



Review of **RSE**

A summary of the draft
Report on the Review of
Relationships and
Sexuality Education
in primary and
post-primary schools



Introduction

This document provides a summary of the findings of the Review of Relationships and Sexuality Education (RSE) in primary and post-primary schools. It is also intended to support those who wish to provide feedback on the draft advice being developed for the Minister for Education and Skills by the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA) to support RSE in our schools.

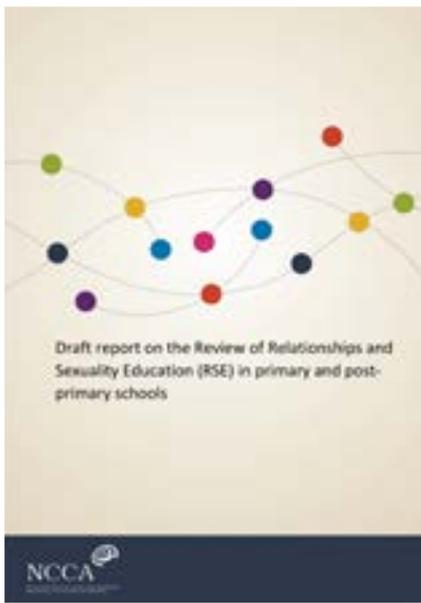
At the request of the Minister a major review of RSE in primary and post-primary schools was undertaken from June 2018 to March 2019. The review examined the experience of teaching and learning in RSE, including; the curriculum, the approach to learning, the supports needed, and ways to improve the experience of RSE for students. With regard to the curriculum, the Minister asked that the following aspects of RSE be considered;

- Consent, what it means and its importance
- Developments in contraception
- Healthy, positive sexual expression and relationships
- Safe use of the internet
- Social media and its effects on relationships and self-esteem
- LGBTQ+ matters.



Continuing the conversation

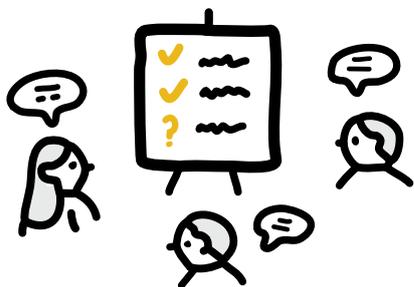
Participation in the review was considerable, demonstrating the level of interest people have in this aspect of education. The review involved students, parents, teachers, school leaders, researchers and organisations with a view to gaining a full appreciation of the nature of young peoples' experience of RSE. We are now engaging in consultation to ensure our findings and the related draft advice are reflective of the needs of students, schools and parents.



To this end, we would like you to consider the findings and the draft advice summarised in this document. We have provided a number of key questions to help you with this.

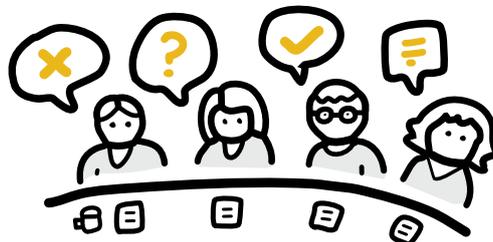
You can respond to these key questions through our online survey or by making a written submission using our online template. These along with the full draft report can be accessed on the [Review of RSE webpage](#) on ncca.ie.

Engagement so far



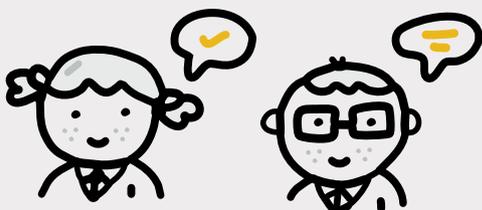
School Focus Groups

- 36** Student focus groups
- 22** Teacher focus groups
- 10** Parent focus groups
- 20** Senior management focus groups



Parent Voice

- 4,038** NCCA survey responses
- 3,306** National Parent Council Primary survey responses
- 554** National Parent Council Post-Primary survey responses



Student Voice

- 512** NCCA survey responses
- 77** Young people at Comhairle na nÓg consultation event



Teacher Voice

- 1,333** NCCA survey responses



Stakeholder Voice

- 65** Written submissions received
- Meetings with **61** organisations



Symposium on RSE

- 51** Organisations represented



Findings

What students said...

