37 of the Employment Act, that Boards of Management are obliged to uphold the ethos of the Patron (Section 15-2(b) Education Act 1998) and that teachers can actually lose their jobs if they refuse to comply with the ethos of the Patron.

Why does the NCCA even want to put teachers in this position, what does an enabling understanding of school ethos mean for a teacher. Are they expected to challenge the ethos of schools when they are contractually obliged to uphold that very ethos?

### **1.6 Teacher Competence, Confidence, and Conditions**

The Draft Report also states that:

*“The key enabler to more confident and comprehensive teaching of RSE is the development of teacher competence and confidence. In addition, teachers need to be supported by a clearly articulated curriculum which all schools are supported in providing and a clear RSE school policy that is enabling and supportive.”*

We agree that supporting teacher competence and confidence with a clearly articulated curriculum is important, but regardless of this, all teachers are still contractually obliged to uphold the ethos of the Patron.

The Draft Report fails to recognise and articulate the legal conditions that schools and teachers operate under. There is no mention of Section 37 of the Employment Act. It is as if it simply does not exist. The Oireachtas had the opportunity to remove the exemption on religious grounds in 2015 under the Equality (Miscellaneous) provisions Act 2015 but they did not do so. It is extraordinary to not even mention it.

At the time the Catholic Schools Partnership made a Submission and stated that:

*“Section 37 allows employers with a religious ethos to give “more favourable treatment” to employees on the religion ground. Thus a church, a temple, a synagogue, a mosque does not discriminate if it requires that certain employees must share the faith that is supported and celebrated in these institutions.*

*If there were no such provision then these religious employers could never use religious adherence as a ground for employment even where it is clearly a relevant and important aspect of a particular position.”*

*<https://www.catholicbishops.ie/2014/10/30/catholic-schools-partnership-calls-balance-amendment-employment-equality-laws/>*

The recent Education (Admission to schools) Act 2018 also protects the ethos of Patron which is articulated in the ‘Admissions policy’ of the school and which goes to the Patron for Approval (Section 62-7(a)) and or amendment. Boards of Management and Teachers have no legal control over ethos and no amount of enabling understanding of ethos will change that fact.

The mostly-Catholic influence on the attitudes, values and experiences of the teachers who will be delivering RSE begins during their training. In order to train as a teacher and gain employment, trainee teachers must take a Certificate in Religious Studies (CRS). As the vast majority of schools in the state are religious, it is nearly impossible to gain employment as a teacher without a CRS.

### **1.7 The Role of Religious External Providers**

The NCCA Draft Report States that when those working on RSE were considering the connection between ethos and RSE that ethos ‘seemed’ to come way down the list of priorities (page 78 Draft Report).

The Draft report acknowledges the value of external provider’s inputs when they are planned in partnership with the school and are complementary to the wider SPHE/RSE teaching and learning taking place. It concludes that:

*“The development of additional guidance for schools on the use of external providers in this area of education will be undertaken on foot of this review.”*

The NCCA Draft Report has failed to take on board the fact that external agencies such as Accord and Pure in Heart are paid by schools out of public money to teach RSE through religion.

Schools that pay these agencies (Denominational and ETB) give priority to delivering RSE through religion and the Catholic religion in particular. These organisations are registered Charities and are legally obliged under the Charities Act to ensure that their activities advance their charitable purpose only. Delivering RSE through religion is the very purpose of what they do and what they are legally obliged to do.

Any additional guidance developed by the NCCA on the use of external providers for RSE will have no bearing on the fact that at present the majority of external providers deliver RSE through religion and they are legally obliged to do so.

We believe that the use of the word ‘seemed’ in the context of ethos is indicative of the failure of the NCCA to take on board their duty to protect human rights. The NCCA Report fails to take on board the fact that schools that pay external RSE providers such as Accord and Pure in Heart are delivering RSE through religion. How can that not be classed as a priority for these schools, when they are using school resources to pay these external providers?

### **1.8 Circular Letters issued by the Department of Education**

The Draft Report states that:

*“The role of the Inspectorate, and Department of Education and Skills (DES) circulars, in supporting good practice in SPHE/RSE should also be emphasised.”*

There is no mention in the Draft Report of the fact that Circular Letter 0037/2010 issued by the Department of Education failed to guarantee that all students had access to:

*“1.5. Access to sexual and health education is an important right for students under the terms of the Article 11.2 of the European Social Charter. The Council of Europe European Committee of Social Rights, which examines complaints regarding breaches of the Charter, has indicated it regards this Article as requiring that health education; “be provided throughout the entire period of schooling” and that sexual and reproductive health education is “objective, based on contemporary scientific evidence and does not involve censoring, withholding or intentionally misrepresenting information, for example as regards contraception or different means on maintaining sexual and reproductive health.”*

Obviously Circular Letters issued by the Department of Education are of no use when a school has a religious ethos. Suggesting Circular Letters as a means to support good practice in SPHE/RSE is meaningless given that Circular Letter 0037/2010 has already failed to guarantee access for students to objective RSE education based on human rights.

## 2. Report Endorses then Ignores Human Rights Approach

### 2.1 Importance of Using a Human Rights Based Approach

The Approach section of the Draft Report starts very well, by explicitly placing the approach to RSE on the foundations of human rights, as set out in numerous international human rights treaties that Ireland has signed up to. It says:

*“The approach to provision for RSE set out here is grounded in the rights and needs of children and young people as set out in numerous international human rights treaties and instruments that refer to the right to education and to the highest standard of health. These include the Universal Declaration of Human Rights; the UN Convention on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights; the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child; the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities; and the UN Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women.”*

This reflects two of our first three recommendations from our original submission to this process:

- (a) *The mandatory provision in Irish schools of sexual and reproductive health education targeted at adolescent girls and boys, as recommended by the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child in 2016;*
- (c) *Scientifically objective, standardised, age-appropriate education on sexual and reproductive health and rights, as recommended by the UN Committee on Elimination of Discrimination against Women in 2017.*

The Draft Report then cites two quotations from United Nations human rights committees that we had included in our original submission. Indeed, the CEDAW recommendation came from Atheist Ireland raising the issue with the United Nations Committee before it questioned Ireland. This was the first time that CEDAW addressed this issue.

*“These foundational agreements form the basis for comprehensive sexuality education in all countries that ascribe to upholding these rights. During its last review under the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child in 2016, the Committee on the Rights of the Child recommended that Ireland:*

*‘Adopt a comprehensive sexual and reproductive health policy for adolescents and ensure that sexual and reproductive health education is part of the mandatory school curriculum and targeted at adolescent girls and boys.’*

*This was reiterated in 2017 in recommendations from the Committee on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women, calling on Ireland to:*

*‘Integrate compulsory and standardised age-appropriate education on sexual and reproductive health and rights into school curricula, including comprehensive sex education for adolescent girls and boys covering responsible sexual behaviours and focused on preventing early pregnancies; and ensure that it is scientifically objective and its delivery by schools is closely monitored and evaluated’.*”

The European Social Charter is another factor that must be considered. Circular Letter 0037/2010 issued by the Department of Education to all second level schools states that:

*“1.5. Access to sexual and health education is an important right for students under the terms of the Article 11.2 of the European Social Charter. The Council of Europe European Committee of Social Rights, which examines complaints regarding breaches of the Charter, has indicated it regards this Article as requiring that health education “be provided*

*throughout the entire period of schooling” and that sexual and reproductive health education is “objective, based on contemporary scientific evidence and does not involve censoring, withholding or intentionally misrepresenting information, for example as regards contraception or different means on maintaining sexual and reproductive health.”*

Under the Education Act 1998, Section 9(b) Boards of Management are obliged to implement the policy of the Minister. The policy of the Minister stated that students had a right to objective sexual and reproductive health education under the European Social Charter. Despite this, many students cannot access their right to objective sex education because of the ethos of their school. We will discuss this in more detail later in this submission.

## **2.2 Consequences of Using a Human Rights Based Approach**

Atheist Ireland welcomes that the Draft Report has included human rights principles as the foundation for its Approach to RSE. However, the rest of the recommendations do not follow through on the consequences of this foundation. This is significant, because, as the European Court stated in *Airey v Ireland* 1979:

*“The Convention is intended to guarantee not rights that are theoretical or illusory but rights that are practical and effective (see, mutatis mutandis, the judgment of 23 July 1968 in the “Belgian Linguistic” case, Series A no. 6, p. 31, paras. 3 in fine and 4; the above-mentioned Golder judgment, p. 18, para. 35 in fine; the Luedicke, Belkacem and Koç judgment of 28 November 1978, Series A no. 29, pp. 17-18; para. 42; and the Marckx judgment of 13 June 1979, Series A no. 31, p. 15, para. 31).”*  
<http://hudoc.echr.coe.int/eng?i=001-57420>

This means that you cannot start the Draft Report by saying that you accept, as the foundation of the Approach, human rights principles that Ireland has signed up to, then make recommendations that do not vindicate these rights in practice.

Also, you cannot supersede human rights requirements by appealing to majority views among stakeholders, or even consensus among stakeholders. As the UN Human Rights Committee told Ireland in 2014, this approach strikes at the very core of human rights law as a safeguard against the tyranny of the majority. Minister for Justice Frances Fitzgerald completely accepted this principle.

*Yuval Shany: “I am however quite, well, very troubled, frankly, by the sweeping claim that has been made, that the free will of the Irish electorate may, by virtue of Article 25 of the Covenant, allow the Irish State to violate other provisions of the Covenant, including nonderogable provisions such as Articles 6 and 7 of the Covenant. I find this argument to be completely unacceptable, I should say, and one that strikes at the very core of human rights law as a safeguard against the tyranny of the majority, and one that cuts against the very raison d’être of having an international regime of universal human rights protections.”*

*Yuji Iwasawa: “I would like to join my colleague Mr Shany in pointing out that human rights cannot be denied by a majority vote in the Parliament. Arguments to justify a deviation from the protection of human rights under the Covenant by invoking article 25 of the Covenant cannot be accepted.”*

*Cornelis Flinterman: “There is no disagreement that a full and free discussion is crucial in any society, and that it is the cornerstone of any democratic and free society... Yet the outcome of such a discussion, even if it is full and free and informed, the outcome of such a discussion in the form of a parliamentary majority decision can never be used as an argument to legitimise the violation of substantive rights under the Covenant. As has been said, such an argument would indeed undermine the essence of the human rights framework both domestically and internationally.”*

*Frances Fitzgerald, Justice Minister: “On question 12, I would want to begin my comments in relation to this by referring to the comments of Mr Shany, Mr Iwasawa and Mr Flinterman. And I want to make it absolutely clear that the Government of Ireland recognises entirely the points made by the members of the Committee in relation to Article 25, that the majority will does not and can not derogate from human rights obligations, and I hope that’s a very clear statement of our position.”*

*<https://atheist.ie/2014/08/irish-government-accepts-abortion-rights-cannot-be-denied-by-majority-votes-video-and-transcript/>*

### **3. School Ethos and the Need to Change the Law**

#### **3.1 The Draft Report Fails to Vindicate Human Rights**

This section of the Draft Report begins by saying that:

*“In 2007, Maynock et al., concluded that the issue of school ethos, and its impacts on RSE, remains shrouded in ambiguity, leading to personal interpretations of ‘ethos’ on the part of teachers and differences in how they approach the content of RSE. (p. 30)”*

This section of the Draft Report is then written with the very same ambiguity that it refers to in the quote from Maynock et al. But it fails to vindicate the human rights principles that the Draft Report says that its whole approach is based on.

If the ethos of a denominational school denies a student their human right to objective sex education, then the law should be changed to prevent school ethos from being used to deny this human right. The Draft Report simply does not address this. It concludes that:

*“At this point school ethos cannot be separated out from other factors that influence the teaching of RSE ...”*

It is not clear whether the above is being expressed as an observation or an endorsement of this situation ‘at this point’. But we do know what the consequences are of not separating out school ethos from other factors that influence RSE. And we do know that the NCCA has a Public Sector Duty under the IHREC Act to eliminate discrimination and protect human rights.

#### **3.2 Catholic School Ethos Opposes Objective Sex Education**

The Council for Catechetics and the Council for Education (Irish Bishops Conference) and the Catholic Schools Partnership made a written submission to the first stage of this review process. This submission says about ethos:

*“In a Catholic school, children and young people are understood to be gifts. Each and every one of them – without exception – is made in the image and likeness of God ... In terms specifically of RSE in a Catholic school, the Catholic school seeks to be a community inspired by Gospel values and transmitting Gospel values ... it is also important to remember that faith schools exist, at primary and post primary levels, because there are parents who wish to have their children educated in accordance with their religious convictions...”*

The Catholic Bishops also made a written submission to the NCCA consultation on Education about Religions, Beliefs and Ethics. In this they said:

*“In the area of Relationships and Sexuality Education... it is explicitly acknowledged that the curriculum must be interpreted in the context of the characteristic spirit of the school. Similarly, NCCA proposals in areas such as religion and ethics should accord with the characteristic spirit of the school. The determination of the ethos or characteristic spirit of a school is not the function of the NCCA or the Minister but rests with the Patron...”*

The Catholic Primary Schools Management Association also made a written submission to the first stage of this review process. This submission says about ethos:

*“Relationships and sexuality education in Catholic schools is situated within a morals and values framework that is derived ultimately from the life and teaching of Christ and transmitted through the teachings of the Catholic Church ... Relationships and Sexuality Education ought therefore to be an integral part of the curriculum in a Catholic school. It should present the positive, yet challenging, Catholic vision for relationships, chastity, marriage and the family...”*

The Catholic Primary Schools Management Association also made a written submission to the NCCA consultation on Education about Religions, Beliefs and Ethics. In this they said:

*“Based on this, the development of NCCA proposals in areas impinging on religious education and the characteristic spirit of the school are of a different nature than other NCCA proposals. This is already acknowledged in the area of Relationships and Sexuality Education as part of the NCCA SPHE curriculum where it is explicitly acknowledged that the curriculum must be interpreted in the context of the characteristic spirit of the school. Education about Religious Beliefs and Ethics is another such area...”*

### **3.3 The UNESCO Report Position on School Ethos**

The NCCA Draft Report says that it is working from the definition of Comprehensive Sexuality Education used in UNESCO’s ‘International Technical Guidance on Sexuality Education: an Evidence-informed Approach.’ This is:

*“A curriculum-based process of teaching and learning about the cognitive, emotional, physical and social aspects of relationships and sexuality. It aims to equip children and young people with knowledge, skills, attitudes and values that will empower them to: realise their health, wellbeing and dignity; develop respectful social and sexual relationships; consider how their choices affect their own wellbeing and that of others; and, understand and ensure the protection of their rights throughout their lives. (UNESCO, p.16 2018)”*

Given that choice of working definition, it makes sense to also work from the UNESCO conclusions on delivering effective programmes in the same Report. UNESCO concludes that the delivery of CSE is as important as its content. It also concludes that evidence shows that the delivery works best where the school ethos reflects the principles of the content.

*“When developing and delivering CSE, it is important to build on existing standards or guidelines, and to develop clear steps for its implementation and evaluation. Evidence is increasingly showing that the delivery of CSE is as important as the content. Effective sexuality education must take place in a safe environment, where young people feel comfortable to participate and their privacy is respected, where they are protected from harassment and where the school ethos reflects the principles of the content (Pound et al., 2017).”*

Note the sequence here: UNESCO is saying that CSE delivery works best when the school ethos reflects the principles of the content, not when the principles of the content reflect the school ethos. Obviously we cannot suddenly change the ethos of denominational schools to reflect objective RSE content, but we can move towards the UNESCO approach by preventing the denominational ethos from influencing the delivery of this specific subject.

### **3.4 Other References to Ethos in the Draft Report**

The section of the Draft Report on Ethos also makes the following statements:

*“When these elements (clear curriculum, RSE school policy, support materials, etc) are not in place, there is inevitable doubt about what teachers should be teaching and school ethos can then be used as a way of avoiding sensitive topics in some instances...”*

This sentence creates the impression that, if these other elements were in place, then sensitive topics would not be avoided. But there is no reason to believe that this would be the case. In denominational schools, it is the school ethos that prevents certain topics from being objectively addressed. That ethos would still be in place even if the other elements were addressed.

*“When those working on RSE in schools were considering the connection between school ethos and their RSE programmes as a factor in future developments related to RSE, school ethos seemed to come well down a list in which teacher qualification, teacher professional support, time allocation, an up-to-date curriculum and support materials, attracted greater priority.”*

It is not surprising that people working on RSE in schools would place the role of ethos low on their list of concerns. These people are employed by the schools with an obligation to maintain the ethos of the school, and they have been trained in teacher training colleges that also have a denominational ethos.

In the context of the influence of ethos, the people who the Draft report should be concerned about are the students whose human right to objective sex education is being denied.

### **3.5 The Need to Change the Education Act**

The section of the Draft Report about ethos concludes by saying:

*“As part of ongoing development work in SPHE/RSE, the NCCA will work with schools to explore how an enabling understanding of school ethos can inform good practice in RSE across a range of contexts.”*

This discussion-based approach will not resolve the problem. The problem is not that the patrons of denominational schools do not understand the issues involved. It is that they have a particular position on the problem, and their position denies students their human right to objective sex education.

In 2015 the Department of Education and Skills published a Research Paper on Advancing School Autonomy in the Irish School System Research Paper. It made clear that:

*“In all primary and post-primary schools, the school’s stated ethos (or characteristic spirit as it is termed in the legislation) is decided by the owners or patrons/trustees of the school and not by central government. Autonomy over ethos does not exist at the level of the school board, principal or teachers. Indeed, one of the specific duties of a board is to uphold, and be accountable to the Patron for so upholding, the characteristic spirit of the school. Thus, depending on the unit of analysis, schools may be viewed as fully autonomous in respect of ethos, or partly autonomous if the unit of analysis is an individual school operating within a specific ethos.”*

<https://www.education.ie/en/Schools-Colleges/Information/Advancing-School-Autonomy-in-Ireland/School-Autonomy-Research-Paper.pdf>

The only way that denominational Patron bodies will change their approach is if the law is changed to oblige them to reflect these human rights. The legal changes required include amending Sections 9(d), 15(2)(b) and 30(2)(b) of the Education Act, which have been identified as problems by the NCCA in 2017.

It is the duty of the NCCA under Section 42 of the Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission Act to ‘protect the human rights of the persons to whom it provides services’. It is therefore imperative that the NCCA does both of two things:

1. Describe what must be done in order for an objective RSE curriculum to be designed and delivered in a way that meets human rights standards; and
2. Acknowledge that the NCCA has not got the legal power to ensure that any revised curriculum on RSE is delivered according to human rights standards, and recommend that the law be changed to enable this to happen.

## 4. Other Issues

### 4.1 Misleading Portrayal of Secularism

The Draft Report addresses secularism in a limited and misleading way. The only time it uses the word 'secular' is to describe it as conveying 'cold, hard, objective information.'

*"Finally, when it comes to the kinds of learning approaches that are needed in RSE, a continuum of perspectives was evident among parents. Views ranged from those who said that the approach should be completely secular; cold, hard, objective information, and religion has no part to play in the teaching of RSE; to those who said RSE in Catholic schools needs to reflect Catholic values."*

'Secular,' or even 'completely secular,' does not mean conveying 'cold, hard, objective, information'. Also, 'objective' information should not be framed with pejorative words like 'cold' and 'hard.' We realise that this paragraph is quoting a viewpoint, but it has misleading connotations because it is the only place in the Draft Report that the word 'secular' is used.

Secularists live our lives on the basis of the same evolved moral and social attributes as all people do. These include empathy, compassion, reciprocity, cooperation, fairness, and justice. It is misleading for the only reference to secularism in the Draft Report to imply otherwise.

The next paragraph says of the online survey of parents:

*"Over half of all respondents named respect as the most important value. Other values included openness, kindness, inclusiveness, nurturing and being informed."*

These are all values shared by most secularists. They are perfectly consistent with wanting RSE to provide scientifically objective, standardised, age-appropriate education on sexual and reproductive health and rights, as recommended by the UN Committee on Elimination of Discrimination against Women in 2017, and for RSE to be delivered in an objective, critical and pluralistic manner, as recommended by the Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission in 2015.

### 4.2 The Need for a Single Consistent Curriculum

Under the heading of Curriculum, the Draft Report begins by saying:

*"The review has highlighted the need to create one integrated curriculum that sets out the learning for SPHE/RSE as one subject."*

This reflects one of our recommendations in our original submission to this process:

- (b) *A single consistent curriculum for relationships and sexuality education across all schools, as recommended by the Ombudsman for Children in 2016.*

As the NCCA Draft Report is working from the UNESCO definition of Comprehensive Sexuality Education, it makes sense to also work from the UNESCO description and key concepts that together make up the UNESCO Report on International Technical Guidance on Sexuality Education: an Evidence-informed Approach.

UNESCO says that CSE is education delivered in formal and non-formal settings that is: Scientifically accurate; Incremental; Age- and developmentally-appropriate; Curriculum based; Comprehensive; Based on a human rights approach; Based on gender equality; Culturally relevant and context appropriate; Transformative; Able to develop life skills needed to support healthy choices

UNESCO then gives details of eight key concepts, along with topics and learning objectives. These eight key concepts are: Relationships; Values; Rights, Culture and Sexuality; Understanding Gender; Violence and Staying Safe; Skills for Health and Well-being; The Human Body and Development; Sexuality and Sexual Behaviour; Sexual and Reproductive Health.

The section of the Draft Report on Approach also recommends a whole-school approach, and states that:

*“This approach also recognises the opportunities for promoting RSE both within and beyond the classroom.”*

A whole-school approach is described elsewhere in the Draft Report as:

*“An approach in which a culture of shared responsibility is nurtured to support RSE both within the classroom and on the corridors.”*

But if a school promotes RSE both within and beyond the classroom, including on the corridors, then that has consequences, in denominational schools, for the human rights requirement to ensure a neutral studying environment, including in denominational schools, outside the confines of optional religious instruction classes, as raised with Ireland by the UN Human Rights Committee in 2014.

### **4.3 Religious Influence on Training of Educators**

The Draft Report concludes that training of educators is one of the crucial levers of success of quality sexuality education programmes. It suggests Teacher Professional Development at pre-service and in-service levels, and a specialist post-graduate qualification in SPHE/RSE. It continues:

*“Furthermore, professional development for RSE is unlike other subjects, not only because teachers generally come to CPD with limited pre-service training in this area but also because CPD in RSE requires teachers to reflect upon their own attitudes, values and experiences.”*

Teachers’ “own attitudes, values and experiences” are of course shaped by Section 37 of the Employment Equality Act, by their training in denominational teacher training colleges, and by the terms of their contracts in most State-funded schools.

Section 37 of the Employment Equality Act 1998 gives a school that is run by a body established for religious purposes permission to discriminate on religious grounds. It states that:

*“A religious, educational or medical institution which is under the direction or control of a body established for religious purposes or whose objectives include the provision of services in an environment which promotes certain religious values shall not be taken to discriminate against a person for the purposes of this Part or Part II if—*

*\* it gives more favourable treatment, on the religion ground, to an employee or a prospective employee over that person where it is reasonable to do so in order to maintain the religious ethos of the institution, or*

*\* it takes action which is reasonably necessary to prevent an employee or a prospective employee from undermining the religious ethos of the institution.”*

Section 37 also extends to teachers employed in ETB schools and colleges. In a 2017 case at the Workplace Relations Commission, Tipperary ETB successfully argued that Clonmel Central Technical Institute (CTI) could rely on Section 37 because it has a Christian, mostly Catholic, ethos. This case did even involve a teacher of religion, but a teacher of computer science.

The mostly-Catholic influence on the “attitudes, values and experiences” of the teachers who will be delivering RSE begins during their training. In order to train as a teacher and gain employment, trainee teachers must take a Certificate in Religious Studies (CRS). As the vast majority of schools in the state are religious, it is nearly impossible to gain employment as a teacher without a CRS.

St. Patricks Teacher Training College and the Mater Dei Institute are now colleges of Dublin City University. Both colleges still retain their religious ethos which is incompatible with human rights. The DCU website says of the Certificate in Religious Studies that:

*“The part-time Certificate in Religious Studies prepares primary teachers to teach in Catholic schools in accordance with the requirements of the Council for Catechetics of the Irish Episcopal Conference. In making appointments, Catholic school management boards will normally require the CRS as a condition of employment.”*

The Mater Dei Centre section of the DCU website states that:

*“Within the DCU Institute of Education, the MDCCE seeks to ensure that teachers and other educators, graduating from DCU programmes, will have a deep appreciation of the Catholic understanding of the full development of the human person which informs every aspect of work in a Catholic setting.”*

The Joint Managerial Body AMCSS Secretariat’s ‘Guidelines on the Inclusion of Students of Other Faiths in Catholic Secondary Schools’ states that

*“The general programme of the school will be considered as a form of pre-evangelisation.”*

Teachers would fall foul of Section 37 if they refused to pre-evangelise, as they would not be upholding the religious ethos of the school. This is completely inconsistent with the aim of providing objective sex education, particularly if it is done through “a whole-school approach” where “shared responsibility is nurtured to support RSE both within the classroom and on the corridors.”

All of these practices clearly shape the “attitudes, values and experiences” of existing teachers who will be delivering any new RSE curriculum. Ultimately, these practices should change, as they breach the human rights of both teachers and students. In the immediate term, any programme of Continuing Professional Development for teaching RSE will have to counter their influence.

#### **4.4 The Role of Religious External Providers**

The Draft report acknowledges the value of an external providers inputs when they are planned in partnership with the school and are complementary to the wider SPHE/RSE teaching and learning taking place. It concludes that:

*“The development of additional guidance for schools on the use of external providers in this area of education will be undertaken on foot of this review.”*

Many primary and second level schools including ETB schools invite in outside agencies to deliver RSE, including ACCORD and Pure in Heart. The purpose of inviting in organisations such as these is to provide RSE through religion, and consequently to evangelise.

These outside agencies are registered Charities. All charities are legally obliged to ensure that their activities advance their charitable purpose only.

According to the website of the Charities Regulator the purpose of Accord is:

*“Charitable Purpose  
Advancement of education  
Advancement of religion*

*Charitable Objects*

*The principal object for which the Company is established is the advancement of health, education and religion to be achieved primarily by providing:*

- (a) vocational courses in sacramental marriage preparation according to the Catholic Church’s teaching on marriage;*
- (b) marriage and relationship and ancillary counselling services*
- (c) relationship education programmes in schools and elsewhere from the perspective of the Catholic Christian tradition; and*
- (d) any other services whose purpose is to promote and support marriage and the family in accordance with the Church’s vision of marriage as a vocation of life and love.*

According to the website of the Charities Regulator the purpose of Pure in heart is:

*“Charitable Purpose  
Advancement of religion*

*Charitable Objects*

*The main object for which the Company is established is to bring young people into a closer relationship with God by promoting the teachings of the Roman Catholic church and particularly the following:*

- a. To promote the Roman Catholic Church virtue of chastity to young people and to encourage and support the living of pure and chaste lives.*
- b. To promote respect for human life at all stages of development.*
- c. To promote an understanding of human sexuality.*
- d. To promote the Roman Catholic lifestyle to young people to better mind, heart and soul.*
- e. To promote the teachings of the Roman Catholic Church and evangelise young people by means of prayer meetings, school retreats, weekend retreats, parish missions, liturgical based events, educational courses and any other means deemed appropriate.*
- f. To publish or assist in publishing reports, periodicals, books or other information in the furtherance of the main objects.”*

Schools are willing to pay for Catholic RSE, while ignoring Department of Education policy (Circular Letter 0037/2010) and the right of all students to objective sexual and reproductive education under the European Social Charter. Department of Education policy and the Education Act have failed to secure the right of all students under the European Social Charter.

It is clear that Department of Education Policy, as expressed through Circular Letters, will not secure the human rights of students, and consequently we need a change in legislation.

ETB schools and colleges are also paying Catholic agencies such as Accord to deliver Catholic sex education. Remember also that the same ETB sector tells non-religious parents and religious minorities that they can’t afford to supervise their children outside the religion class and their children can’t choose another subject.

#### **4.5 Recommendations from our Original Submission**

We are pleased that the Draft Report reflects our first three recommendations from our original submission to this review process in August 2018.

- (a) *The mandatory provision in Irish schools of sexual and reproductive health education targeted at adolescent girls and boys, as recommended by the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child in 2016;*
- (b) *A single consistent curriculum for relationships and sexuality education across all schools, as recommended by the Ombudsman for Children in 2016; and*
- (c) *Scientifically objective, standardised, age-appropriate education on sexual and reproductive health and rights, as recommended by the UN Committee on Elimination of Discrimination against Women in 2017.*

The Draft Report accepts the above recommendations as the foundation of a human rights based approach to the issue. However, it does not follow through on the consequences of this.

In the Dail debate on Solidarity's Objective Sex Education Bill in 2018, the Minister for Education acknowledged that young people have the right to get factual information about sexual matters. But having factual content is not enough, if that content is delivered through the religious ethos of a school Patron body. As well as the content being factual:

- (d) *The content must be delivered in an objective, critical and pluralistic manner that avoids indoctrination, as part of the curriculum outside of optional religion classes, as recommended by the Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission in 2015; while*
- (e) *Ensuring a neutral studying environment, including in denominational schools, outside the confines of optional religious instruction classes, as raised with Ireland by the UN Human Rights Committee in 2014.*

In order for the content to be delivered objectively without religious influence, the law will have to be amended, because the NCCA has no legal power over how the curriculum is delivered. Instead the school Patron bodies can choose to deliver the curriculum according to their own religious ethos.

- (f) *The legal changes required include amending Sections 9(d), 15(2)(b) and 30(2)(b) of the Education Act, which have been identified as problems by the NCCA in 2017, and which are referred to in Solidarity's Objective Sex Education Bill in 2018.*
- (g) *The NCCA should acknowledge that it has no power over how the curriculum is delivered and cannot guarantee that any revised curriculum will be suitable for all students from various backgrounds. It is the duty of the NCCA under Section 42 of the Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission Act to 'protect the human rights of the persons to whom it provides services'. It is therefore imperative that the NCCA acknowledge that it has not got the legal power to ensure that any revised curriculum on RSE is delivered according to human rights standards.*

Audrey Halpin, Dublin City University

# Review of Relationships and Sexuality Education (RSE)

At the request of the Minister for Education and Skills, a major review of RSE in primary and post-primary schools was undertaken from June 2018 to March 2019. The review examined the experience of teaching and learning in RSE including; the curriculum, the approach to learning, the supports needed, and ways to improve the experience of RSE for students. Engagement in the review was considerable and signals the level of interest and concern people share in relation to this aspect of education. We are now engaging in consultation to ensure the findings and draft advice is reflective of the needs of students, schools, and parents.

In responding to the findings and draft advice on the future directions of RSE it is recommended that you read the draft report or the summary of the draft report both of which are available here <https://www.ncca.ie/en/updates-and-events/consultations/review-of-relationships-and-sexuality-education-rse>.

<b>Name</b>	Audrey
<b>Surname</b>	Halpin
<b>Position (if applicable)</b>	Teacher Educator
<b>Organisation (if applicable)</b>	DCU (at present; views and knowledge are my own from a varied background of teaching in all sectors and in many places particularly with students who are marginalised in/by school practices) with a particular role in Postgraduate Education for Teachers in Support Teaching Roles and RSE within that role.
<b>Date</b>	25.10.19
<b>Email</b>	

Please provide some brief background information on your organisation (if applicable).

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## The approach

Across all stakeholders, there was strong agreement that RSE needs to be more than information about biological aspects of growing up and sexual activity. It needs a holistic approach that balances discussion about the risks and dangers associated with relationships and sexual activity with discussion about the positive, healthy and enjoyable aspects of relationships. A holistic approach can be understood as teaching and learning about the cognitive, emotional, physical and social aspects of relationships and sexuality. It aims to equip children and young people with knowledge, skills, attitudes and values that will empower them to: realise their health, wellbeing and dignity; develop respectful social and sexual relationships; consider how their choices affect their own wellbeing and that of others; and understand and ensure the protection of their rights throughout their lives.

**To what extent do you broadly agree/disagree with the proposed direction on the approach to RSE that has emerged from the review? Please tick your response in the box below.**

Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
√			

**What are the aspects of the proposed approach that you agree/disagree with?**

**What else is important when considering the approach for teaching SPHE/RSE in schools?**

## The curriculum

The Review highlighted the need to create a single integrated curriculum that sets out the learning for SPHE/RSE as one subject and incrementally provides continuity of experience from early childhood to post-primary. In the immediate term the NCCA will develop interim guidelines to support the current curriculum on how it can be approached in a more holistic way and provide clarity on how topics can be taught in an inclusive manner to incorporate current themes identified by the review.

**To what extent do you broadly agree/disagree with the need for a single integrated curriculum for SPHE/RSE? Please tick your response in the box below.**

Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
√			

### Please provide a reason for your level of agreement/disagreement.

Will there be broad invited participation (particularly of diversely-identified citizens and teachers/teacher educators) in the development of the Interim Guidelines?

Will there be non-normative perspectives taken into account in all parts of the guidelines from the start rather than add-ons and considerations for 'differences/diversities' considered after the fact? This (different curricula and/or different resources for different people rather than how to personalise curricula for all learners) is very problematic throughout our curricula at present. In this RSE area difficulties and additional marginalisations are (unintentionally) created by how we do what we do at schools even as there is an overall intention to 'include'. This is most evident for populations described/understood as 'special' with disastrous consequences in terms of relationships, sexuality and wellbeing within school and beyond.

This fear/request is informed by my ongoing work with/observation of teachers and students around learning and ability diversities in schools, by my engagement with students and teachers who experience education from a minority (sexuality/gender/faith/ability/ethnicity etc.) perspective and by a recent exchange experience to Ontario, Canada on this topic. Retrofitting often reinforces that which it is trying to address. The development of different curricula for certain populations in previous curricula and having special days/weeks for other 'diverse' populations all serve to reinforce exclusions and difference as problematic rather than as a normal part of human diversity all of which should be part of an RSE for all curriculum.

The hidden curriculum in this area is particularly problematic in schools and among many educators.

### What else do you consider important in relation to future curriculum development in SPHE/RSE?

Involving diverse voices in all aspects, stages and iterations of curriculum development if the curriculum is to be for all. People who have not lived marginalised experiences (or those who have a mainly majority-experience of life) do not see the unintentional exclusions in terms of content knowledge or of pedagogies.

### **Creating the conditions for effective RSE**

The Review makes it clear that teachers need in-depth and sustained training and support in the area of SPHE/RSE. Consequently, access to professional development needs to be enhanced at pre-service and in-service levels. The Review also identified the need to take stock of current teaching and learning resources available in this area.

**To what extent do you broadly agree/disagree with the Review's findings on the necessary conditions for effective SPHE/RSE? Please tick your response in the box below**

<b>Strongly Agree</b>	<b>Agree</b>	<b>Disagree</b>	<b>Strongly Disagree</b>
✓			

### **Please provide a reason for your level of agreement/disagreement.**

Teacher education (getting away from the limiting and limited conception of 'training') in this area needs substantial overhaul at a systemic level (E.G. staffing (numbers and quality) implications at teacher-education and school level need to be examined). Increasing the current types of 'training' and support and the lottery/scarcity approach will not address the attrition/moving rates in this area. An over-emphasis on the production of 'resources' without the accompanying education reinforces the idea that there is or should/could be a package for 'delivery'. Certainly a rich bank of resources is important but it is no substitute for education and confidence building to enhance use of same and teachers' ongoing development of their own resources as in other subject areas.

Systemic changes needed so that the long-term outcomes can be different to what we already know to be problematic (previous reports have indicated similar findings to this review so far but it seems the impact of the previous findings has been very low). There are implications for Initial Teacher Education and for all levels of teacher education.

**What else do you consider important in order to create the conditions for effective SPHE/RSE?**

All ITE/PGTE and CPD in SPHE/RSE and in the SPHE/RSE implications of everything we do at schools needs to consider diversity at the core of what will be taught and how rather than an add-on. Tweaking core education (for students or teachers) to be diversity-responsive (e.g. the laborious and ineffective interpretations of differentiation that abound) after the fact continues to reinforce the ideas that it is harder to teach some than others and that some people need different and/or diluted curriculum.

This RSE/SPHE teacher education is a great opportunity to implement universal approaches that are intrinsically inclusive (and thus preventive of many difficulties that arise in terms of relationships (and sexuality) at school.

This (RSE/SPHE) being given sufficient time at ITE level for all teachers is also an opportunity for all teachers to understand how to make a meaningful contribution towards the realisation of Sustainable Development Goals (especially 4) from the start of their careers.

### Other considerations

The Review concluded that comprehensive oversight and support for SPHE/RSE is required to meet the needs identified in the review process. The Review also found schools cannot do it alone and parents must be encouraged and supported in assuming their responsibility for their child's learning. In addition, it suggests that post-primary schools require further support and guidance in planning for junior cycle wellbeing in order to enhance students' learning in SPHE/RSE.

**To what extent do you broadly agree/disagree that these are important considerations for SPHE/RSE? Please tick your response in the box below.**

Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
	√		

**Please provide a reason for your level of agreement/disagreement.**

Comprehensive ongoing support is of course a good idea but it is perhaps overemphasized and teachers' reluctances or fears taken as an ongoing, unavoidable given rather than something that can be proactively managed and ameliorated over time with meaningful investment in their education. There are inherent potential dangers of this remaining somewhat outside the main(stream) of what is important and just expected at schools if the need for external supports and the 'taboo' of RSE and RSE teaching is (deliberately/unconsciously) reinforced rather than putting a strong system of robust teacher education (ITE for all teachers, PGTE and CPD) in place within a certain timeframe, along with meaningful professional engagement opportunities, to reduce the current fringe position of the subject and its teaching.

This 'empire'/expertism approach is not unique to RSE/SPHE of course but in Ireland this taboo/caution/danger approach is particularly problematic in regards to RSE.

**Are there any other considerations that should be highlighted in the advice for SPHE/RSE?**

It is very interesting to read that many contributors to the review did not see school ethos (even where this is of a particular religious persuasion) as a barrier to a holistic approach to RSE.

For some this may reflect the experience they have of living their lives mainly within a majority and may mask the biases within the ethos (and how these play out with negative consequences for many in all the living at school not just what might get discussed in an occasional lesson) that are not intentional and of which they may not even be aware. This is especially problematic in classrooms and throughout school life for many students considered to have 'special' educational needs. As a lesbian educator it is incomprehensible to me that anyone would not see a school ethos (or a HEI) aligning itself with a belief that living my sexuality is inherently problematic as a barrier. Ability norms, gender norms and heteronormativity are pervasive in all our curricula and most schools (not just those of religiously aligned ethos) as they are in our society so being aware of this is essential to move in the direction of holism. Of course affiliation with certain faith systems may not stop some schools covering content as indicated or prescribed but the aforementioned hidden curriculum is ongoing and being mindful of this ethos-related-influence as a potential barrier (and thus one to be minded and managed) is essential for holistic approach over time.

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# Blanchardstown Baptist Church

# Review of Relationships and Sexuality Education (RSE)

At the request of the Minister for Education and Skills, a major review of RSE in primary and post-primary schools was undertaken from June 2018 to March 2019. The review examined the experience of teaching and learning in RSE including; the curriculum, the approach to learning, the supports needed, and ways to improve the experience of RSE for students. Engagement in the review was considerable and signals the level of interest and concern people share in relation to this aspect of education. We are now engaging in consultation to ensure the findings and draft advice is reflective of the needs of students, schools, and parents.

In responding to the findings and draft advice on the future directions of RSE it is recommended that you read the draft report or the summary of the draft report both of which are available here <https://www.ncca.ie/en/updates-and-events/consultations/review-of-relationships-and-sexuality-education-rse>.

<b>Name</b>	Derry
<b>Surname</b>	O'Sullivan
<b>Position (if applicable)</b>	Pastor
<b>Organisation (if applicable)</b>	Blanchardstown Baptist Church
<b>Date</b>	23 <sup>rd</sup> October 2019
<b>Email</b>	[REDACTED]

**Please provide some brief background information on your organisation (if applicable).**

Local church established 30 years, ministering to a multi ethnic population.

## The approach

Across all stakeholders, there was strong agreement that RSE needs to be more than information about biological aspects of growing up and sexual activity. It needs a holistic approach that balances discussion about the risks and dangers associated with relationships and sexual activity with discussion about the positive, healthy and enjoyable aspects of relationships. A holistic approach can be understood as teaching and learning about the cognitive, emotional, physical and social aspects of relationships and sexuality. It aims to equip children and young people with knowledge, skills, attitudes and values that will empower them to: realise their health, wellbeing and dignity; develop respectful social and sexual relationships; consider how their choices affect their own wellbeing and that of others; and understand and ensure the protection of their rights throughout their lives.

**2. To what extent do you broadly agree/disagree with the proposed direction on the approach to RSE that has emerged from the review? Please tick your response in the box below.**

<b>Strongly Agree</b>	<b>Agree</b>	<b>Disagree</b>	<b>Strongly Disagree</b>
			<b>Strongly Disagree</b>

**3. What are the aspects of the proposed approach that you agree/disagree with?**

The proposal involves moving teachers into the highly controversial and contentious areas of abortion, sexual orientation, gender identify, etc. These areas belong to parents (or guardians) and to them alone. The consultation process appears to have favoured special interest groups to the exclusion of the vast majority of parents who were not even aware that the “consultation” was taking place.

**4. What else is important when considering the approach for teaching SPHE/RSE in schools?**

Any proposal that is likely to alienate a substantial group of parents should be carefully avoided. No parent should be alienated by unacceptable or controversial material being taught to his/her children. Schools should not be turned into battlefields of competing ideologies. Only approaches should be considered where schools are kept as safe spaces where no student should be made to feel uncomfortable by the official propagation of morals and practices that contradict their family belief systems.

### **The curriculum**

The Review highlighted the need to create a single integrated curriculum that sets out the learning for SPHE/RSE as one subject and incrementally provides continuity of experience from early childhood to post-primary. In the immediate term the NCCA will develop interim guidelines to support the current curriculum on how it can be approached in a more holistic way and provide clarity on how topics can be taught in an inclusive manner to incorporate current themes identified by the review.

**5. To what extent do you broadly agree/disagree with the need for a single integrated curriculum for SPHE/RSE? Please tick your response in the box below.**

<b>Strongly Agree</b>	<b>Agree</b>	<b>Disagree</b>	<b>Strongly Disagree</b>
			<b>Strongly Disagree</b>

**6. Please provide a reason for your level of agreement/disagreement.**

There is no need for the proposed amalgamation as these subject are quite different and separate. The proposed amalgamation and associate recommendations etc. appear to be driven by a narrow ideological agenda and has not arisen from a widespread grass roots demand. Thus a genuine and proper consultation process needs to be undertake that is given wide publicity and which gives the parents an opportunity to see the details of the curriculum material that is proposed to be utilised in the schools.

**7. What else do you consider important in relation to future curriculum development in**

## SPHE/RSE?

A future curriculum development should respect any religious ethos that a school may have. It is unacceptable that the proposed curriculum would be imposed on all schools irrespective of ethos. A future curriculum development should take into account the wishes of the overwhelming majority of parents and should accommodate any minority views that are uncomfortable with the proposed curriculum. Thus no curriculum should be imposed on the school system that violates the inalienable constitutional right of the parent(s) to educate their children in matters of morality and ethics. The report claims that a majority of parents favour age-appropriate and relevant RSE as an important part of the school curriculum. But were the parents asked specifically what they consider to be appropriate and relevant? These terms are too broad and virtually everybody can agree with them unless they are defined more specifically. In this regard, the consultation was misleading. The implications of each proposals need to be clearly defined and debated equitably such as for example - is the the teaching about gender dysphoria to 5 year olds appropriate for them? Thee topics are best dealt with at home.

## Creating the conditions for effective RSE

The Review makes it clear that teachers need in-depth and sustained training and support in the area of SPHE/RSE. Consequently, access to professional development needs to be enhanced at pre-service and in-service levels. The Review also identified the need to take stock of current teaching and learning resources available in this area.

**8. To what extent do you broadly agree/disagree with the Review's findings on the necessary conditions for effective SPHE/RSE? Please tick your response in the box below**

Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
			Strongly Disagree

**9. Please provide a reason for your level of agreement/disagreement.**

This depends very much on who does the training and the foundational belief system of the trainers. Much of the material currently available is biased in the direction of promoting alternative lifestyles and choices. Genuine balanced training needs to expose teachers to a range of parental viewpoints including conservative material so that they can be sensitive to avoid any promotion of their viewpoints in the class room. That must be left to the parents.

**10. What else do you consider important in order to create the conditions for effective SPHE/RSE?**

Re-run the consultation process but this time with an effective public publicity campaign so that all parents have a genuine chance to contribute. Be open with the parents about what it is proposed to teach and supply alternative texts for the proposed curriculum. Start from the perspective of viewing the parents are the primary educators in the realm of morality and ethics.

## Other considerations

The Review concluded that comprehensive oversight and support for SPHE/RSE is required to meet the needs identified in the review process. The Review also found schools cannot do it alone and parents must be encouraged and supported in assuming their responsibility for their child's learning. In addition, it suggests that post-primary schools require further support and guidance in planning for junior cycle wellbeing in order to enhance students' learning in SPHE/RSE.

