



THE FUTURE OF
RELATIONSHIP AND SEX
EDUCATION IS IN OUR HANDS.



HOW TO RESPOND

1

READ

THE RSE CONSULTATION GUIDE AT:
[HTTPS://TINYURL.COM/RESPONDRSE](https://tinyurl.com/respondrse)

RESPOND

USE OUR TEMPLATE TO HELP
COMPLETE THE CONSULTATION

2

SHARE

3

SHARE WITH YOUR ONLINE FRIENDS
AND EDUCATE YOUR COMMUNITY
ON RSE

Alliance for Choice are disheartened that there has been a concerted disinformation campaign about the new RSE proposals for post primary education.

Our current RSE is sub-standard, we frequently take calls from people with little to no knowledge on how their bodies, contraception or consent work.

If we want to make sure that people who have been the victims of sexual abuse can come forward, they need to know what the differences between healthy and dangerous relationships are and where to access the best help and support.

49% of young people felt that the way RSE was taught was influenced by religion or the ethos of their school *



We have made this guide to help you respond to the government consultation fully and appropriately. We really encourage you to feedback any firsthand experiences at the end of the consultation.

When the abortion services consultation was released we were told no public engagement was necessary yet organised religion responses defied this and submitted responses which were then misrepresented as a majority lack of support, despite all previous evidence. We don't want this to happen for RSE.



* <https://www.belfastcity.gov.uk/documents/youth-forum/any-use-report>

YOUNG PEOPLE'S PERSPECTIVES:

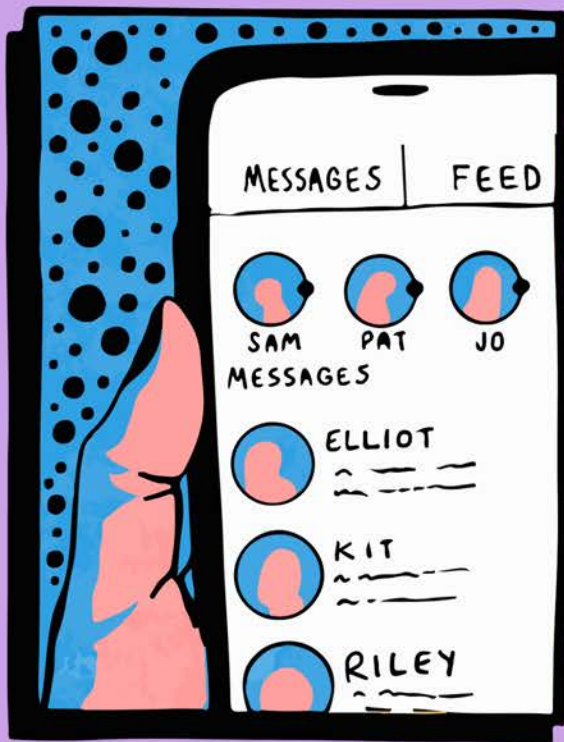


“We’re being taught this stuff too late and, at this point, I feel like...the information that we have, either we learnt it from our parents or we learnt it on the internet because the school really doesn’t do much to help us with these types of topics.”*

* <https://www.belfastcity.gov.uk/documents/youth-forum/any-use-report>

The recent “Any Use”^{*} study in Northern Ireland found that 77% of young people thought a taught course as part of an existing subject or a special RSE curriculum programme was the best way to deliver RSE.

Many schools are out of step with the real world around us, without safe, evidence-based guidance, we are unable to protect young people from image-based abuse, grooming and harm.



Allowing random strangers on Google or TikTok to be our kids' main educators on relationships and sex, risks exposing them to misinformation, myths, and many misconceptions.

62% resort to friends and 55% use social media for information on sex and relationships. The internet was the main source of information for boys. ^{*}

The abortion legislation was brought in after an extensive 2 year inquiry in Northern Ireland by the United Nations. The Secretary of State for NI and Department of Education are duty-bound to provide RSE based on the human rights recommendations made into law. They state,

“Make age-appropriate, comprehensive and scientifically accurate education on sexual and reproductive health and rights a compulsory curriculum component for adolescents, covering early pregnancy prevention and access to abortion, and monitor its implementation”. ^{**}



^{*} <https://www.belfastcity.gov.uk/documents/youth-forum/any-use-report>

^{**} <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/uksi/2023/602/contents/made>

ABORTION

89% of NI adults believe a woman should never go to prison for an abortion*

Teen pregnancies are associated with poor social and economic conditions and prospects for women, potentially compromising their educational and economic opportunities. **

Young people have specifically outlined that they want RSE content broadened to include LGBT rights, personal relationships, sexual rights, gender equality, abortion, violence prevention, consent, and more STI information.