In general, students say that RSE tends to be too little, too late and too biological.

Most students agree that RSE is an important part of learning in school. Students want schools to teach comprehensive, relevant and age-appropriate RSE at both primary and post-primary level. They feel they are not guaranteed the same quality of experience in RSE that they can expect in other subjects. Students want greater opportunities to talk about the emotional and social aspects of growing up and forming healthy relationships.

Students told us that RSE is often overly negative focusing on risks and dangers at the expense of learning about the healthy, positive and enjoyable aspects. Students want a safe and inclusive environment where they can discuss, ask questions and talk about all aspects of relationships and sexuality with teachers who are trained and confident in teaching this area of the curriculum.

For more on student perspectives **[read pages 14 to 25 of the draft Report.](#)**



Findings

What parents said...

The majority of parents agree that age-appropriate and relevant RSE is an important part of the school curriculum.

However, a minority of parents are of the view that schools and teachers should not provide such education. Many parents are unaware of the scope of learning within current RSE programmes.

They want more communication and information from schools on an ongoing basis about RSE. Parents are acutely aware of the pressures faced by young people growing up today, particularly those associated with the online world.

The majority of parents see schools as uniquely positioned to provide a space where children and young people can discuss these challenges in an informed, thoughtful and open manner.

For more on parent perspectives **[read pages 26 to 33 of the draft Report.](#)**



Findings

What teachers said...

Teachers would like greater clarity on how to approach topics at different stages of children’s learning in RSE.

However, some pointed out that such guidance should ensure flexibility for schools to respond to their specific students’ needs. Teachers are aware of the importance of teacher professional development in improving the quality of RSE. They would like to see enhanced training available at both pre-service and in-service levels. In addition, post-primary teachers suggested there should be a qualification to teach SPHE.

A further priority for teachers is an updated curriculum which would facilitate learning needed to navigate growing up in the world today. Teachers felt that greater time was needed for teaching SPHE/RSE in order to facilitate meaningful learning across the range of topics students need to engage with.

For more on teacher perspectives **[read pages 44 to 54 of the draft Report.](#)**



Findings

What school leaders said...

Many school principals agreed that teacher confidence and enhanced CPD in the area of RSE was a key enabler to providing quality RSE in schools.

Post-primary principals affirmed the value of a pre-service qualification in RSE. Many principals in primary and post-primary schools saw a positive role for external agencies and organisations who teach aspects of SPHE/RSE. They saw the supportive role they play in a school's RSE programme and spoke about the success of these inputs when they are part of an integrated approach that allows for follow-up with the class teacher. However, some principals raised concerns about an over-reliance on external providers especially in 5th/6th class and transition year.

More guidance on how to work in partnership with external providers was requested by many principals.

For more on school leaders perspectives **read pages 34 to 43 of the draft Report.**



Findings

What other stakeholders said...

It was generally agreed that additional topics need to be taught as part of RSE today in order to meet the challenges of young people's lives.

All stakeholders agreed that RSE has an important place in the curriculum of primary and post-primary schools. Concurring with other perspectives, they identified teacher professional development as the key enabler for improving RSE.

There was broad agreement that RSE is best approached in a manner that is student-centred, holistic, inclusive and age- and developmentally-appropriate. Pressure of time and an overloaded curriculum also featured in discussions about RSE.

For more on other stakeholder perspectives [**read pages 55 to 70 of the draft Report.**](#)



Advice on future directions

Relationships and sexuality are central to being human and at the same time are among the most challenging aspects to living a happy life. The Review shows strong agreement on the need for, and importance of improving children and young people's experience of RSE in school. The Review Report sets out a summary of the NCCA's draft advice on how this might be achieved. The advice is presented under four broad headings:

- The approach to RSE
- The curriculum
- Creating conditions for effective RSE
- Other considerations.

The NCCA has a specific remit for developing the curriculum and advising on approaches to teaching and learning. This is reflected in the emphasis given to these areas in the advice on future directions.