**11. To what extent do you broadly agree/disagree that these are important considerations for SPHE/RSE? Please tick your response in the box below.**

<b>Strongly Agree</b>	<b>Agree</b>	<b>Disagree</b>	<b>Strongly Disagree</b>
			<b>Strongly Disagree</b>

**12. Please provide a reason for your level of agreement/disagreement.**

These are mere empty words when the proposed changes impose a type and level of instruction that many parents would if rightly informed, consider to be age inappropriate or even completely unacceptable.

**13. Are there any other considerations that should be highlighted in the advice for SPHE/RSE?**

Some of the proposed material comes close to or even possibly amounts to a promotion of particular lifestyles and life choices. This goes well beyond the remit of any school curriculum and thus must be rejected and removed from the proposals.

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Cavan Baptist Church

# Review of Relationships and Sexuality Education (RSE)

At the request of the Minister for Education and Skills, a major review of RSE in primary and post-primary schools was undertaken from June 2018 to March 2019. The review examined the experience of teaching and learning in RSE including; the curriculum, the approach to learning, the supports needed, and ways to improve the experience of RSE for students. Engagement in the review was considerable and signals the level of interest and concern people share in relation to this aspect of education. We are now engaging in consultation to ensure the findings and draft advice is reflective of the needs of students, schools, and parents.

In responding to the findings and draft advice on the future directions of RSE it is recommended that you read the draft report or the summary of the draft report both of which are available here <https://www.ncca.ie/en/updates-and-events/consultations/review-of-relationships-and-sexuality-education-rse>.

<b>Name</b>	Ivan
<b>Surname</b>	Watson
<b>Position (if applicable)</b>	Parent & Pastor
<b>Organisation (if applicable)</b>	Cavan Baptist Church
<b>Date</b>	24/10/19
<b>Email</b>	

**Please provide some brief background information on your organisation (if applicable).**

We are a community of around 150 people meeting regularly in Cavan Town who come from diverse social, ethnic & religious backgrounds.

## The approach

Across all stakeholders, there was strong agreement that RSE needs to be more than information about biological aspects of growing up and sexual activity. It needs a holistic approach that balances discussion about the risks and dangers associated with relationships and sexual activity with discussion about the positive, healthy and enjoyable aspects of relationships. A holistic approach can be understood as teaching and learning about the cognitive, emotional, physical and social aspects of relationships and sexuality. It aims to equip children and young people with knowledge, skills, attitudes and values that will empower them to: realise their health, wellbeing and dignity; develop respectful social and sexual relationships; consider how their choices affect their own wellbeing and that of others; and understand and ensure the protection of their rights throughout their lives.

**To what extent do you broadly agree/disagree with the proposed direction on the approach to RSE that has emerged from the review? Please tick your response in the box below.**

Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
			Yes

**What are the aspects of the proposed approach that you agree/disagree with?**

- The parents are the primary educators of their Children ( Article 42 of the Constitution of Ireland:“The State acknowledges that the primary and natural educator of the child is the Family and guarantees to respect the inalienable right and duty of parents to provide, according to their means, for the religious and moral, intellectual, physical and social education of their children.” This right must supersede the proposed right of children and teenagers to have access to certain information.
- I am very concerned with the presexualisation of children from a very young age. The World Health Organisation Standard for Sexuality Education in Europe Report actually suggested to teach children as young from 0-4 Years of age “enjoyment and pleasure when touching one’s own body-early childhood masturbation.” The NCCA suggested changes to the RSE curriculum should “meet best international standards as set down by the World Health Organisation (WHO),” and they are looking at this report for guidance—I am very concerned about this.
- External providers of RSE need to be vetted by the Board of Management of each school and everything they teach should first be approved by the parents.

**What else is important when considering the approach for teaching SPHE/RSE in schools?**

The parents are the primary educators. Written permission therefore must always be given by the parents and all the content taught must be outlined in the permission letter.

The moral and spiritual dimensions of relationships are an essential part of a truly holistic approach; to neglect these aspects of relationships are serious omissions in this 'holistic' approach.

### The curriculum

The Review highlighted the need to create a single integrated curriculum that sets out the learning for SPHE/RSE as one subject and incrementally provides continuity of experience from early childhood to post-primary. In the immediate term the NCCA will develop interim guidelines to support the current curriculum on how it can be approached in a more holistic way and provide clarity on how topics can be taught in an inclusive manner to incorporate current themes identified by the review.

**To what extent do you broadly agree/disagree with the need for a single integrated curriculum for SPHE/RSE? Please tick your response in the box below.**

Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
			Yes

**Please provide a reason for your level of agreement/disagreement.**

- RSE is a highly sensitive and intimate subject with unique moral aspects and should be taught separately from SPHE. Keeping it separate allows for adjusting the RSE curriculum to be taught in accordance with the wishes of schools and parents.
- Integrating RSE with SPHE gives the impression that sexual relationships are on a par with social relationships without any additional moral dimension, which is very misleading.
- Sex education should not be taught in early childhood as indicated, and integrating RSE with SPHE in an incremental way would lead to the early sexualization of children
- It is not appropriate to merge both subjects SPHE and RSE as SPHE is a mandatory subject. If you link them both then RSE will also be mandatory. Therefore it would be nearly impossible for parents to take their children out of certain classes if they so wish. Parents are the primary educators and must always have the right to remove their children from any class if they feel the content is not age appropriate or goes against their moral values.

**What else do you consider important in relation to future curriculum development in SPHE/RSE?**

- There are many dangers for young people and this certainly should be discussed with them preferably by parents with back up from the school if requested.
- At Primary Level I believe that what is there at the moment mostly suffices

There are some things that I think should not be taught to young children.

- Masturbation should certainly not be mentioned to children–this is sexualising children
- Children are too young to be taught about transgenderism. This could cause much confusion and anxiety
- Sex education should not be taught in early childhood as indicated, and integrating RSE with SPHE in an incremental way would lead to the early sexualization of children
- Parents on every level are by far the most important people in a child's life. Nobody has a right to interfere with parent's wishes and values as regards the education and formation of their children, above all in the highly sensitive area of sexual relationships
- This report does not give much useful information as you have not outlined the content to be taught to each age group. When this is done –the schools and all the parents must have an absolute right to refuse to allow their children to attend these classes.

Senior Level:

- Teenagers should be informed of dangers and possible consequences to casual sex: low self-esteem, anxiety, pregnancy, STIs, gossip, little focus on education etc.

There should be a non-judgemental approach but very good, appropriate as deemed by their parents, advice should be given to the young people, on this subject.

- Teenagers must be taught that freedom of choice does not mean freedom from consequences of choice in all areas including Drugs, Alcohol, Porn, Casual Sex etc. Testimonials from people who have gone through difficult times is an excellent way to inform young people of the certain dangers

- The whole area of technology should be discussed including Internet/Phonesafety, sexting, bullying on social media, and how self-esteem can be effected by social media

**Creating the conditions for effective RSE**

The Review makes it clear that teachers need in-depth and sustained training and support in the area of SPHE/RSE. Consequently, access to professional development needs to be enhanced at pre-service and in-service levels. The Review also identified the need to take stock of current teaching and learning resources available in this area.

**To what extent do you broadly agree/disagree with the Review's findings on the necessary conditions for effective SPHE/RSE? Please tick your response in the box below**

Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
		Yes	

**Please provide a reason for your level of agreement/disagreement.**

Teachers should have the right to opt out of RSE training, especially if it takes an explicit and pornographic approach, as set out in the WHO Report on Sexuality Standards which is in line with the holistic approach to RSE proposed in the Review

**What else do you consider important in order to create the conditions for effective SPHE/RSE?**

- Here is an alternative approach – to firstly inform the parents and let them then discuss all the issues with their children as they see fit.
- An information night for parents would be essential and external teachers would have to give them a written document of what was to be taught. It would be essential that a booklet for parents would be made available so that Parents then could discuss all the issues with their children as they considered appropriate. Further RSE classes could be made available within the school if the parents wished to avail of them. Any parent must have the right to remove his/her child from an RSEclass
- The learning resources should reflect the ethos of the school and be approved by the Board of Management. Also if a parent does not approve of the content of the learning resources they must have the right to remove their children from RSE classes.

### **Other considerations**

The Review concluded that comprehensive oversight and support for SPHE/RSE is required to meet the needs identified in the review process. The Review also found schools cannot do it alone and parents must be encouraged and supported in assuming their responsibility for their child's learning. In addition, it suggests that post-primary schools require further support and guidance in planning for junior cycle wellbeing in order to enhance students' learning in SPHE/RSE.

**To what extent do you broadly agree/disagree that these are important considerations for SPHE/RSE? Please tick your response in the box below.**

<b>Strongly Agree</b>	<b>Agree</b>	<b>Disagree</b>	<b>Strongly Disagree</b>
		<b>Yes</b>	

**Please provide a reason for your level of agreement/disagreement.**

I agree that "parents must be encouraged and supported in assuming their

responsibility for their child's learning.”

- I acknowledge there are a lot of dangers out there and all children need the appropriate information. However I do not agree with your views on what is appropriate.
- Comprehensive oversight is not the right approach to RSE, as this suggests compliance with a one size fits all RSE curriculum; RSE needs to be flexible to reflect the values of different schools and parents
- RSE should not be integrated with SPHE, as from a moral and formative perspective RSE is a very different subject from SPHE

**Are there any other considerations that should be highlighted in the advice for SPHE/RSE?**

- The Review is couched in generalities which seem reasonable, but it does not spell out that the 'holistic' approach is focused on a 'sex is for pleasure approach' and is very similar to the Comprehensive Sexuality Education approach promoted by UN bodies, as in the WHO Report which sets out a highly sexualized approach to RSE 'education' for children.
- The Review does not spell out what the actual RSE content for each age group would look like or include. It would be very helpful to have the detail of the RSE content proposed for each age group so that people can see what will actually be delivered to their children.
- In our view there needs a whole new round of consultation with parents and schools for the consultation process to be genuine and transparent

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# Catholic Primary Schools Management Association (CPSMA)

# Review of Relationships and Sexuality Education (RSE)

At the request of the Minister for Education and Skills, a major review of RSE in primary and post-primary schools was undertaken from June 2018 to March 2019. The review examined the experience of teaching and learning in RSE including; the curriculum, the approach to learning, the supports needed, and ways to improve the experience of RSE for students. Engagement in the review was considerable and signals the level of interest and concern people share in relation to this aspect of education. We are now engaging in consultation to ensure the findings and draft advice is reflective of the needs of students, schools, and parents.

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<b>Name</b>	
<b>Surname</b>	
<b>Position (if applicable)</b>	
<b>Organisation (if applicable)</b>	Catholic Primary Schools Management Association
<b>Date</b>	25 <sup>th</sup> October 2019
<b>Email</b>	

**Please provide some brief background information on your organisation (if applicable).**

Catholic Primary School Management Association (CPSMA), is the management body for Catholic primary schools in Ireland and this submission seeks to represent the perspective of those tasked with the governance of Catholic primary schools regarding the provision of relationships and sexuality education.

As a management body which provides training and advice on a wide range of areas to over 2800 schools, we are in the unique position of being able to understand and react to the needs of a large number of primary schools.

## The approach

Across all stakeholders, there was strong agreement that RSE needs to be more than information about biological aspects of growing up and sexual activity. It needs a holistic approach that balances discussion about the risks and dangers associated with relationships

and sexual activity with discussion about the positive, healthy and enjoyable aspects of relationships. A holistic approach can be understood as teaching and learning about the cognitive, emotional, physical and social aspects of relationships and sexuality. It aims to equip children and young people with knowledge, skills, attitudes and values that will empower them to: realise their health, wellbeing and dignity; develop respectful social and sexual relationships; consider how their choices affect their own wellbeing and that of others; and understand and ensure the protection of their rights throughout their lives.

**To what extent do you broadly agree/disagree with the proposed direction on the approach to RSE that has emerged from the review? Please tick your response in the box below.**

Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
	✓		

**What are the aspects of the proposed approach that you agree/disagree with?**

CPSMA agree that the provision of RSE needs to be more than the imparting of information about biological aspects of growing up and sexual activity. However what is meant by ‘more’, needs considerable clarification.

The Education Act, Section 9(d) is very clear where it outlines the responsibility of a school in providing education which should be appropriate to the abilities and needs of its pupils and should ‘promote the **moral, spiritual, social and personal** development of students and provide health education for them, in consultation with their parents, having regard to the characteristic spirit of the school’.

This is the foundation of all educational provision in Catholic primary schools where the role of the school is to provide for the development and nurturing of young children, to develop their personal responsibility and teach them the skills and attitudes necessary for the formation of healthy and life-giving relationships.

The definition provided for Holistic Sexuality Education approach in the research paper focuses on the social and personal development with either insufficient or no regard for the moral and spiritual development of children. RSE should not be reduced to the imparting of objective information dissociated from a morals and values framework or from the totality of relationships communicated through the ethos or characteristic spirit of any school.

**What else is important when considering the approach for teaching SPHE/RSE in schools?**

The importance of spirituality in the life and development of the child is acknowledged in NCCA Curriculum documents including the Primary Curriculum 1999, the Aistear/Siolta documents and

the Junior Cycle Framework. It is of great concern that the spiritual dimension is completely absent from the current definition of Holistic Sexuality Education.

### **The curriculum**

The Review highlighted the need to create a single integrated curriculum that sets out the learning for SPHE/RSE as one subject and incrementally provides continuity of experience from early childhood to post-primary. In the immediate term the NCCA will develop interim guidelines to support the current curriculum on how it can be approached in a more holistic way and provide clarity on how topics can be taught in an inclusive manner to incorporate current themes identified by the review.

**To what extent do you broadly agree/disagree with the need for a single integrated curriculum for SPHE/RSE? Please tick your response in the box below.**

<b>Strongly Agree</b>	<b>Agree</b>	<b>Disagree</b>	<b>Strongly Disagree</b>
		✓	

### **Please provide a reason for your level of agreement/disagreement.**

In Catholic primary schools, RSE sits within the broader Social Personal Health Education curriculum. This allows schools to provide a broad and rich education for pupils which sees sex education as one aspect within a framework which seeks to support the development of social and personal skills to give children the tools with which to manage relationships and social interactions as they grow and develop. Schools' implementation of the RSE programme in this context strive to promote a positive self -image and attitude to sexuality. Pupils are also encouraged to take responsibility for their decisions, the choices they make and develop a growing awareness of their own personal values, while acknowledging and accepting that the values of others that may be different to their own. Many schools already sensitively provide pupils with the necessary support to navigate questions they have regarding their own unique individuality and current best practice should be recognised and valued going forward.

In recognition of a whole school approach, the RSE programme will only make sense if it is consistent with the wider characteristic spirit of the school. RSE cannot be value neutral. Value judgements are impossible to avoid and should be consistent with the ethos of the school.

Schools are not the primary educators of children. The rights of the parent as primary educator are enshrined in law and cannot be ignored in an attempt to promote a particular perspective based on as yet unproven educational approach. The views of parents would be particularly difficult to manage in a single integrated curriculum.

Indeed, the Department of Education and Skills Guidelines for RSE for Primary and Post Primary Schools, published in 1997, clearly details the importance of partnership with parents in this important aspect of their child's educational journey.

Research (Catherine Conlon's research (2018)) quoted by Morhan, Keating and Collins (NCCA 2018) supports parental involvement provided for in the current RSE Programme and suggests that such involvement should be retained and strengthened in any future interactions.

Primary schools have proven systems of communication with parents which recognises and respects their role and their rights as pertain to their developing child. CPSMA understands the role of the school as that of scaffolding and building upon the foundations as set down by parents. In fact, the circulation of the school's sex education programme to parents prior to the more sensitive lessons being taught is recognised in the report by the Department of Education and Skills Inspectorate, 2009, as being a contributing factor to the success of the implementation of the RSE programme at primary level.

Any proposed integration of the subject matter should allow for meaningful opt out for parents of their children in this area as is their constitutional right. Concerns voiced by parents regarding the importance of the subject matter being dealt with in an age appropriate manner after consultation cannot be ignored.

**What else do you consider important in relation to future curriculum development in SPHE/RSE?**

CPSMA cannot emphasise strongly enough the importance of providing meaningful engagement with parents, teachers, students, principals and patrons/trustees in the next stage of RSE development. Any process for engagement needs to take into account the reasonable concerns of parents and the characteristic spirit of the school. Proper recognition needs to be given to those at local level who are perfectly placed, in consultation with parents, to identify the age appropriate needs of the children attending the school. Approaches to issues need to be tailored to the age and maturity of the children in each individual class.

**Creating the conditions for effective RSE**

The Review makes it clear that teachers need in-depth and sustained training and support in the area of SPHE/RSE. Consequently, access to professional development needs to be enhanced at pre-service and in-service levels. The Review also identified the need to take stock of current teaching and learning resources available in this area.

**To what extent do you broadly agree/disagree with the Review's findings on the necessary conditions for effective SPHE/RSE? Please tick your response in the box below**

Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>		

**Please provide a reason for your level of agreement/disagreement.**

Any future proposals which would offer well-ordered and integrated supports for teachers in their planning and practice would be welcome.

Such training should recognise the characteristic spirit of the school as an integral part of the RSE provision within the school. Training would need to encompass the whole school community, in particular the board of management of the school. Leadership and management of the school need adequate space and training in order to manage engagement and consultation at local level effectively particularly as previously mentioned regarding parental involvement.

**What else do you consider important in order to create the conditions for effective SPHE/RSE?**

Guidelines and resources provided for the provision of RSE in the primary school need to provide for planning and teaching through the lens of the characteristic spirit of the school.

Many schools already sensitively provide pupils with the necessary support to navigate questions they have regarding their own unique individuality and current best practice should be recognised and valued going forward. Any future proposals which would offer well-ordered and integrated supports for teachers in their planning and practice would be welcome.

Care and time should be taken to fully interrogate any proposed changes to the current provision in order to avoid change for the sake of change.

**Other considerations**

The Review concluded that comprehensive oversight and support for SPHE/RSE is required to meet the needs identified in the review process. The Review also found schools cannot do it alone and parents must be encouraged and supported in assuming their responsibility for their child's learning. In addition, it suggests that post-primary schools require further support and guidance in planning for junior cycle wellbeing in order to enhance students' learning in SPHE/RSE.

**To what extent do you broadly agree/disagree that these are important considerations for SPHE/RSE? Please tick your response in the box below.**

Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>		

**Please provide a reason for your level of agreement/disagreement.**

The RSE report suggests a comprehensive oversight of and support for SPHE/RSE by the inspectorate and DES. Such a development would be welcome provided it recognizes and gives due regard to the role of the characteristic spirit of the school.

The Irish Constitution states that;

42."1: The State acknowledges that the primary and natural educator of the child is the Family and guarantees to respect the inalienable right and duty of parents to provide, according to their means, for the **religious** and **moral, intellectual, physical** and **social** education of their children.

This constitutional imperative is strongly supported in the Department of Education document Going Forward Together; An Introduction for Parents to Relationships and Sexuality Education which states;

*As a parent, you are the first teacher of your child. You hand on values and attitudes to each new generation of children.* (DES, 1997, p.3)

The child's right to Social, Personal and Health Education is enshrined in law in the Education Act, 1998. Section 9 requires that every school shall use its available resources;

*"to promote the moral, spiritual, social and personal development of students and to provide health education for them, in consultation with their parents and having regard to the characteristic spirit of the school."*

With regard to parents assuming their responsibility, school management and in particular principals need adequate support around the management of communication and dialogue with parents. Such engagement needs to focus on the needs of the students, the values of the parents and the school ethos.

**Are there any other considerations that should be highlighted in the advice for SPHE/RSE?**

While CPSMA fully accept that in order to respond to the emerging needs of Irish society curriculum examination is necessary. Through interaction with schools on a daily basis there is a clear message that schools are at breaking point the wide range of demands being placed on them. Primary schools afford much time and effort, through both targeted lessons and dealing with situations as they arise, to the development of a child's understanding of relationships and how they are best developed and nurtured. Schools need to be able to maintain this sense of flexibility in order to best tailor RSE provision to the students in each unique context while adhering to that which is enshrined in law.

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Caroline West, Dublin City University

# Review of Relationships and Sexuality Education (RSE)

At the request of the Minister for Education and Skills, a major review of RSE in primary and post-primary schools was undertaken from June 2018 to March 2019. The review examined the experience of teaching and learning in RSE including; the curriculum, the approach to learning, the supports needed, and ways to improve the experience of RSE for students. Engagement in the review was considerable and signals the level of interest and concern people share in relation to this aspect of education. We are now engaging in consultation to ensure the findings and draft advice is reflective of the needs of students, schools, and parents.

In responding to the findings and draft advice on the future directions of RSE it is recommended that you read the draft report or the summary of the draft report both of which are available here <https://www.ncca.ie/en/updates-and-events/consultations/review-of-relationships-and-sexuality-education-rse>.

<b>Name</b>	Dr. Caroline
<b>Surname</b>	West
<b>Position (if applicable)</b>	Lecturer in Sexuality Studies
<b>Organisation (if applicable)</b>	Dublin City University
<b>Date</b>	20.10.19
<b>Email</b>	[REDACTED]

**Please provide some brief background information on your organisation (if applicable).**

I am a lecturer in sexuality studies in Dublin City University. I currently teach the module 'Ireland Sex and Text', which covers the history of sex and sexuality in Ireland. I also teach classes on consent, pornography literacy and sexual health to various groups, and

have trialled the Bystander Programme in DCU. I have a PhD in sexuality studies, MA in sexuality studies, HDip in Psychoanalysis, and a BA in Social Science. I frequently do public talks on sexuality related topics also.

### **The approach**

Across all stakeholders, there was strong agreement that RSE needs to be more than information about biological aspects of growing up and sexual activity. It needs a holistic approach that balances discussion about the risks and dangers associated with relationships and sexual activity with discussion about the positive, healthy and enjoyable aspects of relationships. A holistic approach can be understood as teaching and learning about the cognitive, emotional, physical and social aspects of relationships and sexuality. It aims to equip children and young people with knowledge, skills, attitudes and values that will empower them to: realise their health, wellbeing and dignity; develop respectful social and sexual relationships; consider how their choices affect their own wellbeing and that of others; and understand and ensure the protection of their rights throughout their lives.

**To what extent do you broadly agree/disagree with the proposed direction on the approach to RSE that has emerged from the review? Please tick your response in the box below.**

<b>Strongly Agree</b>	<b>Agree</b>	<b>Disagree</b>	<b>Strongly Disagree</b>
<b>x</b>			

### **What are the aspects of the proposed approach that you agree/disagree with?**

I agree with the proposals, as they are, because they are inclusive, fact based, and empowering. It would bring Ireland in line with best international guidelines as outlined by the UN.

Ireland currently falls far short of international guidelines on the provision of sex education. UNESCO advises that sex education should be comprehensive and/or holistic, with the aim of providing fact based information to people who can then empower themselves to make decisions that are right for them. A review of international sex education curriculums by UNESCO published in 2018 showed that comprehensive sex education results in delayed initiation of sexual intercourse, decreased frequency of sexual intercourse, decreased number of sexual partners, reduced risk taking, increased use of condoms, and increased use of contraception [1]. It also increases knowledge about STIs, which are on the increase in Ireland. Currently there is a new diagnosis of HIV every 18 hours in Ireland, and syphilis, gonorrhoea, herpes and chlamydia infections are all increasing [2].

[1]<https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000264649>

[2]<https://www.hpsc.ie/a-z/sexuallytransmittedinfections/publications/stireports/stiweeklyreports/>

**What else is important when considering the approach for teaching SPHE/RSE in schools?**

Pleasure is often missing from conversations about sex. Instead, we are often left with a fear-based approach that centres around STI's, unwanted pregnancy, and the harms of sex. While it is important these issues are taught, we must also teach that sex can be a pleasurable experience. People do not have sex solely for reproduction, and conversations that exclude this reality can mean a lack of engagement or a lack of options for full empowerment of young people. A comprehensive, fact based approach can help young people to define pleasure for themselves, and enjoy sex in a way that is consensual for them, their partners, and does not cause harm or trauma to anyone. This is a fundamental building block in building a happier society where we cause less harm to each other.

**The curriculum**

The Review highlighted the need to create a single integrated curriculum that sets out the learning for SPHE/RSE as one subject and incrementally provides continuity of experience from early childhood to post-primary. In the immediate term the NCCA will develop interim guidelines to support the current curriculum on how it can be approached in a more holistic

way and provide clarity on how topics can be taught in an inclusive manner to incorporate current themes identified by the review.

**To what extent do you broadly agree/disagree with the need for a single integrated curriculum for SPHE/RSE? Please tick your response in the box below.**

<b>Strongly Agree</b>	<b>Agree</b>	<b>Disagree</b>	<b>Strongly Disagree</b>
x			

**Please provide a reason for your level of agreement/disagreement.**

I teach almost 70 students. Out of that number, none of them stated they felt their sex education was adequate, and only four stated they had been taught about consent. Around half stated they did not receive any sex education at all. The LGTB+ students stated the education they received was not inclusive. Students have also come up to me while teaching about STI's to share that they know people who were not educated on STIs and therefore were not using condoms; relying on birth control for pregnancy prevention only. Disability was also never mentioned, yet we know that people with disabilities also have sex and have a sexual orientation. These anecdotes are consistent with recent research on the implementation of RSE in Ireland [3].

This is an unacceptable situation. This lack of knowledge is under preparing students for making choices around sex, sexual health, and understanding sexual identity. Therefore, this gap in knowledge has the very real potential to cause trauma- both mentally and physically. Sex and sexuality in Ireland has historically been linked to trauma, given our history of silence and condemnation inflicted upon anyone who had sex outside of marriage, outside of procreation, and outside of heterosexual sex. We are now living in an Irish society that purports to care about its' citizens, yet we are failing our citizens in this area by not giving them the information needed to empower themselves. Providing an excellent standard of sex education is a step to healing this trauma and creating a healthier society overall.

[3]<https://www.ncca.ie/media/3781/relationships-and-sexuality-education-rse-in-primary-and-post-primary-irish-schools-a-research-paper.pdf>

**What else do you consider important in relation to future curriculum development in SPHE/RSE?**

We have much hand wringing in Ireland about the fear of the impact of pornography. Yet, we do nothing to support young people around this. Studies on pornography have often produced conflicting results on the realities of its impacts, due to methodological concerns, bias, and content examined. While we wait for academic research to improve in this area, we must be accepting of reality- that young people are going to watch pornography, whether we approve or not. Accepting this reality means that we can develop educational measures that are age appropriate and allow young people a space to develop pornography literacy skills. If the only advice young people hear about pornography is that 'pornography is bad, don't watch it', they will not engage with this and are still left with many questions, and a fear of finding a safe space in order to discuss their concerns. It can be difficult to navigate through sensationalist media headlines about pornography, watching pornography, and trying to decipher conflicting societal messages about pornography. Therefore, a modern sex education curriculum must be inclusive of how to support young people around pornography in a way that they will engage with.

**Creating the conditions for effective RSE**

The Review makes it clear that teachers need in-depth and sustained training and support in the area of SPHE/RSE. Consequently, access to professional development needs to be enhanced at pre-service and in-service levels. The Review also identified the need to take stock of current teaching and learning resources available in this area.

**To what extent do you broadly agree/disagree with the Review's findings on the necessary conditions for effective SPHE/RSE? Please tick your response in the box below**

<b>Strongly Agree</b>	<b>Agree</b>	<b>Disagree</b>	<b>Strongly Disagree</b>
x			

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**Please provide a reason for your level of agreement/disagreement.**

Teachers have outlined this need, and I agree with supporting them. It can be hard to teach a subject like sex education if they themselves did not receive adequate sex education themselves. This may lead them to be uncomfortable. Students also deserve to be taught by teachers who have up to date training and access to modern resources. Students also deserve to be taught by a teacher that has been supported to be comfortable, confident and inclusive. Teachers may also be uncertain of what they can teach given that sex education is not standardised. This can be offset by the development of a standardised curriculum across Ireland.

**What else do you consider important in order to create the conditions for effective SPHE/RSE?**

Sex education must be regulated. It is a subject like any other, and deserves to be taught by qualified people who can be objective, consistent, transparent, and accountable. As we currently have unregulated external agencies often taking the bulk of this work, this is not an ideal situation, as this does not provide consistency or transparency. What qualifications do these individuals and agencies have to teach sex education? Regulation is important to work towards avoidance of causing trauma, being exclusionary, and to ensure that a high standard of education is achieved. I believe a full school culture shift towards sex and sexuality as normal and healthy will provide an environment for teachers and students to engage more comfortably with sex education.

## Other considerations

The Review concluded that comprehensive oversight and support for SPHE/RSE is required to meet the needs identified in the review process. The Review also found schools cannot do it alone and parents must be encouraged and supported in assuming their responsibility for their child's learning. In addition, it suggests that post-primary schools require further support and guidance in planning for junior cycle wellbeing in order to enhance students' learning in SPHE/RSE.

**To what extent do you broadly agree/disagree that these are important considerations for SPHE/RSE? Please tick your response in the box below.**

Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
x			

**Please provide a reason for your level of agreement/disagreement.**

Sex and sexuality are conversations that Ireland should be open to having on a national scale. This shift from silence, shame and stigma to healthy, calm discourse can support parents, teachers, school, youth groups, and the young person themselves to find their voices in ways that work for them. We cannot expect any singular group to be able to fully have these conversations without any support or education. Support for parents is very much needed, as they are also victims of poor sex education and conversations that painted sex and sexuality in a negative light. In modern Ireland, it is time to change this and support everyone to be comfortable, in order to build a healthier and happier society.

**Are there any other considerations that should be highlighted in the advice for SPHE/RSE?**

Ireland is ready for these conversations; however, it is often lacking the language and skills to have these conversations appropriately, safely, and comprehensively. Our language around consent, for example, has greatly evolved in the twenty years since the initial implementation of RSE, and we need to reflect this in modern RSE approaches. Parents have also shown to be very supportive of consent classes in secondary schools [4]. Facilitating calm, fact based conversations about sex and sexuality in an age appropriate manner can build these spaces for discussion and development. This approach also needs

to be inclusive of parents, as parents also often received poor sex education themselves and may feel unsure of how to support their young people in this area. Teachers have also stated that they feel untrained in this area and therefore uncomfortable, and pressure to focus on exam subjects means that sex education is not given the attention it deserves [5].

[4]<https://www.irishexaminer.com/breakingnews/ireland/overwhelming-support-for-school-consent-classes-by-parents-946381.html>

[5] Mayock, P., Kitching, K. and Morgan, M. (2007). Relationships and sexuality education: An Assessment of the challenges to full implementation in post-primary schools. Dublin: Crisis Pregnancy Agency

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## Consent Matters Ireland

# Review of Relationships and Sexuality Education (RSE)

At the request of the Minister for Education and Skills, a major review of RSE in primary and post-primary schools was undertaken from June 2018 to March 2019. The review examined the experience of teaching and learning in RSE including; the curriculum, the approach to learning, the supports needed, and ways to improve the experience of RSE for students. Engagement in the review was considerable and signals the level of interest and concern people share in relation to this aspect of education. We are now engaging in consultation to ensure the findings and draft advice is reflective of the needs of students, schools, and parents.

In responding to the findings and draft advice on the future directions of RSE it is recommended that you read the draft report or the summary of the draft report both of which are available here <https://www.ncca.ie/en/updates-and-events/consultations/review-of-relationships-and-sexuality-education-rse>.

<b>Name</b>	Gráinne
<b>Surname</b>	Carr
<b>Position (if applicable)</b>	Owner
<b>Organisation (if applicable)</b>	Consent Matters Ireland (CMI)
<b>Date</b>	23/10/19
<b>Email</b>	

Please provide some brief background information on your organisation (if applicable).

Consent Matters Ireland's vision is to make society safer through consent awareness. Our mission is to support and guide consent education in Ireland through the development and delivery of trainings that will empower individuals across all segments of the population.

Consent does not solely relate to sexual consent, it permeates through all aspects of our lives and is a life skill that should be taught to children from an early age. Consent is a mutually acceptable agreement between two or more people. A fully consensual agreement is one that respects people's boundaries and is achieved without pressure, coercion or manipulation. In all relationships, but particularly those of an intimate or sexual nature, being aware of our own and other people's boundaries in addition to obtaining wholehearted consent, is crucial to healthy interactions.

CMI help individuals and organisations further their knowledge of consent so that they have a greater awareness of how to define personal boundaries, how to be more aware of personal boundaries, how to communicate them clearly and confidently to others and how to be respectful, mindful and accepting of the boundaries of others.

Our work supports the private individual and also those who work in areas that require a deep understanding of the topic of consent and it's importance within their work context, particularly it's importance for those they support through their work.

Consent Matters Ireland offers trainings, lectures and workshops on consent, tailor made for specific groups in order to support them directly in developing an deep understanding of consent and it's application in their work, suitable for young adults, teachers, facilitators, therapists, coaches, sporting organisations, state and private healthcare services, NGOs, corporations and government bodies.

CMI works with those who work with children and teens to develop age appropriate consent awareness consent education and in doing so supports youth care workers, those currently providing RSE/SPHE in primary and secondary schools and at 3<sup>rd</sup> level and children and youth focused NGOs.

## **The approach**

Across all stakeholders, there was strong agreement that RSE needs to be more than information about biological aspects of growing up and sexual activity. It needs a holistic approach that balances discussion about the risks and dangers associated with relationships and sexual activity with discussion about the positive, healthy and enjoyable aspects of relationships. A holistic approach can be understood as teaching and learning about the cognitive, emotional, physical and social aspects of relationships and sexuality. It aims to equip children and young people with knowledge, skills, attitudes and values that will empower them to: realise their health, wellbeing and dignity; develop respectful social and sexual relationships; consider how their choices affect their own wellbeing and that of others; and understand and ensure the protection of their rights throughout their lives.

**To what extent do you broadly agree/disagree with the proposed direction on the approach to RSE that has emerged from the review? Please tick your response in the box below.**

<b>Strongly Agree</b>	<b>Agree</b>	<b>Disagree</b>	<b>Strongly Disagree</b>
✓			

**What are the aspects of the proposed approach that you agree/disagree with?**

SPHE/RSE must be taught uniformly, with all students having access to the same information, taught by people who are knowledgeable, confident, non-judgemental and are shame free when facilitating this subject. Every student must have access to a redeveloped curriculum that supports them in an ongoing and age appropriate way in developing the life skills necessary to have healthy and happy relationships.

**What else is important when considering the approach for teaching SPHE/RSE in schools?**

Those who teach this subject matter must be sufficiently skilled to be able to teach the curriculum effectively and to facilitate discussion with confidence and in a positive, non-judgemental, shame free manner.

Smaller class sizes (15 participants or less) are essential to allow for students to feel safe and confident enough to participate fully.

Gender Neutral language should be adopted both in printed materials and in classroom to support our growing cultural awareness of diversity and the importance of inclusion.

Parents/Care givers involvement is hugely welcome – with information evenings being held for parents so they are familiar and comfortable with the detail of content being discussed in the classroom.

Acknowledgement of diverse familial structures should be considered throughout, not all children come from homes with two full time parents and to suggest this is the case is exclusionary and shaming for those who do not have this experience in their home life.

Acknowledgement and accommodation for Neurodiverse students is essential.

SPHE/RSE education prioritisation is also essential – this topic is too fundamental to the future safety and wellbeing of students for it to be side-lined in preference of other subjects.

It is essential that all students at state funded schools have access to the full revised curriculum each year with no reduction to time allotted as detailed within the curriculum or revision of the curriculum.

## The curriculum

The Review highlighted the need to create a single integrated curriculum that sets out the learning for SPHE/RSE as one subject and incrementally provides continuity of experience from early childhood to post-primary. In the immediate term the NCCA will develop interim guidelines to support the current curriculum on how it can be approached in a more holistic way and provide clarity on how topics can be taught in an inclusive manner to incorporate current themes identified by the review.

**To what extent do you broadly agree/disagree with the need for a single integrated curriculum for SPHE/RSE? Please tick your response in the box below.**

Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
✓			

**Please provide a reason for your level of agreement/disagreement.**

**What else do you consider important in relation to future curriculum development in SPHE/RSE?**

The development of the curriculum has to be prioritised to ensure that we no longer allow students to exit the education system without comprehensive knowledge and awareness. The Netherlands and New Zealand have already created successful programmes so it would appear that the most effective and efficient way to develop a programme for this country should involve discussion with relevant bodies in those countries.

The creation of appropriate training for teachers/external facilitators shall be essential to ensure they fully comfortable with content, have comprehensive and up to date knowledge and have the confidence necessary to support students individually or in class room discussion.

## Creating the conditions for effective RSE

The Review makes it clear that teachers need in-depth and sustained training and support in the area of SPHE/RSE. Consequently, access to professional development needs to be enhanced at pre-service and in-service levels. The Review also identified the need to take stock of current teaching and learning resources available in this area.

**To what extent do you broadly agree/disagree with the Review's findings on the necessary conditions for effective SPHE/RSE? Please tick your response in the box below**

Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
✓			

**Please provide a reason for your level of agreement/disagreement.**

The CMI particular area of expertise and awareness means we have a keen understanding of the complexity of the topic of Consent. Within this broad subject matter, we focus on the importance of those who are going to be delivering content in this area understanding that key learning outcomes must include:

An increased understanding that consent does not just apply to intimate relationships but to all relating.

Discussing rejection and learning how to deal with rejection in a healthy way is essential so that if consent is not given that rejection is dealt with in a respectful and accepting manner.

Becoming aware of one's personal boundaries and becoming confident in expressing them leads to greater thought and consideration before making decisions or agreements with others.

Through comprehensive consent focused learning the capacity of learners to say No confidently without guilt is increased.

**What else do you consider important in order to create the conditions for effective SPHE/RSE?**

**Other considerations**

The Review concluded that comprehensive oversight and support for SPHE/RSE is required to meet the needs identified in the review process. The Review also found schools cannot do it alone and parents must be encouraged and supported in assuming their responsibility for their child's learning. In addition, it suggests that post-primary schools require further support and guidance in planning for junior cycle wellbeing in order to enhance students' learning in SPHE/RSE.

**To what extent do you broadly agree/disagree that these are important considerations for SPHE/RSE? Please tick your response in the box below.**

<b>Strongly Agree</b>	<b>Agree</b>	<b>Disagree</b>	<b>Strongly Disagree</b>
✓			

**Please provide a reason for your level of agreement/disagreement.**

Positive support from Parents/Adult Carers is of fundamental importance and so clear communication to parents/carers regarding the benefits of comprehensive SPHE in other countries is essential.

**Are there any other considerations that should be highlighted in the advice for SPHE/RSE?**

To be able to fully understand consent and boundaries as they apply to all relationships it is important that those who will be teaching students have access to appropriate training themselves on this complex topic.

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Christian Association of Ireland

# Christian Association of Ireland

Hill Road

Drumshanbo

Co Leitrim

24/10/2019

Dear Minister,

We as parents are extremely concerned about the Provision of Objective Sex Education Bill 2018 (Bill 34 of 2018), which, with a few small changes to our comprehensive and widely respected Education Act of 1998, proposes to change the face of education, schools, their boards and the duty of the Minister for Education. It proposes to interfere with the rights of parents as primary educators in choosing a school according to ethos and deciding upon the type of education appropriate for their children. The enforcement of a sex education curriculum by a minority government is very worrying. It is the very subject that parents should have most input into. We, as parents, would like to decide the appropriate time and setting for educating our children on topics with moral gravity, like sex education, so as to give our children the best chance to become responsible people and members of society. We have a many questions about the bill which we would like answered. The following points break down the proposed changes to the Education Bill of 1998 and the widespread effect they would have on schools, boards of management and the Education Minister.

1. Amendment to Education Act, 1998 Section 9(d) referring to the role of the school and parents.

Does this mean that the intention is not to consult with parents and to over-rule the characteristic spirit of the school on which basis parents may choose a particular school for their children?

Does this mean that the intention is to deny the rights of the parents, as per our constitution, to be the primary educators of our children in being consulted about curriculum and in choosing a school according to ethos and characteristic spirit? Amendment to Education Act, 1998 Section 15 (2)(b) referring to the role of the board of management.

Does this mean that the board of management of a school would be forced to change their existing duty to uphold the school ethos and instead will be manipulated by external pressures or agencies, even when the influences are not part of their educational, moral, religious, social, linguistic and spiritual values and traditions, as protected by our Education Act, 1998, but rather, are contrary to those values?

Amendment to Education Act, 1998, Section 30 which refers to the Minister for Education: With the following subsection to be added after subsection (1): (1A) When prescribing the curriculum for relationships and sexuality education the Minister shall ensure—

The curriculum is factual and objective, age appropriate, and not gender normative, Definition of “factual”: “Concerned with what is actually the case” (Oxford English Dictionary). Definition of “objective”: “not influenced by personal feelings or opinions in considering and representing facts”

Who is it that decides what is objective or age appropriate and why do they get to choose? The delivery of such a proposed curriculum is non-objective since it is neither fair, just, impartial nor unprejudiced, and it disagrees with the fundamental beliefs of many, including many parents. Gender normative - If it is not gender normative, then it will not conform to the objective norms of gender in Ireland and, it will not teach the shared values of our culture. The curriculum includes the following areas in a factual and objective manner:

- (i) Consent to sexual activity; Why are children being taught about this? Is this so as to encourage law-breaking? Increasing knowledge of risky behaviour leads to increased risky behaviour for those children who are undecided. We, as parents, do not want to create the curiosity that early sex education leads to.
- (ii) The different types of sexuality; The teaching of different types of sexuality bring with it, moral implications. It is not the place of a government or school to put forward a curriculum such as this, where all sexualities are taught as valid and morally equal choices. It goes against our beliefs and not only removes our parental rights but also our religious freedom.
- (iii) The different types of gender; Gender is either male or female - this is a biological fact. With regard to different types of gender, the proposition is neither accurate, correct, credible, nor scientifically verifiable. The belief that gender and sex are the same thing is a belief held by many millions of people from many religions and none. The traditional view is a mainstream belief that must be respected. Where is the proof that these different types of gender that are being proposed, are actually fact?

Is this a “fact” that will change from time to time as new genders are put forward? The imposition of gender ideology on our children is contrary to long-established facts and to our beliefs. Teaching children these controversial theories as if they are fact amounts to indoctrination of political ideologies, which should have no place in any school. Schools are currently not required to manipulate children into believing that gender ideology is factual or morally right. If a school is to teach something that is untrue, it becomes a centre of indoctrination, not education. You have a moral obligation, as our representative, to oppose a bill which enforces indoctrination. Is this bill proposing that our children be indoctrinated with an ideology that is contrary to our beliefs and against our will?

There is no law requiring that people must agree with gender ideology. Will the school, the school boards and the Minister for Education be forced to act as if there is?

Methods of contraception; Why is this teaching being proposed for a group of people who are not legally allowed to have sex or buy contraceptives?

The termination of pregnancy; This bill was introduced in April 2018, a month before the Abortion Referendum in Ireland. The inclusion of this section is questionable at the very least. In addition to this, and very importantly, it is the belief of hundreds of thousands of people in Ireland today that the ending of life in abortion is immoral. It is an objective fact that abortion always ends a life, and as such the education around abortion should not be imposed upon children within the school curriculum.

The curriculum is delivered in a factual and objective manner in all schools regardless of the characteristic spirit of the school.

While some of the above propositions in this bill may be deemed factual by some, they are not necessarily appropriate for teaching in our schools and absolutely not while ignoring the ethos of the school. Parents choose schools for their children based on ethos and characteristic spirit. There can be no exception to the aspects of school, education and school life which do not influence or aren't affected by ethos. There can be no exceptions imposed, especially when those exceptions involve forcing something immoral or untrue statements on the school, infringing upon the status of parents as the primary educators of their children and indoctrinating pupils with falsehoods. The rights of students to access factual and objective education on reproductive healthcare is guaranteed, protected and upheld in all schools."

- (a) What is the definition of "reproductive healthcare"? Is it referring to women having babies? Or is it a term used to hide the more sinister intention of providing education on contraception and abortion to children?
- (b) How could the education around matters with such moral gravity ever be mandated for in legislation or be open to political influence? And how is it acceptable to force teachers to teach material with a moral view contrary to that of the parents, to impressionable young people and present it as morally good and beneficial for the flourishing of society? Is this proposed amendment suggesting that the rights of the students to access any questionable proposed curriculum, under the pretence of "Education on reproductive healthcare" supersedes the constitutional right of parents to be the primary educators and to decide what is suitable and appropriate education for their children? The Amendment to Education Act, 1998, subsection (2)(b) referring again to the role of the Minister For Education. Would this proposed bill force the Minister of Education to ignore the ethos of a school and the rights of a parent to choose a school by its ethos, by imposing any legislated curriculum put forward under "Relationships and Sexuality Education"?
- (c) Ethos or characteristic spirit of a school cannot be ignored and exceptions based on immoral or untrue material cannot be imposed. This bill has been proposed by people and supported by groups who do not represent us. See appendix 5. It is also sad to see second level student groups being used to denigrate religious beliefs and rights of those who cherish and want the best for, those same second level students; their parents. We are the primary educators of our children, this is protected in our Constitution and a God given right, more powerful than any legislation. The law recognises the right of parents to raise their children in accordance with their beliefs including during a child's

education. To propose a curriculum taught without any moral bearing or inference is dangerous, even if it were legal to do so without parental consent. We don't want the elimination of individual character and ethos of our schools. We do not want the elimination of choice with regard to the education of our children and the provision of their education. We have constitutional protections which must be respected and upheld. We are very concerned and we want answers to the questions we have posed. We look forward to receiving your response to these concerns as soon as possible.