Many of the scare tactics around the new legal duty for science and evidence-based RSE are based on the abortion information implications.

As abortion access advocates, Alliance for Choice feel we need to reassert that pro-choice is the majority view in NI. 72% believe it is a woman's right to choose.*

Young people are not the only people that need abortions, but the first time they encounter abortion it should be in a framework where it is included in the wider spectrum of reproductive health choices.



* <https://www.ark.ac.uk/nilt/2018/Abortion/NOPRISON.html>

** <https://www.guttmacher.org/fact-sheet/adolescent-pregnancy-and-its-outcomes-across-countries>

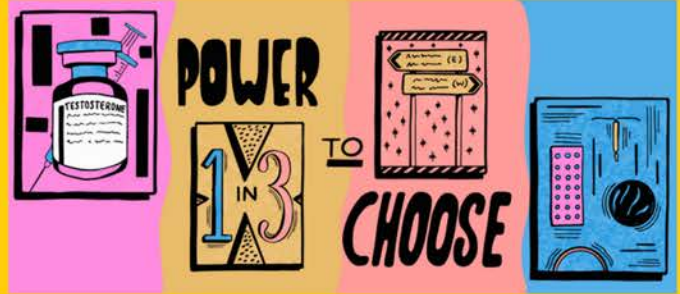
TEACHER:



“When I first started looking at it, the programme we had was very much in terms of “The students will be making rash decisions, and actually, they won’t be thinking about the consequences”. {..} it very quickly became obvious that they do know quite a lot – sometimes it’s not wholly accurate – but they do know a lot, and they actually, when they make decisions, they’re based on the information they have available at the time. So, the more information we can give them, the better placed they are to make decisions that will keep them safe.”

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Responses!



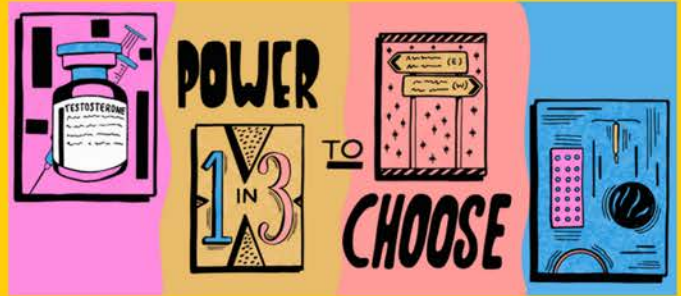
Q1. The content of teaching and learning resources for Learning for Life and Work developed by CCEA should be factual and contain age appropriate, comprehensive and scientifically accurate education on sexual and reproductive health and rights, covering prevention of early pregnancy and access to abortion and these resources should not advocate, or oppose, a particular view on the moral and ethical considerations of abortion or contraception.

A1. AGREE

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS.

- Resources for Learning for Life and Work developed by CCEA **MUST** be factual rather than only 'should be' factual, this should not be consulted on, it is a legal obligation.
- Prevention of pregnancy and abortion choices should be explicit and all statutory services should be signposted.
- Abortion does not belong in the controversial issues section but in the RSE section in order to fulfil that they should "not advocate, or oppose, a particular view on the moral and ethical considerations of abortion or contraception".
- Global best practice should be evidenced in all materials, from organisations such as the UN WHO guidance, CEDAW Guidance and UNCRC.
- When taught in other subjects, evidence-based RSE should not be contradicted (eg: RE)
- Concerned that Churches are listed as stakeholders (give evidence of Inst. abuse but also why churches can't be neutral on sex ed, LGBT, Abortion etc)

Responses!

