

Relationships and sex education (RSE) policy

FPA believes that all children and young people have the right to high-quality, comprehensive relationships and sex education, which promotes good sexual health and equal and enjoyable relationships. We support a rights-based approach, based on qualities such as mutual respect, trust and enjoyment.

A note on terminology

The education that young people receive on sex and relationships is referred to in different ways across the UK. This includes relationships and sex education, sex and relationships education, relationships and sexuality education, and relationships,

What we believe

1. All children and young people have the right to comprehensive RSE which equips them with the information and skills they need, and promotes good sexual health and equal and enjoyable relationships.
2. RSE should be a statutory subject for children and young people of all ages at all primary and secondary schools. It should be taught as part of wider personal, social, health and economic (PSHE) education.
3. RSE should be offered in a timely manner, centred on the needs of young people, and evidence-based.
4. PSHE education and RSE should be considered as important as other subjects. They should have timetabled lesson and be taught by trained staff.
5. FPA recognises that young people learn about sex and relationships from a variety of sources, including parents and carers. Schools should ensure that they involve parents in the delivery of an RSE programme for all pupils.
6. Comprehensive RSE should provide children and young people with the knowledge and skills they need to recognise and enjoy safe and equal relationships and enjoy their sexuality.
7. FPA believes in providing education that is open and inclusive of all children and young people. RSE should recognise and meet the needs of young people of different gender identities, sexual orientations, minority ethnic groups and those with physical or learning disabilities, and should celebrate diversity.

sexual health and parenthood education. From September 2020, primary schools in England will be required to teach relationships education.

In this statement, we refer to the subject as relationships and sex education or RSE. We believe the real issue is not what it is called, but that all young people receive high-quality education on sex, relationships, emotions and sexuality.

Why we believe this

- 1. All children and young people have the right to comprehensive relationships and sex education (RSE) which equips them with the information and skills they need, and promotes good sexual health and equal and enjoyable relationships.***

Research demonstrates the benefit of RSE in keeping children and young people safe and healthy throughout their lives.

Research carried out through the National Survey of Sexual Attitudes and Lifestyles (NATSAL), and published in the British Medical Journal found that young people (particularly young women) who had learned about sex and relationships mainly at school were less likely to report poor sexual health outcomes.¹ School RSE increased the likelihood of people choosing to have sex for the first time at comparatively later ages, and reduced the likelihood of experiencing a sexually transmitted infection (STI). It also reduced the likelihood of young people engaging in unsafe sex or reporting distress about sex or an experience of non-volitional sex.

A 2013 enquiry carried out by The Office of the Children's Commissioner (OCC) into child sexual exploitation showed that young people do not always recognise non-consensual sexual situation and often interpret consent as a simple 'yes' or 'no' issue, with little appreciation of the contextual factors which impede the ability to give or withhold consent. The inquiry confirmed the importance of good quality sex and relationship education and its role in equipping young people with the knowledge to recognise abuse and understand the issues around sexual consent and healthy relationships.²

¹ Macdowall W, Jones KG, Tanton C, et al, [Associations between source of information about sex and sexual health outcomes in Britain: findings from the third National Survey of Sexual Attitudes and Lifestyles \(Natsal-3\)](#) BMJ Open, 2015;5

² Office of the Children's Commissioner, [Inquiry into Child Sexual Exploitation in Gangs and Groups](#), 2013



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2. RSE should be a statutory subject for children and young people of all ages at all primary and secondary schools. It should be taught as part of wider personal, social, health and economic (PSHE) education.

The delivery of RSE in schools around the UK is inconsistent and many children and young people do not currently receive the RSE they need. A survey of almost 22,000 children and young people by the UK Youth Parliament, for example, found that 40% of respondents described their sex education as either poor or very poor, while 43% said they had not been taught about personal relationships at school.³

We believe that the best way to ensure a high-quality, consistent standard is by making RSE statutory. This would mean enacting legislation to ensure that all primary and secondary schools in all parts of the UK are required to teach comprehensive RSE.