Yours sincerely

*Sean Wynne*

Sean Wynne  
Secretary

#### References

Increased spending on sex education does not prevent teenage pregnancies but actually contribute to increased rates: Journal of Health economics 54 (2017) 135-146, "The Effect of Spending Cuts On Teen Pregnancy". David Patona,\*, Liam Wrightb a Nottingham University Business School, Jubilee Campus, Wollaton Road, Nottingham, NG8 1BB, United Kingdom b School of Health and Related Research, University of Sheffield, Regent Court, Sheffield, S1 4DA, United Kingdom  
[https://www.cochrane.org/CD006417/INFECTN\\_school-based-interventions-preventinghiv-sexually-transmitted-infections-and-pregnancy-adolescents](https://www.cochrane.org/CD006417/INFECTN_school-based-interventions-preventinghiv-sexually-transmitted-infections-and-pregnancy-adolescents)  
Amendment to Education Act, 1998 Section 9(d) 9. A recognised school shall provide education to students which is appropriate to their abilities and needs and, without prejudice to the generality of the foregoing, it shall use its available resources to: (d) Promote the moral, spiritual, social and personal development of students and provide health education for them, in consultation with their parents, having regard to the characteristic spirit of the school The new bill proposes that Section 9(d) is amended by inserting “, with the exception of relationships and sexuality education,” after “having”.

Amendment to Education Act, 1998 Section 15 (2)(b) which requires the board of management to (b) uphold, and be accountable to the patron for so upholding, the characteristic spirit of the school as determined by the cultural, educational, moral, religious, social, linguistic and spiritual values and traditions which inform and are characteristic of the objectives and conduct of the school, and at all times act in accordance with any Act of the Oireachtas or instrument made thereunder, deed, charter, articles of management or other such instrument relating to the establishment or operation of the school The new bill proposes that Section 15(2) (b) of the Principal Act shall be amended by adding the words “with the exception of relationships and sexuality education,” after “upholding,”.

Amendment to Education Act, 1998, subsection (2)(b): the minister (for Education) shall have regard to the characteristic spirit of a school or class of school in exercising his or

her functions under this section. The bill proposes to amend this section by adding “, with the exception of relationships and sexuality education” after “section”.

This bill was proposed by Ruth Coppinger (Socialist Party TD) Paul Murphy and Mick Barry (People Before Profit TDs). It is supported by: National Women's Council of Ireland Shout Out Daltaí 4 Choice Rape Crisis Network UCD Students Union Irish Family Planning Association Be Long To You Act Europe Irish Second Level Students Union and Atheist Ireland

The Council for Catechetics, Education (Irish Bishops Conference)  
and the Catholic Schools Partnership

## Review of Relationships and Sexuality Education (RSE)

<b>Name</b>	
<b>Surname</b>	
<b>Position (if applicable)</b>	
<b>Organisation (if applicable)</b>	Council for Catechetics, Council for Education and Council for the Catholic Schools Partnership
<b>Date</b>	25 <sup>th</sup> October, 2019
<b>Email</b>	██████████

### 1. The approach

Across all stakeholders, there was strong agreement that RSE needs to be more than information about biological aspects of growing up and sexual activity. It needs a holistic approach that balances discussion about the risks and dangers associated with relationships and sexual activity with discussion about the positive, healthy and enjoyable aspects of relationships. A holistic approach can be understood as teaching and learning about the cognitive, emotional, physical and social aspects of relationships and sexuality. It aims to equip children and young people with knowledge, skills, attitudes and values that will empower them to: realise their health, wellbeing and dignity; develop respectful social and sexual relationships; consider how their choices affect their own wellbeing and that of others; and understand and ensure the protection of their rights throughout their lives.

**To what extent do you broadly agree/disagree with the proposed direction on the approach to RSE that has emerged from the review? Please tick your response in the box below. \***

Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

#### **What are the aspects of the proposed approach that you agree/disagree with?**

We agree that RSE needs to be focused on more than information about biological aspects of growing up and sexual activity. However, we note the following:

1. What that 'more' is, requires more substantial unpacking than is currently provided in this report. Asking for comment from parents, in particular, without full clarity in terms of the details around what will actually happen in their children's classroom is very problematic. It is arguably relatively easy to get some consensus around general future directions; it is the specifics that parents are looking for in terms of any consultation with which they are asked to engage.
2. Previous guidelines, curriculum documents, DES circulars and indeed the Education

Act itself have attended to a values framework into which RSE/SPHE sits. Education in this area was consistently situated in a moral, social and spiritual framework (Morgan, M., 2000. *Relationships and sexuality education: an evaluation and review of implementation*. Dublin: Stationery Office.) There was, and arguably continues to be consensus that this is the kind of framework required. However, the current definition of holistic RSE provided above (which many parents we met felt draws too heavily from a highly contested document – the World Health Organisation’s, *Standards for Sexuality Education in Europe*, 2010) appears to focus on the social and personal, with insufficient attention to the moral and spiritual. This was very problematic for the parents with whom we engaged as part of our consultation.

3. Although the NCCA mentions ‘values’ in their review, there is insufficient unpacking in this definition and in the report in terms of what that will look like. Parents have, time and again, asked that this be defined fully. Recognising that there is no such thing as values neutral education, parents are asking serious and important questions around who gets to decide what values underpin teaching and learning in RSE in the schools to which they send their children.
4. Obviously anything that focuses only on the biological aspects of growing up and human sexuality will be insufficient. So too will any approach that focuses solely on a risk/dangers model. But equally any reduction in terms of a simple legal and pleasure/enjoyment approach will not be enough. For parents, this clearly points to questions they have around what the actual purpose of RSE is for their children, and indeed, also how effective RSE is in meeting its aims. It should also be noted that students themselves in the NCCA review clearly indicated that they wanted more from RSE; they also wanted the space to explore values (NCCA, p.17).

Human relationships, as this definition above from the NCCA helpfully suggests, always involve questions around the person’s individual dignity and worth and the dignity and worth of the people which whom he/she interacts. This will mean helping young people to make judgements in terms of what is right and what is wrong, not only for themselves but for those people with whom they form relationships. As teachers and parents we provide this clear guidance in other areas of their lives, and in the area of RSE, parents especially call on schools to provide guidance and to suggest meaningful boundaries for their children as they navigate their way through what can be a very difficult dimension of growing up today. Parents came to our consultation gatherings in significant numbers because of their interest in this area of their children’s education, and they spoke powerfully of the need for their children to be supported in leading good lives in line with their own and their families’ values.

5. Deficits in this definition will soon become clear across all of the issues the then Minister for Education Richard Bruton suggested as possible foci for the report. In the area of consent, for example, many parents have said clearly that we obviously cannot have a situation where any suggestion is made to students (at whatever age) that the only criteria for engaging in sexual activity is; is it safe, is it legal, is it consensual and is it enjoyable? Questions around the importance of sexual activity most optimally taking place in committed relationships (for many people of different faiths, in the

context of marriage) need to be at the heart of RSE. The importance of delaying first sexual experiences for girls and boys (verified time and again by a whole range of academic studies in this area e.g. Honor Young, Lorraine Burke and Saoirse Nic Cabhainn, *Sexual intercourse, age of initiation and contraception among adolescents in Ireland: findings from the Health Behaviour in School-aged Children (BCSC) Ireland study*", BMC Public Health (2018)) needs also to be presented and explored. That human beings need to treat one another as subjects not objects is a basic requirement in any approach to RSE. Put simply, as many parents said to us at our meetings, this means teaching children and young people the difference between right and wrong in how they treat one another and they need to be taught this not only for their own good but for the good of others as well. Much of the wider report from the NCCA chimes with this but it would be helpful to see it captured in the above definition as well.

6. Another obvious difficulty with the above definition and with the wider report is the absence of any meaningful philosophical rationale underpinning the approach suggested. There needs to be more substantial attention given to questions like; who is the human being in relation to others? What is the ultimate 'good' of human relating? What does it mean to live a good life in relation to oneself and to others? What is it to be human, to be a sexual being? At a basic level, without some attention being given to these questions and others like them, the very rationale underpinning RSE will be insufficient to carry the subject in any meaningful or serious way in any type of school.

In the Council for Catechetics, Council for Education and CSP submission made previously, our answering of these key philosophical questions might be helpful to note, purely by way of an example, in terms of answering these questions. A Christian anthropology of the person combined with an inclusive and invitational approach to teaching and learning and a community experience that affirms the dignity of each person are at the heart of how good RSE is approached in Catholic schools. We believe that each person is created in God's image and because of that dignity each person should be treated with care and respect. We believe in providing spaces for students to engage and dialogue with a rich and challenging vision of the human person and human sexuality in a way that is entirely invitational. Students can accept or reject these teachings but Catholic schools provide opportunities to engage with a vision that we believe, and many parents believe, has the potential to give meaning and purpose to the young person's life.

In other school types other answers to these important philosophical questions will be provided and that also needs to be respected in line of course with students' needs, parents' wishes and the ethos of the school. That is why provision into the future has to be made in line with the Education Act's guidance around characteristic spirit.

And outside of the school setting, other people coming from different philosophical perspectives will answer these questions differently – the point is, we all have a perspective and it would be helpful to have the NCCA's perspective on these questions in advance of any decisions being made on a revised RSE curriculum.

7. As we have previously stated in our last submission, we agree with the NCCA and many others that RSE should not avoid anything that students need to know in the area of relationships and sexuality education in line with parental wishes and the learning needs and interests of students, provided for in an age and stage approach way. Archbishop Eamon Martin in his address to JMB/AMCSS was very clear on this point and in doing so, provided real leadership in this area for Catholic primary and post primary schools.

It might be argued that this question has already been dealt with for schools through Circular 0037/2010. This means providing the facts, as they are now and as they are likely to continue to emerge on a whole range of matters relating to human sexuality and relationships; drawing on the best from science, psychology, sociology, philosophy and anthropology.

8. RSE is not just about what should be taught; it is also about how it should be taught. This definition gives insufficient attention to the question of pedagogy. (The underlining pedagogy is captured in the Report itself but even there more is required). If RSE is to be about equipping children and young people with knowledge, skills, attitudes and values it will mean providing important pedagogical spaces for dialogue and discussion so that learning can be personally appropriated and values explored and expressed in line with this learning. In our consultations with students, they asked that their engagement in RSE be as academically and intellectually challenging and interesting as it is in other subjects. They also want spaces for good dialogue. This chimes well with what is provided in terms of what students' said they needed in terms of meeting their actual learning needs. (NCCA, p. 25).

### **What else is important when considering the approach for teaching SPHE/RSE in schools?**

Once again, we highlight the absence of the spiritual dimension of the child/young person's life. This is puzzling because the spiritual dimension is acknowledged in other NCCA curriculum documents (Primary Curriculum, Junior Cycle Framework, Wellbeing Guidelines, Aistear). (For example, see Wellbeing Guidelines, p.17). Interestingly it is also acknowledged (albeit in a rather vague way) in the WHO report, *Standards for Sexuality Education in Europe* (p. 17).

In the area of Wellbeing for Junior Cycle, for example, the NCCA helpfully provides material for teachers teaching a whole range of subjects to engage with the topic, *Being Spiritual*, providing rich definitions for students to engage with what being spiritual means. Why it is not acknowledged here in the current RSE Review Report is very strange because it is at the level of the spiritual that the human person engages with the 'big questions' around the meaning of one's own life, the meaning and purpose of relationships and of course, for Christians and all people of faith, the question of the divine and what God wants for us in our relating to one another. Previous iterations of SPHE (including most recently in terms of SPHE as a short course as part of Wellbeing,

NCCA, 2016), include the spiritual. No reasons have been given by the NCCA for the omission as part of the review of RSE of this key part of the child/young person's life.

In all faith schools, not just Catholic schools, and in line with the Constitution and the Education Act, the spiritual matters in education and in our consultations with parents, the failure by the NCCA to acknowledge the spiritual dimension of life in this area is problematic.

## 2. The curriculum

The Review highlighted the need to create a single integrated curriculum that sets out the learning for SPHE/RSE as one subject and incrementally provides continuity of experience from early childhood to post-primary. In the immediate term the NCCA will develop interim guidelines to support the current curriculum on how it can be approached in a more holistic way and provide clarity on how topics can be taught in an inclusive manner to incorporate current themes identified by the review.

### **Please provide a reason for your level of agreement/disagreement.**

We acknowledge the NCCA's understandable wish to provide a single integrated curriculum that sets out the learning for SPHE/RSE as one subject and incrementally provides continuity of experience from early childhood to post-primary. This wish makes particular sense in view of the current work being done by the NCCA in terms of a redeveloped Primary Curriculum and the work done as part of Junior Cycle reform, especially in the area of Wellbeing. However, we note the following:

Firstly in terms of an integrated curriculum:

1. Integration here can also be taken to point to a whole school approach to SPHE/RSE, where provision in this curricular area is understood and experienced as a whole school reality. Or put another way, when the values explored in and through SPHE/RSE are made real through the ethos of the school; through for example, the values of inclusion, respect for all, openness to dialogue and to difference, and through a desire on the part of teachers and leaders to provide parameters and guidance around good behaviour and right relationships, then what is taught and learnt in RSE will make sense to students. This 'whole school' dimension to the provision of RSE as part of SPHE will only be fully coherent when the programme for RSE is fully consistent with the wider characteristic spirit of the school. It is through this whole school reality that the NCCA's 'continuity of experience' can most optimally take place.
2. The current provision for RSE as part of SPHE is already integrated. In the *Post Primary Interim Curriculum and Guidelines* for example (see section 3.3), the RSE component is clearly an integrated part of the SPHE curriculum. The SPHE short course for Junior Cycle also clearly presents RSE as an integrated part of SPHE,

sitting within the wider area of Wellbeing.

What additional integration is being suggested needs to be further unpacked for the sake of absolute clarity, particularly in terms of engagement with schools and with parents. A question we have been asked is, will this integration allow for meaningful opt out for parents of their children in this area as is their constitutional right.

3. The current low-status in many primary, but especially post primary schools of RSE as part of SPHE, the overcrowded timetable and the pressure of the examination system in Post Primary all militate against the provision of a richly integrated approach to RSE. Until these challenges are addressed, such provision will fall short in terms of the practical, on-the-ground experience of teachers and learners.

Secondly, in terms of any interim guidelines/curriculum that might bring clarity on how topics can be taught in an inclusive manner to incorporate current themes identified by the review:

4. In our consultations with parents, one of the questions most frequently asked was who will ultimately decide what gets taught and when it gets taught in RSE. Who decides what is 'age' and 'stage' appropriate? If the NCCA is to bring all parents with them through this process then clarity is required in terms of this question. It's interesting, in this regard to note the content knowledge that parents feel is important for their children to learn in RSE (through the NCCA engagement with parents, p. 29); respect, relationships, consent, safety and social media. This chimes well with our engagement with the parents we met who want their children to learn core values that mirrored the values their children were learning in the home.

Not surprisingly, given the wish to be part of the decision making process that decides what will be taught and when, they expressed a desire for better communication and information from schools in relation to what their child is learning in RSE (NCCA, p. 32). Parents are incredibly and understandably protective of their children and this desire to protect their children cannot be overstated. Ways have to be found of working together, in partnership, to ensure this kind of rich dialogue between school and parents happens in the area of RSE, so that the child/young person's experience of RSE can be as rich as possible.

The role of the Patron/Trustee is important here. The approach in the Education Act is one of partnership; where Patrons/Trustees work with the DES and NCCA to meet their obligations. However, the review report fails in any substantial way to expressly name this partnership. This is problematic.

5. The themes originally suggested by then Minister Bruton are all important. In our previous submission, we have clearly stated that no issue should be left out or not dealt with properly in Catholic schools, in consultation with parents. This remains the case. Speaking with parents, they were very clear that all of these issues need

to be dealt with in an age appropriate manner and after full consultation with parents. In addition, other groups with whom we have met (e.g. principals and Chairs of Boards of Management of primary schools and groupings of deputy principals of Catholic Voluntary Secondary Schools) have also clearly said that all of the issues suggested as important need to be looked at from moral as well as social and personal perspectives.

But as stated above, it is not only about what will be covered in RSE and when, it is also about how it will be covered. Children and young people need to be provided with the space to look at a variety of views and perspectives on all of the various issues. In the area of pornography for example, in a Catholic school, the importance of exploring 'person as subject' as opposed to 'person as object' will obviously be important. Issues around human trafficking, the dangers of porn addiction and the increasing prevalence of very violent pornography (see <https://www.thejournal.ie/internet-porn-problems-trinity-4852164-Oct2019/>) might, in line with a school's RSE policy, and in an age appropriate way, be explored with senior students. In addition, that the use of pornography has been found to be de-sensitising young people might also be addressed. (See <https://www.bbc.com/news/education-36527681> outlining research by NSPCC in England of over one thousand young people on their experience of pornography). All of this would obviously be situated, within a fully integrated and holistic approach to RSE that speaks richly to the dignity of all human persons who should always, as stated earlier, be treated as subjects and never as objects.

**What else do you consider important in relation to future curriculum development in SPHE/RSE?**

The next stage of RSE curriculum development by the NCCA will obviously be challenging. Engaging in decision making around the specifics being proposed without bringing parents, teachers, students, school principals and patrons/trustees fully on board will make the work to be done twice as difficult. It is vital as we enter together this next stage of the work that sufficient attention is given by all of us to the reasonable concerns being addressed through this process by parents. All parents want to put their children's needs front and centre in the area of RSE. The people best placed to decide what it is that their children need are parents, and the process best equipped to deal with engaging with parents will need to be more local and will need to take full account of the learning needs of students and the characteristic spirit of the school.

Other ways of ensuring very robust consultation with parents on the ground, in their local settings, have to be found to ensure as full engagement as possible can happen. This may mean engaging with education partners and other stakeholders that were perhaps not fully utilised in this stage of the review process.

### 3. Creating the conditions for effective RSE

The Review makes it clear that teachers need in-depth and sustained training and support in the area of SPHE/RSE. Consequently, access to professional development needs to be enhanced at pre-service and in-service levels. The Review also identified the need to take stock of current teaching and learning resources available in this area.

#### **Please provide a reason for your level of agreement/disagreement.**

In terms of teachers needing in-depth and sustained training and support in the area of SPHE/RSE, we are in broad agreement. However, to this we would add:

1. If characteristic spirit is to remain an integral part of RSE/SPHE provision going forward (and we and the parents with whom we engaged believe it must), such training will have to include this dimension of the work. This will mean providing meaningful tools and opportunities for teachers to engage with questions relating to characteristic spirit in and through training.
2. In addition to training and support for teachers, principals and Chairs of Boards of Management also arguably need this engagement also. In our work with teachers, principals, deputy principals and Chairs of BOMs, we found that those in leadership roles in particular felt they needed to be given the time and the space to consider how best to manage engagement with parents and with students in this area. Simply providing policy development guidelines and templates will not be sufficient if we are to move together into a new phase of RSE/SPHE provision in primary and post primary schools in Ireland. Patrons/Trustees also have a clear responsibility to assist schools in this regard.

#### **What else do you consider important in order to create the conditions for effective SPHE/RSE?**

In terms of programmes and materials, and in line with DES thinking underpinning, for example, the new Junior Cycle Framework (Circular 0055/201) what is provided by the NCCA in terms of guidelines and new material needs to make more space for different school types to plan and programme for RSE out of their particular characteristic spirit and with a view to the learning needs and interests of all of their students. The review report acknowledges that ethos need not be a barrier to the delivery of good RSE at primary or post primary school level. In light of this, greater efforts need to be made by all involved in education to show how ethos in a whole range of different school types, and in line with the wishes of parents, can actually assist in the creation of spaces for teachers, students, and parents to come together to dialogue on what it is that students need to hear and to engage with in order for them to be equipped with the values, skills, attitudes and knowledge they need to live meaningful lives in relation to others. Up to date tools need to be developed for these conversations to happen and adequate training and support for school Boards of Management and principals needs to be provided in their work leading these processes. This is something for all Patrons/Trustees and not

just Patrons/Trustees of faith schools. In addition, individual Patrons/Trustees also have a responsibility to their schools to provide materials and other supports that assist in areas like RSE policy development and RSE/SPHE programmes.

#### 4. Other considerations

The Review concluded that comprehensive oversight and support for SPHE/RSE is required to meet the needs identified in the review process. The Review also found schools cannot do it alone and parents must be encouraged and supported in assuming their responsibility for their child's learning. In addition, it suggests that post-primary schools require further support and guidance in planning for junior cycle wellbeing in order to enhance students' learning in SPHE/RSE.

#### **Please provide a reason for your level of agreement/disagreement.**

The NCCA review report states that comprehensive oversight of and support for SPHE/RSE on the part of the Inspectorate and the DES is required in order to meet the needs identified in this review. Patrons/Trustees also have a clear function, under the Education Act, and at local level through Boards of Management, to ensure and oversee good RSE/SPHE in their schools. Support for this is required. If we say characteristic spirit isn't a block to RSE, and in fact, properly understood, can provide a real opportunity for rich engagement for students in this area, then for this to happen, support from patrons/trustees and indeed the DES and NCCA is required.

We agree that parents need support in this area. For this to happen, Boards of Management, principals and teachers need to be helped to manage this. A good place to start may be the review by the school partners including parents (all parents or as many parents as possible) of the school's RSE policy. Such reviews can be a rich opportunity to dialogue and discuss the needs of the students, the values of the parents and the school's ethos.

Time issues are a clear emerging concern. By way of example, in terms of planning for Junior Cycle Wellbeing, the biggest challenge facing schools has been time. Obviously one approach that could be taken is a cross-curricular one. This requires careful planning and, in order to do this, schools need time and support.

*\*We have chosen not to tick any of the boxes/scales in terms of agreeing/disagreeing as we feel the statements contain too many distinct elements for us to agree/disagree with them in their entirety.*

## Daughters of Charity of St Vincent de Paul

# Review of Relationships and Sexuality Education (RSE)

At the request of the Minister for Education and Skills, a major review of RSE in primary and post-primary schools was undertaken from June 2018 to March 2019. The review examined the experience of teaching and learning in RSE including; the curriculum, the approach to learning, the supports needed, and ways to improve the experience of RSE for students. Engagement in the review was considerable and signals the level of interest and concern people share in relation to this aspect of education. We are now engaging in consultation to ensure the findings and draft advice is reflective of the needs of students, schools, and parents.

In responding to the findings and draft advice on the future directions of RSE it is recommended that you read the draft report or the summary of the draft report both of which are available here <https://www.ncca.ie/en/updates-and-events/consultations/review-of-relationships-and-sexuality-education-rse>.

<b>Name</b>	Anne
<b>Surname</b>	Neylon
<b>Position (if applicable)</b>	Teacher
<b>Organisation (if applicable)</b>	Daughters of Charity of St Vincent de Paul
<b>Date</b>	24-10-2019
<b>Email</b>	

**Please provide some brief background information on your organisation (if applicable).**

St Vincent de Paul and St Louise de Marillac in France founded the Company of the Daughters of Charity of St Vincent de Paul in 1633. The Daughters of Charity founded to serve those who lived in poverty in seventeenth century society continue the mission today according to the Vincentian charism. Education plays a key part in all the ministries and there is a constant call to reach out to those who live on the margins of society.

*"Since God is satisfied with our good will and honest efforts, let us also be satisfied with the outcome He gives to them, and our actions will never be without good results."* Saint Vincent de Paul

## The approach

Across all stakeholders, there was strong agreement that RSE needs to be more than information about biological aspects of growing up and sexual activity. It needs a holistic approach that balances discussion about the risks and dangers associated with relationships and sexual activity with discussion about the positive, healthy and enjoyable aspects of relationships. A holistic approach can be understood as teaching and learning about the cognitive, emotional, physical and social aspects of relationships and sexuality. It aims to equip children and young people with knowledge, skills, attitudes and values that will empower them to: realise their health, wellbeing and dignity; develop respectful social and sexual relationships; consider how their choices affect their own wellbeing and that of others; and understand and ensure the protection of their rights throughout their lives.

**To what extent do you broadly agree/disagree with the proposed direction on the approach to RSE that has emerged from the review? Please tick your response in the box below.**

Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
	Agree		

**What are the aspects of the proposed approach that you agree/disagree with?**

### A. The APPROACH

1. As well as RSE being "grounded in the rights and needs of young people" (as written in the Review document, p.11), it is essential to consider the "permanent principles of the Church's social doctrine" which "constitute the very heart of Catholic Social Teaching." (The Compendium of the social doctrine of the Church, no.160).

- The Principles of Catholic Social Teaching:
  - The Principle of the Common Good
  - The Universal Destination of Goods
  - The Principle of Subsidiarity
  - Participation
  - The Principle of Solidarity
  - The Fundamental Values of Social Life
- A Catholic school strives daily to teach the *Grow in Love* religious education programme according to the norms of the **Catholic Preschool and Primary RE Curriculum for Ireland (2015)** where it puts God and God's love at the centre of the school day. In addition, Catholic Religious Education always emphasises moral education. The RSE programme is taught within this context of the Catholic school. The home/parish/school work in partnership so the child can grow to be the best person God calls him/her to be. One of the hallmarks of the Catholic school is its inclusivity. Faith is at the core of our being as God reveals his love and plan to those He has created. Through prayer and

reaching out in an active love with one's neighbour, the relationship with God is built each day within those who desire and believe

- The approach to RSE is written according to the norms outlined for each level of the Catholic Primary School in *the Catholic Preschool and Primary RE Curriculum for Ireland (2015)* and adheres to the teachings of the Catholic Church.
- The role of the family is central to the teaching of RSE. The family 'constitutes "a community of love and solidarity, which is uniquely suited to teach and transmit cultural, ethical, social, spiritual and religious values, essential for the development and well-being of its own members and of society"' (Holy See, Charter of the Rights of the Family quoted in The Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church, p. 117).
- Particular attention will be given to the **Agreed Schedule for a Catholic Primary School in the Republic of Ireland** and to the latest publication of the Catholic Schools Partnership on the ethos process, **"Understanding and Living the ethos in a Catholic Primary School, A Process Centred on Conversations (2019)."**

With reference to the proposed "holistic approach" to RSE (as outlined in the Review of RSE p.11), the focus of RSE is in the faith context which includes body, heart, soul and mind. Scripture teaches, "You must love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul with all your strength and with all your mind... You must love your neighbour as yourself" (Lk 10:27).

Catholic education takes a certain moral outlook based on the idea that it acknowledges God as Creator who has revealed certain truths and laws to which we choose to adhere and commit. Catholic education has a distinct understanding of the human person, which manifests itself in the inclusion of all. The dignity of the human person is sacrosanct whereby each one understands they are loved, are worth loving and that God loves them unconditionally. This is a recurring message constantly reinforced in the child's early years, conveyed through loving acts and through growth in love of self, love of God, love of the other and the environment.

RSE taught outside of a faith/religion context paves the way for a "neutral education" that is opposed to Christian values and misguided interpretation.

In identifying an approach to RSE "there is a need to consult regularly with students to identify their real and expressed needs in the area of RSE" (RSE Review, p.11) However, there is also a need firstly to consult regularly with the parent/guardians of the pupils. The Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church identifies, "Parents are the first educators, not the only educators, of their children. It belongs to them, therefore to exercise with responsibility their educational activity in close and vigilant cooperation with civil and ecclesial agencies." (The Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church, no. 240). The family also is responsible for providing an "integral education" through which the children are educated through words and witness, cultivating "virtues of justice and charity." (The Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church, no. 240).

**What else is important when considering the approach for teaching SPHE/RSE in schools?**

A Catholic school recognises "parents have a particular responsibility in the area of sexual education." It proposes that sex education be taught at an age appropriate level acknowledging that "a new and appropriate language" is needed "in introducing children and adults to the topic of sexuality." (*Amoris Laetitia*, no. 281). This takes place in the context of ongoing conversation and dialogue.

**The curriculum**

The Review highlighted the need to create a single integrated curriculum that sets out the learning for SPHE/RSE as one subject and incrementally provides continuity of experience from early childhood to post-primary. In the immediate term the NCCA will develop interim guidelines to support the current curriculum on how it can be approached in a more holistic way and provide clarity on how topics can be taught in an inclusive manner to incorporate current themes identified by the review.

**To what extent do you broadly agree/disagree with the need for a single integrated curriculum for SPHE/RSE? Please tick your response in the box below.**

<b>Strongly Agree</b>	<b>Agree</b>	<b>Disagree</b>	<b>Strongly Disagree</b>
	<b>Agree</b>		

**Please provide a reason for your level of agreement/disagreement.**

**THE CURRICULUM**

1. "A single integrated SPHE curriculum" (RSE Review, p.12) would not recognise the faith context of all pupils. *The Catholic Preschool and Primary Religious Education Curriculum for Ireland (2015)* outlines the Christian Morality Strand, under the Strand Unit, RSE in a Christian Context, for the four levels of the Catholic primary school. It is a spiral curriculum and respects the stages of the children's development. This curriculum provides scope for current and future writers of programmes within the context of the Catholic teaching.

The Catholic Church advocates "a positive and prudent sex education to be imparted to children and adolescents "as they grow older" with "due weight being given to the advances in the psychological, pedagogical and didactic sciences." (*Amoris Laetitia* no.280).

Sex education is viewed within the wider framework of an education for love, for mutual self-giving. Such an education includes identifying what it means to be human, to encounter and engage in healthy and loving relationships. One single integrated SPHE curriculum would not take in the unique qualities of each human being. Self-knowledge, self-awareness, self-respect all in the context of developing healthy and loving relationships are at the core of an appropriate sex education programme. If a

programme is too scientific, the relationship and encounter elements get lost. Making choices and commitments are important skills in teaching RSE.

2. Developing "interim guidelines" (RSE Review, p. 13) need to take into account the opinions of faith traditions involved and those of parents/guardians together with their children. This programme should in no way be rushed in at this time when sexuality "tends to be trivialised and impoverished" (*Amoris Laetitia*, no.280) rather than listening to stakeholders and pilot programmes the "language of sexuality may be more "illuminated and enriched." (*Amoris Laetitia*, no. 281). Interim guidelines may end up being a mini single integrated SPHE curriculum.

Firstly, the young people, their parents / guardians and teachers must evaluate future curriculum development. It is recognised that "a new and appropriate language" is needed "in introducing children and adults to the topic of sexuality." (*Amoris Laetitia*, no. 281). Secondly, future curriculum development in SPHE/RSE must provide for upskilling parents and training teachers. There is need for a "positive and prudent sex education" (*Amoris Laetitia*,no.281) to be imparted to each child.

Archbishop Eamonn Martin also states in relation to 'public discussion about LGBT and gender issues, "it is important that we in Catholic schools, also evaluate the support offered to students who are facing new and deep questions relating to their sexual identity as they mature." (3 May 2018, JMB,AMCSS, 31 st Annual Conference)

**What else do you consider important in relation to future curriculum development in SPHE/RSE?**

A climate of openness to listening and discerning in the context of the signs of our times

### Creating the conditions for effective RSE

The Review makes it clear that teachers need in-depth and sustained training and support in the area of SPHE/RSE. Consequently, access to professional development needs to be enhanced at pre-service and in-service levels. The Review also identified the need to take stock of current teaching and learning resources available in this area.

**To what extent do you broadly agree/disagree with the Review's findings on the necessary conditions for effective SPHE/RSE? Please tick your response in the box below**

Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Agree			

Please provide a reason for your level of agreement/disagreement.

**CREATING CONDITIONS FOR EFFECTIVE RSE**

1. In the teaching of RSE, "specialist training and pathways for professional development must be developed" (RSE Review, p. 13), whilst recognising the teaching of the Catholic Church in the Catholic school. Teachers require in-depth and structured training and support. Parents/guardians need likewise. This subject is too subjective and personal to award a specialist given qualification. An open environment and a trusting relationship are key to the quality of RSE taught with due consideration given to time and moral values of the educators. Evaluation procedures must be put in place to guard against anti-Catholic influences and the diluting influences of religion, faith and ethos.

2. It is always helpful to review "current resources" (RSE Review, p.13) and to develop of "up to date resources" (RSE Review,p.13). The faith context of RSE must be acknowledged also the age and the unique nature of the child in terms of physical, emotional and spiritual development. Parents' views are for consideration and parents/guardians welcome the support of teachers in an open environment where they "can enquire about the methods for sexual education in educational institutions in order to verify that such an important and delicate topic is dealt with properly." (The Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church, no. 243).

**What else do you consider important in order to create the conditions for effective SPHE/RSE?**

A well informed, incremental curriculum is essential with professional training for parents/guardians and teachers

**Other considerations**

The Review concluded that comprehensive oversight and support for SPHE/RSE is required to meet the needs identified in the review process. The Review also found schools cannot do it alone and parents must be encouraged and supported in assuming their responsibility for their child's learning. In addition, it suggests that post-primary schools require further support and guidance in planning for junior cycle wellbeing in order to enhance students' learning in SPHE/RSE.

**To what extent do you broadly agree/disagree that these are important considerations for SPHE/RSE? Please tick your response in the box below.**

<b>Strongly Agree</b>	<b>Agree</b>	<b>Disagree</b>	<b>Strongly Disagree</b>
	<b>Agree</b>	<b>Disagree</b>	

**Please provide a reason for your level of agreement/disagreement.**

## **OTHER CONSIDERATIONS**

1. "DES oversight of SPHE/RSE is essential to the working of the programme" (RSE Review,p.14). "It is envisaged that Wellbeing and the wellbeing space propose to enhance students' learning in SPHE/RSE". (RSE Review, p. 14).

In addition, in Catholic schools at primary and post primary level the Diocesan Advisors will offer the support and the CPD on RSE, integrated with Religious Education on a regular basis.

Young people in a Catholic school are educated to discern what plan God has for them in life so they can do his will as modelled by the mission of Jesus. At the heart of this mission is discipleship, love of God, of neighbor, of self and the environment. The ultimate destination in doing God's will is eternal life with God in everlasting happiness.

A DES oversight alone will not consider individual children's experience.

### **Are there any other considerations that should be highlighted in the advice for SPHE/RSE?**

A DES insight must support, encourage and provide training for parents. It is the duty and right of parents to "impart a religious education and moral formation to their children," a right the State cannot annul but which it must respect and promote. This is a primary right that the family may not neglect or delegate." (The Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church no. 239). Time given in school to RSE needs to be matched with time at home

Boards of Management must be allowed to uphold the lived Catholic ethos of the school including RSE. The Provision of Objective Sex Education Bill if it makes it compulsory for the child to be taught about different types of sexuality, gender, methods of contraception and abortion (as a right and a good, a freedom for women) is contrary to Catholic teaching.

The NCCA fully respects your right to privacy. Any personal information which you volunteer to the NCCA will be treated with the highest standards of security and confidentiality, strictly in accordance with the Data Protection Acts.

If you require further information related to data protection and [www.ncca.ie](http://www.ncca.ie) you can contact the NCCA's Data Protection Officer at [dpo@ncca.ie](mailto:dpo@ncca.ie)

Debbie Ging, Dublin City University

# Review of Relationships and Sexuality Education (RSE)

At the request of the Minister for Education and Skills, a major review of RSE in primary and post-primary schools was undertaken from June 2018 to March 2019. The review examined the experience of teaching and learning in RSE including; the curriculum, the approach to learning, the supports needed, and ways to improve the experience of RSE for students. Engagement in the review was considerable and signals the level of interest and concern people share in relation to this aspect of education. We are now engaging in consultation to ensure the findings and draft advice is reflective of the needs of students, schools, and parents.

In responding to the findings and draft advice on the future directions of RSE it is recommended that you read the draft report or the summary of the draft report both of which are available here <https://www.ncca.ie/en/updates-and-events/consultations/review-of-relationships-and-sexuality-education-rse>.

<b>Name</b>	Dr. Debbie
<b>Surname</b>	Ging
<b>Position (if applicable)</b>	Associate Professor, School of Communications
<b>Organisation (if applicable)</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- Dublin City University</li><li>- Institute for Future Media and Journalism (FuJo)</li><li>- National Anti-Bullying Research and Resource Centre</li></ul>
<b>Date</b>	25.10.19
<b>Email</b>	

Please provide some brief background information on your organisation (if applicable).

The National Anti-Bullying Research and Resource Centre is a university designated research centre located in DCU. The objectives of the Centre are aligned to support the UN's overarching goal to ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote

lifelong learning opportunities for all by 2030 (SDG4) and the implementation of the Government of Ireland's Action Plan on Bullying (2013).

FuJo is an interdisciplinary research centre that aims to advance the social and democratic values of journalism in the digital age

## The approach

Across all stakeholders, there was strong agreement that RSE needs to be more than information about biological aspects of growing up and sexual activity. It needs a holistic approach that balances discussion about the risks and dangers associated with relationships and sexual activity with discussion about the positive, healthy and enjoyable aspects of relationships. A holistic approach can be understood as teaching and learning about the cognitive, emotional, physical and social aspects of relationships and sexuality. It aims to equip children and young people with knowledge, skills, attitudes and values that will empower them to: realise their health, wellbeing and dignity; develop respectful social and sexual relationships; consider how their choices affect their own wellbeing and that of others; and understand and ensure the protection of their rights throughout their lives.

**To what extent do you broadly agree/disagree with the proposed direction on the approach to RSE that has emerged from the review? Please tick your response in the box below.**

Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
✓			

### What are the aspects of the proposed approach that you agree/disagree with?

I don't disagree with any aspects of the proposal, although the language is quite vague and individualistic. RSE should be explicitly framed within a human rights, equality and inclusivity framework.

I would prefer to see a lot more emphasis on core values of rights and equality, empowerment and transformation, inclusivity, and co-production with students (Renold and McGeeney, 2017). Sexual citizenship is a key concept in this regard.

### What else is important when considering the approach for teaching SPHE/RSE in schools?

Firstly, a basic rethinking of **what sex is** should be the starting point.

It is important that the programme does not construct heterosexual intercourse as the primary definition of sex because:

- This evades acknowledgement of other important sexual practices.

- This excludes LGBTQ's students' experiences and sexual practices (Elia and Eliason, 2010), and reinforces a heteronormative understanding of sex.
- This places undue focus on the concept of virginity, which is heavily associated with the moral policing of adolescent female sexuality, and encompasses a narrow, heteronormative definition of sexual coming-of-age.
- Encouraging young people to wait for sex 'until the time is right' leaves a significant void between now and 'then', not only in terms of vital education about other sexual practices but also in terms of learning about consent in relation to these practices.

Secondly, RSE cannot be successfully taught in a way which assumes that all individuals are the same / equally empowered, or which ignores the fact that wider social values heavily influence sexual attitudes and behaviours. To this end, it must acknowledge gender and sexual inequality, the issue of sexual consent and the diversity of sexual experience and orientations.

Central to addressing consent is an acknowledgment of the persistence of the sexist double standard in society, whereby male sexual agency is taken as a given, while female sexual agency is ignored or constructed as shameful. The current RSE programme does not give young women a language of choice and agency or pleasure and desire, nor does it encourage young men to question dominant social norms and expectations relating to male sexuality.

More specifically, the revised programme should acknowledge and address:

**1. The restrictive gender norms placed on both girls and boys by:**

- Encouraging awareness of how gender norms affect young people's sexual identities, confidence and behaviours.
- Encouraging young people to challenge social norms and sexist attitudes, such as the paradoxical pressures on girls to both please and abstain, and the pressure on boys to perceive sex as a conquest.
- Addressing sexual harassment, domestic violence and rape.
- Using creative resources that originate with students' own experiences and perceptions. The Agenda resource, recently adopted by the Welsh government, provides an excellent example of how creativity, new media and activism can be used to explore and discuss these issues:

[http://www.agenda.wales/all\\_resources/14\\_pdf\\_guide/english\\_agenda.pdf](http://www.agenda.wales/all_resources/14_pdf_guide/english_agenda.pdf)

**2. Consent as a key focus of both junior-cycle and senior cycle materials. Consent needs to be addressed:**

- as an issue of ongoing negotiation, both within a relationship and within a unique sexual encounter
- in relation to alcohol and drug consumption
- in the context of sexist and unequal attitudes to women regarding their clothing, alcohol consumption, number of sexual partners, etc.
- in terms of helping young people to develop a frank and open language of bodily autonomy and ongoing negotiation of what is acceptable / desired and what is not.

3. **LGBTQ students' experiences and sexual practices. An LGBTQ-inclusive programme:**
- does not presume what sex is but rather starts with - and encourages critical reflection on - young people's own understandings of sex, virginity, abstinence, intimacy, relationships, etc.
  - Offers LGBTQ-inclusive information about HIV and other STIs.
4. **The role played by the internet, social media, mobile phones and pornography in both enhancing and restricting young people's sexual citizenship, including:**
- Pornography addressed as an industry, as a genre and as a set of representational practices. A critical, gender-aware, media-literate perspective on this topic is essential in order to reveal the stereotypes and misconceptions perpetrated about both women and men in most pornography, and to facilitate meaningful discussion about its uses, limitations and impacts.
  - A component on online dating, sexting, consensual and non-consensual image-sharing.
  - The adoption of a framework of digital rights and digital (sexual) citizenship (Albury et al., 2010) rather than solely internet safety.
  - Acknowledgement of the realities of offline and online abuse, whereby females are significantly more likely than males to be the target of sexual and misogynistic attacks, unsolicited intimate images, non-consensual image sharing and cyberstalking<sup>1</sup>.

## The curriculum

The Review highlighted the need to create a single integrated curriculum that sets out the learning for SPHE/RSE as one subject and incrementally provides continuity of experience from early childhood to post-primary. In the immediate term the NCCA will develop interim guidelines to support the current curriculum on how it can be approached in a more holistic way and provide clarity on how topics can be taught in an inclusive manner to incorporate current themes identified by the review.

**To what extent do you broadly agree/disagree with the need for a single integrated curriculum for SPHE/RSE? Please tick your response in the box below.**

Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
✓			

**Please provide a reason for your level of agreement/disagreement.**

Bodily autonomy is an essential starting point for young children. Currently certain religious and hate groups are attempting to stall this review by claiming that children will be taught about sex too young. It vital to get the message out that consent taught at

<sup>1</sup> European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights (2014). Violence against women: an EU-wide survey, p. 104.

primary level is more about bodily autonomy and children’s rights generally than it is about sex. There are clear guidelines in the international literature on age-appropriate RSE content and best practice. Moral panic about the erosion of children’s innocence is pervasive and could damage public support for primary level education (which of course already exists but needs to be tied into and provide building blocks for each age-appropriate tier of the curriculum). A clear and unapologetic message is needed to defuse this misinformation in the public domain.

**What else do you consider important in relation to future curriculum development in SPHE/RSE?**

Treating RSE as a human rights / children’s rights issue is vital to countering the scare-mongering of religious groups and attempts made by certain schools to block or adapt curriculum content on the basis of ‘ethos’.

A recent synthesis and review of international research on children and young people’s views suggests that high quality RSE starts early; is adaptable and needs-led; offers a spiral curriculum; collaborates with external providers; is of sufficient duration; is engaging and participatory; and creates a safe, respectful and confidential learning environment (Pound et al., 2017).

The international literature recommends that an overall shift in focus is required toward a rights and gender equity based, inclusive, holistic, creative, empowering and protective RSE curriculum (Renold and McGeeney, 2017). This should be underpinned by key principles of sexual literacy and sexual citizenship (Pascoe, 2011).

**Creating the conditions for effective RSE**

The Review makes it clear that teachers need in-depth and sustained training and support in the area of SPHE/RSE. Consequently, access to professional development needs to be enhanced at pre-service and in-service levels. The Review also identified the need to take stock of current teaching and learning resources available in this area.

**To what extent do you broadly agree/disagree with the Review’s findings on the necessary conditions for effective SPHE/RSE? Please tick your response in the box below**

Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
✓			

**Please provide a reason for your level of agreement/disagreement.**

Significant problems have been observed in relation to the delivery of the curriculum (Maycock et al., 2007):

- It must compete for space in an already crowded curriculum.
- Not enough schools have adopted an RSE policy.
- There is insufficient ongoing professional training for SPHE/RSE teachers.
- There is a strong perception amongst students that RSE is selectively addressed and sometimes even skipped over.
- The religious ethos of many schools allows them to ignore many of the core issues that are vital to educating young people about sexual rights, agency and citizenship. The interference of religious values is incompatible with a progressive, inclusive and rights-based sex education.
- There is sometimes an unspoken assumption that sex education is primarily directed toward girls. This is supported by lower levels of implementation in all-boys' schools.
- Teachers report that boys find it particularly difficult to talk about sex and intimacy. That boys appear to be paying less attention than girls to issues of intimacy, consent, contraception and sexual communication is a matter of serious concern.
- Teaching about consent starts too late. It needs to be addressed at primary level in a non-sexual context, relating to issues of bodily autonomy and integrity, and later in relation to challenging the particular social pressures imposed on girls to please others and to avoid being assertive (Burkett and Hamilton, 2012).

With a view to rectifying these issues, the Irish RSE programme should consider adopting / adapting the core principles underpinning the recent recommendations made on the future of the sex and relationships education curriculum in Wales: Rights and Gender Equity; Creative and Curious; Empowering and Transformative; Experience-near and Coproduced; Holistic; Inclusive; Protective and Preventative (Renold and McGeeney, 2017).