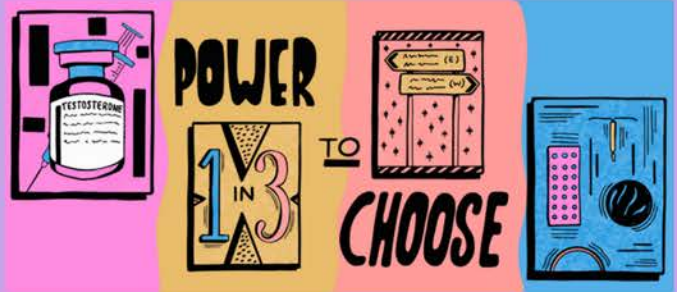


- Marriage, civil partnerships, all families need to be covered rather than focusing on marriage only.
- Children's rights are notably absent – more on childrens' reproductive, sexual and LGBT rights etc.
- In short, attention to the full range of sexual health topics, across grades, embedded in supportive school environments and across subject areas, has the potential to improve sexual, social, and emotional health, and academic outcomes for young people.” *
- Providing children and young people with adequate knowledge about their rights, and what is and is not acceptable behaviour, sexuality education makes them less vulnerable to abuse. **
- An outstanding issue of CEDAW is combating gender stereotypes – these need addressed.
- There is sound evidence that unequal gender norms begin early in life, with harmful impacts on both males and females. It is estimated that 18%, or almost 1 in 5 girls worldwide, have experienced child sexual abuse. **
- Research shows, however, that education in small and large groups can contribute to challenging and changing unequal gender norms. Based on this, the UN's international guidance on sexuality education recommends teaching young people about gender relations, gender equality and inequality, and gender-based violence. **

* <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S1054139X20304560>

** <https://www.who.int/news-room/questions-and-answers/item/comprehensive-sexuality-education>

Responses!



Q2. Parents/carers should be informed about the specific nature and content of the age-appropriate, comprehensive and scientifically accurate education on sexual and reproductive health and rights, covering prevention of early pregnancy and access to abortion.

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS.

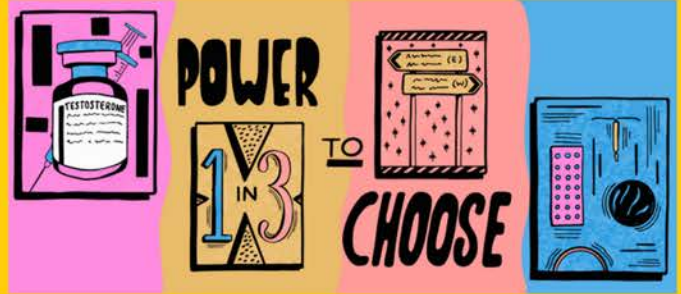
A2. AGREE

- Misinformation campaigns to be addressed.
- RSE info should be relayed to parents and guardians but not any differently to other subjects. We acknowledge parent-specific additional resources may also be appropriate.
- Framing of consultation is focused on opting out – not how can we deliver to as many children in best way possible according to their rights and needs.
- Abusive families/parents are more likely to remove kids most at risk from sexual/relationship violence in the home. 2/3 of children experience sexual or violent abuse from a family member. *
- Abstinence cannot continue to be a recommended part of the topics covered as it has no scientific basis. It is considered to be a harmful teaching practice – it doesn't meet the minimum CEDAW and legal requirements – it is highly stigmatising, and is used to exclude LGBT pupils. **
- What MUST be included already from previous requirements? LGBT+ inclusions had been for 15 yrs – in order to meet CEDAW minimum requirements it should not include 'Marriage and Abstinence' but all types of healthy relationships and safe sexual and non-sexual practices.

* <https://learning.nspcc.org.uk/research-resources/statistics-briefings/child-sexual-abuse>

** Beh, H., & Diamond, M. (2006). The failure of abstinence-only education: minors have right to honest talk about sex. *Columbia Journal of Gender and Law*, 15(1), 12–62. <https://heinonline.org/HOL/Page?handle=hein.journals/coljgl15&id=14&collection=journals&index=>

Responses!



Q3. The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child³ includes at Articles 1–3 and 12 the rights of the child to 'express their views, feelings and wishes in all matters affecting them, and to have their views considered and taken seriously' and at Article 5 'the rights and responsibilities of parents and carers to provide guidance and direction to their child as they grow up so that they fully enjoy their rights. This must be done in a way that recognises the child's increasing capacity to make their own choices.' The Department's guidance, when developed, should consider in such instances how schools balance the rights of both children and parents/carers in implementing the Regulations.

A3. DISAGREE

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS.