While RSE should ensure young people have a biological understanding of puberty, reproduction and STIs, it should also equip young people with the knowledge and skills they need to determine and enjoy their sexuality. It should be positioned within a wider context so that sex and relationships are linked to other lifestyle issues, including alcohol and drugs.

RSE across the UK

- **England:** As of September 2020, all secondary schools will be required to teach relationships and sex education. All primary schools will be required to teach relationships education. Updated government guidance on RSE is due for publication by September 2019.
- **Wales:** Compulsory, comprehensive and inclusive relationships and sexuality education will be introduced in Wales in 2022. The planned changes mean the subject, under its new name of relationships and sexuality education, will be taught to children from the age of five.
- **Scotland:** The Scottish Government has published statutory guidance relating to the conduct of relationships, sexual health and parenthood education in state-maintained schools, but it is not compulsory and faith schools, which teach one in five pupils in Scotland, are allowed to follow their own guidance.
- **Northern Ireland:** RSE is included on a statutory basis within the curriculum. Although grant-aided schools are required to develop a policy on relationships and sexuality education, this is based on the ethos of the school and there is evidence to suggest a large number of schools do not have a policy in place.

³ UK Youth parliament, [SRE: Are you getting it?](#), 2007

3. RSE should be offered in a timely manner, centred on the needs of young people, and evidence-based.

There is clear evidence to suggest that young people are not receiving information in time for when they need it. A 2016 survey by the Sex Education Forum found that 24% of girls started their periods before learning about periods in school.⁴

With increased access to online pornography, there is also concern about young people learning about sex and sexuality from sources that reinforce gender stereotypes and encourage potentially harmful behaviour.

Analysis published in the British Medical Journal has shown that school is young people's preferred source of additional information on sex and relationships. Around half of men and women reported getting most of their information from 'other' sources such as their first sexual partner, friends, siblings or media sources.⁵ 3.4% of boys also reported using pornography as their main source of information, this compared to just 0.2% of girls.

Beginning RSE at primary school ensures that young people get evidence-based information about sex and relationships before they encounter pornography or other unreliable sources of information. It also help to foster an open and honest culture and ensure that young people are able to understand and challenge misinformation and stereotypes they may encounter in the future.

4. PSHE education and RSE should be considered as important as other subjects. They should have timetabled lesson and be taught by trained staff.

We believe relationships and sex education is an essential part of a young person's learning. Not only should it have the same status as other lessons, but it should be taught in regularly timetabled classes. Over 90% of teachers agreed with this in a 2017 survey commissioned by NAHT.⁶

As a training and education provider, we recognise that there are often not the resources or curriculum time necessary to deliver a comprehensive programme of RSE. Much of the guidance across the UK is outdated. [For example, current guidance in](#) England, makes no reference to topics including online safety or

⁴ Sex Education Forum, [E-magazine: The Puberty Issue](#), 2016

⁵ Tanton C, Jones KG, Macdowall W, et al [Patterns and trends in sources of information about sex among young people in Britain: evidence from three National Surveys of Sexual Attitudes and Lifestyles](#), BMJ Open 2015

⁶ NAHT, Key findings from NAHT's survey on PSHE and RSE [file:///C:/Users/emilyj/Downloads/Key%20findings%20from%20NAHT%20survey%20on%20PSHE%20and%20RSE.pdf](#), 2017

texting.⁷ From September 2020, schools in England will be required to have regard for new statutory guidance which has a particular focus on safeguarding.

A lack of training for teachers and other staff responsible for the delivery of RSE means that delivery is often variable. We believe that RSE should be part of core Initial Teacher Training (ITT) programmes for all teachers throughout the UK.

Other professionals, including youth workers and health professionals should also receive core training and continued opportunities for development ahead of the delivery of RSE.

5. FPA recognises that young people learn about sex and relationships from a variety of sources, including parents and carers. Schools should ensure that they involve parents in the delivery of an RSE programme for all pupils.