### **What else do you consider important in order to create the conditions for effective SPHE/RSE?**

#### **The review should prioritise:**

- A whole school approach. The Welsh Sex and Relationships Education Expert Panel has recommended that their SRE curriculum is embedded in a whole-school approach. This means that the workforce required to deliver SRE will consist of all school staff, including; teachers, teaching assistants, school support staff, school governors, health professionals and sexual health specialists.
- Ongoing professional training. High quality school-based SRE depends upon having a well-trained and confident workforce. Without specialist training schools may either avoid covering perceived sensitive or challenging topics altogether or deliver SRE in a way that fails to adequately safeguard children and young people (Renold and McGeeney, 2017).
- The proactive adoption by every school of an RSE policy
- The appointment by every school of a dedicated RSE lead with protected hours and access to resources.
- The establishment of an RSE excellence mark to highlight exemplary whole school approaches to gender equality and RSE.

To this end, a review of RSE delivery must take into account:

- Obstacles faced by teachers in the classroom
- Teachers' fears and concerns regarding sensitive topics
- Incompatibilities between religious ethos and inclusive sexuality education
- The time devoted to RSE in the curriculum
- The supports offered to schools for developing an RSE policy
- Consideration of how the materials function in co-educational contexts compared with single-sex schools
- Consideration of how the primary and post-primary resources could best be tied

### Other considerations

The Review concluded that comprehensive oversight and support for SPHE/RSE is required to meet the needs identified in the review process. The Review also found schools cannot do it alone and parents must be encouraged and supported in assuming their responsibility for their child's learning. In addition, it suggests that post-primary schools require further support and guidance in planning for junior cycle wellbeing in order to enhance students' learning in SPHE/RSE.

**To what extent do you broadly agree/disagree that these are important considerations for SPHE/RSE? Please tick your response in the box below.**

Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
	✓	✓	

**Please provide a reason for your level of agreement/disagreement.**

To some extent I agree but if RSE is a human right and if we conceive of it in terms of sexual citizenship, then the onus is on the state to provide for its citizens in this regard.

This is yet another reason for addressing RSE within a rights-based framework – it is impossible to ensure that parents will fulfil requirements of RSE. Too many children would fall through the cracks and there are no checks and balances. Addressing RSE as a vital part of the child's education, on the other hand, can be standardised, quality-controlled and properly supported.

Educating and including parents insofar as is possible is desirable but the onus must be on education.

**Are there any other considerations that should be highlighted in the advice for SPHE/RSE?**

- The government should make compulsory an RSE curriculum underpinned by core values of rights and equality, empowerment and transformation, inclusivity, co-production with students, and protection and prevention (Renold and McGeeney, 2017).
- The Department of Education and Skills should provide specialist training in RSE for all post-primary teachers.
- All schools should be required to adopt an RSE policy.
- All schools should be required to appoint a dedicated RSE lead with protected hours and access to resources.
- Schools must adopt a whole school approach to safeguarding and promoting the values and principles underpinning such a revised curriculum. This is perhaps the biggest challenge as many staff will inevitably be disinterested in, opposed to or indifferent to RSE. Training of principals and year heads as well as RSE teachers might go some way to creating a more holistic culture in this regard.

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Diocese of Elphin, Sligo

## Review of Relationships and Sexuality Education (RSE)

<b>Name</b>	Kevin
<b>Surname</b>	Doran
<b>Position (if applicable)</b>	Bishop of Elphin
<b>Organisation (if applicable)</b>	Diocese of Elphin
<b>Date</b>	25 <sup>th</sup> October, 2019.
<b>Email</b>	[REDACTED]

### 1. The approach

We welcome the NCCA's extensive consultation to date and appreciate that many hopes and concerns expressed in our previous submissions have also been articulated by others and appear to be respected.

We welcome incorporation of the various voices, and particularly those of students and teachers, in this review report.

We welcome the manner the NCCA approach has allowed student, teacher and parent voices in particular to come to the fore.

**To what extent do you broadly agree/disagree with the proposed direction on the approach to RSE that has emerged from the review? Please tick your response in the box below. \***

While there is much that we value, e.g. recognition of importance of holistic provision, CPD (continuous professional development) for teachers, we find the report ambiguous regarding RSE provision with regard to the requests of many Christian parents for a holistic provision that will encompass exposure to the Christian vision of the human person as an integral unity of body and spirit. While the review report acknowledged that ethos need not be a barrier to the delivery of good RSE at primary or post primary school level, it stops short of stating how this would actually inform future work on the part of the NCCA. If the teaching of RSE is not carried out in a manner which accords with our own ethos, we would wonder what other values might underpin it instead, since there is clearly no such thing as a value free education.

<b>Strongly Agree</b>	<b>Agree</b>	<b>Disagree</b>	<b>Strongly Disagree</b>
<p><i>While we find the questions posed in this review document helpful to our engagement we have opted not to engage with the ticking exercise regarding strength of agreement / disagreement. The fact the statements embrace more than one distinct element has been a key consideration.</i></p>			

**What are the aspects of the proposed approach that you agree/disagree with?**

We agree (embracing the spirit of the review) that RSE:

- (i) must be attuned, in terms of delivery, to the challenges many children encounter in navigating their way through what can be a very challenging dimension of growing up
- (ii) should not avoid anything that students need to know in the area of relationships and sexuality education in line with parental wishes and the learning needs and interests of students, provided for in an age appropriate way
- (iii) should never be reduced, especially at Senior Cycle level, to being a summary of risks and dangers linked with unsafe and discouraged sexual practices or to the biological aspects of growing up and managing one's sexual activity.
- (iv) will benefit, going forward, from the adoption of mechanisms that support on-going consultation, particularly with senior cycle students and parents.
- (v) will be impoverished (and likely to be rejected by parents, teachers and school leaders in various faith communities) if left bereft of a moral, social and spiritual framework

We don't agree that:

- (i) there is sufficient illumination of the rationale of RSE as it pertains to the remit of the NCCA vis-à-vis the development of a new programme
- (ii) with the presentation of the World Health Organisation as the definitive expert voice. Its publication *Standards for Sexuality Education in Europe, 2010* is highly contested. Like many others we do not hold to the separation of social and personal development from moral and spiritual development.
- (iii) with any assertion (not stated overtly but it seems to be assumed) that a one-size-fits-all RSE programme can be developed and delivered in schools with divergent characteristic spirits vis-à-vis matters such as the sanctity of life. Due regard must be given to philosophical underpinnings and patron concerns, which in our experience, mirror parental concerns.  
For example, there must be scope in a Catholic School to invite students to reflect on the dignity of every human person as illuminated in Christian anthropology and to explore why (senior cycle) the Church advocates chastity until such time as one has both the maturity and freedom to embrace both the joys and responsibilities of a committed intimate relationship and the balancing of personal choice with care for the common good.

**What else is important when considering the approach for teaching SPHE/RSE in schools?**

- (i) Care of teachers and school leaders as they educate and lead within school communities.
- (ii) Support for Boards of Management, not only in developing and reviewing policy and initiating discussion with parents, but in grappling with the challenges currently pertaining to this area of education.

## **2. The curriculum**

The Review highlighted the need to create a single integrated curriculum that sets out the learning for SPHE/RSE as one subject and incrementally provides continuity of experience from early childhood to post-primary. In the immediate term the NCCA will develop interim guidelines to support the current curriculum on how it can be approached in a more holistic way and provide clarity on how topics can be taught in an inclusive manner to incorporate current themes identified by the review.

**To what extent do you broadly agree/disagree with the need for a single integrated curriculum for SPHE/RSE? Please tick your response in the box below.**

<b>Strongly Agree</b>	<b>Agree</b>	<b>Disagree</b>	<b>Strongly Disagree</b>

**Please provide a reason for your level of agreement/disagreement.**

Our Education Secretariat and many parents availing of Catholic Schools in our diocese would appreciate more information on what is meant by ‘a single integrated curriculum’. How, for example, will this tally with the characteristic spirit, mission statement or charter of a Catholic, Church of Ireland, Muslim, Jewish or ETB school?

Can you offer a reassurance that faith-based schools will not be prohibited from presenting teaching rooted in their own faith tradition regarding topics that will be explored, e.g. the right to life?

**What else do you consider important in relation to future curriculum development in SPHE/RSE?**

On-going dialogue and consultation are key and we would like some indication from the NCCA / Minister for Education and Skills that, in the continuation of this work, you will bring school principals and patrons/trustees bodies on board as well as students, parents and teachers.

We perceive parental perceptions and concerns as key to the next phase of development, and would like agreed procedures to support parental engagement in

a manner that respects both the diversity of views held by parents and the diversity of Post-Primary school types serving families in Ireland at this time.

### 3. Creating the conditions for effective RSE

The Review makes it clear that teachers need in-depth and sustained training and support in the area of SPHE/RSE. Consequently, access to professional development needs to be enhanced at pre-service and in-service levels. The Review also identified the need to take stock of current teaching and learning resources available in this area.

**To what extent do you broadly agree/disagree with the Review's findings on the necessary conditions for effective SPHE/RSE? Please tick your response in the box below**

Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree

**Please provide a reason for your level of agreement/disagreement.**

We agree but anticipate many difficulties should provision not honour the characteristic spirit and mission statements of school communities, and in our case, the rightful expectations of parents choosing faith-based schools for their children to enjoy meaningful exposure to relevant Church teaching. To put it simply, Catholic Schools cannot remain authentically Catholic if they are required to teach things which conflict with core elements of Catholic faith.

**What else do you consider important in order to create the conditions for effective SPHE/RSE?**

Please see joint submission of the Councils for Catechetics and Education of the Irish Catholic Bishops' Conference and of the Catholic Schools Partnership. We share their concern. Please also see the submission of the Diocese of Elphin in the previous phase of the consultation.

### 4. Other considerations

The Review concluded that comprehensive oversight and support for SPHE/RSE is required to meet the needs identified in the review process. The Review also found schools cannot do it alone and parents must be encouraged and supported in assuming their responsibility for their child's learning. In addition, it suggests that post-primary schools require further support and guidance in planning for junior cycle wellbeing in order to enhance students' learning in SPHE/RSE.

To what extent do you broadly agree/disagree that these are important considerations for SPHE/RSE? Please tick your response in the box below.

Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree

**Please provide a reason for your level of agreement/disagreement.**

We agree that this merits further consideration and requires teasing out. We would be happy to seek the support of some of the Catholic Primary and Catholic Voluntary Secondary School communities in our diocese in relation to a pilot initiative aimed at exploring viable possibilities.

We are mindful too of parental needs in this area, particularly at a time when family life is quite demanding of them. Further exploration as to how school communities may support parents as distinct from replacing them in this area of education will be very important.

Thank you for giving us this opportunity to contribute.

## Dublin Rape Crisis Centre

# Review of Relationships and Sexuality Education (RSE)

At the request of the Minister for Education and Skills, a major review of RSE in primary and post-primary schools was undertaken from June 2018 to March 2019. The review examined the experience of teaching and learning in RSE including; the curriculum, the approach to learning, the supports needed, and ways to improve the experience of RSE for students. Engagement in the review was considerable and signals the level of interest and concern people share in relation to this aspect of education. We are now engaging in consultation to ensure the findings and draft advice is reflective of the needs of students, schools, and parents.

In responding to the findings and draft advice on the future directions of RSE it is recommended that you read the draft report or the summary of the draft report both of which are available here <https://www.ncca.ie/en/updates-and-events/consultations/review-of-relationships-and-sexuality-education-rse>.

<b>Name</b>	Noeline
<b>Surname</b>	Blackwell
<b>Position (if applicable)</b>	CEO
<b>Organisation (if applicable)</b>	Dublin Rape Crisis Centre
<b>Date</b>	October 25 <sup>th</sup> 2019
<b>Email</b>	

**Please provide some brief background information on your organisation (if applicable).**

The Dublin Rape Crisis Centre (DRCC) is a non-governmental organisation which aims to prevent the harm and heal the trauma of rape and sexual abuse in Ireland.

Since 2008, DRCC has a well-established BodyRight programme <https://www.drcc.ie/get-informed/education-and-training/bodyright/>. It is a 4-day training programme which is delivered to equip teachers, guidance counsellors, Youth Reach workers and others working in schools, alternative education settings, clubs and other social settings for young people to raise awareness about sexual violence, to assist in its prevention and to develop healthy relationships programmes. In response to the emerging needs of young people, recent years have seen the addition to the programme of modules addressing sexting, advertising, popular culture, pornography and the meaning of consent.

We provide other training to many agencies and individuals who encounter the impact of sexual violence on those with whom they work. Our services include running the National 24-hour confidential Helpline as well as accompaniment services for those attending at Garda stations or for court proceedings. We offer counselling and therapy services to adults and young people over 16 years' old who have experienced rape, sexual assault and childhood sexual abuse. We provide analysis and research on issues of sexual violence for policy and advocacy purposes. We carry out public awareness campaigns to prevent sexual violence.

### **The approach**

Across all stakeholders, there was strong agreement that RSE needs to be more than information about biological aspects of growing up and sexual activity. It needs a holistic approach that balances discussion about the risks and dangers associated with relationships and sexual activity with discussion about the positive, healthy and enjoyable aspects of relationships. A holistic approach can be understood as teaching and learning about the cognitive, emotional, physical and social aspects of relationships and sexuality. It aims to equip children and young people with knowledge, skills, attitudes and values that will empower them to: realise their health, wellbeing and dignity; develop respectful social and sexual relationships; consider how their choices affect their own wellbeing and that of others; and understand and ensure the protection of their rights throughout their lives.

**To what extent do you broadly agree/disagree with the proposed direction on the approach to RSE that has emerged from the review? Please tick your response in the box below.**

<b>Strongly Agree</b>	<b>Agree</b>	<b>Disagree</b>	<b>Strongly Disagree</b>
✓			

**What are the aspects of the proposed approach that you agree/disagree with?**

DRCC agree with the proposed holistic approach that balances and connects both the relational as well as the sexual dimensions of RSE across a range of perspectives - cognitive, emotional, physical and social in addition to covering a broad range of topics. Children and young people have the right to lead healthy lives and the education curriculum has a part to play by providing them with comprehensive sexual health education that gives them the tools they need to make decisions that can impact their health and well-being for the rest of their lives. We are also in agreement with the proposed approaches that:

- RSE should be based not just on biological facts around sex but one that also provides an opportunity to put forward the positive aspects of intimate relationships which are based on equality and mutual respect;
- The importance of an inclusive approach to RSE which respects diversity and enables children and young people to feel accepted, understood and included through what they are taught and what they learn;
- All of which can be provided in an age and developmentally appropriate manner which establishes a foundation on which more complex knowledge can be built up over time.

A holistic approach should also encompass issues related to consent and sexual violence set in the context of healthy relationships with the self and others. Our opinion is grounded in the expertise and experience we have gained through devising and delivering the DRCC's BodyRight sexual violence prevention programme over the past 11 years. It is designed to be delivered after and integrated with a programme focusing on healthy relationships. As a leading provider of such training, DRCC is available to share our expertise, experience and resources with the Department of Education & Skills to develop undergraduate, post graduate and CPD training for school staff.

**What else is important when considering the approach for teaching SPHE/RSE in schools?**

- A phased approach to the introduction of topics that heretofore have not been included in the curriculum;

- This review process illustrated the value of engaging with young people so ongoing meaningful youth participation should prevail;
- Include all parents in the process: those who are supportive of the changes to the curriculum and those who hold a view that home is the more appropriate place for their child to learn about these topics or simply do not want it discussed. We find that this can often be because of fear or misunderstanding about what is involved which adequate communication can allay;
- Support for teachers and/or principals around speaking with parents whose cultural and religious beliefs may not support the RSE programme being provided in school;
- Comprehensive training and ongoing support for teachers delivering these topics: including resources and professional qualifications.

### **The curriculum**

The Review highlighted the need to create a single integrated curriculum that sets out the learning for SPHE/RSE as one subject and incrementally provides continuity of experience from early childhood to post-primary. In the immediate term the NCCA will develop interim guidelines to support the current curriculum on how it can be approached in a more holistic way and provide clarity on how topics can be taught in an inclusive manner to incorporate current themes identified by the review.

**To what extent do you broadly agree/disagree with the need for a single integrated curriculum for SPHE/RSE? Please tick your response in the box below.**

<b>Strongly Agree</b>	<b>Agree</b>	<b>Disagree</b>	<b>Strongly Disagree</b>
✓			

**Please provide a reason for your level of agreement/disagreement.**

DRCC agree with a single integrated curriculum for SPHE/RSE where there is clarity on the topics which need to be covered at the different stages of a child's learning and development. Alongside that building block basis on which to gradually layer knowledge in an age and stage appropriate manner for children and young people, should be guidelines for teachers as to how the sections of the curriculum interrelate.

This would create a foundation in early childhood education upon which more complex knowledge can be built over time thus making SPHE/RSE communication part of daily life

for children/young people. It is also important that the materials are kept up-to date and accessible to optimise their learning.

**What else do you consider important in relation to future curriculum development in SPHE/RSE?**

- Monitoring the implementation of the RSE programme on an ongoing basis, including how the interim guidelines are effecting the transition from the current curriculum to a more holistic approach;
- Interim guidelines are just that, short-term, and so a timeframe for transitioning from interim to the new curriculum should be set and agreed;
- Included in the monitoring of the new curriculum should also include the impact the school's ethos has on the implementation, parental engagement, any discernible differences between the primary and post-primary experiences;
- Internal and external evaluation of the programme at agreed intervals;
- Tailoring the curriculum and taking into consideration alternative content approaches for use with diverse groups;
- DRCC cannot emphasise enough the importance of providing age-appropriate sex and relationship education in schools, dealing with issues including online pornography and sexting so that young people have the information they need to keep themselves safer online and to build positive attitudes to relationships;
- We have identified through BodyRight that it is very important to include a component on the nature of sexual violence on the curriculum as part of education on healthy positive sexual expression.

**Creating the conditions for effective RSE**

The Review makes it clear that teachers need in-depth and sustained training and support in the area of SPHE/RSE. Consequently, access to professional development needs to be enhanced at pre-service and in-service levels. The Review also identified the need to take stock of current teaching and learning resources available in this area.

**To what extent do you broadly agree/disagree with the Review's findings on the necessary conditions for effective SPHE/RSE? Please tick your response in the box below.**

<b>Strongly Agree</b>	<b>Agree</b>	<b>Disagree</b>	<b>Strongly Disagree</b>
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✓			
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**Please provide a reason for your level of agreement/disagreement.**

Teachers are one of the key constituents influencing the quality implementation of the SPHE/RSE programmes so we strongly agree that they need the appropriate training, supports and time to provide that education. The availability of and access to attend training events is an important aspect of improving and enhancing the quality of teaching. The inclusion of SPHE/RSE as a subject on the curriculum for undergraduate primary education and specialist post-graduate primary and secondary teaching qualifications would, represent a major step in the recognition of this subject. DRCC would also advocate for the role and profile of SPHE/RSE to be elevated within the curriculum, even if it is competing for time and space with examinable subjects because the consequences of not doing so are too serious.

**What else do you consider important in order to create the conditions for effective SPHE/RSE?**

- A whole of school approach to the development and endorsement of a school policy on SPHE/RSE that involves the Board of Management, parents, student councils and other key stakeholders is essential;
- School leadership is key to the effective application of an SPHE/RSE curriculum in schools;
- DRCC believes that the training of teachers in this area ought to include personal development where the teachers are given the opportunity to challenge their own beliefs and attitudes in subjects relating to SPHE/RSE. Adopting such a methodology promotes best practice in the teacher's approach to the curriculum while being cognisant of their wellbeing. This is the model that DRCC uses to train teachers and youth workers in our BodyRight Programme.

**Other considerations**

The Review concluded that comprehensive oversight and support for SPHE/RSE is required to meet the needs identified in the review process. The Review also found schools cannot do it alone and parents must be encouraged and supported in assuming their responsibility

for their child's learning. In addition, it suggests that post-primary schools require further support and guidance in planning for junior cycle wellbeing in order to enhance students' learning in SPHE/RSE.

**To what extent do you broadly agree/disagree that these are important considerations for SPHE/RSE? Please tick your response in the box below.**

Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
✓			

**Please provide a reason for your level of agreement/disagreement.**

DRCC agree that engaging parents in the process is key to raising their awareness and understanding of what the programme entails and the value of subject.

**Are there any other considerations that should be highlighted in the advice for SPHE/RSE?**

- Promoting 2-way communication between:
  - Parents and the school so that parents are aware of the curriculum content; and
  - Parents and children to encourage the continuation of conversations started in school.
- Resources should be made available to schools to engage parents with this revised curriculum and strengthen links between school and home life which could be done in many ways including through the continuation of class work into project work that can be done at home;
- Given the recent inclusion of wellbeing in the curriculum, it's understandable that that further support and guidance would be required. In our view, planning for wellbeing to enhance student learning in SPHE/RSE sends out a positive message to students, parents and teachers that this area of learning is important too.

The NCCA fully respects your right to privacy. Any personal information which you volunteer to the NCCA will be treated with the highest standards of security and confidentiality, strictly in accordance with the Data Protection Acts.

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Educate Together

# Review of Relationships and Sexuality Education (RSE)

At the request of the Minister for Education and Skills, a major review of RSE in primary and post-primary schools was undertaken from June 2018 to March 2019. The review examined the experience of teaching and learning in RSE including; the curriculum, the approach to learning, the supports needed, and ways to improve the experience of RSE for students. Engagement in the review was considerable and signals the level of interest and concern people share in relation to this aspect of education. We are now engaging in consultation to ensure the findings and draft advice is reflective of the needs of students, schools, and parents.

In responding to the findings and draft advice on the future directions of RSE it is recommended that you read the draft report or the summary of the draft report both of which are available here <https://www.ncca.ie/en/updates-and-events/consultations/review-of-relationships-and-sexuality-education-rse>.

<b>Name</b>	Sandra
<b>Surname</b>	Irwin-Gowran
<b>Position (if applicable)</b>	Education & Support Manager
<b>Organisation (if applicable)</b>	Educate Together
<b>Date</b>	24 <sup>th</sup> October, 2019
<b>Email</b>	

**Please provide some brief background information on your organisation (if applicable).**

Educate Together is a patron and management body operating a national network of equality based schools in Ireland 92 primary schools and 17 second-level schools in Ireland, catering to over 30,000 students.

## The approach

Across all stakeholders, there was strong agreement that RSE needs to be more than information about biological aspects of growing up and sexual activity. It needs a holistic approach that balances discussion about the risks and dangers associated with relationships and sexual activity with discussion about the positive, healthy and enjoyable aspects of relationships. A holistic approach can be understood as teaching and learning about the cognitive, emotional, physical and social aspects of relationships and sexuality. It aims to equip children and young people with knowledge, skills, attitudes and values that will empower them to: realise their health, wellbeing and dignity; develop respectful social and

sexual relationships; consider how their choices affect their own wellbeing and that of others; and understand and ensure the protection of their rights throughout their lives.

**To what extent do you broadly agree/disagree with the proposed direction on the approach to RSE that has emerged from the review? Please tick your response in the box below.**

Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
x			

**What are the aspects of the proposed approach that you agree/disagree with?**

Educate Together commends the NCCA for the extensive consultative process that they have undergone in the Review of the Relationships & Sexuality (RSE) in primary and post-primary schools; in particular we welcome the efforts made to get widespread input from children, young people, parents and guardians.

Educate Together is an organisation that has as its core the rights and needs of children and young people. The model of education promoted by Educate Together is one where the child/young person is at the centre; in line with this Educate Together considers that approaches to RSE should be grounded in the rights and needs of young people.

Successive reviews and studies on the implementation of RSE in schools have revealed that in general young people are not receiving an RSE programme that is grounded in their needs and rights. Consequently, Educate Together is fully supportive of reform, revision and redevelopment of the existing programme. In particular Educate Together advocates for a national curriculum that every child and young person can hope to experience in their school and one that is not dependent on the particular school type that they attend. In this regard Educate Together strongly supports the removal of any religious or denominational thinking or beliefs in the redrafting of the RSE programme; the new programme should be based on the principle of equality of esteem, especially in relation to family type, sexuality and gender. The balance of the rights of parents/guardians is provided for within Bunreacht na hÉireann.

Educate Together is fully in favour of the form of holistic sexuality education outlined in the research paper as it *“addresses the realities of young people’s lives, the diversity of sexuality and gender identities that have emerged and continue to emerge, and the challenges young people face in navigating relationships in a positive, healthy way. The basis of this approach is young people’s right to learn about themselves and their bodies in a positive and participative process”*. This is fully in line with the learner-centered, equality-based principle of our schools.

**What else is important when considering the approach for teaching SPHE/RSE in schools?**

Scientific, evidence-based information should be provided without prejudice to students, in a way that is differentiated according to their age and development.

RSE should take into account the breath of human sexuality and not just focus on the heterosexual reproductive process. Modern society is much more complex – RSE needs to address sexuality broadly and ensure that young people receive the necessary information regardless of their sexual orientation or gender identity.

RSE needs also to address modern advances in reproductive health. This is not only important from an information point of view, but it is also important for many young people themselves to understand how they themselves were conceived.

To support this there needs to be serious and sustained investment in teacher education to support such a programme. This investment needs to be innovative in how it is utilised, the same methods that have served us to date have not proved to be effective and consequently need to be revised.

**The curriculum**

The Review highlighted the need to create a single integrated curriculum that sets out the learning for SPHE/RSE as one subject and incrementally provides continuity of experience from early childhood to post-primary. In the immediate term the NCCA will develop interim guidelines to support the current curriculum on how it can be approached in a more holistic way and provide clarity on how topics can be taught in an inclusive manner to incorporate current themes identified by the review.

**To what extent do you broadly agree/disagree with the need for a single integrated curriculum for SPHE/RSE? Please tick your response in the box below.**

<b>Strongly Agree</b>	<b>Agree</b>	<b>Disagree</b>	<b>Strongly Disagree</b>
<b>x</b>			

**Please provide a reason for your level of agreement/disagreement.**

Educate Together considers it wholly achievable to create a single integrated curriculum that sets out the learning for SPHE/RSE as one subject and incrementally provides continuity of experience from early childhood to post-primary.

Primary education already successfully provides an integrated education model. This is less the case at second-level, although Educate Together second level schools provide models of such pedagogical approaches.

In general, the definitions of an integrated curriculum include a combination of subjects or concepts; an emphasis on projects; sources that go beyond the textbook; relationships between

concepts, themes, etc. Often integrated curriculum modules can reduce the overall demands on teachers and the range of skills and capacities of students such as reflection, problem solving and creative thinking skills can be enhanced in cross curricular understanding. Consequently, an integrated approach to RSE might serve to reduce issues in teacher capacity or comfort assuming that the integration is horizontal as well as vertical.

Whilst the draft review suggests that an integrated curriculum may be developed and this is broadly welcomed by Educate Together, we would also strongly endorse RSE as a discreet learning area in of itself. It's integration within SPHE has not served it well to date.

**What else do you consider important in relation to future curriculum development in SPHE/RSE?**

### Creating the conditions for effective RSE

The Review makes it clear that teachers need in-depth and sustained training and support in the area of SPHE/RSE. Consequently, access to professional development needs to be enhanced at pre-service and in-service levels. The Review also identified the need to take stock of current teaching and learning resources available in this area.

**To what extent do you broadly agree/disagree with the Review's findings on the necessary conditions for effective SPHE/RSE? Please tick your response in the box below**

Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
x			

**Please provide a reason for your level of agreement/disagreement.**

The very fact that many schools continue to use external agencies/providers to deliver certain aspects of the RSE curriculum is an indication of the need within the teaching staff of many schools in relation to this area. This need is often related to a lack of confidence in dealing with sensitive issues. ITE and CPD needs to address this comprehensively as it is a skill and a competence that is required by teachers in general and not just confined to RSE.

**What else do you consider important in order to create the conditions for effective SPHE/RSE?**

Whilst Educate Together acknowledges that contracting external agencies by a school to deliver aspects of RSE is a matter for the Board of Management on an individual school, Educate Together considers that it is not appropriate for religious-run organisations to deliver RSE; the RSE programme should be delivered without religious bias whilst respectfully acknowledging and supporting the identity of all children and young people and family types.

## Other considerations

The Review concluded that comprehensive oversight and support for SPHE/RSE is required to meet the needs identified in the review process. The Review also found schools cannot do it alone and parents must be encouraged and supported in assuming their responsibility for their child's learning. In addition, it suggests that post-primary schools require further support and guidance in planning for junior cycle wellbeing in order to enhance students' learning in SPHE/RSE.

**To what extent do you broadly agree/disagree that these are important considerations for SPHE/RSE? Please tick your response in the box below.**

Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
x			

### **Please provide a reason for your level of agreement/disagreement.**

Educate Together strongly supports the role of parents of their child's education and indeed there are countless examples of how the role of parents/guardians can support a child's/young person's education.

RSE is a prime area where the links between home and school should be strong. That said, it should be noted that the rights and needs of young people and children should be kept at the centre and consequently the balance needs to be in this direction.

There are countless examples of situations where young people cannot or do not share personal information at home. Often school and a teacher is a safe haven for them, this is particularly true in relation to emerging sexual orientation or gender identity; care should be taken to take such issues into account in new developments.

Any new programme approach will require a thorough gender, gender identity, sexual orientation identity, family status proofing before being finalised.

### **Are there any other considerations that should be highlighted in the advice for SPHE/RSE?**

**As above.**

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Foróige

# Review of Relationships and Sexuality Education (RSE)

At the request of the Minister for Education and Skills, a major review of RSE in primary and post-primary schools was undertaken from June 2018 to March 2019. The review examined the experience of teaching and learning in RSE including; the curriculum, the approach to learning, the supports needed, and ways to improve the experience of RSE for students. Engagement in the review was considerable and signals the level of interest and concern people share in relation to this aspect of education. We are now engaging in consultation to ensure the findings and draft advice is reflective of the needs of students, schools, and parents.

In responding to the findings and draft advice on the future directions of RSE it is recommended that you read the draft report or the summary of the draft report both of which are available here <https://www.ncca.ie/en/updates-and-events/consultations/review-of-relationships-and-sexuality-education-rse>.

<b>Name</b>	Sarah
<b>Surname</b>	Haslam
<b>Position (if applicable)</b>	Training, Learning and Development Manager
<b>Organisation (if applicable)</b>	Foróige, the National Youth Development Organisation
<b>Date</b>	24 <sup>th</sup> October 2019
<b>Email</b>	[REDACTED]

**Please provide some brief background information on your organisation (if applicable).**

Foróige is Ireland's leading youth organisation, providing a broad range of services and programmes to young people, families and communities across the country for almost 70 years. Foróige works with over 50,000 young people (over 10% of the youth population) and engages over 5,500 volunteers. It employs over 470 professional youth workers. Foróige's purpose is to enable young people to involve themselves consciously and actively in their own development and in the development of society. Foróige works to meet the needs of young people within their own communities.

Foróige works with young people in communities across Ireland through volunteer-led youth clubs and staff-led youth projects. Our programmes focus on building skills, resilience, belief and aspiration in young people. The benefits of these programmes are far reaching. Our work is a unique partnership between young people, parents, volunteers and the wider community.

## The approach

Across all stakeholders, there was strong agreement that RSE needs to be more than information about biological aspects of growing up and sexual activity. It needs a holistic approach that balances discussion about the risks and dangers associated with relationships and sexual activity with discussion about the positive, healthy and enjoyable aspects of relationships. A holistic approach can be understood as teaching and learning about the cognitive, emotional, physical and social aspects of relationships and sexuality. It aims to equip children and young people with knowledge, skills, attitudes and values that will empower them to: realise their health, wellbeing and dignity; develop respectful social and sexual relationships; consider how their choices affect their own wellbeing and that of others; and understand and ensure the protection of their rights throughout their lives.

**To what extent do you broadly agree/disagree with the proposed direction on the approach to RSE that has emerged from the review? Please tick your response in the box below.**

Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
√			

**What are the aspects of the proposed approach that you agree/disagree with?**

The approach to RSE must be holistic and comprehensive. RSE for children and young people needs to be more than just “sex education.” It is vital that it focusses on personal development and aims to equip children and young people with the skills, knowledge and confidence to develop healthy relationships, make responsible decisions in relation to their sexual health and ultimately delay the onset of early sexual activity.

Holistic RSE will facilitate the development of key competencies in relation to decision making and communication to promote positive well-being and confidence in relationships. It will also ensure all children and young people will have access to a core RSE curriculum which meets their needs.

**What else is important when considering the approach for teaching SPHE/RSE in schools?**

To ensure a holistic and comprehensive approach to RSE the following should be considered

- High quality, comprehensive and holistic RSE is accessible to all children and young people as a right
- The approach has core and elective elements to ensure it is flexible to meet the needs of all children and young people
- The approach is developed using a spiral curriculum which enables children and young people to develop key knowledge, skills and competencies that are built on throughout their engagement in primary and secondary education.

- The non-formal education system, in particular youth work, is a vital component in its development. Youth work organisations have decades of experience in developing holistic, evidence based, proven, world class RSE in partnership with young people, parents, communities and other stakeholders. These organisations and their programmes can support the development of formal education curriculum while also ensuring learning and development in school is supported and reinforced outside of school.

### The curriculum

The Review highlighted the need to create a single integrated curriculum that sets out the learning for SPHE/RSE as one subject and incrementally provides continuity of experience from early childhood to post-primary. In the immediate term the NCCA will develop interim guidelines to support the current curriculum on how it can be approached in a more holistic way and provide clarity on how topics can be taught in an inclusive manner to incorporate current themes identified by the review.

**To what extent do you broadly agree/disagree with the need for a single integrated curriculum for SPHE/RSE? Please tick your response in the box below.**

Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
	√		

### Please provide a reason for your level of agreement/disagreement.

The development of RSE as part of one single integrated curriculum will ensure that it is given due weight within the current education system. It will also ensure all children and young people have access to RSE as part of both primary and secondary school supporting continuity and development of skills, knowledge and competency throughout.

While interim guidelines to support current curriculum are welcomed, this leaves a gap in access to holistic and comprehensive RSE to those currently in the school system. While some schools may follow guidelines and/or look to develop or access more holistic curriculum others may not. If this approach is taken we will continue to fail a large number of children and young people who should have the right to access holistic RSE.

Interim guidelines also may create a situation where some RSE topics are introduced in isolation or as once off “talks” such as a discussion on consent without first having explored healthy and unhealthy relationships, boundaries and emotional well-being.

To develop these interim guidelines it will be important to work in partnership with schools, teachers, young people, non-formal education providers and the HSE.

**What else do you consider important in relation to future curriculum development in SPHE/RSE?**

Foróige strongly recommends that the non-formal education system is looked to now, to support schools in the interim of future curriculum development and training of teachers in same.

Foróige believes that youth work organisations can offer the education system a) decades of expertise in enabling and equipping young people to develop the skills, confidence and knowledge to develop healthy relationships b) a comprehensive, evidence based relationships and sexuality programmes that could be delivered in schools now through a network of skilled and trained facilitators currently available in communities all over Ireland.

There are a number of RSE programmes currently being delivered in out of school settings which are holistic, evidenced informed and proven to meet the needs of young people.

Foróige's REAL U (Relationships Explored and Life Uncovered) programme is one such example of this. However the REAL U programme is currently the **only** programme being delivered that meets the full range of needs outlined by the Minister and captured in this review including; a holistic approach, developed to meet the needs of young people, ongoing updating to meet the changing needs to young people, focusses on a core programme with elective modules to ensure young people have access to the full range of RSE topics, includes support for parents/guardians, provides a comprehensive training and ongoing support for facilitators and has been robustly proven, through a rigorous university study, to be effective.

This programme and its network of over 1,000 trained facilitators across Ireland could be utilised now with young people aged 12-18 while schools ready themselves to deliver this or other similar revised RSE programme.

**Creating the conditions for effective RSE**

The Review makes it clear that teachers need in-depth and sustained training and support in the area of SPHE/RSE. Consequently, access to professional development needs to be enhanced at pre-service and in-service levels. The Review also identified the need to take stock of current teaching and learning resources available in this area.

**To what extent do you broadly agree/disagree with the Review's findings on the necessary conditions for effective SPHE/RSE? Please tick your response in the box below**

Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
√			

**Please provide a reason for your level of agreement/disagreement.**

Teacher training for RSE needs to begin during initial teacher training and then sustained through a range of professional development opportunities, networking, self-directed learning and sharing of best practice within and across school communities and with the non-formal education sector.

While the call has been for RSE to be developed in a holistic curriculum, RSE is not just a subject to be taught but should be a key part of school culture and support to children and young people to successfully navigate issues, concerns and relationship building throughout their life. As such, knowledge of and training in RSE should be intertwined across all pre-service training to support all teachers develop a culture of openness and understanding of RSE and an ability to support children and young people in their school communities.

In-depth RSE training on a holistic and comprehensive school curriculum should also be available in pre-service training, particularly for secondary school teachers, who will then be in a position to teach the curriculum. This will ensure such teachers are comfortable and confident to teach the RSE curriculum in a consistent and quality manner. Accessing the support of key stakeholders outside of the formal education system who are working with children and young people on RSE must also be a key part of the development and facilitation of teacher training.

Access to ongoing professional development for RSE teachers in particular, but also for all teachers, will be vital to success of a holistic RSE in schools. The needs of children and young people in relation to RSE are changing, as such teachers should be supported to access further training and workshops to enhance their teaching and the curriculum. Teachers should also be resourced to harness the support and expertise of the non-formal education sector who are working with children and young people on RSE. Support can be accessed through availing of training opportunities, attending seminars and linking in with key networks in local communities.

**What else do you consider important in order to create the conditions for effective SPHE/RSE?**

Ensuring children and young people have access to a quality, comprehensive and holistic RSE that meets their needs will require curriculum developers and educators to be open to the need for such a curriculum to be updated on a regular basis. To give one example, Foróige's REAL U programme was first developed in 2012, was then updated in 2015 and will require further updating in 2020. Trained facilitators of the REAL U programme receive the updated manual but in becoming facilitators of the programme, also take on

the responsibility of keeping themselves up to date on the topics covered in the programme.

It will be important that an approach of continuous review and ongoing learning and development on the subject of RSE is taken by both the Department of Education and Skills and its educators.

As mentioned previously, RSE is as much a subject to be taught as to be facilitated. There is much learning from youth work and its approaches that can be transferred to RSE in schools. The role of the trained facilitator is to guide children and young people through topics, create a safe space for discussion and support children and young people to come to conclusions and make responsible decisions. The learning by doing approach of youth work organisation should also be a key element in RSE. Children and young people should be provided with a safe space to learn, practice what they have learned, reflect on this and plan for using this learning outside the classroom.

### Other considerations

The Review concluded that comprehensive oversight and support for SPHE/RSE is required to meet the needs identified in the review process. The Review also found schools cannot do it alone and parents must be encouraged and supported in assuming their responsibility for their child's learning. In addition, it suggests that post-primary schools require further support and guidance in planning for junior cycle wellbeing in order to enhance students' learning in SPHE/RSE.

**To what extent do you broadly agree/disagree that these are important considerations for SPHE/RSE? Please tick your response in the box below.**

Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
✓			

**Please provide a reason for your level of agreement/disagreement.**

We believe the RSE curriculum should be regularly reviewed to ensure an ongoing commitment in keeping the curriculum current, engaging and up to date to meet the needs of modern Irish young people. This is a responsibility that should be shared by the Department of Education and Skills, schools, teachers and non-formal education providers.

Key to this process will be to ensure that the voices, opinions and experiences of young people themselves are central to the construction and review of the RSE curriculum. Ongoing active engagement with children, young people and their representative organisations ensure sustained success of holistic RSE in schools.

Parents and guardians must be aware of the RSE their children are gaining and developing in schools and supported to continue this learning at home.

**Are there any other considerations that should be highlighted in the advice for SPHE/RSE?**

RSE is lifelong learning. Through this consultation process a number of highly skilled, experienced and knowledgeable external stakeholders providing comprehensive RSE to children and young people have been identified. They are ready to collaborate and work in partnership with Department of Education and Skills and schools to ensure all children and young people have access to the best possible RSE both inside and outside the classroom. This should be built upon and harnessed now to ensure children and young people in schools **today** have access to proven RSE programmes and support is provided to parents and guardians.

Foróige would welcome the opportunity to work in partnership and share our expertise with the NCCA and the Department of Education and Skills on this.

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Elva Casey, Hibernia College of Education

# Review of Relationships and Sexuality Education (RSE)

At the request of the Minister for Education and Skills, a major review of RSE in primary and post-primary schools was undertaken from June 2018 to March 2019. The review examined the experience of teaching and learning in RSE including; the curriculum, the approach to learning, the supports needed, and ways to improve the experience of RSE for students. Engagement in the review was considerable and signals the level of interest and concern people share in relation to this aspect of education. We are now engaging in consultation to ensure the findings and draft advice is reflective of the needs of students, schools, and parents.

In responding to the findings and draft advice on the future directions of RSE it is recommended that you read the draft report or the summary of the draft report both of which are available here <https://www.ncca.ie/en/updates-and-events/consultations/review-of-relationships-and-sexuality-education-rse>.

<b>Name</b>	Elva
<b>Surname</b>	Casey
<b>Position (if applicable)</b>	Lecturer in Education
<b>Organisation (if applicable)</b>	Hibernia College
<b>Date</b>	22/10/19
<b>Email</b>	

**Please provide some brief background information on your organisation (if applicable).**

Hibernia College provides a blended learning programme (Masters, Level 9) of Initial Teacher Education, in the areas of Primary and Post Primary education.

## The approach

Across all stakeholders, there was strong agreement that RSE needs to be more than information about biological aspects of growing up and sexual activity. It needs a holistic approach that balances discussion about the risks and dangers associated with relationships and sexual activity with discussion about the positive, healthy and enjoyable aspects of relationships. A holistic approach can be understood as teaching and learning about the cognitive, emotional, physical and social aspects of relationships and sexuality. It aims to equip children and young people with knowledge, skills, attitudes and values that will empower them to: realise their health, wellbeing and dignity; develop respectful social and sexual relationships; consider how their choices affect their own wellbeing and that of others; and understand and ensure the protection of their rights throughout their lives.

**To what extent do you broadly agree/disagree with the proposed direction on the approach to RSE that has emerged from the review? Please tick your response in the box below.**

Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
✓			

### **What are the aspects of the proposed approach that you agree/disagree with?**

I strongly agree that we need to have a much more prominent emphasis on the positive aspects of RSE. Pupils need to be equipped with the correct biological material about growing up and sexual activity. In my experience, many teachers operate on a 'need to know' basis. They would, for example, believe that boys have no need to understand about menstruation cycles because it is not something they experience themselves. This is a very short-sighted view. If we only teach what we are likely to personally experience, then our horizons are significantly limited. The need to teach wellbeing as related to our rights and choices in the area of RSE is also extremely significant. The issue of consent is one which is not clearly understood in Irish society and there is a need to engage with the topic over the course of the pupil's education.

### **What else is important when considering the approach for teaching SPHE/RSE in schools?**

## The curriculum

The Review highlighted the need to create a single integrated curriculum that sets out the learning for SPHE/RSE as one subject and incrementally provides continuity of experience from early childhood to post-primary. In the immediate term the NCCA will develop interim guidelines to support the current curriculum on how it can be approached in a more holistic way and provide clarity on how topics can be taught in an inclusive manner to incorporate current themes identified by the review.

**To what extent do you broadly agree/disagree with the need for a single integrated curriculum for SPHE/RSE? Please tick your response in the box below.**

Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
✓			

**Please provide a reason for your level of agreement/disagreement.**

Teachers engage with SPHE over the course of the entire year however many teachers leave RSE until later in the school year. It is treated in isolation as something to be 'approached' when the children are 'ready' or when the teacher feels comfortable enough to do so. Reference is often made to whether children are mature enough to handle the content. However, RSE should be engaged with throughout the year and the choice to engage should not be in any way dependant on the maturity level of the children. In reality, a child or adolescent who appears to lack maturity may be in more need of education around the issues of consent and respect for perceived differences in the LGBT+ community. SPHE aims of promoting self-esteem, wellbeing and confidence are intrinsically linked to making decisions about relationships and sexuality in a moral and caring way. For these reasons I strongly agree with the need for a single integrated SPHE/RSE curriculum.

**What else do you consider important in relation to future curriculum development in SPHE/RSE?**

I think that the curriculum should be developed with 'Station Teaching' and collaborative teaching in mind. Currently, SPHE/RSE delivery depends heavily on stories and questioning, both valid approaches. However, I think that (in line with findings of the Review, July 2019) pupils will engage more openly in small groups where meaningful discussion takes place. They also need to be able to access and engage with resources themselves, discussing them in their peer groups, rather than having the information always filtered through a teacher.

### **Creating the conditions for effective RSE**

The Review makes it clear that teachers need in-depth and sustained training and support in the area of SPHE/RSE. Consequently, access to professional development needs to be enhanced at pre-service and in-service levels. The Review also identified the need to take stock of current teaching and learning resources available in this area.

