



Responding to the Northern Ireland:

# RELATIONSHIPS AND SEXUALITY EDUCATION (RSE) CONSULTATION



Response guide by:  
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## Question 1:

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.

Research demonstrates that curriculum-based RSE contributes to:

- delayed sexual initiation,
- decreased frequency in sexual intercourse,
- decreased number of sexual partners,
- reduced risk-taking,
- increased and more consistent condom use,
- increased and more consistent use of contraceptive methods.\*

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## PLEASE ANSWER **AGREE TO THIS QUESTION**

RSE classes should focus on learning factual science-based information at regular, age-appropriate intervals throughout schooling.

Information resources should not comment on the "moral and ethical considerations of abortion or contraception" as RSE classes are not the appropriate space for moral and ethical discussion of abortion or contraception.

Resources should align with the fact that abortion is not a criminal act in Northern Ireland and therefore should focus on the importance of freedom of access, and provide non-directive and appropriate signposting.

## Question 2:

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.

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### PLEASE ANSWER **AGREE TO THIS QUESTION**

It is fair to agree that parents and carers should have access to what their child is being taught at school. However, additional access to RSE lesson material compared to subjects such as English, Maths or Science is unnecessary. To single out the RSE curriculum in this way is to imply that RSE is somehow dangerous or requires more parental input than other subjects.

The nature and content of RSE information should align with the fact that abortion is not a criminal act in Northern Ireland and therefore should focus on the importance of freedom of access, and provide non-directive and appropriate signposting.

Appropriate terminology, information about abortion, STI treatment and support can save lives. It is worth noting that RSE and pastoral support in schools may be the only place that young people can receive information about their sexual and emotional health - parents may not be supportive.

There must be further adult education across the board to support parents/carers in understanding and responding to issues discussed in RSE lessons.

QUB research in 2020 concluded that parents have an important complementary role to play in SRH education by sharing their own experiences, values, beliefs and expectations in relation to sexual behaviour and SRH.\*



Western Europe pioneered the introduction of school based RSE programmes 50 years ago. Countries such as Sweden, Norway and the Netherlands have long-standing RSE programmes in schools, and significantly lower birth rates than countries where discussions of issues related to sexuality and RSE in schools remains more sensitive.\*\*

\*[Source: Aventin Á, et al, Engaging parents in digital sexual and reproductive health education: evidence from the JACK trial. *Reprod Health*. 2020 Aug 27;17(1):132. doi: 10.1186/s12978-020-00975-y]

\*\*[Source: UNESCO. 2017. International technical guidance on sexuality education, p. 83.]



## PLEASE ANSWER **DISAGREE** TO THIS QUESTION

Young people have repeatedly answered this question - they want their views taken seriously and to be realised and accepted as capable of making their own choices.

A space within schooling that provides children, teens and young adults with educational age-appropriate material on relationships and sex is a good thing and should be actively encouraged for the emotional and physical well-being of young people in Northern Ireland.

To leave young people to figure out relationships and sex without appropriate resources and education is to leave them and their peers vulnerable to potentially harmful or even dangerous situations and relationships.

The rights of the child should be a priority. The Department should consider what to do in instances where children are being denied access to RSE education by carers or parents.

### Question 3:

The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child 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.

**In 2019, QUB research found that only 23% of young people felt adults trusted them to make their own choices about relationships and sex.\***

## Question 4:

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

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## PLEASE ANSWER **AGREE TO THIS QUESTION**

It is fair to agree that parents/carers have access to what their child is being taught at school. However, to single out the RSE curriculum is to imply that it is somehow dangerous or requires more parental input than other subjects.

The Department should also consider more broadly what is needed in terms of education and support for parents because RSE should be underpinned at home.

Knowledge of RSE curriculum may allow pupils to have at home discussions with parents/carers, allowing for more exploration and the potential of greater learning across family generations.

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## GOT QUESTIONS? CONTACT US!

Email: [allianceforchoicederry@gmail.com](mailto:allianceforchoicederry@gmail.com)  
Instagram: [instagram.com/derryforchoice](https://www.instagram.com/derryforchoice)  
Twitter: [twitter.com/a4cderry](https://twitter.com/a4cderry)

Come to our RSE Event at Cultúrlann Uí Chanáin on **Thursday 16 November** at 6pm! All welcome!



The proposed CCEA statutory curriculum includes a prescribed minimum content in relation to RSE. Schools have flexibility to decide on how best to deliver RSE to meet the needs of pupils within the context of each school's distinctive ethos (which can include the moral and religious principles held by parents and school management authorities).\*

\*[Source: Fact Check Northern Ireland, <https://factcheckni.org/articles/relationships-and-sexuality-education-rse-in-northern-ireland-whats-happening/>.]