- Question is based on the premise that RSE is corrupting, whilst RSE is actually education for asserting a child's rights and safety.
- You cannot opt out of sex education & still teach or learn quality relationship education, given that some relationships are also sexual. RSE is at its best when everyone avails of all of it.
- When power dynamics between parent and child and risk of violence, abuse or denial of rights come into play, it's clear the child's rights are paramount.
- Do parents even have a right to know? LGBT+ children have a right to be safe, this is unequivocal. Telling parents a child's sexual orientation or gender identity could make them unsafe.
- Children's rights are being qualified – but shouldn't be. Basic misunderstanding of children's rights & Article 5.
- Religious Education is only other subject can opt out of but we have a right to be free FROM religion but not free from sex education.

Responses!



POWER



TO



CHOOSE



Q4. Pupils and parents/carers should have access to an overview of their school's RSE policy and planned RSE programme.

A4. Neither agree nor disagree

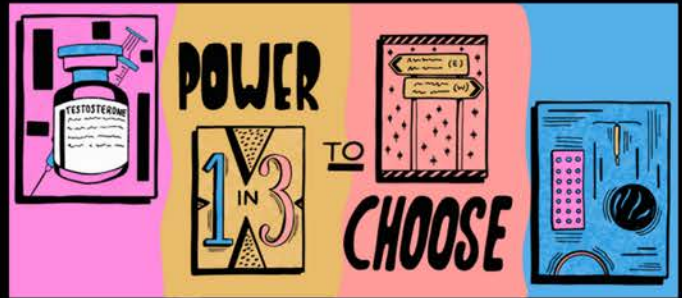
- Being open and transparent protects against misinformation. The minimum requirements for all subjects on the curriculum are freely available via CCEA.

BUT

- It is no different than any other topic – so it should not be exceptionalised.
- Being open means that we can support young people with the content
- Evidence suggests that schools are best able to provide reliable and universal access to sex education.
- Widespread evidence has demonstrated that schools based sexual education interventions involving parents improve communication about relationships and sexuality between parents and adolescents and increase safer sex behaviours.*
- The recent Committee on the Rights of the Child Concluding observations for the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, “urges the State party to ensure the meaningful participation of children in the design and implementation of policies and programmes aimed at achieving all 17 Sustainable Development Goals as far as they concern children.”

* Templeton M, Lohan M, Kelly C, Lundy L. A systematic review and qualitative synthesis of adolescents' views of sexual readiness. J Adv Nurs 2017; 73: 1288–301.

Responses!



ANY ADDITIONAL COMMENTS

THIS IS YOUR CHANCE!

Here we urge you to describe any failings in RSE that you have experienced. We also have some more information for you on the last pages with linked resources.

Below we have also some additional points to consider, but it would be great if this bit could be as individual and personalised as possible.

The good mental health of LGBTQ+ young people depends on their ability to access evidence-based information and peer support, all of which must be part of RSE provision.

The vast majority of children who experience sexual abuse were abused by someone they knew, (NSPCC 2021). Children need to be able to identify grooming and abuse in order to seek safety from a trusted adult, RSE is the best way to ensure this is information is provided in a safe and age appropriate way as a key form of prevention of sexual abuse and exploitation of children.

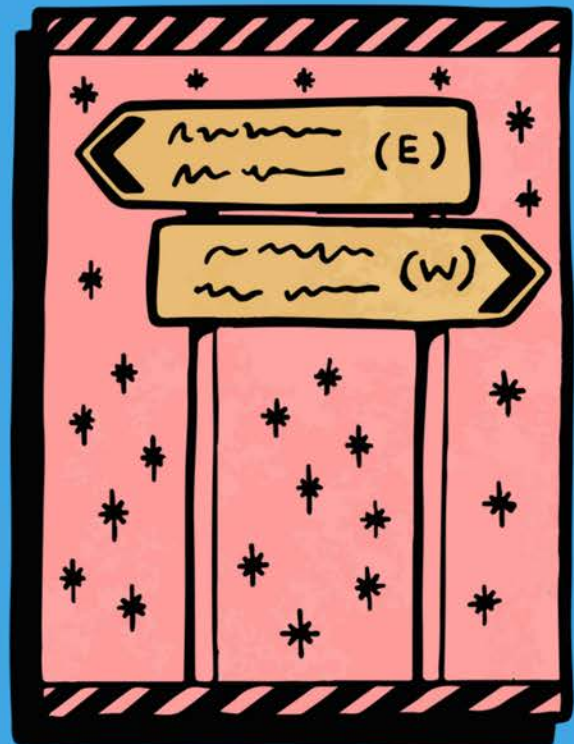
The legislation requires that the implementation of RSE is monitored. The Department must set out a clear plan of how this monitoring will happen.