FPA recognises the crucial role that parents and carers play in their children's development. We believe that schools have a key role in communicating the benefits of RSE with parents and carers and working in partnership so that lessons in schools support the information and messages children and young people receive at home.

School should encourage the involvement of parents in the development of RSE policies and parents should be made aware of the content of RSE in schools, through the publication of a clear statement of their policy.

The majority of parents support the teaching of RSE and a 2013 NAHT survey found that 88% of the parents of school-aged pupils want RSE to be taught in all schools.⁸ Focus groups in England have also shown that parents regard sex and relationships education as hugely important in a child's overall development.⁹

While a small minority of parents do not support the teaching of RSE, we believe all children and young people have the right to high-quality, comprehensive relationships and sex education, which promotes good sexual health and equal and enjoyable relationships. Therefore, we believe that parents should not be able to withdraw children and young people from sex education lessons.

For more information see our Policy Statement on Parenting.

⁷ Department for Education and Employment, [Sex and Relationship Education Guidance](#), 2000

⁸ Research Now, Research commissioned by the National Association of Head Teacher, April 2013

⁹ [Associations between source of information about sex and sexual health outcomes in Britain: findings from the third National Survey of Sexual Attitudes and Lifestyles](#) (Natsal-3), BMJ, 2015

6. Comprehensive RSE should provide children and young people with the knowledge and skills they need to recognise and enjoy safe and equal relationships and enjoy their sexuality.

Young people should be given the information and skills they need to feel comfortable and confident about their bodies and their sexuality. We believe that RSE should cover a range of topics in order to provide young people with all of the skills and values they need be able to enjoy and understand their sexuality. Currently this is not the case.

A 2016 survey by the Sex Education Forum found that, of over 2,000 young people, half did not learn how to get help if they were abused at school and more than 4 in 10 had not learned about healthy or abusive relationships.¹⁰ RSE is also important in influencing positive sexual behaviours and providing young people with the knowledge they need to feel happy and confident in their choices. For example, evidence shows that school-based RSE acts as a delay for the start of sexual activity and increases condom and contraceptive use among those already sexually active.⁹

Fundamentally, effective RSE should help young people to appreciate difference, and foster an open attitude about sex. Young people should develop skills to effectively negotiate, communicate, assert themselves and manage their emotions and relationships as well as understand puberty, the biological aspects of sex and information about contraception, sexually transmitted infections and how to access services.

7. FPA believes in providing education that is open and inclusive of all children and young people. RSE should recognise and meet the needs of young people of different gender identities, sexual orientations, minority ethnic groups and those with physical or learning disabilities, and should celebrate diversity.

RSE should recognise the needs of all children and contribute towards combatting the bullying of young people of different genders, sexual orientations, minority ethnic groups and those with physical or learning disabilities, which research suggests is widespread. Research carried out by the charity Stonewall found that 45% of lesbian, gay, bisexual and trans (LGBT) pupils in British schools are bullied for being LGBT.¹¹

¹⁰ Sex Education Forum, [Heads or Tails? What young people are telling us about SRE](#), 2016

¹¹ Stonewall, [School report: The experiences of lesbian, gay, bi and trans young people in Britain's schools in 2017](#), 2018



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We believe that RSE has a distinct role to play in educating young people about diversity and relationships and can contribute towards ending discrimination in schools, by challenging stereotypes.

Further resources

- [FPA sex and relationships education factsheet](#)
- [FPA policy statement on parenting](#)

Additional reading

- [Life lessons: PSHE and SRE in schools, Education Select Committee](#)
- [Not yet good enough: personal, social, health and economic education, Ofsted](#)
- [Shh... No talking: LGBT-inclusive Sex and Relationships Education in the UK, Terrence Higgins Trust](#)
- [Gaps in sex and relationships education leave too many children at risk, Sex Education Forum](#)
- [Position statement on relationships and sex education, Brook.](#)