**To what extent do you broadly agree/disagree with the Review's findings on the necessary conditions for effective SPHE/RSE? Please tick your response in the box below**

Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
✓			

**Please provide a reason for your level of agreement/disagreement.**

Pre-service and in-service training of an ongoing nature which is both sustained and in-depth is essential. This training should be compulsory and delivered at school and college level. At present, many teachers engage with SPHE/RSE at a very surface level. Teacher background, personality and beliefs are determining factors in the extent and format of delivery. While a menu curriculum has many advantages, there needs to be a means to ensure that the same learning is happening across the country, irrespective of the school climate, culture or ethos. Learning Resources in most schools are very limited or non-existent.

**What else do you consider important in order to create the conditions for effective SPHE/RSE?**

Teachers would benefit from observing excellent practice in the teaching of SPHE/RSE. The most effective way of doing this would be to have a number of 'online resources'; recordings of teachers delivering the programme. A teacher forum could also be set up to provide solution based discussions on the programme.

**Other considerations**

The Review concluded that comprehensive oversight and support for SPHE/RSE is required to meet the needs identified in the review process. The Review also found schools cannot do it alone and parents must be encouraged and supported in assuming their responsibility for their child's learning. In addition, it suggests that post-primary schools require further support and guidance in planning for junior cycle wellbeing in order to enhance students' learning in SPHE/RSE.

**To what extent do you broadly agree/disagree that these are important considerations for SPHE/RSE? Please tick your response in the box below.**

Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
✓			

**Please provide a reason for your level of agreement/disagreement.**

A holistic approach to SPHE/RSE is essential in order to provide pupils with a comprehensive education in this area. I think we need to be specific as to the form the 'encouragement' and 'support' takes. Children and adolescents are bombarded with misinformation from a wide variety of sources and it is important that they can trust what they hear at school and home. Parents should be provided with written material and evening courses at various points in their child's education. The advice and support needs to focus on content and appropriate delivery methods. There should be opportunities for parents to voice their concerns and feedback into the process. There are clear concerns as to how some schools facilitate SPHE/RSE in full without feeling that they are compromising their school ethos. I believe that, as part of the interview process, new teachers should be questioned on their understanding of SPHE/RSE and their willingness/ability to deliver it.

**Are there any other considerations that should be highlighted in the advice for SPHE/RSE?**

I think that we need to be very aware of the impact a school culture and ethos can have on the delivery of SPHE/RSE. I think that we need to look at how understanding/comprehension is going to be assessed. There need to be measurable outcomes in order to ensure full, comprehensive deliver.

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Friends for Life, Loughrea

# Review of Relationships and Sexuality Education (RSE) Submission by Friends for life Loughrea.

At the request of the Minister for Education and Skills, a major review of RSE in primary and post-primary schools was undertaken from June 2018 to March 2019. The review examined the experience of teaching and learning in RSE including; the curriculum, the approach to learning, the supports needed, and ways to improve the experience of RSE for students. Engagement in the review was considerable and signals the level of interest and concern people share in relation to this aspect of education. We are now engaging in consultation to ensure the findings and draft advice is reflective of the needs of students, schools, and parents.

In responding to the findings and draft advice on the future directions of RSE it is recommended that you read the draft report or the summary of the draft report both of which are available here [https://www.ncca.ie/en/updates-and-events/consultations/review-of-relationships-and-sexuality-](https://www.ncca.ie/en/updates-and-events/consultations/review-of-relationships-and-sexuality-education-rse)

<b>Name</b>	Sean
<b>Surname</b>	McGee
<b>Position (if applicable)</b>	Secretary
<b>Organisation (if applicable)</b>	Friends for life Loughrea
<b>Date</b>	19-10-2019
<b>Email</b>	

[education-rse.](#)

Please provide some brief background information on your organisation (if applicable).

A Pro-Family and Pro-Life organisation.

Across all stakeholders, there was strong agreement that RSE needs to be more than information about biological aspects of growing up and sexual activity. It needs a holistic approach that balances discussion about the risks and dangers associated with relationships and sexual activity with discussion about the positive, healthy and enjoyable aspects of relationships. A holistic approach can be understood as teaching and learning about the cognitive, emotional, physical and social aspects of relationships and sexuality. It aims to equip children and young people with knowledge, skills, attitudes and values that will empower them to: realise their health, wellbeing and dignity; develop respectful social and sexual relationships; consider how their choices affect their own wellbeing and that of others; and understand and ensure the protection of their rights throughout their lives.

**To what extent do you broadly agree/disagree with the proposed direction on the approach to RSE that has emerged from the review? Please tick your response in the box below.**

Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
			X

**What are the aspects of the proposed approach that you very strongly disagree with?**

The proposed approach ignores the fact that Parents are the **primary educators** of their children. It diminishes parental rights by implying that Teachers and the State have a superior role to play in the education of young people. This proposal implies that children belong to the State before they belong to the family as if man is born a citizen and so primarily belongs to the State. This does not bear in mind that that before being a citizen man must exist and existence does not come from the State it comes from the parents and from God.

This so called “holistic approach” above does not accept the **primary rights of Parents** in the education of their children and that these rights are constitutionally defined and come from both natural law and divine law. It also does not accept that any educative activity, related to education for love and carried out by persons outside the family, must be subject to the parents’ acceptance of it and must be seen not as a substitute but as a support for the Parent’s work.

These **primary rights of parents as primary educators** entitles them to withdraw their children from any form of sexual instruction imparted outside the home. No mention is made of this nor *the right of the child and the young person to be adequately informed* by their own parents on moral and sexual questions.

There is no mention of morality – there is no mention of promoting the virtues of modesty, chastity, temperance which are all essential for human flourishing.

Further, there is no mention of the call to Marriage, both sacramental and institutional, as the only context for sexual union between a man and a woman. It is well established that being married is associated with greater stability, health, well-being and longevity both for adults and their children.

Research, for instance, undertaken by the Marriage Foundation in the UK shows that:

- Marriage is a proven indicator of social mobility. British adults whose parents were married at the time of their birth are 16% less likely to ever receive benefits, 23% more likely to have been to university and 10% more likely to have got married themselves.<sup>1</sup>
- Reasons are likely rooted in the higher break-up rates of unmarried versus married families. Whereas 3 out of 4 parents who are married when their child is born will still be together by the time the child takes their GCSEs, not much more than 1 in 4 parents who don't marry will still be together. The Marriage Foundation suggests that "family breakdown affects children through lack of parental resources, reduced social capital, father absence, and how the children themselves interpret their parents' break-up".<sup>2</sup>
- Family breakdown is the biggest factor behind the UK's child mental health crisis. More than a third (36%) of children whose parents have split up report poor mental health, compared to only a fifth (22%) with parents who were still together. 32% of children of unmarried parents exhibited problems compared to only 23% of married parents. Among parents who had no formal relationship – neither married nor cohabiting – 40% of children had problems.<sup>3</sup>

**What else is important when considering the approach for teaching SPHE/RSE in schools?**

The proposed approach takes no account of "the years of innocence" which are from about the years of five to puberty when there is a period of tranquility and serenity which must never be disturbed by unnecessary and explicit information about sex. Then, during the years of puberty it is the Parents, as primary educators of their children, who should discuss relationships in the context of marriage. The virtues of modesty, chastity, temperance and morality must be taught by parents from an early age. This is not acknowledged in the proposed approach.

**The curriculum**

The Review highlighted the need to create a single integrated curriculum that sets out the learning for SPHE/RSE as one subject and incrementally provides continuity of experience from early childhood to post-primary. In the immediate term the NCCA will develop interim guidelines to support the current curriculum on how it can be approached in a more holistic way and provide clarity on how topics can be taught in an inclusive manner to incorporate current themes identified by the review.

**To what extent do you broadly agree/disagree with the need for a single integrated curriculum for SPHE/RSE? Please tick your response in the box below.**

<b>Strongly Agree</b>	<b>Agree</b>	<b>Disagree</b>	<b>Strongly Disagree</b>
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<sup>1</sup> Harry Benson & Spencer James, The Long Term Effect of Marriage of Social Mobility (Marriage Foundation, Jan 2018)

<sup>2</sup> Ibid

<sup>3</sup> Harry Benson & Stephen Mckay, Family Breakdown & Teenage Mental Health (Marriage Foundation, Nov 2017)

			<b>x</b>
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**Please provide a reason for your level of strong disagreement.**

It should be kept in mind that Children absorb and imitate the relationships they see around them, not what they are taught, which is why it is very hard to teach 'relationships' in the same way as one would teach any other school subject. It is unscientific to build a curriculum around something that really cannot be classified as a subject. The SPHE / RSE program in reality is more of a partisan ideological agenda with the aim of the sexualization of children, the eradication of morality and the undermining of traditional marriage as well as the traditional family unit.

**What else do you consider important in relation to future curriculum development in SPHE/RSE?**

1. The realisation that SPHE/RSE is not a subject but a radical liberal ideological push.
2. Parents to maintain the right to remove their children from these courses.
3. The promotion of Traditional marriage and the traditional family unit.
4. The promotion of virtues of chastity, modesty, temperance and purity.
5. The non-provision of any explicit sexual material for every age group.
6. The non- promotion of transgenderism - Subjecting all children to transgender ideology risks seriously confusing them and creating psychological problems in some children where there were none.<sup>4</sup>

**Creating the conditions for effective RSE**

The Review makes it clear that teachers need in-depth and sustained training and support in the area of SPHE/RSE. Consequently, access to professional development needs to be enhanced at pre-service and in-service levels. The Review also identified the need to take stock of current teaching and learning resources available in this area.

**To what extent do you broadly disagree with the Review’s findings on the necessary conditions for effective SPHE/RSE? Please tick your response in the box below**

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<sup>44</sup> 11 The Telegraph recently reported how ‘the number of children being referred to gender identity clinics has quadrupled in the past five years’. Figures from the Gender Identity Development Service (GIDS) show that in 2016 ‘there were a total of 2,016 referrals for youngsters aged between three and 18, more than six times more than the 314 referrals five years previously’. The article quotes Chris McGovern, a former advisor to the Department for Education, as saying: “It has become an industry, people are making a career out of encouraging children to question gender at an age when they need to be left to be children. When teachers raise these issues children can become confused or unhappy and traumatised by it.” The Telegraph, 8th July 2017; available online at: <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2017/07/08/number-children-referred-gender-identity-clinics-has-quadrupled/> 12

Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
			x

**Please provide a reason for your level of strong disagreement.**

Some teachers will disagree with SPHE/RSE principles and ideological agenda. They should be allowed to opt out of teaching this so called “subject”.

Access to “professional development” should mean access to objective existing research data as referenced in the footnotes above, particularly the link between the contraceptive mentality and the culture of death resulting in between 40 to 50 million abortions worldwide each year.<sup>5</sup>

The review should have identified the necessity to teach the moral virtues like chastity and modesty and temperance. The teaching of these virtues may not be “current teaching” but they will ensure the happiness and flourishing of children.

**What else do you consider important in order to create the conditions for effective SPHE/RSE?**

The benefits of Natural marriage should be taught because of the well documented benefits to society:

- Research in the UK shows that around 27% of couples that were cohabiting when their child was born have separated by the time the child is aged 5, compared with 9% of couples that were married when their child was born.<sup>6</sup>
- The annual financial cost of family breakdown in the UK, calculated by Relationships Foundation, is revealed to have now reached an all-time high of £51 billion. The figure, which has risen from £37 billion ten years ago, takes into account the cost to the taxpayer of families splitting up across areas including tax, benefits, housing, health, social care, civil and criminal justice and education.<sup>7</sup>

**Other considerations**

The Review concluded that comprehensive oversight and support for SPHE/RSE is required to meet the needs identified in the review process. The Review also found schools cannot do it alone and parents must be encouraged and supported in assuming their responsibility for their child's learning. In addition, it suggests that post-primary schools require further support and guidance in planning for junior cycle wellbeing in order to enhance students' learning in SPHE/RSE.

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<sup>5</sup> World Health Organisation.

<sup>6</sup> 16 Harry Benson, Married and Unmarried Family Breakdown: Key Statistics Explained (Bristol Community Family Trust, 2009).

<sup>7</sup> <http://marriagefoundation.org.uk/government-pressure-back-marriage-cost-family-breakdown-hits-51-billion/>

To what extent do you broadly agree/disagree that these are important considerations for SPHE/RSE? Please tick your response in the box below.

Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
			X

**Please provide a reason for your level of agreement/disagreement.**

Schools are not meant to “do it alone” – the Parents are primary educators of their children. It is the parents’ duty to teach their children about sex not schools or the state. Parents know this too. Do not assume to schools and to the state a responsibility which is not theirs either constitutionally or by natural law.

**Are there any other considerations that should be highlighted in the advice for SPHE/RSE?**

Do not subject children to radical sexualized material nor to any sexualized material - this will lead to the child’s physical, emotional and spiritual downfall. It will lead to broken families and to an even more broken Irish society. Human beings are called to virtuous living and with the correct support from family, schools, society and by God’s grace this is achievable. “The meaning of life is found in giving and receiving love, and in this light human sexuality and procreation reach their true and full significance. Love also gives meaning to suffering and death; despite the mystery which surrounds them, they can become saving events. Respect for life requires that science and technology should always be at the service of man and his integral development. Society as a whole must respect, defend and promote the dignity of every human person, at every moment and in every condition of that person’s life.”<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Evangelium Vitae 81.

# Institute of Guidance Counsellors



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### **RSE Submission October 2019**

The Institute of Guidance Counsellors supports the review of RSE in Irish second level schools and calls for increased resources to ensure that each second level student has access to appropriate, unbiased and factual information concerning the extremely important topic of RSE.

A thorough review of our current RSE curriculum and delivery methods is overdue. There is a clear need for more inclusive and holistic sex education in our second level schools. In our work with young people in schools, guidance counsellors are often confronted with issues relating to relationships, sexual health, consent and contraception. It is clear that young people want to talk about these issues with an adult who is comfortable with the topics and will take an unbiased, non-judgemental approach. Young people want to be respected in their need to understand and discuss these important issues and want to be educated about the reality of relationships and sexuality. It is important that our RSE curriculum reflects the reality of modern Ireland and the relationships of all our learners. It should reflect the diversity of modern Irish families and be inclusive of our LGBTQI+ students. If we are to offer a truly inclusive curriculum, it is crucial that they see themselves represented therein. Latest research shows that bullying of LGBTI+ young people is still widespread and has devastating effects on mental health. The levels of extreme stress, depression and anxiety are up to four times higher in LGBTI+ young people. All too often, the school guidance counsellor is the first port of call for a young person struggling to understand their sexuality and relationships, unsupported by a curriculum that does not reflect their reality or meet their needs. It is important that any revised RSE curriculum would have a broader and more representative scope, would work to reduce the harmful effects of stigma and would aim to create more tolerant and inclusive attitudes towards LGBTQI+ relationships.

The IGC also calls for adequate resources and supports to effectively implement any changes. Guidance Counsellors are well placed to offer guidance and support in the area of RSE but further CPD, training resources and time will be needed to ensure that any proposed changes have the chance to embed effectively in our second level system.

The IGC is hopeful about the opportunity to update our approach to teaching RSE in second level schools. We would call for a student-centred, whole school approach which is inclusive and age appropriate. With adequate resources and supports for schools and professionals engaged in the delivery of the new curriculum, this may be seen as an opportunity to not only listen to, but to effectively respond to student voice.

Signed on behalf of the Institute of Guidance Counsellors

Beatrice Dooley  
President

Irish National Teachers Organisation (INTO), LGBT group

# Review of Relationships and Sexuality Education (RSE)

At the request of the Minister for Education and Skills, a major review of RSE in primary and post-primary schools was undertaken from June 2018 to March 2019. The review examined the experience of teaching and learning in RSE including; the curriculum, the approach to learning, the supports needed, and ways to improve the experience of RSE for students. Engagement in the review was considerable and signals the level of interest and concern people share in relation to this aspect of education. We are now engaging in consultation to ensure the findings and draft advice is reflective of the needs of students, schools, and parents.

In responding to the findings and draft advice on the future directions of RSE it is recommended that you read the draft report or the summary of the draft report both of which are available here <https://www.ncca.ie/en/updates-and-events/consultations/review-of-relationships-and-sexuality-education-rse>.

<b>Name</b>	Cecelia
<b>Surname</b>	Gavigan
<b>Position (if applicable)</b>	Chairperson
<b>Organisation (if applicable)</b>	INTO LGBT+ Teachers' Group
<b>Date</b>	19th October 2019
<b>Email</b>	[REDACTED]

**Please provide some brief background information on your organisation (if applicable).**

We are a volunteer group of primary school teachers who advocate for LGBT+ inclusion in the classroom, staffroom and school.

- As our area of expertise is with regard to LGBT+ inclusion in primary schools, it is this area of the proposals which we have focused on in detail. Also, as we previously submitted to this process, these comments have been kept brief.

## The approach

Across all stakeholders, there was strong agreement that RSE needs to be more than information about biological aspects of growing up and sexual activity. It needs a holistic approach that balances discussion about the risks and dangers associated with relationships and sexual activity with discussion about the positive, healthy and enjoyable aspects of relationships. A holistic approach can be understood as teaching and learning about the cognitive, emotional, physical and social aspects of relationships and sexuality. It aims to equip children and young people with knowledge, skills, attitudes and values that will empower them to: realise their health, wellbeing and dignity; develop respectful social and sexual relationships; consider how their choices affect their own wellbeing and that of others; and understand and ensure the protection of their rights throughout their lives.

**To what extent do you broadly agree/disagree with the proposed direction on the approach to RSE that has emerged from the review? Please tick your response in the box below.**

Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
X			

### What are the aspects of the proposed approach that you agree/disagree with?

The inclusion of LGBT+ identities is a very welcome and long-overdue development and one that should be prominent at all levels from junior infants up (in of course age-appropriate manners i.e. encouraging focus on the inclusion of same-sex headed families in discussions in SPHE etc and the interrogation of the teacher's own adherence to/propagation of gender stereotypes). This positive, proactive inclusion from an early age is vital to ensure that LGBT+ young people and adults grow up feeling included and welcome in their communities which is a prerequisite for strong mental health.

### What else is important when considering the approach for teaching SPHE/RSE in schools?

That some (perhaps most) teachers will need high-quality training on how to implement it, strong and practical guidelines for speaking to parents/guardians and resources to enhance their own knowledge and comfort level with regard to proactive LGBT+ inclusion (especially regarding gender identity).

## The curriculum

The Review highlighted the need to create a single integrated curriculum that sets out the learning for SPHE/RSE as one subject and incrementally provides continuity of experience from early childhood to post-primary. In the immediate term the NCCA will develop interim guidelines to support the current curriculum on how it can be approached in a more holistic way and provide clarity on how topics can be taught in an inclusive manner to incorporate current themes identified by the review.

**To what extent do you broadly agree/disagree with the need for a single integrated curriculum for SPHE/RSE? Please tick your response in the box below.**

Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
X			

**Please provide a reason for your level of agreement/disagreement.**

A single curriculum will enable teachers to cover all areas and not leave anything out. Teachers are already trying to deliver an overcrowded curriculum so the more consolidated the content is, the easier it will be for teachers to plan and teach.

It also gives the message that learning in this area is part of our holistic development as human beings rather than something additional or somehow different to general education.

**What else do you consider important in relation to future curriculum development in SPHE/RSE?**

The needs of children should be prioritised above all. Children (including LGBT+ children and children in LGBT+ headed families) are at the heart of what we do as teachers and decisions should be made in terms of what is best for them rather than what is easy.

It should be constructed in a way that it can easily incorporate future research/developments; perhaps with online resources that can be updated as the need arises.

## Creating the conditions for effective RSE

The Review makes it clear that teachers need in-depth and sustained training and support in the area of SPHE/RSE. Consequently, access to professional development needs to be enhanced at pre-service and in-service levels. The Review also identified the need to take stock of current teaching and learning resources available in this area.

To what extent do you broadly agree/disagree with the Review's findings on the necessary conditions for effective SPHE/RSE? Please tick your response in the box below

Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
X			

### Please provide a reason for your level of agreement/disagreement.

Teachers have contacted our group on many occasions asking for support in this area. We are however a purely voluntary organisation of currently-serving teachers and such we are not in a position to go to schools to deliver training in this area. People have said that even after PDST training for RSE, they still did not feel equipped to deal with anything related to LGBT+ inclusion. It is an urgent need which is not currently being addressed.

ITE will be an important sector to target initially as it is an efficient way to begin to develop those skills and knowledge within our teaching workforce.

### What else do you consider important in order to create the conditions for effective SPHE/RSE?

Strong leadership from principals and Boards of Management is vital to ensure that teachers feel comfortable, supported and able to deliver the content required of them.

Staff will need to be encouraged to be open minded and willing to learn - they may need to be educated about why this kind of work is important in order to develop this open attitude.

Encourage teachers to critically reflect on the textbooks provided by publishers with regard to their inclusivity and to supplement them/alter them as necessary to ensure positive and proactive inclusion of LGBT+ identities.

## Other considerations

The Review concluded that comprehensive oversight and support for SPHE/RSE is required to meet the needs identified in the review process. The Review also found schools cannot do it alone and parents must be encouraged and supported in assuming their responsibility for their child's learning. In addition, it suggests that post-primary schools require further support and guidance in planning for junior cycle wellbeing in order to enhance students' learning in SPHE/RSE.

**To what extent do you broadly agree/disagree that these are important considerations for SPHE/RSE? Please tick your response in the box below.**

Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
X			

### **Please provide a reason for your level of agreement/disagreement.**

Oversight is an important factor to ensure that the policies/curricular documents etc translate to real improvements in the experiences of pupils in our schools. We have heard anecdotal reports that in some schools although they have bullying policies which meet the requirements of the 2013 procedures but these policies are not implemented in reality.

DES inspectors should be looking for evidence that this work is indeed conducted in all schools.

The point regarding parents is less clear cut however due to the vast differences in opinion between different families. Teachers will need to be solidly supported with clear guidelines on how to negotiate situations where there is contentious differences of opinion.

### **Are there any other considerations that should be highlighted in the advice for SPHE/RSE?**

Teacher knowledge (particularly in the area of gender identity) is a major area that will need to be developed in order to successfully create a more inclusive system for all pupils and young people

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LGBT Ireland

# Review of Relationships and Sexuality Education (RSE)

At the request of the Minister for Education and Skills, a major review of RSE in primary and post-primary schools was undertaken from June 2018 to March 2019. The review examined the experience of teaching and learning in RSE including; the curriculum, the approach to learning, the supports needed, and ways to improve the experience of RSE for students. Engagement in the review was considerable and signals the level of interest and concern people share in relation to this aspect of education. We are now engaging in consultation to ensure the findings and draft advice is reflective of the needs of students, schools, and parents.

In responding to the findings and draft advice on the future directions of RSE it is recommended that you read the draft report or the summary of the draft report both of which are available here <https://www.ncca.ie/en/updates-and-events/consultations/review-of-relationships-and-sexuality-education-rse>.

<b>Name</b>	Paula
<b>Surname</b>	Fagan
<b>Position (if applicable)</b>	CEO
<b>Organisation (if applicable)</b>	LGBT Ireland
<b>Date</b>	24/10/19
<b>Email</b>	

**Please provide some brief background information on your organisation (if applicable).**

LGBT Ireland is a national charitable organisation working to improve the visibility, inclusion and rights of LGBT people living in Ireland. Through our telephone, online and face to face services we provide confidential support and information to thousands of LGBT+ people and their family members each year.

Informed by the issues and experiences raised through our frontline services, we also provide training and advocacy support to ensure that LGBT people's voices are heard in policy and practice developments which effect that lives.

## The approach

Across all stakeholders, there was strong agreement that RSE needs to be more than information about biological aspects of growing up and sexual activity. It needs a holistic approach that balances discussion about the risks and dangers associated with relationships and sexual activity with discussion about the positive, healthy and enjoyable aspects of relationships. A holistic approach can be understood as teaching and learning about the cognitive, emotional, physical and social aspects of relationships and sexuality. It aims to equip children and young people with knowledge, skills, attitudes and values that will empower them to: realise their health, wellbeing and dignity; develop respectful social and sexual relationships; consider how their choices affect their own wellbeing and that of others; and understand and ensure the protection of their rights throughout their lives.

**To what extent do you broadly agree/disagree with the proposed direction on the approach to RSE that has emerged from the review? Please tick your response in the box below.**

<b>Strongly Agree</b>	<b>Agree</b>	<b>Disagree</b>	<b>Strongly Disagree</b>
	x		

**What are the aspects of the proposed approach that you agree/disagree with?**

**What else is important when considering the approach for teaching SPHE/RSE in schools?**

In 2017, we responded to 1,957 contacts to our helpline and instant messaging support services, while over 63,000 people visited our website [www.lgbt.ie](http://www.lgbt.ie) for support and information. The majority of contacts (79%) to our instant messaging service were from young LGBT+ people under the age of 25 years, while 55% were under the age of 18 years.

For these young people their experiences in school plays a fundamental part in whether they can accept and express their LGBT+ identity. Lack of visibility, isolation and homophobic and transphobic bullying within school, continues to be problems faced by many of the young people who contact us.

We also support parents and family members of LGBT+ people. Last year a number of contacts from parents, related to concerns regarding the lack of visibility and inclusion of LGBT identities and relationships in the RSE programme being delivered in their schools. These parents noted frustration and concern about the negative impact this was having on their children's overall self-esteem and belonging.

Alongside concerns regarding the emotional impact of the lack of visibility of LGBT identities in the RSE curriculum, we would also have major concerns regarding the impact this is having on the sexual health of young LGBT+ people. In our services, we frequently talk to young people who have very limited or no understanding of risks associated with unprotected sex and of safer sex practices.

With the rates of HIV and other STIs continuing to rise in Ireland, we need to educate young people properly so that they can stay healthy. In 2016, 508 people were newly diagnosed with HIV in Ireland, with sex between men the predominant route of HIV transmission accounting for just over half of diagnoses (51%) ([www.hivireland.ie/hiv/hiv-in-ireland](http://www.hivireland.ie/hiv/hiv-in-ireland))

### **The curriculum**

The Review highlighted the need to create a single integrated curriculum that sets out the learning for SPHE/RSE as one subject and incrementally provides continuity of experience from early childhood to post-primary. In the immediate term the NCCA will develop interim guidelines to support the current curriculum on how it can be approached in a more holistic way and provide clarity on how topics can be taught in an inclusive manner to incorporate current themes identified by the review.

**To what extent do you broadly agree/disagree with the need for a single integrated curriculum for SPHE/RSE? Please tick your response in the box below.**

<b>Strongly Agree</b>	<b>Agree</b>	<b>Disagree</b>	<b>Strongly Disagree</b>
	<b>x</b>		

**Please provide a reason for your level of agreement/disagreement.**

**What else do you consider important in relation to future curriculum development in SPHE/RSE?**

## Creating the conditions for effective RSE

The Review makes it clear that teachers need in-depth and sustained training and support in the area of SPHE/RSE. Consequently, access to professional development needs to be enhanced at pre-service and in-service levels. The Review also identified the need to take stock of current teaching and learning resources available in this area.

**To what extent do you broadly agree/disagree with the Review's findings on the necessary conditions for effective SPHE/RSE? Please tick your response in the box below**

Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
x			

**Please provide a reason for your level of agreement/disagreement.**

Schools and teachers need to be equipped to teach the revised curriculum to ensure they have the knowledge and skills to provide accurate relationship and sex education which is inclusive and embracing of LGBT+ identities.

**What else do you consider important in order to create the conditions for effective SPHE/RSE?**

It is imperative that the religious ethos of a school cannot influence the content or implementation of sex education.

## Other considerations

The Review concluded that comprehensive oversight and support for SPHE/RSE is required to meet the needs identified in the review process. The Review also found schools cannot do it alone and parents must be encouraged and supported in assuming their responsibility for their child's learning. In addition, it suggests that post-primary schools require further support and guidance in planning for junior cycle wellbeing in order to enhance students' learning in SPHE/RSE.

To what extent do you broadly agree/disagree that these are important considerations for SPHE/RSE? Please tick your response in the box below.

Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
	x		

Please provide a reason for your level of agreement/disagreement.

Are there any other considerations that should be highlighted in the advice for SPHE/RSE?

The new curriculum should equip young people with knowledge to assist them to make healthy and respectful choices about their bodies and relationships. The curriculum needs to be inclusive and informative of all types of romantic relationships, sexual orientation, gender identity and safer sex practices.

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Mel Duffy, Dublin City University

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In responding to the findings and draft advice on the future directions of RSE it is recommended that you read the draft report or the summary of the draft report both of which are available here <https://www.ncca.ie/en/updates-and-events/consultations/review-of-relationships-and-sexuality-education-rse>.

<b>Name</b>	Mel
<b>Surname</b>	Duffy
<b>Position (if applicable)</b>	Assistant Professor Sociology & Sexuality Studies
<b>Organisation (if applicable)</b>	Dublin City University
<b>Date</b>	23/10/19
<b>Email</b>	

**Please provide some brief background information on your organisation (if applicable).**

Education and Research

## The approach

Across all stakeholders, there was strong agreement that RSE needs to be more than information about biological aspects of growing up and sexual activity. It needs a holistic approach that balances discussion about the risks and dangers associated with relationships and sexual activity with discussion about the positive, healthy and enjoyable aspects of relationships. A holistic approach can be understood as teaching and learning about the cognitive, emotional, physical and social aspects of relationships and sexuality. It aims to equip children and young people with knowledge, skills, attitudes and values that will empower them to: realise their health, wellbeing and dignity; develop respectful social and sexual relationships; consider how their choices affect their own wellbeing and that of others; and understand and ensure the protection of their rights throughout their lives.

**To what extent do you broadly agree/disagree with the proposed direction on the approach to RSE that has emerged from the review? Please tick your response in the box below.**

Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
x			

### What are the aspects of the proposed approach that you agree/disagree with?

Listening to the voices of all stakeholders particularly students and teachers. Teachers comfortability with the subject matter much be central to the delivery of any programme. Regardless of parents/legal guardian/teachers belief systems a SPHE/RSE programme should be built that is not underpinned by a faith based approach. No other elements such as French, Mathematics, Biology etc are delivered based on belief systems. It is factual and SPHE/RSE is factual which engages and builds on cognitive, emotional, physical and social development of the child.

### What else is important when considering the approach for teaching SPHE/RSE in schools?

Currently issues of intimacy and pleasure are sporadically covered. Other areas of asexuality, teaching of healthy relationships which consent is a part but not the whole story. Consent is a concept that begins at birth and covers all areas in relation to who has access to our bodies such as parents/legal guardians/doctors/nurses/dentist to name but a few. From an early age, children need to be comfortable in naming their body parts and being able to negotiate access to their bodies. This is important in on many levels including health care and feeds into the concept of health relationships which are based on trust. This should be part of a pre-school programme building on it in primary and secondary. Children need a critical adult who they can trust which may or may not be a parent/legal guardian but may be a teacher who they can be open, honest and seek assistance from in a non-judgmental manner. Teachers are central to the life of a child particular primary school children.

## The curriculum

The Review highlighted the need to create a single integrated curriculum that sets out the learning for SPHE/RSE as one subject and incrementally provides continuity of experience from early childhood to post-primary. In the immediate term the NCCA will develop interim guidelines to support the current curriculum on how it can be approached in a more holistic way and provide clarity on how topics can be taught in an inclusive manner to incorporate current themes identified by the review.

**To what extent do you broadly agree/disagree with the need for a single integrated curriculum for SPHE/RSE? Please tick your response in the box below.**

Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
x			

**Please provide a reason for your level of agreement/disagreement.**

There is a difference between training and education. Education should be aiming to create sexual literacy which enables an individual to speak about a topic with confidence and competent in their knowledge.

At undergraduate level there needs to be a single integrated curriculum. At post-graduate qualification in RSE for teachers would be excellent.

**What else do you consider important in relation to future curriculum development in SPHE/RSE?**

Providing education at undergraduate level does not facilitate current teachers primary/secondary level. There needs to be a postgraduate programme and continuous CDPs.

## Creating the conditions for effective RSE

The Review makes it clear that teachers need in-depth and sustained training and support in the area of SPHE/RSE. Consequently, access to professional development needs to be enhanced at pre-service and in-service levels. The Review also identified the need to take stock of current teaching and learning resources available in this area.

**To what extent do you broadly agree/disagree with the Review's findings on the necessary conditions for effective SPHE/RSE? Please tick your response in the box below**

Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
x			

**Please provide a reason for your level of agreement/disagreement.**

At present DCU offers a Postgraduate Certificate in Sexuality Education & Sexual Wellbeing (from 2020-21) currently known as Sexuality & Sexual Health Education. Information can be found at [https://www.dcu.ie/courses/Postgraduate/snhs/Graduate-Certificate-Sexuality-Education\\_and-Sexual-Wellbeing.shtml](https://www.dcu.ie/courses/Postgraduate/snhs/Graduate-Certificate-Sexuality-Education_and-Sexual-Wellbeing.shtml)

DCU also offers a Postgraduate Certificate in Relationship & Sexuality Education for people with Intellectual Disability. This is a 30 credit, level 9 programme. Information can be found at <https://www.dcu.ie/courses/Postgraduate/shhp/Graduate-Certificate-Relationships-and-Sexuality-Education-for-People>

Once a programme has been set up the requirement for ongoing CPDs dealing with up-to-date developments. Equally refresher programmes for practioners.

**What else do you consider important in order to create the conditions for effective SPHE/RSE?**

Making SPHE/RSE a compulsory or core element of the educational programme offered in all school. Removing any moral or faith based underpinnings for an ethical human rights centred approach to programmes.

**Other considerations**

The Review concluded that comprehensive oversight and support for SPHE/RSE is required to meet the needs identified in the review process. The Review also found schools cannot do it alone and parents must be encouraged and supported in assuming their responsibility for their child's learning. In addition, it suggests that post-primary schools require further support and guidance in planning for junior cycle wellbeing in order to enhance students' learning in SPHE/RSE.

**To what extent do you broadly agree/disagree that these are important considerations for SPHE/RSE? Please tick your response in the box below.**

Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
x			

**Please provide a reason for your level of agreement/disagreement.**

Parents/Legal Guardians are the primary teachers of children. They also require sexual literacy education. Open and honest dialogue needs to take place where both fears and wishes are aired in a safe place. There is a requirement for programmes for parents/legal guardians to enable them to become comfortable and competent with all areas of sexuality and relationship education.

**Are there any other considerations that should be highlighted in the advice for SPHE/RSE?**

The teaching of SPHE/RSE should not be given to teachers as they embark on their careers. SPHE/RSE should not be at second level a timetable filler. No other discipline should feel comfortable removing students from SPHE/RSE for extra tuition. After all this would not happen to students in Mathematics, Irish or French to name but a few. SPHE/RSE it can be argued is a far more important in its subject matters for lifelong wellbeing. It should never be treated as a second-class subject in the hierarchy of subjects. When it comes to parent-teacher meetings the teachers who teach SPHE/RSE should be a compulsory meet with parents. If parents do not engage at parent-teacher meetings then they too have picked up the unwritten message that SPHE/RSE in the grand scheme of things does not matter. Changing the perception matters. It is disingenuous to think that 3<sup>rd</sup> level institutions are responsible in delivering 'Consent' programmes. At this stage it is too late.

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Outcomers Youth, Dundalk

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<b>Name</b>	Lorna
<b>Surname</b>	Costelloe
<b>Position (if applicable)</b>	Youth Co-Ordinator
<b>Organisation (if applicable)</b>	Outcomers
<b>Date</b>	23.10.19
<b>Email</b>	

**Please provide some brief background information on your organisation (if applicable).**

Outcomers is a social and befriending support centre for gay, lesbian, bi-sexual and transgender (LGBT) people. Our drop-in community centre provides a safe, social and relaxed environment for our LGBT community and is located in the centre of Dundalk town. It has been open since 1997. We work to enhance the life of the Gay Lesbian Bi-sexual & Transgender community in the North-East and the border counties. The centre runs a youth service called As I Am for LGBT+ young people aged 12 – 17.

## The approach

Across all stakeholders, there was strong agreement that RSE needs to be more than information about biological aspects of growing up and sexual activity. It needs a holistic approach that balances discussion about the risks and dangers associated with relationships and sexual activity with discussion about the positive, healthy and enjoyable aspects of relationships. A holistic approach can be understood as teaching and learning about the cognitive, emotional, physical and social aspects of relationships and sexuality. It aims to equip children and young people with knowledge, skills, attitudes and values that will empower them to: realise their health, wellbeing and dignity; develop respectful social and sexual relationships; consider how their choices affect their own wellbeing and that of others; and understand and ensure the protection of their rights throughout their lives.

**To what extent do you broadly agree/disagree with the proposed direction on the approach to RSE that has emerged from the review? Please tick your response in the box below.**

Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Y			

**What are the aspects of the proposed approach that you agree/disagree with?**

We strongly agree with the proposed approach to RSE.

**What else is important when considering the approach for teaching SPHE/RSE in schools?**

It is important that the approach for teaching SPHE/RSE in schools is open, honest, non-judgemental and that the person delivering has confidence in their content and skills.

## The curriculum

The Review highlighted the need to create a single integrated curriculum that sets out the learning for SPHE/RSE as one subject and incrementally provides continuity of experience from early childhood to post-primary. In the immediate term the NCCA will develop interim guidelines to support the current curriculum on how it can be approached in a more holistic way and provide clarity on how topics can be taught in an inclusive manner to incorporate current themes identified by the review.

**To what extent do you broadly agree/disagree with the need for a single integrated curriculum for SPHE/RSE? Please tick your response in the box below.**

Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Y			

**Please provide a reason for your level of agreement/disagreement.**

We agree that SPHE and RSE should become a single integrated curriculum, due to the large amount of overlap between the two subjects. Both RSE and SPHE:

- foster a child's sense of well-being
- empower them to be self-confident
- allow them to develop a sense of belonging and personal responsibility for their actions.
- Provide children and young people with the opportunity to develop the skills to create and maintain healthy and supportive relationships with other people.

By combining the two into a single integrated curriculum that is based on continuity from primary to post primary, it will improve the quality of the education and support children and young people are provided with. It will reduce the issue of time constraints.

If SPHE and RSE are combined it will be much more effective at ensuring children and young people are educated about LGBTQ+ matters (which had 61 respondents mention it in the survey), in a well rounded manner that allows them to learn about the LGBT community rather than only from the viewpoints of them navigating a same sex relationship or sex. It gives LGBT relationships the status of being a real choice rather than just a sexually driven option. For example, by exploring the lived experiences of LGBT+ people, discussing different families including LGBT+ parent families, it allows children and young people to understand that being LGBT+ is not just about sex.

**What else do you consider important in relation to future curriculum development in SPHE/RSE?**

We consider it important to ensure that the quality and content of the RSE is the same in every school in Ireland, and is delivered as a compulsory and uniformed message. The proposed aspects of RSE that need to be addressed cannot only be suggestions that the curriculum has an option for, but modules that must be taught to children and young people in order to ensure every child and young person in Ireland receives a comprehensive education.

The curriculum should (as mentioned in the draft report) link modules together and ensure there isn't unnecessary overlap. For example – LGBTQ+ matters and self-identity will overlap as self-identity can explore gender identity and also your sexual orientation.

It is important that SPHE and RSE in primary schools also includes LGBT+ people, as there are children and young people in these schools have LGBT parents, family members and friends, or who are LGBT+ themselves. The LGBTIreland report (2016) shows that the average age a young person realises they are LGBT is 12 – for transgender children this is often much younger. These children are sitting in classrooms across the country right now, and not receiving any information about who they are, or what their identity means. The National LGBT+ Youth Strategy Goal 1, Action 1 states “Create a more supportive and inclusive environment for LGBTI+ young people in formal education settings” and it is vital that this is applied in both primary and post primary settings.

It is however important that when it is age and developmentally appropriate that young people are taught sexual education that is inclusive, in line with Action 2, Goal 2 “Strengthen sexual health services and education to respond to the needs of LGBTI+ young people, including in the area of sexual consent”.

### **Creating the conditions for effective RSE**

The Review makes it clear that teachers need in-depth and sustained training and support in the area of SPHE/RSE. Consequently, access to professional development needs to be enhanced at pre-service and in-service levels. The Review also identified the need to take stock of current teaching and learning resources available in this area.

**To what extent do you broadly agree/disagree with the Review’s findings on the necessary conditions for effective SPHE/RSE? Please tick your response in the box below**

<b>Strongly Agree</b>	<b>Agree</b>	<b>Disagree</b>	<b>Strongly Disagree</b>
Y			

**Please provide a reason for your level of agreement/disagreement.**

For RSE to be effective, teachers must be confident in their training, and continuously improving.

**What else do you consider important in order to create the conditions for effective SPHE/RSE?**

- Delivery of the program must be guided by policy
- Must be part of a teacher’s education while they are studying to become teachers at primary and post primary.

- Culture of school – must be a whole school approach. It should never be treated a filler, and should be a valued curriculum.

**Other considerations**

The Review concluded that comprehensive oversight and support for SPHE/RSE is required to meet the needs identified in the review process. The Review also found schools cannot do it alone and parents must be encouraged and supported in assuming their responsibility for their child's learning. In addition, it suggests that post-primary schools require further support and guidance in planning for junior cycle wellbeing in order to enhance students' learning in SPHE/RSE.

**To what extent do you broadly agree/disagree that these are important considerations for SPHE/RSE? Please tick your response in the box below.**

Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Y			

**Please provide a reason for your level of agreement/disagreement.**

Guidance for schools around planning is important to consider, and it is vital that parents are encouraged to support SPHE/RSE and that what is on the curriculum is communicated clearly to them.

**Are there any other considerations that should be highlighted in the advice for SPHE/RSE?**

It should be considered that those teaching it should be willing and enthusiastic about teaching the curriculum.

The NCCA fully respects your right to privacy. Any personal information which you volunteer to the NCCA will be treated with the highest standards of security and confidentiality, strictly in accordance with the Data Protection Acts.

If you require further information related to data protection and [www.ncca.ie](http://www.ncca.ie) you can contact the NCCA's Data Protection Officer at [dpo@ncca.ie](mailto:dpo@ncca.ie)

Paraic Kerrigan, University College Dublin

# Review of Relationships and Sexuality Education (RSE)

At the request of the Minister for Education and Skills, a major review of RSE in primary and post-primary schools was undertaken from June 2018 to March 2019. The review examined the experience of teaching and learning in RSE including; the curriculum, the approach to learning, the supports needed, and ways to improve the experience of RSE for students. Engagement in the review was considerable and signals the level of interest and concern people share in relation to this aspect of education. We are now engaging in consultation to ensure the findings and draft advice is reflective of the needs of students, schools, and parents.

In responding to the findings and draft advice on the future directions of RSE it is recommended that you read the draft report or the summary of the draft report both of which are available here <https://www.ncca.ie/en/updates-and-events/consultations/review-of-relationships-and-sexuality-education-rse>.

<b>Name</b>	Dr. Páraic
<b>Surname</b>	Kerrigan
<b>Position (if applicable)</b>	Teaching Fellow
<b>Organisation (if applicable)</b>	University College Dublin
<b>Date</b>	25/10/2019
<b>Email</b>	

**Please provide some brief background information on your organisation (if applicable).**

I work in a higher education institution, which is part of the National University of Ireland Federation.

## The approach

Across all stakeholders, there was strong agreement that RSE needs to be more than information about biological aspects of growing up and sexual activity. It needs a holistic approach that balances discussion about the risks and dangers associated with relationships and sexual activity with discussion about the positive, healthy and enjoyable aspects of relationships. A holistic approach can be understood as teaching and learning about the cognitive, emotional, physical and social aspects of relationships and sexuality. It aims to equip children and young people with knowledge, skills, attitudes and values that will empower them to: realise their health, wellbeing and dignity; develop respectful social and sexual relationships; consider how their choices affect their own wellbeing and that of others; and understand and ensure the protection of their rights throughout their lives.

**To what extent do you broadly agree/disagree with the proposed direction on the approach to RSE that has emerged from the review? Please tick your response in the box below.**

Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
X			

### What are the aspects of the proposed approach that you agree/disagree with?

Going beyond the biological is imperative here and identity formation and the process by which adolescents do this at various stages of their youths should inform RSE. On this note, I agree with the approach to develop the knowledge, skills and attitudes of young people, particularly around their own sexual health, but also, empowering them to take ownership of their sexual health, which has largely been couched in taboo. What seems to be the case from the approach noted above – and something which I hope translates – is the fact that that sexual health, should be put on par alongside physical and mental well-being, given the pervasive rise in STDs throughout the Republic. An early intervention and a holistic approach around this could serve as crucial point of education and development for youths participating in an RSE programme. So the approach above I absolutely agree with and encourage. The specifics of how this will be operationalised however is another story.

### What else is important when considering the approach for teaching SPHE/RSE in schools?

That a normalised approach is taken and when I say this, a culture is established within the class room and the school more broadly that will incubate the delivery and achieve the learning outcomes of RSE. A culture that is inclusive, but to be very blunt, cuts out the awkwardness that could be experienced by both students and teachers when discussing what is traditionally a source of humour for school-going youths. Pedagogical approaches that remove these shames stigmas would go a long way in the approach to teaching here.

## The curriculum

The Review highlighted the need to create a single integrated curriculum that sets out the learning for SPHE/RSE as one subject and incrementally provides continuity of experience from early childhood to post-primary. In the immediate term the NCCA will develop interim guidelines to support the current curriculum on how it can be approached in a more holistic way and provide clarity on how topics can be taught in an inclusive manner to incorporate current themes identified by the review.