For advice on future directions **read pages 71 to 84 of the draft Report.**



The approach to RSE

APPROACHES TO RSE SHOULD BE GROUNDED IN THE RIGHTS AND NEEDS OF YOUNG PEOPLE

The foundation for agreeing an approach to RSE must be grounded in the rights and needs of children and young people. These have been set out in numerous international human rights treaties and instruments that refer to the right to education and the highest standard of health. Many students expressed frustration that their right to RSE was not guaranteed and was far too dependent on what school they were in or what teacher they happened to have.

RSE SHOULD ADOPT A HOLISTIC 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.

THERE IS A NEED TO CONSULT REGULARLY WITH STUDENTS TO IDENTIFY THEIR REAL AND EXPRESSED NEEDS IN THE AREA OF RSE

Frequently students said their learning in RSE is too little, too late and not relevant to their needs. There is a need for ongoing conversations with students to find out what particular needs and questions they may have, and such conversations need to happen on a regular basis in order to inform planning for teaching and learning.

QUESTIONS FOR CONSIDERATION

To what extent do you broadly agree/disagree with the proposed direction on the approach to RSE that has emerged from the review?

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

RSE SHOULD BE PART OF A SINGLE INTEGRATED SPHE CURRICULUM AND UPDATED TO INCLUDE AREAS IDENTIFIED BY THE REVIEW

The Review has highlighted the need to create one curriculum that sets out the learning for SPHE/RSE as one subject and incrementally provides continuity of experience in SPHE/RSE from early childhood to post-primary. Such a redeveloped curriculum would also provide an opportunity to update topics and remove any unhelpful overlap.

DEVELOPMENT OF INTERIM GUIDELINES

Curriculum development processes can take time, and the review has highlighted that schools need support now. The extensive curriculum development work required needs to take place within the context of the ongoing reviews of the primary curriculum and senior cycle. In the meantime, the NCCA will produce interim guidelines on how the current curriculum can be approached in a more holistic way and provide clarity on how topics can be taught in a fully inclusive manner.



QUESTIONS FOR CONSIDERATION

To what extent do you broadly agree/disagree with the need for a single integrated curriculum for SPHE/RSE?

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?



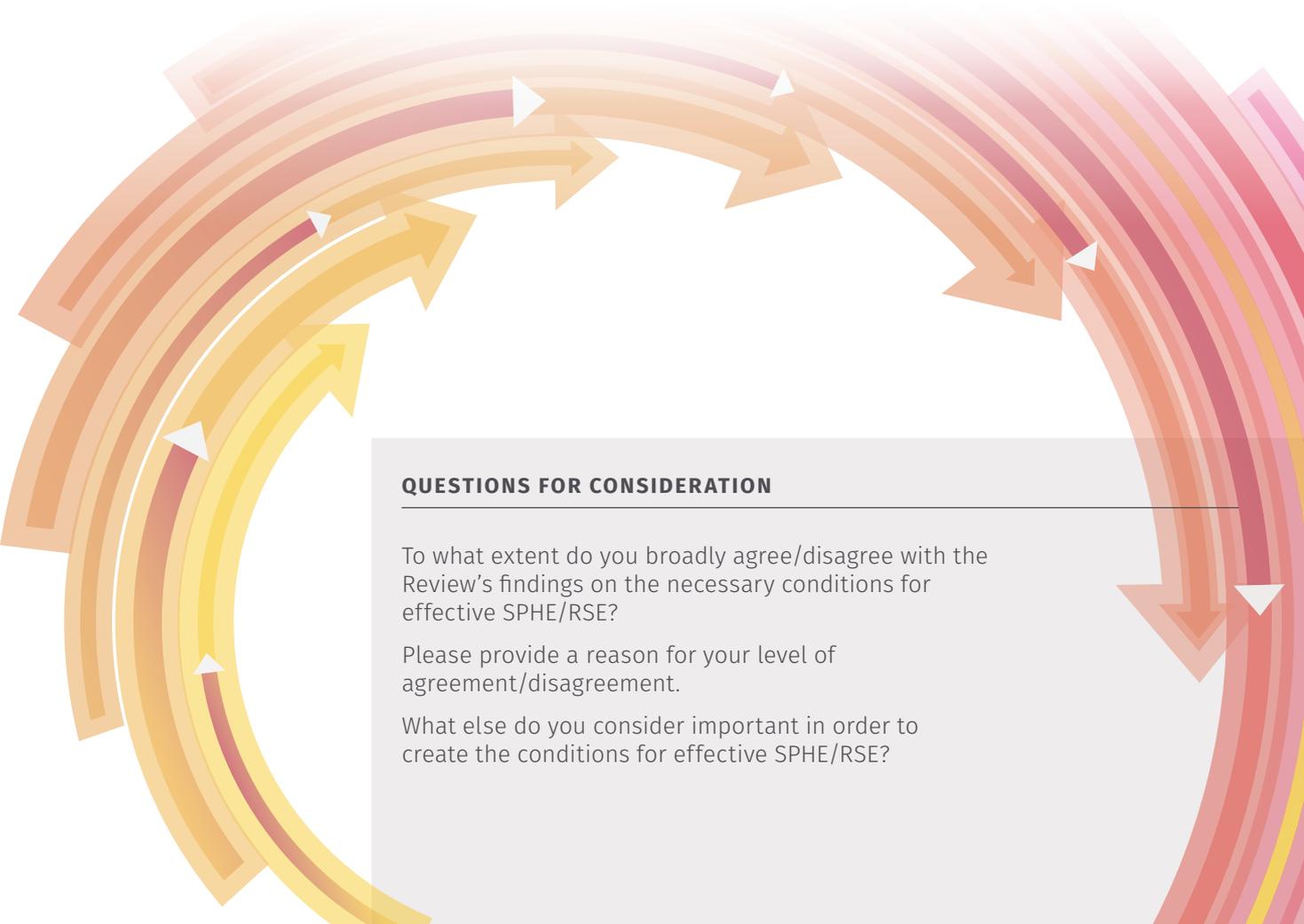
Creating the conditions for effective RSE