MORE INFO.

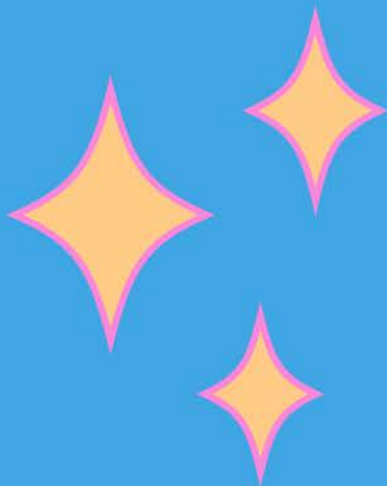
ANY USE REPORT:

Young people raised time and time again is the need for good quality Relationship and Sexuality Education (RSE).

They spoke constantly about their current RSE not meeting their needs and wanting RSE provision to improve in schools. **



Young people's voices and views are missing. RSE is most often designed and implemented from an educator (adult) perspective and fails to explore what young people themselves understand about their rights and readiness for RSE. *



* https://safelives.org.uk/sites/default/files/resources/RSE_Report_2022_0.pdf

** <https://www.belfastcity.gov.uk/documents/youth-forum/any-use-report>

JUNE 2023 COMMITTEE ON THE RIGHTS OF THE CHILD CONCLUDING OBSERVATIONS FOR THE UNITED KINGDOM OF GREAT BRITAIN AND NORTHERN IRELAND *

Adolescent health:

The Committee recommends that the State party:

(a) Ensure access for adolescent girls to age-appropriate family planning services, affordable contraceptives and safe abortion and post-abortion care services, particularly in Northern Ireland and the overseas territories, with a view to ensuring that no adolescent girl has to travel to other jurisdictions of the State party to access reproductive health care;

(b) Integrate comprehensive, age-appropriate and evidence-based education on sexual and reproductive health into mandatory school curricula at all levels of education and into teacher training and ensure that it includes education on sexual diversity, sexual and reproductive health rights, responsible sexual behaviour and violence prevention, without the possibility for faith-based schools or parents to opt out of such education;

* https://tbinternet.ohchr.org/_layouts/15/treatybodyexternal/Download.aspx?symbolno=CRC%2FC%2FGBR%2FCO%2F6-7&Lang=en

OTHER RESOURCES

Women's Policy Group NI guide

<https://wrda.net/wp-content/uploads/2023/10/RSEConsultationQuestionsGuidetoResponding.pdf>

Common Youth – Free, confidential sexual health and wellbeing services for under 25's in Northern Ireland

<https://commonyouth.com/>

NSPCC Child Abuse Statistics

<https://learning.nspcc.org.uk/research-resources/statistics-briefings/child-sexual-abuse>

Schubotz D. Messed up? Sexual lifestyles of 16 year olds in Northern Ireland. 2011.

NISRA. Young Person's Behaviour and Attitudes Survey. Northern Ireland Statistics & Research Agency (NISRA), 2013.

Pound P, Denford S, Shucksmith J, et al. What is best practice in sex and relationship education? A synthesis of evidence, including stakeholders' views. *BMJ Open* 2017; 7. DOI:10.1136/bmjopen-2016-014791.

Pound P, Langford R, Campbell R. What do young people think about their school-based sex and relationship education? A qualitative synthesis of young people's views and experiences. *BMJ Open* 2016; 6: e011329.

Leung H, Shek DTL, Leung E, Shek EYW. Development of contextually-relevant sexuality education: Lessons from a comprehensive review of adolescent sexuality education across cultures. *Int J Environ Res Public Health*. 2019; 16. DOI:10.3390/ijerph16040621.

Alien L. 'Say everything': Exploring young people's suggestions for improving sexuality education. *Sex Educ*. 2005; 5: 389–404.

Beh, H., & Diamond, M. (2006). The failure of abstinence-only education: minors have right to honest talk about sex. *Columbia Journal of Gender and Law*, 15(1), 12–62. <https://heinonline.org/HOL/Page?handle=hein.journals/coljgl15&id=14&collection=journals&index=>