**To what extent do you broadly agree/disagree with the need for a single integrated curriculum for SPHE/RSE? Please tick your response in the box below.**

Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
	X	X	

### Please provide a reason for your level of agreement/disagreement.

I am on the fence about this, but the design of this will really need to be modular and robust, to reflect a significant incorporation of RSE elements and not to overshadowed by SPHE components, which could risk teachers avoiding addressing the RSE components. Those who feel awkward about approaching the subject, or even those who might out rightly disagree with the subject, particularly when it came to LGBTQ issues, sex etc., would work around this by focusing more so on the SPHE elements. In that sense, it is crucial that you can ensure the delivery of the RSE components.

### What else do you consider important in relation to future curriculum development in SPHE/RSE?

Actual blunt conversation around sexual health, be that protection, STDs and so on. But not just a male dominated protection of using condoms, but the broad spectrum that incorporates dental dams and so on. Further, a crucial need to address LGBTQ education at this early stage. The literature clearly indicates that primary and post-primary institutions are central to development and formation of LGBTQ identities. Having this development supported by schools and education is crucial, as these youths needs to see themselves reflected back at themselves in a positive way. In light of this, sex education that incorporates gay sexual practices is crucial.

## Creating the conditions for effective RSE

The Review makes it clear that teachers need in-depth and sustained training and support in the area of SPHE/RSE. Consequently, access to professional development needs to be

enhanced at pre-service and in-service levels. The Review also identified the need to take stock of current teaching and learning resources available in this area.

**To what extent do you broadly agree/disagree with the Review’s findings on the necessary conditions for effective SPHE/RSE? Please tick your response in the box below**

<b>Strongly Agree</b>	<b>Agree</b>	<b>Disagree</b>	<b>Strongly Disagree</b>
X			

**Please provide a reason for your level of agreement/disagreement.**

The answer to this is very simple. A lot of teacher’s currently employed, particular as we now live in a new age of identity politics, will have to be trained around this to familiarise themselves with the ways in which identities are not manifested and articulated. Further, correct use of language and using queer pedagogical frameworks to shift ways of thinking towards more inclusive and different approach is significant. This can be provided at the level of training.

**What else do you consider important in order to create the conditions for effective SPHE/RSE?**

Incorporating the work of experts in the field, be that academics or activists. Much literature and approaches have been developed within academia, with various expertise seen in institutions like MU, DCU and UCD. Bridging this research and the tools and measures developed around inclusion and diversity within higher education would greatly benefit training for RSE practitioners.

### **Other considerations**

The Review concluded that comprehensive oversight and support for SPHE/RSE is required to meet the needs identified in the review process. The Review also found schools cannot do it alone and parents must be encouraged and supported in assuming their responsibility for their child's learning. In addition, it suggests that post-primary schools require further support and guidance in planning for junior cycle wellbeing in order to enhance students’ learning in SPHE/RSE.

**To what extent do you broadly agree/disagree that these are important considerations for SPHE/RSE? Please tick your response in the box below.**

<b>Strongly Agree</b>	<b>Agree</b>	<b>Disagree</b>	<b>Strongly Disagree</b>
		X	

**Please provide a reason for your level of agreement/disagreement.**

Of course support of parents is crucial and vital here, but ownership needs to be given over to professionals who are working in education. Parents can help with the education process, but a lot of them are not experts, particularly in relation to RSE. The reason why this is such a pertinent issue right now is because generationally, this kind of education has not been delivered. Instead, why not establish some programmes for parents that corresponds with the learning of the child around RSE. The language and framework that parents have would not be appropriate and I think educational institutions needs to take ownership of this outrightly.

**Are there any other considerations that should be highlighted in the advice for SPHE/RSE?**

- Queer frameworks.
- Courses/programmes for parents to help support the development of the child.
- Guest speakers and activists delivering learning outcomes.

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## Rape Crisis Network Ireland



**RCNI Submission**

**To the National Council for Curriculum & Assessment  
Consultation on the draft report of  
The Review of Relationships and Sexuality Education**

**October 2019**

### Rape Crisis Network Ireland (RCNI)

Rape Crisis Network Ireland (RCNI) is a specialist information and resource centre on rape and all forms of sexual violence. We advocate for the rights of survivors of sexual violence and work towards prevention. The RCNI role includes the development and coordination of national projects such as national education collaborations and using our expertise to influence national policy and social change, and supporting and facilitating multi-agency partnerships. We are owned and governed by our member Rape Crisis Centres who provide free advice, counselling and other support services to survivors of sexual violence in Ireland.

#### 1. Introduction

1.1 RCNI welcomes the active and open engagement facilitated by the NCCA to date on this review and the careful listening that has been evident throughout. The increasing ubiquity of messages about sex and sexual relationships in our cultural spaces, many of them harmful, misogynistic and violent, means that it is imperative that we devise effective tools to support and empower children with information and efficacy to safely and positively engage with their own experiences of sex and sexuality.

1.2 RCNI strongly endorse **the holistic approach** recommended by the report as outlined in the survey. However, we are querying whether there is a critical gap in the depth and breadth of the approach. While the holistic approach derives from the UNESCO definition and therefore includes 'social issues', RCNI wonder if the NCCA report is silent around some of these social issues, namely sexism and its impact on sex and sexuality. We are in agreement that the approach should focus on positive aspects of sex and sexuality, identifying good consent practice and what a good relationship is, but the reality is that the world children currently occupy is heavily gendered and violent.

We wonder at the report's absence of explicit engagement with the issue and reality of sexism, heteronormative gendered sexual expectations, stereotypes, misogyny and indeed violence against women. **An exploration of consent is both disingenuous and dangerous when addressed from an assumption of 'neutrality' or gender blindness.** It is therefore deeply concerning to us that this aspect of consent is all but unspoken throughout this report. While we might, in good faith, understand it to be implicitly understood, it would be wholly irresponsible of us not to make the case, in the strongest possible manner that this should be made explicit for the avoidance of doubt.

An approach that seeks to promote young people making healthy, safe and positive choices and decisions about sex and their sexuality that does not in parallel and explicitly explore the societal constraints and limitations placed upon them in their choice-making has the impact of giving young people responsibility over matters they do not control thus rendering 'empowerment', disempowering.

## RCNI Submission to NCCA on Draft report of the review of RSE

The assertions around empowerment and individuals' development of efficacy in the absence of a critical engagement with our cultural context, may mean that any negative experiences are processed as repeated individual 'failure', inducing apathy and reinforcing a cycle of self and victim-blaming for sexual violence victims. An assumption of a level playing field when the facts attest to unfortunately highly gendered discrimination and oppression is therefore the opposite of 'neutral', it is complicit. We would strongly urge the draft report be amended to avoid inadvertently through omission, replicating conditions that are facilitative of rape-culture.

Please note that on page 74, bullet point three, 'It is inclusive across the domains of sexuality, gender, culture, ethnicity, dis/abilities, faiths and beliefs.' The category of 'sex' has been omitted and needs to be included.

1.3 RCNI strongly endorse the development of a **single integrated curriculum**. Again we would reiterate that the aspects to be addressed must include gendered sexual expectations and discrimination, these are currently not listed on page 75.

1.4 RCNI very much welcome the recommendations to professionalise **SPHE specialisation** and would very much welcome collaborative engagement on supporting resource development, training and CPD should capacity allow.

1.5 Parents and guardians are partners in a child's education, including in RSE. We would endorse the principle that the development of parallel resources for parents about the SPHE programme, is seen as an integral to curriculum development in this area.

1.6 RCNI appreciates the distinction being made by the NCCA report between the cause and symptoms of the challenges faced by SPHE.

1.7 **Short and intermediate term**. We endorse the steps recommended by the report and reiterate that the topics and themes are critically incomplete. In the NCCA development of guidance to support teaching RCNI would recommend a comprehensive consultation process which ensures the voices of specialists on sexual and domestic violence are heard in so far as it is practicable and notwithstanding the sector's capacity challenges.

1.8 We welcome the commitment to engage with the sector on the development of resources and interagency collaboration. A consideration on how that is to be achieved needs to be the funding and capacity crisis in the DVSV sector, evident in the relatively low specialist input into the NCCA consultation process to date.

## RCNI Submission to NCCA on Draft report of the review of RSE

1.9 We welcome the long term goal towards sustainability of specialisation and accreditation.

### **RCNI knowledge base and background to this Submission**

2.1 RCNI has been engaging with the question of education and prevention since our inception. Some key highlights:

- Developed the national standard on awareness raising to move sexual violence prevention education from a victim focus approach to a prevention and bystander focus, it was adopted as national policy, guiding all government spending on awareness raising in this area.
- Worked with USI in 2013 to incorporate consent into their sexual health 3<sup>rd</sup> level education and awareness initiatives.
- Developed a partnership with Foróige nationally to integrate sexual violence prevention into their youth development training Real U Programme which has been rolling out for the past 5 years with the support of Crisis Pregnancy in the HSE.
- Worked with the HSE, Crisis Pregnancy Programme within Healthy Ireland to develop modules for inclusion in the B4Udecide RSE programme for 12 – 15 year olds in a review stage. These modules centre on personal self-awareness, empathy, communications and consent.
- Developed a Transition Year programme alongside the rest of the RCC sector and were the principal beneficiary partner in a successful European Union bid to draw down the funds to equip the roll out of this programme from four rape crisis centres across the country.
- Commissioned 3<sup>rd</sup> level based research to understand sexual consent behaviour out of which emerged a body of further research and activity including the development of the Smart Consent programmes and further research in this area. In the initial research young people in 3<sup>rd</sup> level themselves identified how unprepared they felt for the complexity of negotiating sexual activity and they strongly recommended consent workshops be delivered.
- Development of RCC bystander programme which has been rolled out in some 3<sup>rd</sup> level institutions.
- A member of the RESPECT network which is an interagency 3<sup>rd</sup> level coalition to look at how 3<sup>rd</sup> level institutions respond to and prevent sexual violence.
- Our Executive Director, Dr Clóna Saidléar was a Ministerial appointed expert on the Consent Framework for HEIs group.

## RCNI Submission to NCCA on Draft report of the review of RSE

**Dr. Clíona Saidléar - Executive Director**  
**Rape Crisis Network Ireland clg (RCNI)**  
Carmichael Centre, North Brunswick Street  
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October 2019

Ruairi McBride, University College Limerick

# Review of Relationships and Sexuality Education (RSE)

At the request of the Minister for Education and Skills, a major review of RSE in primary and post-primary schools was undertaken from June 2018 to March 2019. The review examined the experience of teaching and learning in RSE including; the curriculum, the approach to learning, the supports needed, and ways to improve the experience of RSE for students. Engagement in the review was considerable and signals the level of interest and concern people share in relation to this aspect of education. We are now engaging in consultation to ensure the findings and draft advice is reflective of the needs of students, schools, and parents.

In responding to the findings and draft advice on the future directions of RSE it is recommended that you read the draft report or the summary of the draft report both of which are available here <https://www.ncca.ie/en/updates-and-events/consultations/review-of-relationships-and-sexuality-education-rse>.

<b>Name</b>	Ruari-Santiago
<b>Surname</b>	McBride
<b>Position (if applicable)</b>	Irish research council fellow and Marie Curie Fellow
<b>Organisation (if applicable)</b>	University of Limerick / Transgender Equality Network Ireland
<b>Date</b>	24/10/2019
<b>Email</b>	[REDACTED]

**Please provide some brief background information on your organisation (if applicable).**

I am researcher co-funded by the Irish Research Council and Marie Curie Actions to conduct a research project investigating the post-primary school experiences of transgender youth in Ireland. I am employed by the University of Limerick and collaborate closely with Transgender Equality Network Ireland.

## The approach

Across all stakeholders, there was strong agreement that RSE needs to be more than information about biological aspects of growing up and sexual activity. It needs a holistic approach that balances discussion about the risks and dangers associated with relationships and sexual activity with discussion about the positive, healthy and enjoyable aspects of relationships. A holistic approach can be understood as teaching and learning about the cognitive, emotional, physical and social aspects of relationships and sexuality. It aims to equip children and young people with knowledge, skills, attitudes and values that will empower them to: realise their health, wellbeing and dignity; develop respectful social and

sexual relationships; consider how their choices affect their own wellbeing and that of others; and understand and ensure the protection of their rights throughout their lives.

**To what extent do you broadly agree/disagree with the proposed direction on the approach to RSE that has emerged from the review? Please tick your response in the box below.**

Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
	x		

**What are the aspects of the proposed approach that you agree/disagree with?**

While the approach described is to be commended it fails to appreciate the importance of providing students with the ability to critical reflect on relationships and sexuality. The approach offers no intention to provide students/young people with the ability to understand how social norms associated with relationships and sexuality shape their experience and those of others. Critical reflexivity should be an essential facet of RSE as providing young people with the ability to understand: (a) how social and cultural norms influence relationship dynamics, such as partner communication and expectations; and, (b) how political interests have used norms to marginalise segments of society. In sum, the approach described fails to take into consideration the need to educate young people to appreciate that relationships and sexuality are not interpersonal issues, but also matters of social justice. This is particularly important given the history of institutional abuse in Ireland and the use of sexuality for coercive social control of women and the LGBTI+ community.

**What else is important when considering the approach for teaching SPHE/RSE in schools?**

I think the approach taken should explicitly recognise the right of children and young people to self-determination and to be free of discrimination in relation to this subject area.

### **The curriculum**

The Review highlighted the need to create a single integrated curriculum that sets out the learning for SPHE/RSE as one subject and incrementally provides continuity of experience from early childhood to post-primary. In the immediate term the NCCA will develop interim guidelines to support the current curriculum on how it can be approached in a more holistic way and provide clarity on how topics can be taught in an inclusive manner to incorporate current themes identified by the review.

**To what extent do you broadly agree/disagree with the need for a single integrated curriculum for SPHE/RSE? Please tick your response in the box below.**

Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
	x		

**Please provide a reason for your level of agreement/disagreement.**

The need to combine SPHE/RSE seems necessary to reduce confusion. However, this does not appear to deal with what is perhaps the most important facet, which is the 'age appropriate' delivery of curriculum material. For example, LGBTI+ youth matters are rarely covered prior to 5<sup>th</sup> year. This is way too late for young people who have come to self-realise that they identify as LGBTI+. LGBTI+ matters should be dealt with in a matter of fact way from an early age and throughout their education. This will help all students. It will normalise the reality that LGBTI+ exist, which in turn will contribute to destigmatisation and reduction in discrimination and violence. However, to bring about this change will require collaboration between administration, educators, parents, and NGOs.

The current curriculum materials, while in need of updating and refinement, are not that bad. It is implementation which is the major issue.

**What else do you consider important in relation to future curriculum development in SPHE/RSE?**

The Draft report appears to homogenise LGBTQI+ youth. In particular it appears to conflate transgender identities with issues of sexual orientation. Furthermore, while the draft report acknowledges greater inclusivity, it says little substantively about the inclusion of gender identity and transgender identities in future curriculum development. It is important to note that the need to include issues relating to gender diversity within curriculums and pay specific attention to the needs of transgender students has been noted in several key sexuality education guides and reports, including: (a) Guidelines for Comprehensive Sexuality Education (Sexuality Information and Education Council of the United States 2004), Standards for Sexuality Education in Europe (WHO Regional Office for Europe and BZgA 2010); (b) the International Technical Guidance on Sexuality Education (UNESCO 2009); and, (c) the Sexual and Reproductive Health of Young People in Asia and the Pacific (UNFPA, UNESCO, and WHO 2015). The value of developing curriculum content regarding gender issues generally and gender diversity specifically is of crucial importance for all students, irrespective of whether they are trans or cisgender. It provides them with the capacity for self-understanding and empathy for others. The curriculum should be developed in order to facilitate open dialogue and critical reflection on gender and sexuality diversity in order to reduce inequalities experienced by LGBTQI+ youth. However, it is particularly important for transgender youth who experience marginalisation due to curriculum silences. Curriculum silences lead many trans youth to struggle to come to terms with their gender identity. This can have a negative and long lasting impact on their on the emotional wellbeing and psychological health. It is therefore essential that in developing the curriculum understanding of how socio-cultural norms impact relationships and contribute to prejudice and discrimination is incorporated.

## Creating the conditions for effective RSE

The Review makes it clear that teachers need in-depth and sustained training and support in the area of SPHE/RSE. Consequently, access to professional development needs to be enhanced at pre-service and in-service levels. The Review also identified the need to take stock of current teaching and learning resources available in this area.

**To what extent do you broadly agree/disagree with the Review’s findings on the necessary conditions for effective SPHE/RSE? Please tick your response in the box below**

Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
	x		

### **Please provide a reason for your level of agreement/disagreement.**

Although a cultural shift is occurring towards a more open and inclusive educational culture, there is still considerable fear and discomfort among significant proportion of educators in discussing matters of sexual orientation and gender identity. This leads educators to marginalise these topics in the delivery of RSE. The effect of which is to exclude LGBTI+ youth, adding to feelings of internal shame and isolation. Educators urgently need training at all levels in this area. Pre-service training needs to incorporate LGBTQI+ youth, as well as other marginalised groups such as differently abled youth, traveller youth and youth of colour, throughout and not be included simply as a once off session. In addition qualified educators should be offered training on issues such as inclusion and diversity. There should also be more effort to incorporate the experiences of LGBTI+ youth and other marginalised youth across training initiatives – and not simply have them as a ‘once off’ issue. There are myriad of resources available from NGOs – educators should be encourage to utilise these and funding provided to enable schools to liaise with external organisations to facilitate their implementation.

### **What else do you consider important in order to create the conditions for effective SPHE/RSE?**

It is quite clear many educators avoid ‘difficult’ topics out of personal discomfort and fear of parental backlash. This is fundamentally unacceptable. Educators need to be supported to overcome these fears and be provided with practical strategies with how to engage parents around potentially sensitive topics. Furthermore, when topics such as gender identity / transgender issues / sexual orientation are covered students may respond in a multitude of ways, including in ways that harmful LGBTQI+ youth. Educators need to be aware that how peers respond can have an emotional impact on LGBTQI+ youth who may or may not be out. That they should be supported by giving them practical strategies of how to recognize homophobic/transphobic (as well as racist, sexist, ableist, etc.) language and intervene. If a educator witnesses discriminatory behavior and doesn’t intervene this greatly enhances the negative impact on the young person targeted. Intervention on the other hand validates that discrimination has occurred and that it is not acceptable. Increasing educators’ personal efficacy in this regard will help create the conditions for effective SPHE/RSE.

Currently, RSE seems to be commonly integrated within religious education and taught by religious teachers. In some cases this can work perfectly fine. However, the relationships between

RE and RSE can make some students uncomfortable due to negative associations and experiences with religion. The religious framing of SPHE/RSE can also generate barriers to open dialogue around certain issues due to perceived bias. Some RE teachers and other educators with strong convictions are prejudiced towards LGBTI+ youth and exhibit homophobic/transphobic behaviour. Clear separation of SPHE/RSE from RE will help create the conditions for effective SPHE/RSE.

### Other considerations

The Review concluded that comprehensive oversight and support for SPHE/RSE is required to meet the needs identified in the review process. The Review also found schools cannot do it alone and parents must be encouraged and supported in assuming their responsibility for their child's learning. In addition, it suggests that post-primary schools require further support and guidance in planning for junior cycle wellbeing in order to enhance students' learning in SPHE/RSE.

**To what extent do you broadly agree/disagree that these are important considerations for SPHE/RSE? Please tick your response in the box below.**

Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
	x		

### Please provide a reason for your level of agreement/disagreement.

Yes, the implementation of SPHE/RSE should be subject to review. It is essential that schools receiving public funds provide comprehensive SPHE/RSE so as to properly equip students. Schools can encourage and support parents by providing them with the same information that they provide students and having open dialogue with them. Parents should be offered the opportunity to give their views on SPHE/RSE curriculum and delivery, but this should never be to the extent that enables bigotry into the classroom.

'Wellbeing' is used twice in the new SPHE/RSE 'approach'. There is also considerable overlap between the SPHE/RSE and the wellbeing curriculums, e.g. gender identity is covered on paper in both. Schools will therefore benefit from guidance in order to ensure that the curriculums are delivered coherently to be mutually reinforcing. Educators need to know where SPHE/RSE will sit in relation to the new wellbeing framework for there to be synergic messages across both curriculums. There is a considerable chance for confusion that will perpetuate the longstanding exclusion of particular topics, such as LGBTI+ issues.

### Are there any other considerations that should be highlighted in the advice for SPHE/RSE?

External agencies have an important role to play in this area. Schools should be encouraged to develop links with LGBTQI+ groups in the area and support initiatives such as Stand Up week as part of the SPHE/RSE curriculum. External agencies can provide

training to SPHE/RSE educators and school leaders. They could also provide supervision to help SPHE/RSE teachers in their professional development.

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Ruhama

# Review of Relationships and Sexuality Education (RSE)

At the request of the Minister for Education and Skills, a major review of RSE in primary and post-primary schools was undertaken from June 2018 to March 2019. The review examined the experience of teaching and learning in RSE including; the curriculum, the approach to learning, the supports needed, and ways to improve the experience of RSE for students. Engagement in the review was considerable and signals the level of interest and concern people share in relation to this aspect of education. We are now engaging in consultation to ensure the findings and draft advice is reflective of the needs of students, schools, and parents.

In responding to the findings and draft advice on the future directions of RSE it is recommended that you read the draft report or the summary of the draft report both of which are available here <https://www.ncca.ie/en/updates-and-events/consultations/review-of-relationships-and-sexuality-education-rse>.

<b>Name</b>	Barbara
<b>Surname</b>	Condon
<b>Position (if applicable)</b>	CEO
<b>Organisation (if applicable)</b>	Ruhama
<b>Date</b>	24 <sup>th</sup> October 2019
<b>Email</b>	[REDACTED]

**Please provide some brief background information on your organisation (if applicable).**

[Ruhama](#) is Ireland's only dedicated frontline NGO supporting women affected by prostitution and/or sex trafficking at any time in their lives. For three decades, Ruhama has been providing a broad

range of holistic support services to women who have been impacted by commercial sexual exploitation.

The services we provide include an emergency response, advocacy and accompaniment, education and job-seeking programmes, housing and social welfare supports, assistance with immigration issues, and counselling and other holistic therapies. We currently work with over 300 women per year from over 40 countries.

We also work to change public attitudes, practices and policies which allow the exploitation of women through trafficking and prostitution.

### **The approach**

Across all stakeholders, there was strong agreement that RSE needs to be more than information about biological aspects of growing up and sexual activity. It needs a holistic approach that balances discussion about the risks and dangers associated with relationships and sexual activity with discussion about the positive, healthy and enjoyable aspects of relationships. A holistic approach can be understood as teaching and learning about the cognitive, emotional, physical and social aspects of relationships and sexuality. It aims to equip children and young people with knowledge, skills, attitudes and values that will empower them to: realise their health, wellbeing and dignity; develop respectful social and sexual relationships; consider how their choices affect their own wellbeing and that of others; and understand and ensure the protection of their rights throughout their lives.

**To what extent do you broadly agree/disagree with the proposed direction on the approach to RSE that has emerged from the review? Please tick your response in the box below.**

<b>Strongly Agree</b>	<b>Agree</b>	<b>Disagree</b>	<b>Strongly Disagree</b>
✓			

### **What are the aspects of the proposed approach that you agree/disagree with?**

We agree that the proposed approach must incorporate far more than simply the biological aspects of growing up and sexual activity. This is much too simplistic and does not allow young people the space to explore the complex realities of relationships and sexualities. Education about relationships and sexuality must expand to include the positive, healthy and enjoyable aspects of relationships while still raising awareness of the risks and dangers involved so that young people can make informed decisions.

We agree that the approach ought to allow young people to: realise their health, wellbeing and dignity; develop respectful social and sexual relationships; consider how their choices affect their own wellbeing and that of others; and understand and ensure the protection of their rights throughout their lives.

**With regard to all of the above, we strongly advocate that the adverse impacts of prostitution and sex trafficking on the people involved are included in the approach at secondary level. Prostitution negatively impacts upon the health, wellbeing and dignity of those (primarily women) in the sex trade.<sup>1</sup> Men who pay for sexual access to women in prostitution display disrespectful, misogynistic attitudes about women in general, and tend to see women in prostitution as inherently 'different' to 'other' women. They are also more likely to commit violence against women.<sup>2</sup> The choice of men who pay for access to women in the sex trade must be addressed, and young men must be encouraged to think critically about prostitution. Their choice is in stark contrast to the women who are exploited in prostitution as most are there due to an absence of other choices, backgrounds of trauma and abuse, and violence and coercion at the hands of pimps and traffickers.**

The psychological and emotional harms of prostitution include (but are not limited to): trauma and post-traumatic stress disorder; disembodiment; dissociation; anxiety; depression; addiction; suicidal ideation; low self-esteem; self-objectification; humiliation.<sup>3</sup>

The physical harms include (but are not limited to): sexual assault; rape; physical assault (with or without weapons); torture; STIs; HIV; and increased risks of gynaecological issues including cervical cancer.

Melissa Farley et al. (2003) interviewed 854 individuals currently, or recently, involved in prostitution across 9 countries.<sup>4</sup> They found the following:

- 71% were physically assaulted in prostitution
- 63% were raped
- 89% wanted to leave prostitution
- 68% met the criteria for PTSD (p.34)
- 48% reported drug use & 52% reported alcohol use. In some countries, use of drugs ranged between 70-95% of respondents and alcohol between 71-100% (p.48)

The [European Commission's Study on the Gendered Dimension of Trafficking in Human Beings](#) (2016)<sup>5</sup> brings together research on the harms of trafficking for the purposes of sexual exploitation. The report notes the following:

- Women trafficked for sexual exploitation face repeated rape and sexual violence, and are frequently coerced into alcohol use to lower resistance to rape (p.34)
- PTSD, depression, eating disorders, suicide attempts, panic attacks, anxiety, self-harm and dis-associative disorder (DID) have all been noted in victims of trafficking for sexual exploitation
- The impacts of grooming, coercion, threats, isolation, violence, substance abuse and trauma are severe and enduring for victims of sex trafficking (p.35)

Young people must be equipped with the facts around commercial sexual exploitation. This is particularly important for boys and young men as males represent 98% of those who pay for sex in Ireland, and **15% of them are under the age of 25.**<sup>6</sup> Their demand fuels and sustains the sex trade.

Since 2017, the law in Ireland criminalises the purchase of so-called sexual services in order to deter, disrupt and reduce the demand for prostitution and prevent human trafficking for the purposes of sexual exploitation. This legislation will be most effective when coupled with broader education and awareness-raising that the purchases of sex is not a benign act and not a victimless crime. Up to 97% of those exploited in prostitution in Ireland are migrant women from backgrounds of deprivation, marginalisation and sexual abuse.<sup>7</sup> International research indicates

that a significant proportion of all who enter the sex trade, enter as minors as a result of coercion, trafficking and dire economic circumstances.<sup>8</sup> An issue of concern is the hyper-sexualisation of girls and young women in broader society and this should be addressed in RSE.

Young people must be engaged as agents of change in tackling commercial sexual exploitation.

We are also concerned at the rise in 'Sugar Dating' and 'sex for rent'. Young men must be brought to the conclusion that it is an abuse of power to exploit the economic situations of women for their own gratification. Young women should be equipped with the knowledge that there are people out there who are willing to exploit their financially precarious situations, and that these situations can cause long-term issues.

### **What else is important when considering the approach for teaching SPHE/RSE in schools?**

We are hearing more frequently from our service users, as well other frontline organisations working with women in the sex trade, that those who pay for so-called sexual services are increasingly influenced by pornography and are demanding acts that they have seen in porn from women in prostitution.

Pornography is an aspect of the commercial sex trade that must be included in the curriculum. Research carried out in Sweden with women who were filmed for pornography indicates an overrepresentation of women in financially precarious situations, who had also been subject to previous sexualized violence in their lives. This shows a direct link between the vulnerabilities of those exploited in both prostitution and pornography and young people must be made aware of the abusive nature of the entire sex trade.<sup>9</sup> The rapid advent of new forms of technology has made it easy for young people to access pornography online, and there is growing evidence that indicates worrying links between the consumption of porn and violent behaviours in young men.<sup>10</sup> Furthermore, those (male and female) who consume pornography are more likely to express dissatisfaction in their sexual relationships than those who do not.<sup>11</sup> The average age that children first watch pornography is 11.<sup>12</sup> 88% of scenes in the most viewed pornography include scenes of violence against women.<sup>13</sup>

There is a wide range of resources available to speak to young people about the impacts of the commercial sex trade on themselves and others that the curriculum should review for inclusion.<sup>14</sup>

## **The curriculum**

The Review highlighted the need to create a single integrated curriculum that sets out the learning for SPHE/RSE as one subject and incrementally provides continuity of experience from early childhood to post-primary. In the immediate term the NCCA will develop interim guidelines to support the current curriculum on how it can be approached in a more holistic way and provide clarity on how topics can be taught in an inclusive manner to incorporate current themes identified by the review.

**To what extent do you broadly agree/disagree with the need for a single integrated curriculum for SPHE/RSE? Please tick your response in the box below.**

Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
	✓		

**Please provide a reason for your level of agreement/disagreement.**

While RSE & SPHE are interlinked, it is important that sufficient time is allocated specifically to relationships and sexuality within an integrated curriculum. Educators ought to be given enough time to teach this material, and also held accountable for deviating from it.

**What else do you consider important in relation to future curriculum development in SPHE/RSE?**

Topics covered at the various levels across primary and secondary schools should be age-appropriate and flexibility allocated for within the framework to allow educators to focus on situations that most impact on the students.

The curriculum should allow for reviews to take place at specific intervals so that it can be adjusted and improved accordingly (if necessary) based on feedback from students, educators and other relevant stakeholders.

Schools should not be given the option to opt out of teaching particular topics on the curriculum based on their ethos. The SPHE/RSE curriculum, and all its content within, ought to be mandatory for all schools.

### **Creating the conditions for effective RSE**

The Review makes it clear that teachers need in-depth and sustained training and support in the area of SPHE/RSE. Consequently, access to professional development needs to be enhanced at pre-service and in-service levels. The Review also identified the need to take stock of current teaching and learning resources available in this area.

**To what extent do you broadly agree/disagree with the Review’s findings on the necessary conditions for effective SPHE/RSE? Please tick your response in the box below**

<b>Strongly Agree</b>	<b>Agree</b>	<b>Disagree</b>	<b>Strongly Disagree</b>
✓			

**Please provide a reason for your level of agreement/disagreement**

It is important to review the current standard of teaching and learning resources available to educators in order to create a baseline to measure improvements throughout implementation of the curriculum.

Not all teachers will be familiar, or comfortable, with the topics contained within the curriculum so they will need in-depth and ongoing training in order to build their capacity to educate students on the subject. This will build their confidence in teaching the area, which will create a more engaging environment for students.

We agree with the idea of developing a post-graduate qualification in SPHE/RSE. However, it will take significant time to train a sufficient number of teachers. Therefore, resources must be channelled in the interim towards training current teachers and upskilling them in this area.

**What else do you consider important in order to create the conditions for effective SPHE/RSE?**

Teachers who raise objections to the content taught in SPHE/RSE must be made aware of the importance of covering all of the topics. If they continue to raise objections, for whatever reason, then schools must ensure that a suitable teacher is assigned to teach the subject.

Creative and engaging methodologies should be encouraged in teaching the curriculum, and it should not be taught in traditional lecture style. Students must be given a safe space to engage in dialogue and raise the issues that impact them most and teachers must be capable of facilitating this learning.

In order to supplement the curriculum, schools should consider the option of bringing in external speakers to facilitate learning on particular topics, particularly those with expertise on the continuum of sexual violence. This will enhance students’ understanding of these issues and increase their capacity to think critically beyond what is contained in the curriculum.

**Other considerations**

The Review concluded that comprehensive oversight and support for SPHE/RSE is required to meet the needs identified in the review process. The Review also found schools cannot do it alone and parents must be encouraged and supported in assuming their responsibility for their child's learning. In addition, it suggests that post-primary schools require further support and guidance in planning for junior cycle wellbeing in order to enhance students' learning in SPHE/RSE.

**To what extent do you broadly agree/disagree that these are important considerations for SPHE/RSE? Please tick your response in the box below.**

<b>Strongly Agree</b>	<b>Agree</b>	<b>Disagree</b>	<b>Strongly Disagree</b>
	✓		

**Please provide a reason for your level of agreement/disagreement.**

While parents should be supplementing and supporting their children's learning in RSE/SPHE, parents should also be supported themselves to provide children with relevant, accurate and up-to-date information to minimize the risk of contradiction with the official curriculum and avoid conflicting messages. This could be achieved in a number of ways, including through a public awareness-raising campaign, the development of guidance materials and the establishment of peer-support groups amongst parents.

**Are there any other considerations that should be highlighted in the advice for SPHE/RSE?**

The NCCA fully respects your right to privacy. Any personal information which you volunteer to the NCCA will be treated with the highest standards of security and confidentiality, strictly in accordance with the Data Protection Acts.

If you require further information related to data protection and [www.ncca.ie](http://www.ncca.ie) you can contact the NCCA's Data Protection Officer at [dpo@ncca.ie](mailto:dpo@ncca.ie)

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<sup>1</sup> *Risks of Prostitution: When the person is the product* M. Farley (2018) <http://prostitutionresearch.com/wp-content/uploads/2018/01/Farley-When-the-Person-Is-the-Product-2018.pdf>

<sup>2</sup> *Comparing sex buyers with men who do not buy sex: New data on prostitution and trafficking* M. Farley et al. (2015) <http://prostitutionresearch.com/wp-content/uploads/2015/09/Comparing-Sex-Buyers-With-Men-Who-Do-Not-Buy-Sex.pdf>

<sup>3</sup> Ruhama Annual Report 2018 <https://www.ruhama.ie/wp-content/uploads/Ruhama-Annual-Report-2018.pdf>

<sup>4</sup> Farley et al. (2003) "Prostitution and Trafficking in Nine Countries: An Update on Posttraumatic Stress Disorder" *Journal of Trauma Practice* Vol. 2, No. 3/4 pp. 33-74: <http://www.prostitutionresearch.com/pdf/Prostitutionin9Countries.pdf>

<sup>5</sup> *Study on the gender dimensions of trafficking in human beings* European Commission [https://ec.europa.eu/anti-trafficking/eu-policy/study-gender-dimension-trafficking-human-beings\\_en](https://ec.europa.eu/anti-trafficking/eu-policy/study-gender-dimension-trafficking-human-beings_en)

<sup>6</sup> *Stop Traffick! Tackling demand for sexual services of trafficked women and girls* N. Yonkova & E. Keegan (2014) <http://www.stoptraffick.ie/wp-content/uploads/2013/03/STOP-TRAFFICK-full-report.pdf>

<sup>7</sup> *Globalisation, Sex Trafficking & Prostitution: The Experiences of Migrant Women in Ireland* M. O'Connor & J. Pillinger 2009 <https://www.immigrantcouncil.ie/sites/default/files/2017-09/AT%202009%20Globalisation%2C%20Sex%20trafficking%20%26%20Prostitution%20Report%20SUMMARY.pdf>

<sup>8</sup> *Prostitution: an extreme form of girls' sexualization* M. Farley (2013) <http://prostitutionresearch.com/wp-content/uploads/2016/08/Sexualization-of-GirlsProstitution2013.pdf>

<sup>9</sup> *Out Of Sight, Out Of Mind – Insights Into The Swedish Pornography Industry* Talita, Sweden (2019) [https://talita.se/assets/dokument/rapport\\_eng.pdf](https://talita.se/assets/dokument/rapport_eng.pdf)

<sup>10</sup> *Pornography, Sexual Coercion and Abuse and Sexting in Young People's Intimate Relationships: A European Study* N. Stanley et al. (2016) <http://prostitutionresearch.com/wp-content/uploads/2016/03/Pornography-Sexual-Coercion-and-Abuse-and-Sexting-in-Young-Peoples-Intimate-Relationships-A-European-Study.-2016.pdf>

<sup>11</sup> *Porn studies involving female subjects: negative effects on arousal, sexual satisfaction, and relationships* Your Brain on Porn (2017) <http://prostitutionresearch.com/wp-content/uploads/2017/05/Your-Brain-on-Porn-Porn-studies-involving-female-subjects2017.pdf>

<sup>12</sup> *Kids are seeing porn sooner than adults think* New Jersey Herald (2018) <https://www.njherald.com/lifestyle/20180408/kids-are-seeing-porn-sooner-than-adults-think>

<sup>13</sup> *The Problem Culture Reframed* <https://www.culturereframed.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/05/CR-The-Problem.pdf>

<sup>14</sup> See [www.culturereframed.org/resources](http://www.culturereframed.org/resources)

Safe Ireland

# Review of Relationships and Sexuality Education (RSE)

At the request of the Minister for Education and Skills, a major review of RSE in primary and post-primary schools was undertaken from June 2018 to March 2019. The review examined the experience of teaching and learning in RSE including; the curriculum, the approach to learning, the supports needed, and ways to improve the experience of RSE for students. Engagement in the review was considerable and signals the level of interest and concern people share in relation to this aspect of education. We are now engaging in consultation to ensure the findings and draft advice is reflective of the needs of students, schools, and parents.

In responding to the findings and draft advice on the future directions of RSE it is recommended that you read the draft report or the summary of the draft report both of which are available here <https://www.ncca.ie/en/updates-and-events/consultations/review-of-relationships-and-sexuality-education-rse>.

<b>Name</b>	Caitriona
<b>Surname</b>	Gleeson
<b>Position (if applicable)</b>	Programme & Communication Manager
<b>Organisation (if applicable)</b>	Safe Ireland
<b>Date</b>	25 <sup>th</sup> of October 2019
<b>Email</b>	[REDACTED]

**Please provide some brief background information on your organisation (if applicable).**

Safe Ireland is the National Social Change Agency working to end gender based violence with a specific focus on male violence against women in intimate/domestic relationships. We believe that at the root of all violence is what happens in the home and that the single biggest barrier to achieving gender equality and human rights for women is the high prevalence of gender based violence and its wider personal, family, social and economic impacts. We are working to make Ireland the safest

country in the world for women and children. We collaborate closely with 38 frontline domestic violence services across communities in Ireland, state agencies, civic society organisations, business, community, and cultural organisations throughout the country. We work directly with women to bring their experiences and voices into research, policy, service development and violence prevention programmes. Our core strategic focus is to change culture and transform the response to gender based violence in Ireland and to progress towards realising our vision for a safe Ireland.

### The approach

Across all stakeholders, there was strong agreement that RSE needs to be more than information about biological aspects of growing up and sexual activity. It needs a holistic approach that balances discussion about the risks and dangers associated with relationships and sexual activity with discussion about the positive, healthy and enjoyable aspects of relationships. A holistic approach can be understood as teaching and learning about the cognitive, emotional, physical and social aspects of relationships and sexuality. It aims to equip children and young people with knowledge, skills, attitudes and values that will empower them to: realise their health, wellbeing and dignity; develop respectful social and sexual relationships; consider how their choices affect their own wellbeing and that of others; and understand and ensure the protection of their rights throughout their lives.

**To what extent do you broadly agree/disagree with the proposed direction on the approach to RSE that has emerged from the review? Please tick your response in the box below.**

Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
	x		

#### What are the aspects of the proposed approach that you agree/disagree with?

Safe Ireland agrees with the holistic approach recommended by the report, however urges explicit engagement with the issues of sexism, stereotypes, heteronormative gendered sexual expectations and violence against women.

**The Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against women (CEDAW)**, articles 5 and 10(c) recommend that: States parties strengthen efforts and take proactive measures to eliminate gender stereotyping in education that perpetuate direct and indirect discrimination against girls and women by:

- a)** challenging and changing patriarchal ideologies and structures that limit girls and women from fully exercising their human right and freedom to enjoy their rights to, within and through education;
- b)** developing and implementing policies and programmes, including awareness-raising and educational campaigns about the Convention, gender relations and gender equality, at all levels of schooling and society at large, directed at 'modifying social and cultural patterns of conduct of men and women with a view of achieving the elimination of prejudices and customary practices'
- d)** revising and developing non-stereotypical educational curricula, textbooks and teaching materials to eliminate traditional gender stereotypes that reproduce and reinforce gender-based discrimination against girls and women and to promote more balanced, accurate, healthy, and positive projections of female images and voices;
- e)** instituting mandatory training of teaching staff at all levels of education on gender issues and gender sensitivity and the impact of their gendered behaviours on teaching and learning processes.

**The Istanbul Convention** was ratified by Ireland on the 8<sup>th</sup> of March 2019. Under general obligations, Article 12 asserts that:

- Parties shall take the necessary measures to promote changes in the social and cultural patterns of behaviour of women and men with a view to eradicating prejudices, customs, traditions and all other practices which are based on the idea of the inferiority of women or on stereotyped roles for women and men.
- Parties shall take the necessary measures to encourage all members of society, especially men and boys, to contribute actively to preventing all forms of violence covered by the scope of this Convention.
- Parties shall ensure that culture, custom, religion, tradition or so-called "honour" shall not be considered as justification for any acts of violence covered by the scope of this Convention.
- Parties shall take the necessary measures to promote programmes and activities for the empowerment of women.

In relation to **Education**, Article 14 asserts:

- Parties shall take, where appropriate, the necessary steps to include teaching material on issues such as equality between women and men, non-stereotyped gender roles, mutual respect, non-violent conflict resolution in interpersonal relationships, gender-based violence against women and the right to personal integrity, adapted to the evolving capacity of learners, in formal curricula and at all levels of education.

**What else is important when considering the approach for teaching SPHE/RSE in schools?**

In relation to training of professionals, Article 15 of the Istanbul Convention asserts:

- Parties shall provide or strengthen appropriate training for the relevant professionals dealing with victims or perpetrators of all acts of violence covered by the scope of this Convention, on the prevention and detection of such violence, equality between women and men, the needs and rights of victims, as well as on how to prevent secondary victimisation.
- Parties shall encourage that the training referred to in paragraph 1 includes training on co-ordinated multi-agency co-operation to allow for a comprehensive and appropriate handling of referrals in cases of violence covered by the scope of this Convention.

It is therefore of great importance that teachers are facilitated with pre delivery education and continuous professional development opportunities to ensure consistency in delivery of the curriculum

**The curriculum**

The Review highlighted the need to create a single integrated curriculum that sets out the learning for SPHE/RSE as one subject and incrementally provides continuity of experience from early childhood to post-primary. In the immediate term the NCCA will develop interim guidelines to support the current curriculum on how it can be approached in a more holistic way and provide clarity on how topics can be taught in an inclusive manner to incorporate current themes identified by the review.

**To what extent do you broadly agree/disagree with the need for a single integrated curriculum for SPHE/RSE? Please tick your response in the box below.**

Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
X			

**Please provide a reason for your level of agreement/disagreement.**

Safe Ireland agrees with the development of a single integrated curriculum, but urges the inclusion of gendered sexual expectations and discrimination, these are currently not listed on page 75.

**What else do you consider important in relation to future curriculum development in SPHE/RSE?**

It is essential that there is an explicit focus on GBV that reflects the prevalence of experience within the population and the relationship between complex trauma and intersecting experiences. The majority of households affected by domestic violence have children living in them (Kaukinen, Powers, & Meyer, 2016). Children and adolescents living with domestic violence are at increased risk of experiencing emotional, physical and sexual abuse, of developing emotional and behavioural problems and of increased exposure to the presence of other adversities in their lives. (Holt et al. 2008). The current curriculum does not adequately address the lived experience of and risk to children and young people.

It is essential that there is a clear focus on behaviour and attitudes in relation to gender incorporated in the new curriculum. In a recent study conducted by SAFER (Systematic approaches for the equality of gender), 29% of the students interviewed held stereotyped attitudes towards gender. The relationship between stereotypical attitudes and domestic violence are very well established.

It is essential that the offence of Coercive Control (Domestic Violence Act 2018) is included in future content.

**Creating the conditions for effective RSE**

The Review makes it clear that teachers need in-depth and sustained training and support in the area of SPHE/RSE. Consequently, access to professional development needs to be enhanced at pre-service and in-service levels. The Review also identified the need to take stock of current teaching and learning resources available in this area.

**To what extent do you broadly agree/disagree with the Review’s findings on the necessary conditions for effective SPHE/RSE? Please tick your response in the box below**

Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
X			

**Please provide a reason for your level of agreement/disagreement.**

Safe Ireland welcomes this recommendation and would very much welcome collaborative engagement on supporting resource development, training and CPD.

The identified lack of consistency in relation to content and delivery can be addressed by ensuring adequate pre-service education, CPD opportunities and resources in specialist areas e.g. GBV, ensuring that teachers are sufficiently knowledgeable and prepared to deliver the curriculum and are sufficiently knowledgeable and prepared to recognise and respond to disclosures of domestic violence in a class setting.

**What else do you consider important in order to create the conditions for effective SPHE/RSE?**

In relation to behaviours and attitudes, it is essential that teachers understand their critical position in recognising and responding to domestic violence. In a recent study conducted by SAFER, a significant number of teachers interviewed disclosed that they did not feel competent in responding to GBV. 35% of the teachers interviewed felt that it was not their responsibility to eliminate GBV in school.

**Other considerations**

The Review concluded that comprehensive oversight and support for SPHE/RSE is required to meet the needs identified in the review process. The Review also found schools cannot do it alone and parents must be encouraged and supported in assuming their responsibility for their child's learning. In addition, it suggests that post-primary schools require further support and guidance in planning for junior cycle wellbeing in order to enhance students' learning in SPHE/RSE.

**To what extent do you broadly agree/disagree that these are important considerations for SPHE/RSE? Please tick your response in the box below.**

Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
X			

**Please provide a reason for your level of agreement/disagreement.**

Safe Ireland welcomes the recommendation to include comprehensive oversight and support for SPHE/RSE. An oversight mechanism is essential to ensuring that the curriculum content and delivery are consistent across all schools, that there is the opportunity to review and revise as appropriate.

**Are there any other considerations that should be highlighted in the advice for SPHE/RSE?**

Broader referral pathways need to be established and sustained to respond to the experiences of students and their families in the context of domestic violence. Specialist domestic violence services can also provide invaluable support to teachers in preparation of and in response to delivery of the related curriculum

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ShoutOut.ie

# Review of Relationships and Sexuality Education (RSE)

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<b>Name</b>	Bella
<b>Surname</b>	FitzPatrick
<b>Position (if applicable)</b>	Executive Director
<b>Organisation (if applicable)</b>	ShoutOut
<b>Date</b>	25 <sup>th</sup> October 2019
<b>Email</b>	D [REDACTED]

**Please provide some brief background information on your organisation (if applicable).**

ShoutOut is a charity aiming to improve the lives of LGBTQIA+ people by providing educational workshops on LGBTQIA+ acceptance and awareness to young people, service providers and within the workplace.

## The approach

Across all stakeholders, there was strong agreement that RSE needs to be more than information about biological aspects of growing up and sexual activity. It needs a holistic approach that balances discussion about the risks and dangers associated with relationships and sexual activity with discussion about the positive, healthy and enjoyable aspects of relationships. A holistic approach can be understood as teaching and learning about the cognitive, emotional, physical and social aspects of relationships and sexuality. It aims to equip children and young people with knowledge, skills, attitudes and values that will empower them to: realise their health, wellbeing and dignity; develop respectful social and sexual relationships; consider how their choices affect their own wellbeing and that of others; and understand and ensure the protection of their rights throughout their lives.

**To what extent do you broadly agree/disagree with the proposed direction on the approach to RSE that has emerged from the review? Please tick your response in the box below.**

<b>Strongly Agree</b>	<b>Agree</b>	<b>Disagree</b>	<b>Strongly Disagree</b>
x			

**What are the aspects of the proposed approach that you agree/disagree with?**

We believe comprehensive, holistic sex education is invaluable for the safety and wellbeing of the young people of Ireland.

**What else is important when considering the approach for teaching SPHE/RSE in schools?**

Intersectionality regarding ability, gender identity, gender expression, sexual orientation and sexual characteristics as well as class, race and power dynamics within intimate relationships.

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**The curriculum**

The Review highlighted the need to create a single integrated curriculum that sets out the learning for SPHE/RSE as one subject and incrementally provides continuity of experience from early childhood to post-primary. In the immediate term the NCCA will develop interim guidelines to support the current curriculum on how it can be approached in a more holistic way and provide clarity on how topics can be taught in an inclusive manner to incorporate current themes identified by the review.

**To what extent do you broadly agree/disagree with the need for a single integrated curriculum for SPHE/RSE? Please tick your response in the box below.**

<b>Strongly Agree</b>	<b>Agree</b>	<b>Disagree</b>	<b>Strongly Disagree</b>
<b>x</b>			

<p><b>Please provide a reason for your level of agreement/disagreement.</b></p> <p>The current system is unacceptable and we hear this day in and day out at schools. Young people want to be informed and they are being failed by the current system.</p>
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<p><b>What else do you consider important in relation to future curriculum development in SPHE/RSE?</b></p> <p><b>Biological Sex</b></p> <p>Biological sex is constantly being forced into a false dichotomy in schools. People have no real sense of the many variations that exist in sexual characteristics and as</p>
---

such people feel like they are “other” if their sexual characteristics differ to what they have been told to expect. We feel RSE should include information on the variety of ways humans can display sexual characteristics and the reality that chromosomes do not always determine sex, and sex does not always determine gender.

Although this is not the focus of this exercise, ShoutOut feels strongly that this should be included the science and biology curriculum as well, so LGBTQIA identities can be woven into the narrative of learning.

### **Gender, and how it differs from sex**

Gender and sex should be discussed and differentiated in RSE. As well as this gender roles should be discussed, how they change over time or due to culture, and how people should not feel defined by them.

### **Minority orientations**

Minority orientations are those outside heterosexuality including, but not limited to, lesbian, gay, bisexual, asexual, and pansexual. Because these identities are in the minority this means people are often assumed to be heterosexual until told otherwise. Because of these assumptions, people who are apart of minority orientations can feel isolated.

### **Trans identities, gender identity and gender expression**

Transgender identities should be fully explained giving students a comprehensive education in gender alignments, gender identity and gender expression. Specifically, the way gender identity and expression are different. Young people need to know that many trans people have known their gender identity from as young as 3 years old, and when they come out as trans they are not suddenly deciding something but aligning their gender identity and their gender expression in a new way.

Trans people may or may not take medical steps in their journey, but whether or not they will, or have, is not anyone’s business but their own.

Gender identity should not be expressed as a binary concept. As mentioned above sex is often wrongly forced into a pure dichotomy, and similarly so is gender. Gender exists on a spectrum and the concept of non-binary or third genders have been seen in virtually every society since written record.

Some people identify with the sex assigned to them at birth (cisgender), some people do not identify with the sex assigned to them at birth (transgender), but everyone has a gender identity and gender expression.

### **Sexual activity as a spectrum**

Sexual activity is a spectrum of different acts and should not be limited simply to the act of intercourse. Many people have different wants and desires which will manifest in a variety of ways with their partners, or with themselves.

Because young people are taught that sex is one specific act, those who have disabilities which preclude them from taking part in that act feel excluded. Sex means different things to different people, with the common unifying factor being consent between individuals.

Similarly, not experiences sexual desire but may experience different forms of attraction.

### **HIV and stigma**

Many young people think only gay and bisexual men have HIV, and do not realise that it is a condition anyone can be living with. In 2016, men who have sex with men made up 51% of diagnoses, with 28% among heterosexuals, 16% unknown, 4% among intravenous drugs drug users and 1% mother to child transmissions.

RSE should include information regarding the effective treatment of HIV. They should know that someone with HIV who is taking medication may have an undetectable viral load and therefore will not transmit the virus.

Although it is beyond the purpose of this exercise, we feel the HIV and AIDS epidemic in the 1980s should be apart of the history curriculum.

### **Fluidity of identities**

It should be highlighted that identities, including gender identity and sexual orientation, are not always a static concept and people can change over time. If someone's identity does change over time that is no reason to be disrespectful of it. There should be no stigma attached to a shift in identity which occurs later in life, as many young people may have adults in their life that come out and be confused by this change.

Similarly, all identities should be respected and not challenged. In particular, bisexual people face much discrimination under the idea that it is a "phase" that someone will grow out of. Many studies show that bisexual people make up the majority of the LGBT community\* but even the number of bisexual people does not stop the stigma around this identity.

While most bisexual people will identify as bisexual for their entire lives, they are still faced with being erased as either gay or straight depending on the gender of their romantic partner.

### **Creating the conditions for effective RSE**

The Review makes it clear that teachers need in-depth and sustained training and support in the area of SPHE/RSE. Consequently, access to professional development needs to be enhanced at pre-service and in-service levels. The Review also identified the need to take stock of current teaching and learning resources available in this area.

**To what extent do you broadly agree/disagree with the Review's findings on the necessary conditions for effective SPHE/RSE? Please tick your response in the box below**

Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
x			

**Please provide a reason for your level of agreement/disagreement.**

Ideally, a mandatory accredited programme should be put in place, for all educators, to provide a positive impact on the consistency and quality of rolling out the programme to ensure they can direct students to the right sources of information and to provide a healthy and holistic atmosphere for discussion.

**What else do you consider important in order to create the conditions for effective SPHE/RSE?**

**Teachers should be supported and empowered to deliver RSE. Resources need to be given for teachers to be trained in this regard, it cannot be simply something taught by the history teacher.**

**Schools should be encouraged to work with local and national organisations which already provide this type of training in order to compliment any training decided**

### **Other considerations**

The Review concluded that comprehensive oversight and support for SPHE/RSE is required to meet the needs identified in the review process. The Review also found schools cannot do it alone and parents must be encouraged and supported in assuming their responsibility for their child's learning. In addition, it suggests that post-primary schools require further

support and guidance in planning for junior cycle wellbeing in order to enhance students' learning in SPHE/RSE.

**To what extent do you broadly agree/disagree that these are important considerations for SPHE/RSE? Please tick your response in the box below.**

<b>Strongly Agree</b>	<b>Agree</b>	<b>Disagree</b>	<b>Strongly Disagree</b>

**Please provide a reason for your level of agreement/disagreement.**

Regular reviews of the curriculum will be necessary to ensure we are providing the best education possible.

**Are there any other considerations that should be highlighted in the advice for SPHE/RSE?**

**There should be a clear mandate that RSE should be holistic and inclusive of LGBTQIA+ people and their lived experiences.**

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Spunout

# Review of Relationships and Sexuality Education (RSE)

At the request of the Minister for Education and Skills, a major review of RSE in primary and post-primary schools was undertaken from June 2018 to March 2019. The review examined the experience of teaching and learning in RSE including; the curriculum, the approach to learning, the supports needed, and ways to improve the experience of RSE for students. Engagement in the review was considerable and signals the level of interest and concern people share in relation to this aspect of education. We are now engaging in consultation to ensure the findings and draft advice is reflective of the needs of students, schools, and parents.

In responding to the findings and draft advice on the future directions of RSE it is recommended that you read the draft report or the summary of the draft report both of which are available here <https://www.ncca.ie/en/updates-and-events/consultations/review-of-relationships-and-sexuality-education-rse>.

<b>Name</b>	Jack
<b>Surname</b>	Eustace
<b>Position (if applicable)</b>	Governance & Policy Officer
<b>Organisation (if applicable)</b>	SpunOut.ie
<b>Date</b>	25/10/2019
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**Please provide some brief background information on your organisation (if applicable).**

SpunOut.ie is Ireland's youth information website, run by young people, for young people. We provide free, reliable, non-judgemental information on sexual health, mental health, physical health, education, employment and more for young people aged 16-25 living in Ireland. We meet the information needs of more than 180,000 young eaders each month.

## The approach

Across all stakeholders, there was strong agreement that RSE needs to be more than information about biological aspects of growing up and sexual activity. It needs a holistic

approach that balances discussion about the risks and dangers associated with relationships and sexual activity with discussion about the positive, healthy and enjoyable aspects of relationships. A holistic approach can be understood as teaching and learning about the cognitive, emotional, physical and social aspects of relationships and sexuality. It aims to equip children and young people with knowledge, skills, attitudes and values that will empower them to: realise their health, wellbeing and dignity; develop respectful social and sexual relationships; consider how their choices affect their own wellbeing and that of others; and understand and ensure the protection of their rights throughout their lives.

**To what extent do you broadly agree/disagree with the proposed direction on the approach to RSE that has emerged from the review? Please tick your response in the box below.**

Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
	X		

**What are the aspects of the proposed approach that you agree/disagree with?**

We agree very strongly with the need to ensure consistent, rights-based access to RSE by all young people living in Ireland. The draft report rightly highlights the intolerable situation where much of a young person’s access to reliable RSE is dependent on the ethos and practice of their particular school. Young people have a right to accurate, timely and inclusive RSE and one of the most important aspects of this review must be to ensure that this right is honoured for all young people regardless of the circumstances of their education.

We also agree with the report’s emphasis on an holistic educational approach that recognises issues of RSE do not arise in isolation from the rest of a young person’s educational experience. We welcome the declared need to move away from a view of sexual education in particular as biological, recognising instead the varied experiences and informational needs of young people across as wide as possible a spectrum of sexual orientation and gender identity. As a youth-run organisation, we also commend any moves to improve students’ say in the development of their own education, especially in an area as personal as RSE. Continued consultation with young people and their representative organisations would be a very positive development.

**What else is important when considering the approach for teaching SPHE/RSE in schools?**

In terms of critiques of the draft report, we would prefer to see the drafters go further in their intention to ensure universal standards of access to RSE and make clear that school ethos and parental choice cannot be allowed to stand in the way of accurate, rights-based RSE. We would also like to see a more explicit commitment to ensuring the revised curriculum reflects the needs of LGBTI+ young people, as well as informing students who are not themselves LGBTI+ of the positive diversity of experiences in this area. All students will benefit from a curriculum that acknowledges and celebrates our diversity.

**The curriculum**

The Review highlighted the need to create a single integrated curriculum that sets out the learning for SPHE/RSE as one subject and incrementally provides continuity of experience from early childhood to post-primary. In the immediate term the NCCA will develop interim guidelines to support the current curriculum on how it can be approached in a more holistic way and provide clarity on how topics can be taught in an inclusive manner to incorporate current themes identified by the review.

**To what extent do you broadly agree/disagree with the need for a single integrated curriculum for SPHE/RSE? Please tick your response in the box below.**

Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
X			

**Please provide a reason for your level of agreement/disagreement.**

The benefits of a single integrated curriculum are huge in ensuring all students can access the same level of reliable, fact-based RSE. We welcome the focus on inclusivity in RSE, with the caveat that the curriculum should ideally go further and actively celebrate diversity to improve the experience of vulnerable students and their peers. We very strongly welcome the intention to begin RSE as soon as possible in a young person’s educational journey; while there are certain areas of content which may only become appropriate for students of an older age, basic principles of consent, respect, inclusivity and safety can and should be taught as early in life as possible in order to lay a good foundation for healthy inter-personal relationships, positive self-worth and acceptance of diversity.

**What else do you consider important in relation to future curriculum development in SPHE/RSE?**

That school ethos not be allowed to block the provision of rights- and fact-based RSE for students of all backgrounds, locations, religions, etc.

### **Creating the conditions for effective RSE**

The Review makes it clear that teachers need in-depth and sustained training and support in the area of SPHE/RSE. Consequently, access to professional development needs to be enhanced at pre-service and in-service levels. The Review also identified the need to take stock of current teaching and learning resources available in this area.

**To what extent do you broadly agree/disagree with the Review's findings on the necessary conditions for effective SPHE/RSE? Please tick your response in the box below**

<b>Strongly Agree</b>	<b>Agree</b>	<b>Disagree</b>	<b>Strongly Disagree</b>
X			

**Please provide a reason for your level of agreement/disagreement.**

We trust teachers enormously in this area, and it is only appropriate that they be fully supported with the tools and resources to teach RSE effectively. From the experience of students, it would be insufficient to present even the best-possible curriculum if teachers feel ill-equipped to engage with the material. We believe that we must take RSE as seriously as any examinable subject, and that teachers should be supported with professional development and appropriate resources to ensure they can do the job to the best of their ability.

**What else do you consider important in order to create the conditions for effective SPHE/RSE**

### **Other considerations**

The Review concluded that comprehensive oversight and support for SPHE/RSE is required to meet the needs identified in the review process. The Review also found schools cannot

do it alone and parents must be encouraged and supported in assuming their responsibility for their child's learning. In addition, it suggests that post-primary schools require further support and guidance in planning for junior cycle wellbeing in order to enhance students' learning in SPHE/RSE.

**To what extent do you broadly agree/disagree that these are important considerations for SPHE/RSE? Please tick your response in the box below.**

<b>Strongly Agree</b>	<b>Agree</b>	<b>Disagree</b>	<b>Strongly Disagree</b>
	X		

**Please provide a reason for your level of agreement/disagreement.**

These are all important considerations, however it must be noted that the need to involve parents must not be allowed to let down students whose parents, for reasons of ideology or otherwise, will not or cannot assist in providing fact-based, tolerant RSE in the home. It is vital that, in as far as possible, parents are brought into the process and learning in school and at home reinforce one another. But the essential function of an education system is, after all, to provide education that parents alone cannot deliver. This is especially true for a subject as sensitive and prone to distortion as RSE.

**Are there any other considerations that should be highlighted in the advice for SPHE/RSE?**

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## Solidarity, the Left Alternative



## **Submission to the review of Relationships and Sexuality Education – Solidarity, The Left Alternative – 25 October 2019**

There is a need to greatly change the manner in which Relationships and Sexuality Education (RSE) is delivered in schools and the content of the curriculum. How school ethos is dealt with must be changed as any review by the NCCA can outline excellent curriculum content and proposals for improvement in teacher training, but it can fail to be delivered given the position of ethos in the Education Act 1998.

This submission is not a comprehensive document on our position on RSE, rather a summary on the key issues where changes are needed. Our members of Dáil Éireann, Deputies Mick Barry and Ruth Coppinger, have outlined our position in Dáil debates. We would draw attention to the second stage debate on the Provision of Objective Sex Education Bill 2018 and the recent debate on the Oireachtas Committee on Education and Skill's review of RSE report debated on 26 September 2019. We have also taken part in the hearings by the Joint Oireachtas Committee on Education and Skills in 2018.

### **Change is needed.**

Since the current curriculum was set there have been major changes in Irish society such as the development of extensive availability of the internet, and there is a very welcome changes in attitudes on LGBTQ+ issues, and challenges to sexism, intimate partner violence and gender based oppression in all its forms.

Teenagers have been to the fore in asking for more comprehensive education in relationships and sexuality as they are faced with the challenges of navigating these issues.

The delivery of RSE is not consistent across the State. There are examples of schools that provide excellent RSE and there are very dedicated teachers throughout the education system. A very significant issue with the current system is the lack of training for teachers and the problems of school ethos inhibiting how content is delivered. Solidarity are supportive of increased investment in teacher training and ongoing professional development.

### **Problems arising from religious based ethos**

The draft report states:

*“The review concludes that at this point school ethos cannot be separated out from other factors that influence the teaching of RSE.”*

While there are many factors in the lack of confidence and the patchy delivery of quality RSE in schools, there is a need to challenge the current legal position where teachers and boards of management are legally obliged to implement the ethos of the school.

There is a need to greatly improve the content of the curriculum and the training of teachers. However, even if there were to be significant improvements in these areas the issue of ethos and the legal protections of ethos would remain. Unless the Education Act 1998 is amended to exempt RSE from the ethos of schools then problems with teacher confidence and the consistent delivery of the curriculum will remain.

Ethos has a particular impact on RSE given that the ethos of many schools is one where there are religious based views on relationships, sexuality, LGBTQ+ matters, and contraception. The Education Act 1998 makes schools legally accountable to their patron for the implementation of the school ethos, which is often a religious based one. The 1998 Act also places obligations on the Minister to factor in ethos when setting the curriculum for all subjects.

The NCCA deciding to enable “an understanding of school ethos” so there are improvements in RSE can only go so far. Even with an imaginative re-interpretations of school ethos there will still be schools that will be able to selectively implement the revised curriculum and teachers that will not be confident in delivery of aspects of the curriculum.

### **Voice and rights of young people needs to be central**

It is welcome that the draft report outlines the perspective of the human rights of young people to comprehensive relationships and sexuality education. Often in the discussions on this issue the rights of young people is lost.

There is an important right of young people to be fully informed and educated. We should have an RSE curriculum that will give young people confidence to know what a healthy relationship is, how to cope with relationship difficulties, to identify what is abuse, and what is and is not consent. Young people should also know about different sexualities, genders and know about contraception so they can make informed decisions.

Students need to be brought into the heart of decisions on RSE, especially at a school level so that their concerns and questions are answered. At present, unfortunately, teenagers’ questions on issues such as LGBTQ+ matters, contraception and sexual activities that do not lead to procreation are often not dealt with in many schools.

Largely due to religious based ethos there is a model in many schools that is based on discouraging young people from engaging in sexual activity rather than informing them and educating them to make their own informed decisions.

There is no constitutional barrier to the delivery of high quality RSE in all schools. Indeed, there is a constitutional obligation on the State to deliver standards in education (Article 42.3.2) regardless of the ethos of a school. There is also recognition in the Constitution of the rights of the child (Article 42A).

There is a right of religious institutions to exist and to organise charitable and religious work. This is a right Solidarity supports; there is a right for everyone to have a religion and to not have a religion. However, there is no constitutional barrier on quality RSE in all schools that teaches young people comprehensive and factual information.

### **Outside organisations**

There have been complaints made to our Deputies about the role of outside organisations in the delivery of RSE content. Deputy Coppinger has asked parliamentary questions to the Minister on this matter which shows that religious based outside organisations have even been engaged in the State-run ETB sector.

Often schools rely on outside speakers to deliver RSE content. Teachers feel under prepared, under resourced and not adequately trained. Improving teacher training and support can reduce the tendency to bring in outside organisations to deliver RSE. Solidarity welcomes SPHE/RSE having a full status as a subject and for the resourcing of teacher training and ongoing professional development.

There are no strict regulations on outside bodies delivering RSE and this is particularly troublesome as many have a strong anti-abortion message. Discussion on the termination of pregnancy should be done in a factual, objective and age appropriate manner by professional teachers, rather than being a matter covered by religious based outside speakers.

There are also problems with outside bodies that are religious based as they often will not cover areas in a balanced way such as LGBTQ+ relationships and sexuality, artificial contraception or sexual activity that may not lead to conception.

### **Need for inclusive RSE in schools**

#### *Consent*

Awareness on sexual consent has greatly increased in recent years, and there have been legal changes in the area. At present there is not an adequate delivery of consent classes. Students' Unions report a very low knowledge of consent among their membership coming from schools. Many schools are segregated by sex and this, combined with inadequate RSE, can lead to a poor atmosphere and poor attitudes not being easily dealt with.

#### *LGBTQ+ issues*

LGBTQ+ students feel particularly isolated and excluded in RSE classes. The gender identity covered is often just male and female with non-binary people, transgender people and gender fluid people not being included in many RSE classes.

The education on sexual activity tends to focus on reproductive sexual intercourse and does not cover the sexual activity many LGBTQ+ people and heterosexual people engage in. This leads to

young LGBTQ+ being ill-informed on many issues. There is also a major mental health issue with the exclusion of LGBTQ+ people from the curriculum and the 'hidden curriculum'.

### *Intellectual Disabilities*

Those with intellectual disabilities are often not fully included in RSE. Organisations that advocate on behalf of them say that they are not given the life skills needed to deal with sex and sexual relationships. This places them in an even more vulnerable position. Any change in the curriculum needs to include how those with intellectual disabilities are educated.

### **Need to challenge the ill-informed debate on this review**

Over the past weeks there has been an organised campaign on this issue by individuals and organisations who are socially conservative and involved in far-right and right-populist politics. There is a need for the NCCA and Department of Education and Skills to counter the myths, false information and fears that are being spread by some. Solidarity would suggest that the NCCA or the Department of Education and Skills engage in an information campaign when the revised curriculum is finalised to inform parents of the facts of the changes.

Two main themes are emerging in this mis-information campaign. The first theme is misinformation on the age appropriate nature of a revised curriculum and playing on fears of parents that children will be exposed to sexual content at a young age. The second theme is misinformation on the right of parents to opt their children out of RSE class. No change to the curriculum, nor the passage of the Provision of Objective Sex Education Bill 2018, would remove this legal right.

No doubt, many of the submissions made to this review will be arising from the fears that have been spread in this area. We would call on the NCCA not to remove the much needed changes that are needed in the RSE curriculum from the final report. There is a clear consensus among educators, the majority of parents, and young people themselves for change in RSE that will educate and inform young people.

### **Summary:**

- The RSE curriculum must be revised to consider the developments in society and the experiences of young people in the past 20 years.
- The right of young people to receive comprehensive relationships, sexuality and reproductive health education needs to be vindicated and at the heart of changes to the curriculum.
- Young people and parents should be involved in formulating RSE policies in schools.
- The revised curriculum must deal with consent, sexuality, genders, contraception and termination of pregnancy in a factual, objective and age appropriate manner.
- The revised RSE curriculum should not be inclusive of LGBTQ+ people and not be gender normative.

- The status of SPHE/RSE needs to be improved in schools. There is a need to increase investment in teacher training and ongoing professional development.
- School ethos should not be used to block elements of the RSE curriculum being implemented. The NCCA should support the call for the Education Act 1998 to be amended.
- Outside organisations should be regulated and obliged to teach in a factual and objective manner. If an outside organisation comes to a school, it should complement the existing work of a class teacher.
- To counter mis-information the NCCA and the Department of Education and Skills should engage in a public information campaign when the revised curriculum is finalised to inform parents and the wider community about the changes made to RSE.

### **Solidarity – the Left Alternative**

Solidarity's TDs are:

Ruth Coppinger TD, Dublin West. [Ruth.coppinger@oireachtas.ie](mailto:Ruth.coppinger@oireachtas.ie)

Mick Barry TD, Cork North Central. [Mick.barry@oireachtas.ie](mailto:Mick.barry@oireachtas.ie)

TEACH RSE, Dublin City University

# Review of Relationships and Sexuality Education (RSE)

At the request of the Minister for Education and Skills, a major review of RSE in primary and post-primary schools was undertaken from June 2018 to March 2019. The review examined the experience of teaching and learning in RSE including; the curriculum, the approach to learning, the supports needed, and ways to improve the experience of RSE for students. Engagement in the review was considerable and signals the level of interest and concern people share in relation to this aspect of education. We are now engaging in consultation to ensure the findings and draft advice is reflective of the needs of students, schools, and parents.

In responding to the findings and draft advice on the future directions of RSE it is recommended that you read the draft report or the summary of the draft report both of which are available here <https://www.ncca.ie/en/updates-and-events/consultations/review-of-relationships-and-sexuality-education-rse>.

<b>Name</b>	<b>TEACH-RSE:</b> Teacher Professional Development and Relationships and Sexuality Education RSE: Realising Optimal Sexual Health and Wellbeing Across the Lifespan
<b>TEACH-RSE Team</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Dr. Catherine Maunsell, Associate Professor of Psychology and Human Development and TEACH-RSE Principal Investigator</li> <li>• Dr. Ashling Bourke, Assistant Professor of Psychology and Human Development and TEACH-RSE Co- Investigator</li> <li>• Dr. Claire Cullen, Psychologist and TEACH-RSE Researcher</li> <li>• Dr. Aisling Costello, Psychologist and TEACH-RSE Researcher</li> </ul>
<b>Funder Details</b>	Irish Research Council IRC Coalesce Award 2019/147 with the support of the HSE: Crisis Pregnancy and Sexual Health Programme
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Please provide some brief background information on your organisation (if applicable).

While a range of studies, nationally and internationally, have examined sexuality education from the perspectives of the individual (student, teacher) and/or at school

level, TEACH-RSE is the first of its kind, in an Irish context, to examine the preparation of primary and post-primary teachers to teach Relationships and Sexuality Education RSE. Systematic review of peer-reviewed literature in the field indicates that there is a dearth of research on teacher professional development for sexuality education.

TEACH-RSE seeks to address such lacunae through a mixed methods approach;

- Phase One examines the provision of RSE/RSE-related areas at ITE programme-level; inclusive of documentary analyses and interviews with programme chairs and module co-ordinators/lecturers from across a range of sites of ITE.
- Phase Two surveys student teachers on their knowledge of and attitudes towards RSE/RSE-related areas.

TEACH-RSE research findings will inform the development of guidelines/framework for teacher professional development for RSE.

Publication and first dissemination of TEACH-RSE research findings are scheduled for Summer/Autumn 2020.

### The approach

Across all stakeholders, there was strong agreement that RSE needs to be more than information about biological aspects of growing up and sexual activity. It needs a holistic approach that balances discussion about the risks and dangers associated with relationships and sexual activity with discussion about the positive, healthy and enjoyable aspects of relationships. A holistic approach can be understood as teaching and learning about the cognitive, emotional, physical and social aspects of relationships and sexuality. It aims to equip children and young people with knowledge, skills, attitudes and values that will empower them to: realise their health, wellbeing and dignity; develop respectful social and sexual relationships; consider how their choices affect their own wellbeing and that of others; and understand and ensure the protection of their rights throughout their lives.

**To what extent do you broadly agree/disagree with the proposed direction on the approach to RSE that has emerged from the review? Please tick your response in the box below.**

Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
√			

**What are the aspects of the proposed approach that you agree/disagree with?**

The TEACH-RSE research team strongly endorses an holistic approach as the proposed approach to RSE.

Developmental and inclusive in its orientation, a holistic approach, when compared to other models of/approaches to RSE, has a wide-ranging focus on the sexual health and wellbeing of the learner. An holistic approach to the RSE, with its stronger focus on learners' social and emotional competence, goes beyond traditional preventative-

oriented approaches in terms of realizing optimal sexual health and wellbeing outcomes across the lifespan.

Identified as integral to the effective implementation of RSE (WHO, 2010), the teacher's role, along with their levels of understanding and professional development specific to RSE/RSE-related areas.

Teacher professional development, across the continuum of teacher education, for RSE broadly and for holistic RSE in particular, warrants strategic, ongoing resourcing and evaluation. This call has particular resonance for the TEACH-RSE research team and is further elaborated in the section in the report on creating the conditions for effective RSE.

In acknowledging both the power and elusive nature of language, the challenge raised by Shannon and Smith (2015) in respect of the need for fulsome articulation of the meaning of 'holistic' is one which could be extended upon in the next phase of the review process.

### **The curriculum**

The Review highlighted the need to create a single integrated curriculum that sets out the learning for SPHE/RSE as one subject and incrementally provides continuity of experience from early childhood to post-primary. In the immediate term the NCCA will develop interim guidelines to support the current curriculum on how it can be approached in a more holistic way and provide clarity on how topics can be taught in an inclusive manner to incorporate current themes identified by the review.

**To what extent do you broadly agree/disagree with the need for a single integrated curriculum for SPHE/RSE? Please tick your response in the box below.**

<b>Strongly Agree</b>	<b>Agree</b>	<b>Disagree</b>	<b>Strongly Disagree</b>
√			

**Please provide a reason for your level of agreement/disagreement.**

The creation of a single, integrated curriculum which sets out the learning for SPHE/RSE as one subject and provides for a developmental, spiralling approach to its delivery, is welcomed by the TEACH-RSE research team.

Closer alignment of the proposed integrated SPHE/RSE curriculum, particularly with the broader national curricular reforms and developments and national and international research on Wellbeing, needs further consideration and articulation (cf. Thorburn, 2018). The positioning of SPHE/RSE within Wellbeing is highly salient and, offering as it does a context for the teaching of SPHE/RSE, consistent with the proposed holistic approach to RSE.

Such positioning of SPHE/RSE, aligns with recent NCCA Guidelines in the area, however, the resource challenges in relation to teacher professional development are particularly salient for the TEACH-RSE research team:

Teachers will require professional development to ensure that they have a deep conceptual understanding of wellbeing and are confident in using the pedagogical approaches that are known to support and build students' wellbeing. This is important because their personal understanding and values influence how they care for their own wellbeing and that of their students (NCCA Guidelines for Wellbeing at Junior Cycle, 2017. p. 29).

### Creating the conditions for effective RSE

The Review makes it clear that teachers need in-depth and sustained training and support in the area of SPHE/RSE. Consequently, access to professional development needs to be enhanced at pre-service and in-service levels. The Review also identified the need to take stock of current teaching and learning resources available in this area.

**To what extent do you broadly agree/disagree with the Review's findings on the necessary conditions for effective SPHE/RSE? Please tick your response in the box below**

Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
√			

### Please provide a reason for your level of agreement/disagreement.

The TEACH-RSE research team strongly endorse the Review's recommendation in relation to the need for teacher professional development at both pre-service and in-service levels for SPHE/ RSE so as to create the conditions for effective RSE.

The potential of teacher professional development to respond to the opportunities and challenges of curricular and wider educational reforms in the area of RSE is significant and upheld internationally as '*...one of the crucial levers of success of quality sexuality education programmes and projects*' (WHO Training Matters, 2017).

In responding to the draft Review the TEACH-RSE research team wish to highlight that, in planning for and implementing any programme of RSE, consideration of the following issues as outlined is critical.

Teacher educators' centrality in the ideation, design and delivery of initial and continuing teacher education programmes influences educational discourses, practices and policies on RSE into the future and, thus, warrants further exploration in this review process.

The TEACH-RSE research team call for an enhanced articulation of teacher professional development, to address both the professional and personal development needs of current and future teachers of SPHE/RSE. This call aligns with the Teaching Council's '*Cosán: Framework for Teachers' Learning*' which explicitly acknowledges the key role that personal development of the

teacher plays in their professional lives and which holds even greater salience for teachers of SPHE/RSE (and Wellbeing) (Teaching Council, 2016).

It is the view of the TEACH-RSE team that the recommendations in respect of teacher professional development needs to target the dual aspects of attitudes, both explicit and implicit, while acknowledging that intentionally addressing teachers' implicit attitudes presents a deep challenge for teacher education.

Teacher educators play a significant role in supporting and preparing teachers to facilitate their students' open communication in relation to social, personal and health domains and particularly in relation to relationships and sexuality.

Teacher professional development, particularly at pre-service level, should prioritize opportunities for critical interrogation of student teachers' own personal qualities and self-understanding, their understandings of RSE, their relations with their pupils/students, and the familial, community, and societal contexts in which they will teach. Such critical interrogation should be inclusive in its addressing of the in/visibility of cultural, class, dis/ability, gender, and sexual orientation (and structural inequality regarding what is privileged and silenced in classrooms) in the content and delivery of the RSE curriculum.

Given the strong evidence of the empirical link between teachers' comfort with sex and sexuality issues and both confidence and willingness to teach so-called 'sensitive' sexuality-related topics, student teachers will need to be supported, at ITE level, to interrogate their own positioning on RSE-content relative to normative ideas regarding such topics in order to confidently and competently provide the proposed holistic approach to RSE.

An approach to teacher professional development which emphasizes subject-specific content/pedagogies alone rather than also addressing other more implicit factors, will only go so far in increasing the competence, confidence and comfort of teachers to teach SPHE/RSE (and Wellbeing).

The TEACH-RSE team thus request the NCCA in this review of RSE to go further in articulating the need for teacher professional development to support teachers to reflect on their implicit belief systems and how these can implicitly impact on how they teach the RSE curricula. Through the continuum of their professional development teachers should be enabled to reflect on their own knowledge, attitudes, values and experiences and the impact of these on their teaching of SPHE/RSE and ultimately, on the sexual health and wellbeing outcomes for their learners.

While not pre-empting, the TEACH-RSE research findings (circa June, 2020), international studies to date, highlight that access to professional development both at pre-service and in-services levels in respect of RSE warrants significant further attention. The call in the draft Review for a specialised, professional qualification in SPHE/RSE is thus, particularly welcomed.

Finally, to further enable the creation of conditions for effective RSE, the TEACH-RSE research team call for the enhancement of links between stakeholders involved in curricular development at national level and in teacher professional development.

### Other considerations

The Review concluded that comprehensive oversight and support for SPHE/RSE is required to meet the needs identified in the review process. The Review also found schools cannot do it alone and parents must be encouraged and supported in assuming their responsibility for their child's learning. In addition, it suggests that post-primary schools require further support and guidance in planning for junior cycle wellbeing in order to enhance students' learning in SPHE/RSE.

**To what extent do you broadly agree/disagree that these are important considerations for SPHE/RSE? Please tick your response in the box below.**

Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
√			

### Please provide a reason for your level of agreement/disagreement.

The TEACH-RSE research team strongly agree with the systemic approach as proposed – inclusive as it is of family, school and community factors.

The voice and engagement of the child/young person/learner is central in the shaping of any RSE curriculum and the TEACH-RSE team commend the process undertaken in the development of the draft Report as it exemplifies such inclusivity of young people's perspectives. The rich data contained therein in the Section on Young People's views signifies the contribution that children and young people can make to this review.

Further consideration may prove fruitful, in relation to mechanisms identified by school principals, namely the recently introduced Child Protection and Safeguarding Inspections which, if mirrored in terms of RSE provision, could have the potential to improve RSE within schools; with '*... students themselves will be asked about their experience of RSE as part of the inspection process*' (2019, p. 40).

We call for:

- recommendations in respect of mechanisms for ongoing monitoring and evaluation of the implementation of RSE, at both school and teacher professional development levels of analysis;
- commitment to building and strengthening the evidence-base which explores the role of teacher professional development in challenging/shaping teacher identity,

pedagogic practices and school cultures more broadly, with the ultimate goal of realizing optimal sexual health and wellbeing across their lifespan for all children and young people.

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The Sexual Health Centre, Cork

# Review of Relationships and Sexuality Education (RSE)

At the request of the Minister for Education and Skills, a major review of RSE in primary and post-primary schools was undertaken from June 2018 to March 2019. The review examined the experience of teaching and learning in RSE including; the curriculum, the approach to learning, the supports needed, and ways to improve the experience of RSE for students. Engagement in the review was considerable and signals the level of interest and concern people share in relation to this aspect of education. We are now engaging in consultation to ensure the findings and draft advice is reflective of the needs of students, schools, and parents.

In responding to the findings and draft advice on the future directions of RSE it is recommended that you read the draft report or the summary of the draft report both of which are available here <https://www.ncca.ie/en/updates-and-events/consultations/review-of-relationships-and-sexuality-education-rse>.

<b>Name</b>	Martin
<b>Surname</b>	Davoren
<b>Position (if applicable)</b>	Executive Director
<b>Organisation (if applicable)</b>	The Sexual Health Centre
<b>Date</b>	October 9 <sup>th</sup> , 2019
<b>Email</b>	

**Please provide some brief background information on your organisation (if applicable).**

The Sexual Health Centre is a Not for Profit, Voluntary Sector/Non-Governmental Organisation (NGO). The centre is situated at 16 Peters Street in Cork City. Quality service provision and innovation are at the heart of the organisation. In 2018, the centre continued to respond to and provide services that match the needs of a growing Cork community. As a key service delivery organisation in Cork, the centre introduced a number of new initiatives that reflected and enhanced the existing work being carried out in the area of sexual health, including HIV mentoring, sexual health advice and counselling for young LGBTI+ people and capacity building for professionals to increase their confidence when dealing with sexual health issues. Working in partnership it both referred and accepted referrals from partners in the community, social inclusion, healthcare and disability sectors. In addition, the organisation partners with statutory

and non-statutory agencies to support the sexual health needs of a developing Ireland. The Sexual Health Centre continues to submit a range of policy recommendations including those on relationship and sexual education. This is supported by our inclusion as key collaborators and stakeholders on a number of national and local policy implementation groups. Prior to a funding cut in 2017, the Sexual Health Centre delivered sexual health education to young people in post-primary education across Cork city and county.

## The approach

Across all stakeholders, there was strong agreement that RSE needs to be more than information about biological aspects of growing up and sexual activity. It needs a holistic approach that balances discussion about the risks and dangers associated with relationships and sexual activity with discussion about the positive, healthy and enjoyable aspects of relationships. A holistic approach can be understood as teaching and learning about the cognitive, emotional, physical and social aspects of relationships and sexuality. It aims to equip children and young people with knowledge, skills, attitudes and values that will empower them to: realise their health, wellbeing and dignity; develop respectful social and sexual relationships; consider how their choices affect their own wellbeing and that of others; and understand and ensure the protection of their rights throughout their lives.

**To what extent do you broadly agree/disagree with the proposed direction on the approach to RSE that has emerged from the review? Please tick your response in the box below.**

Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
X			

### What are the aspects of the proposed approach that you agree/disagree with?

It is a positive development that information broader than the biological aspects associated with growing up and sexual activity will be included in the updated RSE programme. The Sexual Health Centre supports a comprehensive, holistic approach that balances discussion about the risks and dangers associated with relationships and sexual activity with discussion about the positive, healthy and enjoyable aspects of relationships. The importance of the broader emotional, physical and social aspects of relationships, sexual health and sexuality is crucial. It is also important to be clear about the differences and intersectionality of sexual health, relationships and sexuality throughout the learning process.

### What else is important when considering the approach for teaching SPHE/RSE in schools?

The intersectionality of sexual health, relationships and sexuality throughout the learning process is crucial to a holistic understanding of RSE.

Communication skills development and how these can support an individual's sexual health, healthy relationships and sexuality is paramount to a holistic, comprehensive RSE programme.

The review should state the individual responsible for delivery due to the fragmented nature of delivery in the past. Is it teachers, outside support, the NGO sector or a mix of all of these? Clarity here will aid future delivery.

Throughout, the report mentions words like 'the majority' or 'most' without quantifying this information. Review will benefit from % (N=X).

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**The curriculum**

The Review highlighted the need to create a single integrated curriculum that sets out the learning for SPHE/RSE as one subject and incrementally provides continuity of experience from early childhood to post-primary. In the immediate term the NCCA will develop interim guidelines to support the current curriculum on how it can be approached in a more holistic way and provide clarity on how topics can be taught in an inclusive manner to incorporate current themes identified by the review.

**To what extent do you broadly agree/disagree with the need for a single integrated curriculum for SPHE/RSE? Please tick your response in the box below.**

<b>Strongly Agree</b>	<b>Agree</b>	<b>Disagree</b>	<b>Strongly Disagree</b>
X			

**Please provide a reason for your level of agreement/disagreement.**

The current review highlights the need to create a single integrated curriculum that's proposes a curriculum of learning for SPHE/RSE as one subject and incrementally provides continuity of experience from early childhood to post-primary. The recommendations provide a space for an interim curriculum prior to the incorporation of the curriculum into future curricula developments. The barriers including time, teacher proficiency, training and support are all named. The impact of school ethos is suggested in relation to implementation. The review and curriculum rightly focus on a holistic response to sexual health and wellbeing for Irish society and in particular the RSE curriculum. Bias in relation to school ethos needs to be named as RSE and ethos are separate issues and not the particular concern of this review. The review showcases the need for the inclusion of healthy relationships, consent, sexuality, contraception, communication and support.

**What else do you consider important in relation to future curriculum development in SPHE/RSE?**

The clear and complete list of items for inclusion in an updated curriculum will be crucial to define delivery. This list should include but is not limited to sexuality, identity, communication, sexual health, health relationships, contraception and support services. In addition, social media, dating apps, family structures, conception and changing/transforming family units should all be included.

The hours of delivery, the connection to the specific curriculum and how this will be monitored in terms of face-to-face delivery should be explicitly stated. The current recommendations do not provide this information clearly.

**Creating the conditions for effective RSE**

The Review makes it clear that teachers need in-depth and sustained training and support in the area of SPHE/RSE. Consequently, access to professional development needs to be enhanced at pre-service and in-service levels. The Review also identified the need to take stock of current teaching and learning resources available in this area.

To what extent do you broadly agree/disagree with the Review's findings on the necessary conditions for effective SPHE/RSE? Please tick your response in the box below

Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
X			

**Please provide a reason for your level of agreement/disagreement.**

It is positive that the review highlights the need for training and development of staff both in training and in service. In addition, it is positive to note the partnership approach where resources and training programmes from all sectors will be included in the review of current resources. Finally, the multi-agency approach to training provides an opportunity for responsive, targeted and holistic sexual health for young people.

**What else do you consider important in order to create the conditions for effective SPHE/RSE?**

Training in relation to sexual health, family, conception, contraception, sexuality, gender identity and positive sexual expression are crucial to support teachers through the implementation of this task. Many resources and trainings are currently available including the WISE sexual health facilitation programme within the Sexual Health Centre which not only provides upskilling in relation knowledge but provides facilitation skills training in a topic which is not always comfortable for teaching staff. Teachers would benefit from youth work/facilitation skills. The review should explicitly state a) who is best placed to deliver RSE be it teacher, outside provider or a collaboration and b) what their experience, skillset and training should include to deem them eligible for provision.

**Other considerations**

The Review concluded that comprehensive oversight and support for SPHE/RSE is required to meet the needs identified in the review process. The Review also found schools cannot do it alone and parents must be encouraged and supported in assuming their responsibility for their child's learning. In addition, it suggests that post-primary schools require further support and guidance in planning for junior cycle wellbeing in order to enhance students' learning in SPHE/RSE.

To what extent do you broadly agree/disagree that these are important considerations for SPHE/RSE? Please tick your response in the box below.

Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
X			

**Please provide a reason for your level of agreement/disagreement.**

It is positive that the role of parents is being supported in the delivery of SPHE and RSE. The review does not provide a clear direction toward the form of support required. Resources for

parents, specific training for teachers and a proposal for the manner in which RSE and SPHE are to be included in the planning for Junior Cycle Wellbeing are not included. Their inclusion would benefit the review, reader and road map for future development. The review should highlight and explicitly state the need for ongoing review of this curriculum, it's delivery and the young person.

**Are there any other considerations that should be highlighted in the advice for SPHE/RSE?**

In the review (pg.7) it is important to detail whether the audit of research was a systematic review or not so that the reader can understand the evidence base.

The elements of selection bias and measurement bias should be acknowledged and their impact clearly stated in the online surveys section (pg. 9).

Detail on whether it was a quantitative analysis of data or a qualitative content analysis should be provided so that the reader can better understand the process of the review.

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## Tusla Services for Sexual Violence, The Manuela Project

SECOND SUBMISSION TO THE NCCA IN RESPONSE TO THE DRAFT REPORT ON THE  
REVIEW OF RELATIONSHIPS AND SEXUALITY EDUCATION (RSE) WITH A FOCUS ON  
RECOMMENDED ACTIONS

DOMESTIC, SEXUAL AND GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE (DSGBV) PROGRAMME; TUSLA  
CHILD AND FAMILY AGENCY, OCTOBER 2019

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## INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this submission is to indicate the strong synergy between the experiences of the Manuela Project and the findings and advice emerging from the Review of Relationships and Sexuality Education (RSE) specifically in the Post-Primary sector, and to highlight the potential of the Manuela programme resources to be utilised to respond to many of the findings and recommendations emerging from the RSE Review.

The Review has identified that RSE is best approached in a student-centred, holistic and inclusive manner, which is very the ethos and approach built into the Manuela programme. This evidence-informed programme aims to equip young people aged 15 to 17 with the knowledge and skills required to negotiate informed consent, develop healthy relationships and ultimately prevent sexual violence. It supports young people to navigate the modern day influences of social media, popular culture and pornography and, in line with what young people say is important to them, the approach is non-judgmental and participatory.

The Review report has identified teacher professional development as the key enabler for improving RSE. The Manuela Project recognised the need to build the capacity and confidence of teachers to deliver the sensitive content of the programme independently and this is integral to the project design. Experienced, external facilitators work in partnership with teachers to build their knowledge, skills and confidence to deliver the sensitive content of the modules, acting as a support to teachers rather than a replacement. This is complemented by specific training days for teachers run in local Education Centers and the provision of the comprehensive and highly practical Manuela Programme Facilitator's Handbook.

The evaluation of the Manuela Programme is ongoing, but initial findings show promising indications of statistically significant outcomes for young people. Feedback from students and teachers to date has been overwhelmingly positive. The evaluation will provide a crucial evidence-base for the programme and is expected to make practical recommendations for its effective, efficient and sustainable future delivery.

Tusla would welcome opportunities to collaborate and to facilitate partnerships and sharing of resources to support the implementation of effective consent and healthy relationship education for young people.

## BACKGROUND TO THE MANUELA PROJECT

- The Tusla Domestic Sexual and Gender Based Violence programme is currently supporting an extended national pilot of sexual consent and healthy relationship education in Post Primary schools and some out of school settings with 15-17 year olds –largely focused on transition year students and their teachers.
- The ‘Manuela Programme’ is an evidence-informed, holistic and inclusive programme, originally developed through a collaborative project between the Rape Crisis Network Ireland, 16 national Rape Crisis Centers and the Manuela Riedo Foundation Ireland (MRFI), with input from young people’s sexual health and wellbeing expert Dr. Sue Redmond.
- In 2016 Tusla secured funding from the EU Commission to deliver and evaluate the Manuela Programme in partnership with 4 Rape Crisis Centers in Galway, Kerry, Wexford and Dublin from September 2017 to March 2020.
- The programme is delivered in an empowering, participatory and non-judgmental manner, to equip young people with the knowledge skills required to negotiate informed consent, develop healthy relationships and prevent sexual violence. Topics include understanding sexual violence, understanding and negotiating consent, healthy relationships and boundaries, and navigating influences such as social media and pornography and their effects on wellbeing and healthy relationships. The learning is integrated and young people are empowered to understand how we can all play a role in preventing sexual violence. It is delivered in 6 x 2-hour modules.
- Core to the Project is building the knowledge, skills and confidence of teachers to implement the programme independently, with remote support available from the Manuela Project Workers if needed. 4 part-time project workers have been employed to deliver the project in geographical clusters in partnership with teachers through co-facilitation and follow up training with the purpose of supporting them to develop their own capacity to deliver this challenging and sensitive RSE material. Co-facilitation by teachers is complemented by follow up teacher training days held in local Education Centres, ongoing remote support from the experienced Project Workers and guidance from the extremely comprehensive and practical programme Handbook. The training days have contributed towards meeting the participating teachers’ CPD requirements.
- To date approximately 45 schools and 1,850 students have participated. The response from teachers and students has been overwhelmingly positive. Many more schools are requesting involvement than can be managed within the project capacity The Project Workers are booked up for the remainder of the project (up to March 2020) and the waiting list for the programme (currently 25 schools) continues to grow as demand increases.
- The project sets out to establish evidence of what works in supporting students to know what sexual consent means and how to negotiate it in their real experience. It also asks if this is a useful, efficient or sustainable way to deliver what is probably a most challenging aspect of RSE and what the qualitative experience for young people and teachers is.

- To find answers to these questions and specifically to ascertain whether participation in the Manuela programme leads to a significant change in young people’s knowledge attitude and behaviours, an independent rigorous evaluation (with ethical approval) has been commissioned and is central to the project. Informed and explicit consent to participate in the Project is required from parents, as well as students.

## EMERGING FINDINGS

The Manuela Riedo project evaluation will deliver a final report by early March 2020, which will be published and widely disseminated. There are some promising early indications that the Manuela programme does bring about some statistically significant changes.

In the meantime, the Manuela project can deliver some emerging qualitative findings that can be considered in the context of the future directions proposed in the Draft RSE Review Report.

The project workers who are now in the third academic year of establishment and delivery (through shared facilitation) of multiple rollouts to hundreds of young people in mixed and single gender classes in a wide range of rural and urban Post-primary schools, have amassed considerable and valuable experience from which there is much to learn. In perspective however this experience was gained in only a small proportion of between 6- 8% of Post- primary schools (based on n= 730 Post-primary schools nationally).

## MANUELA PROJECT FEEDBACK FROM TEACHERS

### BASELINE FOR FEEDBACK

The project workers have had the opportunity to; co-facilitate in a lead role with teachers; co-facilitate in a back-up role with teachers; carry out 4 one-day training with teachers (in Education Centres in Galway, Kerry, Wexford and Dublin) and finally mentor the teachers going it alone. So they have witnessed the worries and concerns that some teachers experience managing sensitive consent input to students. They have also witnessed how teachers become much more confident and comfortable along the way given the opportunity for training and support.

- Teachers report that the most challenging part of the programme are the sections on pornography and on the legal system.
- The Manuela programme requires an open discursive facilitated format where students are empowered as equal partners in the process. Indeed, the students are recognised as having the up to date information and as experts on their own experiences. This is a process at odds with the general more didactic approach in subject teaching in Post –primary (this may be less the case in a Primary school setting).

- Offering students, the opportunity to discuss issues about consent requires good and solid knowledge and practice for the teacher/facilitator in relation to managing disclosures should they happen and Children First protocols. However, it should be said that these are required in any case so it is a good opportunity to reconfirm familiarity with school and national policies.
- Facilitating RSE and in particular consent and healthy relationship material places responsibility on the teacher to have reflected on these issues personally. It can surface or bring into focus the experience of uncomfortable situations that may have happened in school or elsewhere (e.g. student to teacher inappropriate/lewd comments /gestures). Training and support are all the more relevant and important therefore in this context. Familiar school policies relating to RSE and issues that may emerge are required.
- Teachers enjoyed the opportunities that their training gave them to explore such issues and to share with peers in other schools. There is a good case to be made for developing a 'community of practice' for teachers involved in RSE work whereby they could establish peer links and mentoring arrangements on a cluster basis across a number of schools.
- Finding protected time in the crowded transition year schedule has been a real challenge for the Manuela project. This has been compounded by the challenge that it is shaped around 2-hourly sessions, which is counter cultural in schools. It is likely that the evaluation will call for adaptations in both timing and content.
- While the project workers are external experts initially, the aim of the project is to embed capacity in the school system.

Very much in line with the findings of the review, the Project Workers report that teacher confidence is critical. Teachers reported that the training days greatly supported them by increasing their confidence to deliver the sensitive content of the programme.

#### MANUELA PROJECT FEEDBACK FROM STUDENTS

Project workers carried out a preliminary analysis of a random selection of 515 student feedback forms from the first year of the project, before the evaluation started. Please refer to Appendix A for a copy of the feedback survey.

Over 90% of participants expressed that they were glad to have participated in the programme, that the topics covered were relevant to young people, that the facilitators were knowledgeable about the topics covered and that they were comfortable with the way the programme was delivered.

Over 80% thought they learned new skills and information to build their confidence around their sexual health.

Regarding the content, the information on consent and / or sexual violence were elements that the students particularly appreciated. For example, students stated that the programme:

*'had a purpose, it can help stop rape and it targets the right age group'*

*'it taught me more about sexual intercourse and rape'*

*'being able to discuss these problems. Learning about consent, sexual violence, assault, rape. Feeling comfortable about what we were talking about'.*

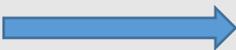
*'the programme did as it said, I am now a lot more educated in sexual health, consent and other problems', while another added that 'I learned a lot about consent and my rights. I am more knowledgeable now'.*

The interactive, discursive and participatory nature of the facilitation style and the methodologies used were important to young people. They particularly enjoyed the walking debates and film clips, with many citing the opportunity to talk openly about these sensitive topics as very positive.

Young people were most likely to be critical about the length of the programme, with many finding the 2 hour sessions too long. Many of the reports indicated the opinion that, while the programme was much appreciated, delivering the programme at a younger age at least in some form should be considered.

## RESPONSE TO THE FUTURE DIRECTIONS

THE RESPONSE TO QUESTIONS FOR CONSIDERATION IN RELTION TO THE ADVICE ON THE FUTURE DIRECTIONS FOR THE MINSTER, AS OUTLINED IN THE DRAFT RSE REVIEW REPORT FOLLOWS

<b>Following the advice on future directions –with responses from the Manuela Project Team</b>			
<b>The Review advises as follows:</b> 	The Review asks the following questions 		
<b>The approach to RSE</b>	Extent of broad agreement/disagreement	Specifics of agreement/disagreement	What else?
Ground the approach in a rights based framework	Fully agree		
There should be a holistic approach to RSE	Fully agree	This will also be a strength based approach	
Need for ongoing regular conversations	Fully agree	It is also a right to have YP voice heard on matters	The approach should be interactive,

with students to find out their needs, concerns and questions		which affect them. Manuela Project feedback from young people echoed the 'too little too late'.	participatory and non-judgemental
<b>The curriculum</b>	Extent of broad agreement/disagreement	Reason for agreement/disagreement	What else?
Part of a single integrated updated SPHE curriculum	Fully agree		
Development of Interim Guidelines	Fully agree	Curriculum change is very slow. Schools are crying out for support NOW.	The Manuela Project is willing to be involved in this process –see*
<b>Creating the conditions for effective RSE</b>	Extent of broad agreement/disagreement	Reason for agreement/disagreement	What else?
Specialist training and pathways for professional development for SPHE/ RSE	Fully agree	The Manuela Project(MP) experience bears this out When offered facilitation support and training teachers gained confidence enough to continue on their own	The Manuela Project is willing to support this process in the short term - see**
Review of current resources and development of up – to –date resources	Fully agree	The MP would be keen to offer the M programme in full to the resource portal once the evaluation is complete –showing the evidence base	The MP is willing to support this process –see*
<b>Other considerations</b>	Extent of broad agreement/disagreement	Reason for agreement/disagreement	What else?
Comprehensive oversight is required	Fully agree	Otherwise SPHE/RSE will remain as a choice less valued	
NCCA to support planning for wellbeing in Post-P junior cycle	Fully agree		Feedback from students indicates that consent elements of RSE should be introduced earlier  An adapted programme has been trialled with 2 <sup>nd</sup> years at school request

## WHAT THE MANUELA PROJECT CAN POTENTIALLY CONTRIBUTE GOING FORWARD

### Short –medium term actions

#### INTERIM GUIDELINES/RESOURCES/DEVELOPMENT:

- a. The Manuela Project is due to finish in its current form on 03.03.20.
- b. With stakeholder agreement the Project could contribute the resources used in the Manuela Project to the NCCA.
- c. Share the evaluation report indicating what evidence there is to support the Manuela programme and how this could be used to advantage further RSE development.
- d. There is a group of highly attuned and passionate project personnel some/all of whom could contribute to the following short term actions.
- e. Continue to embed capacity in the school system.
- f. Support the development of in-service CPD modules for SPHE/RSE teachers.
- g. Adapt resources of the Programme for younger students in Post-primary schools to contribute to resources.
- h. Adapt resources for SEN settings.
- i. Adapt resources to better fit time-tabling.
- j. Train teachers in the delivery of the Manuela Programme as a prototype for future training.
- k. Develop support/mentor framework for SPHE/RSE teachers.
- l. Provide a link for schools to the specialist sexual violence service providers.

Once the EU project ends in March 2020 there will be significant costs attached to delivering on the above or other actions. There is no guarantee that core funding will be available or that this work will compete successfully in the commissioning climate we are operating in. However, a cross Departmental co-commissioning arrangement might strengthen this possibility.

#### **External provision of specialist consent or other RSE input to schools.**

It has long been a concern of the Tusla DSGBV Programme as to how best to support schools in the really important work of education on this specialist subject and on the upstream prevention opportunity this affords.

Rape Crisis Centres and others have enthusiastically offered themselves locally to fulfil this task within their funding capacity. Tusla has not been in a position to commission the training function within the sector, so much of the work has been done with other streams of funding or fundraising.

This work should be quality assured, embedded meaningfully into the school system, be sustainable and equitable. As it currently exists it is not sustainable.

Interagency collaboration between NCCA and Tusla would be necessary for any forward progression. This could be strengthened through formal memoranda of understandings.

An inter-departmental agreement between the Department of Children and Youth Affairs and the Department of Education and Skills would be a longer term goal one that would serve the interests of all parties very well.

# Appendix A

## Manuela Programme Evaluation

Your feedback is really important to us. It will help guide how other courses are run for young people so please share with us ideas about how to make this programme even better! Thank you.

School \_\_\_\_\_

Male

Female

Questions 5= Strongly Agree 1= Strongly Disagree	1	2	3	4	5	Comments on how we can improve
I am glad I participated in the programme.						
I learned new skills and information to build my confidence around my sexual health.						
The topics covered were relevant to young people.						
The facilitators were knowledgeable about the topics covered						
I was comfortable with the way the programme was facilitated.						

\*You can write more than one answer for each of the following if you wish:

1. The things I liked about the programme were:

2. The things I did not like about the programme were:

3. The programme could be improved by:

4. Other comments I would like to make include:

Uplift

## **Uplift Submission to the NCCA on the Review of Relationship and Sex Education in Ireland**

**24 Oct 2019**

### **About Uplift**

Uplift is a people powered campaigning community of more than 220,000 people who take coordinated action together for a more progressive, equal, socially just and democratic Ireland. Uplift members come from all over Ireland and have many different experiences and backgrounds.

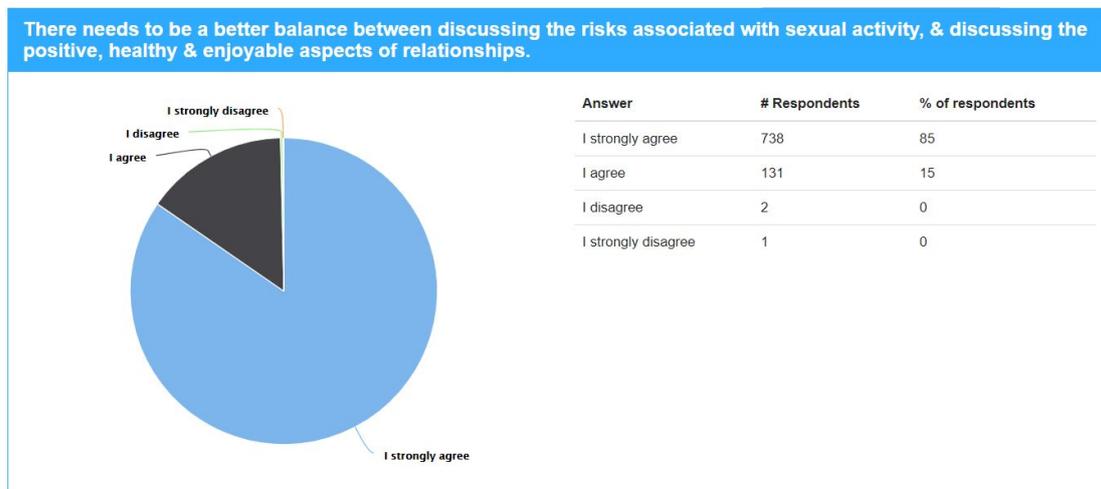
### **About this Submission**

Uplift members have been campaigning in areas related to gender equality, LGBTQIAA+ rights and sex education reform. An opinion poll was first taken by Uplift members, who expressed their high interest in this matter.

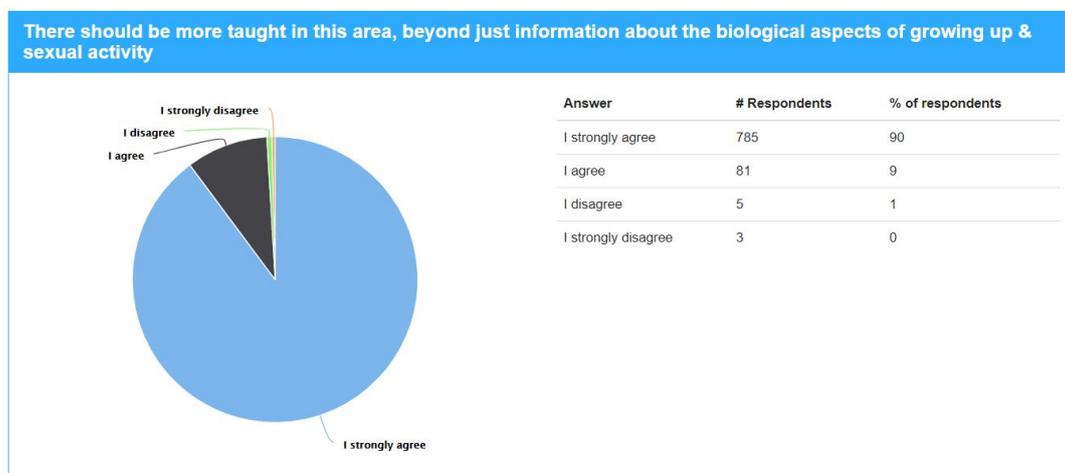
Uplift members were invited to participate in this submission over a period of 6 weeks from September and October 2019. 880 members in total contributed to this submission.

## The approach to teaching relationship and sex education

85% of people who participated in this submission process strongly agree there needs to be better balance discussing the risks associated with sexual activity, and discussing the positive, healthy and enjoyable aspects of a relationship. A further 15% agree, with just two members disagreeing with this statement.



90% of people who participated in this submission process strongly agree there should be more taught in this area, beyond just information about biological aspects of growing up and sexual activity.



As a community we believe that a holistic approach is vital when it comes to relationship and sex education. Sex education needs to be factual, holistic and inclusive. Open discussions on health relationships are essential when approaching matters around sex education.

Young people must be positively informed when engaging in sex and relationships. They should have the ability to ask questions, informed about their own bodies and understand bodily autonomy.

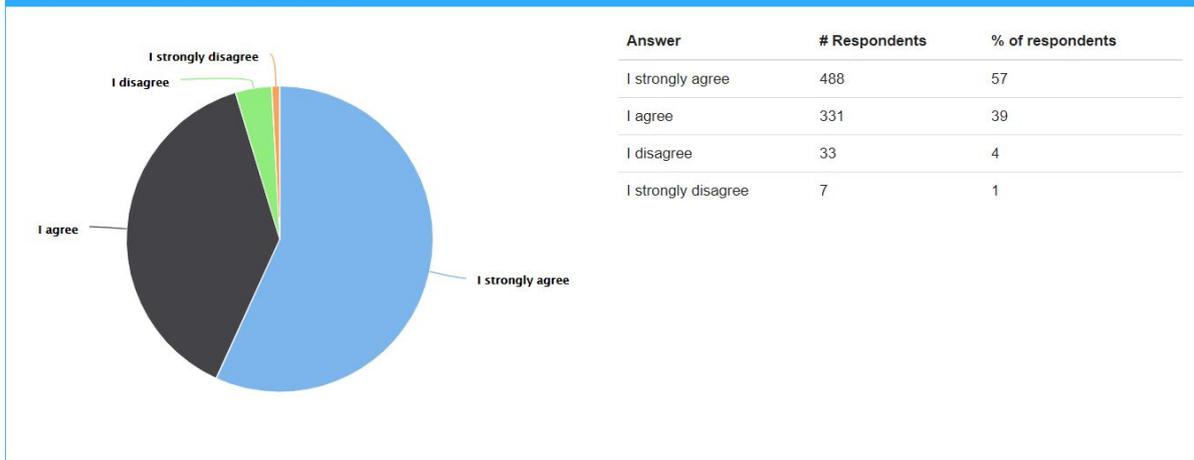
Members acknowledge the role social media and the internet played in the role of ideology in sex and relationships, with many making the connection to body positivity, online bullying, unrealistic approaches to sex and the risks associated to all the above- mentioned.

*“My son is a gay 17 year old boy and gets no form of LGBTQ+ sex ed/relationship talks/advice in schools. It makes him feel like an outsider in his classroom. He is never going to use sex to reproduce but for love and pleasure and why should he be ashamed of that!”*

## **The Relationship and Sex Education Curriculum**

**96% of people who participated in this submission process, agree that the RSE programme should be more integrated into the school curriculum and the SPHE programme should be taught as one subject**

**It is proposed that the RSE programme is more integrated into the school curriculum i.e., the SPHE Programme should be taught as one subject**



Many Uplift members outlined the importance of having the curriculum provide clarity on how topics can be taught in a more inclusive manner, in doing so incorporate current themes identified by the review.

Members also outlined the structural difference between Social Personal and Health (SPE) to Relationship and Sexual Education and that both need in-depth and specified attention.

Members expressed that it is imperative to have both programmes appropriately adapted to the development of children.

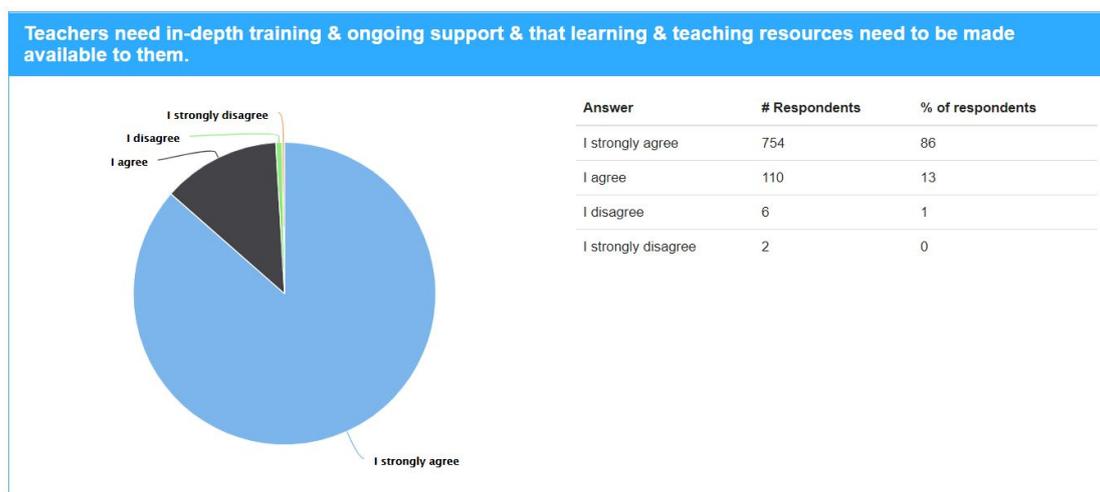
The areas of top importance to members was an inclusive curriculum, taught in a non-judgemental and objective way without the ethos of religion.

*“These should not be integrated as these are two different subjects. Sphe teaches us about the effects of sex and our mental health whereas RSE looks more at the scientific ways of intercourse and pregnancy. What should be added to SPHE is lgbt+ relationships and their emotions and how they may feel left out. When I was in school I felt so different from all the other girls because no one dared to teach anything about lgbt or even mention it.”*

*“Young people should be taught to love their bodies, that no-one has a right to access their bodies unless they give it. And with that positive body relationship, pleasure doesn’t always have to be dependent on someone else - particularly important & potentially freeing for girls/ women I think.”*

## **Creating the conditions for effective Relationship and Sex Education**

**Virtually every person who participated in this submission process agree that teachers need in-dept training and ongoing support and that learning and teaching resources need to be made available to them**



Teachers play the most imperative role in shaping this reform. In-depth training must be provided to support them. According to the respondents, most to all people were in favour of strong support and training, with access to continued professional development.

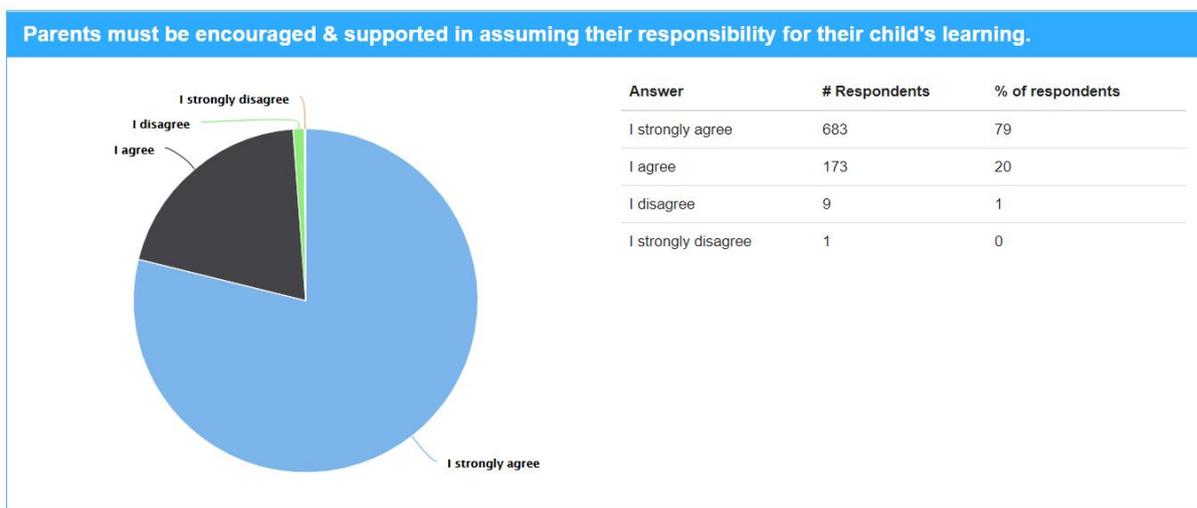
Of the respondents in the petition, 274 people identified as being a teacher and in support of a reformed sex education curriculum - yet acknowledged the importance of having access to the resources, training and support needed to be able to deliver the curriculum effectively and openly.

*“I am a secondary school teacher and have heard first hand the misunderstanding and misinformation that students have”*

*“Whoever is responsible for teaching this programme has to be unbiased and open to hearing everything.”*

### **Other considerations raised by Uplift members**

**79% of people who participated in this submission process strongly agree that parents must be encouraged and supported in assuming their responsibility for their child’s learning**



**79% of people who participated in this submission process strongly agree that post-primary schools need more support and guidance to deliver relationship and sex education in a way that enhances students learning and wellbeing**

*“There should be education available for parent on how to talk to your child about sex. Sex ed should start as early as possible, with age appropriate lesson. We need to move away from stigmatising sex for girls. Everyone should be able to see sex as a normal part of a healthy relationship. In addition, I think it's really important to have lessons on consent.”*

It was acknowledged that while a specific reformed sex and relationship programme is necessary, ultimately we should be opening up the dialogue about sex and relationships in a broader context. These conversations are what facilitate inclusivity, understanding of different family structures, genders and sexual orientations.

It was concluded that an openness with parents and young people about sex, is highly valuable in reducing earlier pregnancies and reducing STD's. Uplift members considered that all members in our society will benefit about more conversation surrounding consent, especially with young boys in the era of high accessibility to porn and social media. Further this must come from both parents and teachers.

Many Uplift members expressed that parents should also be an active participant in their child's learning of sex and relationship education. This includes measures such as homework for both the parents and child, evening classes, discussions at parent-teacher interviews, trainings and workshops for parents.

A dominant thread in member opinions was the need to ensure relationship and sex education should not be influenced by religious belief and that the basis for teaching should be non secular.

*“School patronage or Church bias and influence, to be removed from this education.”*

*“It is important that the school ethos does not override the need to have comprehensive relationship and sex education.”*

*“Educational programmes should be offered to parents to teach them how to communicate in open and frank terms with their children about all aspects of sexuality and sexual relationships. This is something that can be a very difficult topic for many parents”*

## **Conclusion**

This submission provides a brief insight into the views of 880 Uplift members in relation to the call for submissions by the NCCA Review of Relationships and Sexuality Education (RSE).

## **Contact**

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Uplift

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We Care About Our Children

# Review of Relationships and Sexuality Education (RSE)

At the request of the Minister for Education and Skills, a major review of RSE in primary and post-primary schools was undertaken from June 2018 to March 2019. The review examined the experience of teaching and learning in RSE including; the curriculum, the approach to learning, the supports needed, and ways to improve the experience of RSE for students. Engagement in the review was considerable and signals the level of interest and concern people share in relation to this aspect of education. We are now engaging in consultation to ensure the findings and draft advice is reflective of the needs of students, schools, and parents.

In responding to the findings and draft advice on the future directions of RSE it is recommended that you read the draft report or the summary of the draft report both of which are available here <https://www.ncca.ie/en/updates-and-events/consultations/review-of-relationships-and-sexuality-education-rse>.

<b>Name</b>	Gabriel
<b>Surname</b>	Ryan
<b>Position (if applicable)</b>	Secretary
<b>Organisation (if applicable)</b>	We Care About Our Children
<b>Date</b>	24 <sup>th</sup> October 2019
<b>Email</b>	[REDACTED]

**Please provide some brief background information on your organisation (if applicable).**

Set up in 2019 in response to proposed changes to RSE in schools.

## The approach

Across all stakeholders, there was strong agreement that RSE needs to be more than information about biological aspects of growing up and sexual activity. It needs a holistic approach that balances discussion about the risks and dangers associated with relationships and sexual activity with discussion about the positive, healthy and enjoyable aspects of

relationships. A holistic approach can be understood as teaching and learning about the cognitive, emotional, physical and social aspects of relationships and sexuality. It aims to equip children and young people with knowledge, skills, attitudes and values that will empower them to: realise their health, wellbeing and dignity; develop respectful social and sexual relationships; consider how their choices affect their own wellbeing and that of others; and understand and ensure the protection of their rights throughout their lives.

**To what extent do you broadly agree/disagree with the proposed direction on the approach to RSE that has emerged from the review? Please tick your response in the box below.**

Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
			<b>x</b>

**What are the aspects of the proposed approach that you agree/disagree with?**

On first reading the “Holistic Sexuality Education” approach sounds great but on further investigation we have uncovered that it is dangerous and harmful for our children. It will NOT equip children with knowledge, skills, attitudes and values but instead sexualise them. RSE education shouldn’t revolve mainly around the sexual aspects of relationships. This will lead to the early sexualisation of children, which is completely inappropriate.

As per your research paper of November 2018, Holistic Sex Education approach has as its primary focus “sexuality as a positive human potential and a source of satisfaction and pleasure”, (Ketting and Winkelmann, 2013, p 251). (Page 23 of your report.) What about the other aspects of fulfillment, loyalty, family life, love and respect?

**What else is important when considering the approach for teaching SPHE/RSE in schools?**

When RSE guidelines, recommendations, information and legislation on these issues of moral consequence are used in a school with a Christian ethos, there will obviously be conflict. There are too many possibilities for error, misunderstandings and mistakes in RSE without clear guidelines for teachers. In Christian schools, where parents have chosen the school according to ethos, guidelines should reflect Christian family values.

Parents should be handed (not referred to an online resource) the FULL program outline of any RSE program which has moral, personal and ethical consequences. Assumed parental consent is unacceptable. An opt in approach is fundamental!

### **The curriculum**

The Review highlighted the need to create a single integrated curriculum that sets out the learning for SPHE/RSE as one subject and incrementally provides continuity of experience from early childhood to post-primary. In the immediate term the NCCA will develop interim guidelines to support the current curriculum on how it can be approached in a more holistic way and provide clarity on how topics can be taught in an inclusive manner to incorporate current themes identified by the review.

**To what extent do you broadly agree/disagree with the need for a single integrated curriculum for SPHE/RSE? Please tick your response in the box below.**

<b>Strongly Agree</b>	<b>Agree</b>	<b>Disagree</b>	<b>Strongly Disagree</b>
			<b>x</b>

### **Please provide a reason for your level of agreement/disagreement.**

RSE is a highly sensitive and intimate subject with unique moral aspects and should be taught separately from SPHE. Keeping it separate allows for adjusting the RSE curriculum to be taught in accordance with the wishes of parents.

Integrating RSE with SPHE gives the impression that sexual relationships are on a par with Social relationships without any moral dimension, which is very misleading.

Sex education should not be taught in early childhood as indicted and integrating RSE with SPHE in an incremental way would lead to the early sexualisation of our children.

**What else do you consider important in relation to future curriculum development in**

**SPHE/RSE?**

**As parents we were not consulted in the previous NCCA survey as part of this review. The last survey was flawed and should be disregarded. Public consultation of parents with children in schools should begin. The parent is the primary educator according to our constitution and we are protected by international laws to have our children educated according to our family values.**

**Creating the conditions for effective RSE**

The Review makes it clear that teachers need in-depth and sustained training and support in the area of SPHE/RSE. Consequently, access to professional development needs to be enhanced at pre-service and in-service levels. The Review also identified the need to take stock of current teaching and learning resources available in this area.

**To what extent do you broadly agree/disagree with the Review’s findings on the necessary conditions for effective SPHE/RSE? Please tick your response in the box below**

<b>Strongly Agree</b>	<b>Agree</b>	<b>Disagree</b>	<b>Strongly Disagree</b>
			<b>x</b>

**Please provide a reason for your level of agreement/disagreement.**

Teachers are in school to teach academic subjects like maths, English etc. Sensitive subjects with a moral aspect should be left to parents and family.

Teacher members of our organisation are deeply concerned about this new in-depth training in sex education, given that leaders in the area such Padraig MacNeela and Kate Dawson of AIDS West and the Psychology Dept of NUIG, have been exposed for their extreme perverted ideas when it comes to teaching our children.

**What else do you consider important in order to create the conditions for effective SPHE/RSE?**

**SPHE and RSE are TWO SEPARATE SUBJECTS! They are not the same thing and should not be treated as such.**

**Parents need to be respected and consulted at EVERY LEVEL.**

**Other considerations**

The Review concluded that comprehensive oversight and support for SPHE/RSE is required to meet the needs identified in the review process. The Review also found schools cannot do it alone and parents must be encouraged and supported in assuming their responsibility for their child's learning. In addition, it suggests that post-primary schools require further support and guidance in planning for junior cycle wellbeing in order to enhance students' learning in SPHE/RSE.

**To what extent do you broadly agree/disagree that these are important considerations for SPHE/RSE? Please tick your response in the box below.**

<b>Strongly Agree</b>	<b>Agree</b>	<b>Disagree</b>	<b>Strongly Disagree</b>
		<b>x</b>	

**Please provide a reason for your level of agreement/disagreement.**

Parents are well able to teach their own children about these important issues of moral, social, ethical and personal consequence! Why is it assumed that they need this encouragement and support?!

As parents we realise the individual needs of our children and ONLY A PARENT can have both the time and the knowledge of how to best address such topics with each individual

child.

If secondary schools are going to receive further support and guidance in planning for changes in RSE why is it not an option to teach “Abstinence” as the only 100% effective way to avoid pregnancy, STIs and a plethora of social problems? Why in your research paper was this approach only afforded minimal space and discussion?

**Are there any other considerations that should be highlighted in the advice for SPHE/RSE?**

**The review is couched in generalities that seem reasonable but it does not spell out that the Holistic approach is focused on “sex is for pleasure “ approach and is very similar to the Comprehensive Sexuality Approach which is promoted by UN bodies as in the WHO report which sets out a highly sexualized approach to RSE and “Education” for children. This review does not spell out what the actual RSE content for each age group would look like or include, or what teaching aids will be used!**

**The review needs to set out in detail, the RSE content proposed for each age group so that parents can see what will actually be delivered to their children. This needs a whole new round of consultation with parents and schools for the consultation process to be genuine and transparent.**

**In Primary school aged children the years of Innocence should be protected. This is a precious time of life for children that should not be disturbed by unnecessary information about sex. This is a widely researched and honoured time of life, not by psychologists and psychiatrists worldwide and throughout the ages! At this age there is NO need for sex education and parents can decide how much to tell their children. Have we not learned from mistakes in the past when we have allowed access to our children and trusted that other adults would respect and honour their innocence?! Now what is being proposed is that we hand over this trust to strangers (external agents) or relative strangers (teachers) in a school setting to talk to our children about these sensitive issues at a level that someone else has decided is age appropriate!**

**In secondary schools our children are taught to view every aspect of life through a sexualized lens. At the heart of these proposals is consent, which aims to teach our children that sex is no more than a transaction, without due consideration to the**

**physical, emotional, spiritual and moral consequence. Who decides what values are taught with these consent classes? Consent alone is not enough to speak to our children about. Shouldn't we be talking about the ideal? Consent plus marriage? Plus love? Why deny that consent on its own is the perfect recipe to feel abused, exploited and used? Or do we tell our children sex is just a physical act, of the moment, no different from deciding to eat dinner or not?**

**Will these factual classes about abortion include the objective fact that abortion ALWAYS ends the life of the unborn child? If not, why not? Who decides on which facts will be included and why do they get to decide?**

**How about genders? In terms of sexualities and genders, the curriculum is not at all objective or value neutral. It is the product of a very particular value-system. A curriculum where all sexualities are taught as valid and morally equal choices, irrespective of the ethos of the school, is not ok. It excludes a whole range of perspectives that have existed for millennia. Also, gender is either male or female, this is a biological fact. Proposing different types of gender is neither accurate, correct, credible, nor scientifically verifiable and it's contrary to long-established facts. Will the assertion that gender is a social construct be taught as objective? Or that male and female is a mere preference?**

**The belief that gender and sex are the same thing is a belief held by many millions of people from many religions and none, and must be respected. Teaching that this is objectively subjective disregards those views.**

**If a school teaches something untrue as fact, it becomes a centre of indoctrination, not education.**

The NCCA fully respects your right to privacy. Any personal information which you volunteer to the NCCA will be treated with the highest standards of security and confidentiality, strictly in accordance with the Data Protection Acts.

If you require further information related to data protection and [www.ncca.ie](http://www.ncca.ie) you can contact the NCCA's Data Protection Officer at [dpo@ncca.ie](mailto:dpo@ncca.ie)

Youth Work Ireland

# Review of Relationships and Sexuality Education (RSE)

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<b>Name</b>	Michael
<b>Surname</b>	Mc Loughlin
<b>Position (if applicable)</b>	Head of Advocacy
<b>Organisation (if applicable)</b>	Youth Work Ireland
<b>Date</b>	24.10.2019
<b>Email</b>	

Please provide some brief background information on your organisation (if applicable).

Youth Work Ireland is the largest youth organisation in Ireland. We are made up of 21 Local Member Youth Services and a national office. We support our members to deliver an [Integrated Youth Services Model](#) to young people in their communities. This means

that young people around Ireland can avail of a whole range of services and supports when they need them.

### The approach

Across all stakeholders, there was strong agreement that RSE needs to be more than information about biological aspects of growing up and sexual activity. It needs a holistic approach that balances discussion about the risks and dangers associated with relationships and sexual activity with discussion about the positive, healthy and enjoyable aspects of relationships. A holistic approach can be understood as teaching and learning about the cognitive, emotional, physical and social aspects of relationships and sexuality. It aims to equip children and young people with knowledge, skills, attitudes and values that will empower them to: realise their health, wellbeing and dignity; develop respectful social and sexual relationships; consider how their choices affect their own wellbeing and that of others; and understand and ensure the protection of their rights throughout their lives.

**To what extent do you broadly agree/disagree with the proposed direction on the approach to RSE that has emerged from the review? Please tick your response in the box below.**

<b>Strongly Agree</b>	<b>Agree</b>	<b>Disagree</b>	<b>Strongly Disagree</b>
X			

#### **What are the aspects of the proposed approach that you agree/disagree with?**

The Approach set out in the Review Document very much rhymes with our experience of working with young people and the views expressed by young people to us and in survey work we have carried out.

In our own work and research including a survey of over 1000 young people in 2018 inclusive sex education has emerged as a key issue for young people, who tell us that current RSE is inadequate, not fit for purpose and does not reflect or address the needs of young people growing up in Ireland today. Ireland has changed in the last decades, we are a more inclusive, equal and progressive society and sex education in Irish schools must reflect this.

The survey showed that young people are not turning to their parents or teachers for information about positive and healthy sexual relationships. Instead they are turning to social media, the internet and worryingly, pornography.

#### **What else is important when considering the approach for teaching SPHE/RSE in schools?**

Schools clearly have a critical roll to play but other actors inside and outside are important too. Youth services have played a role both in and out of school as have others. Some changes to the DCYA funding schemes may play a role here so this needs to be taken in to account. Clearly quality control for all providers would be important. Also, the respective roles of teachers, schools and non-school actors need to be clear. There may be different relationships with children and indeed different legal and safeguarding responsibilities.

### **The curriculum**

The Review highlighted the need to create a single integrated curriculum that sets out the learning for SPHE/RSE as one subject and incrementally provides continuity of experience from early childhood to post-primary. In the immediate term the NCCA will develop interim guidelines to support the current curriculum on how it can be approached in a more holistic way and provide clarity on how topics can be taught in an inclusive manner to incorporate current themes identified by the review.

**To what extent do you broadly agree/disagree with the need for a single integrated curriculum for SPHE/RSE? Please tick your response in the box below.**

<b>Strongly Agree</b>	<b>Agree</b>	<b>Disagree</b>	<b>Strongly Disagree</b>
<b>X</b>			

### **Please provide a reason for your level of agreement/disagreement.**

Once more this is consistent with our experience and research. The “teaching” of this topic if such a word is accurate will need a lot of flexibility but also ensure common issues, themes and subject matter is covered. Most of all it needs an innovative and participative approach. A didactic approach will not suffice (indeed this is an issue across all subjects). Young people at different ages may have different experiences and questions and despite the need for “normalisation” the topic may still lead to tension, insecurity and vulnerability between pupils, teachers and others. Disclosures may be made, and these may not always be clear. Pupils primary experiences of relationship issues at an older level may well be between each other or indeed fellow pupils in the actual class. Furthermore, pupils are generally older in school due to later starting and transition year. Many future pupils will finish school at 19 and are thus adults in their final year.

### **What else do you consider important in relation to future curriculum development in SPHE/RSE?**

The consultation and involvement of students as envisaged in the document is crucial. Schools are not always the most participative environment and we need to understand there is a considerable imbalance in power in the school. It would then be important that involvement is meaningful, done in the right context and produces tangible results. Once more we believe the youth work sector could assist in some of these methodologies.

## Creating the conditions for effective RSE

The Review makes it clear that teachers need in-depth and sustained training and support in the area of SPHE/RSE. Consequently, access to professional development needs to be enhanced at pre-service and in-service levels. The Review also identified the need to take stock of current teaching and learning resources available in this area.

**To what extent do you broadly agree/disagree with the Review's findings on the necessary conditions for effective SPHE/RSE? Please tick your response in the box below**

Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
X			

**Please provide a reason for your level of agreement/disagreement.**

This is self-evident for any form of curriculum change but particularly for this process. However again we need to step back from the traditional school environment, culture and methods. Our education system is highly regulated and indeed regimented. The points race and other factors do not lend themselves to the most emotionally sensitive topics. Curriculum change and training while important are not the whole picture, we need a major culture change in schools which will change many things along with improving this area.

**What else do you consider important in order to create the conditions for effective SPHE/RSE?**

As above a change in school culture, leadership and the power dynamics. The curriculum reform at senior level will also be important.

There is also an issue of timing and urgency. Curriculum reform seems to work at a different time pace to other things and takes a long time. The reform of the Junior Cert is a case in point, often further issues of bedding down and industrial relations add to this. Young people do not have this amount of time. Our research shows online pornography is supplanting the role of educators in this space which is something that needs to change.

A young person starting secondary school would practically be finished there by the time a particular piece of curriculum reform is delivered from the outset to being in the school. This process must improve and respond speedily to the needs of young people.

## Other considerations

The Review concluded that comprehensive oversight and support for SPHE/RSE is required to meet the needs identified in the review process. The Review also found schools cannot do it alone and parents must be encouraged and supported in assuming their responsibility for their child's learning. In addition, it suggests that post-primary schools require further support and guidance in planning for junior cycle wellbeing in order to enhance students' learning in SPHE/RSE.

**To what extent do you broadly agree/disagree that these are important considerations for SPHE/RSE? Please tick your response in the box below.**

Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
X			

**Please provide a reason for your level of agreement/disagreement.**

Once more the support and guidance are critical, but it may well need to go further than the school itself. While youth participation on boards is provided for it is not properly supported and resourced and neither is the role of parents.

**Are there any other considerations that should be highlighted in the advice for SPHE/RSE?**

The [Oireachtas Committee Report on Relationships and Sexual Education](#) has made a number of recommendations which both support and echo the views held by our young people. The report recommends the teaching of inclusive sexual health education and amendments to be made to the Education Act 1998 to remove of the role of ethos as a barrier to the teaching of sexual health education.

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