SPECIALIST TRAINING AND PATHWAYS FOR PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT MUST BE DEVELOPED IN THE AREA OF SPHE/RSE

The Review makes it clear that teachers need more in-depth and sustained training and support in the area of SPHE/RSE. Access to professional development needs to be enhanced at pre-service and in-service levels through a multi-model and multi-agency approach. Such an approach could be front-loaded in preparation for a redeveloped curriculum. In addition, the provision of a specialist post-graduate qualification in SPHE/RSE would represent a major step forward in providing for effective SPHE/RSE in schools in the long term.

REVIEW OF CURRENT RESOURCES AND DEVELOPMENT OF UP-TO-DATE RESOURCES

The Review has identified the need to take stock of current teaching and learning resources available in this area. The NCCA will collaborate with other stakeholders in the development of a portal site where current and future resources can be accessed.



QUESTIONS FOR CONSIDERATION

To what extent do you broadly agree/disagree with the Review's findings on the necessary conditions for effective SPHE/RSE?

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

DES OVERSIGHT OF SPHE/RSE

The role of the Inspectorate and the Department of Education and Skills (DES) circulars in supporting good practice in SPHE/RSE was highlighted in the review. Comprehensive oversight 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.

SUPPORT SCHOOLS IN THE ENHANCEMENT OF SPHE/RSE WITHIN THE CONTEXT OF PLANNING FOR WELLBEING IN JUNIOR CYCLE

It is clear that post-primary schools require further support and guidance in planning for junior cycle wellbeing. The NCCA will undertake an examination of how schools are planning for wellbeing and provide examples of how schools can use the wellbeing space to enhance students' learning in SPHE/RSE.

RESOURCES AND SUPPORTS FOR PARENTS IN THE AREA OF SPHE/RSE

Schools cannot do it alone and parents must be encouraged and supported in assuming their responsibility for their child's learning. The engagement of parents is a matter for parent bodies in partnership with relevant government agencies and might include consideration of the development of public education and information in this area.

QUESTIONS FOR CONSIDERATION

To what extent do you broadly agree/disagree that these are important considerations for SPHE/RSE?

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?



Next steps

You are invited to submit your views by **completing our survey** or by emailing a written submission to **rsereview@ncca.ie** by Friday 25th October 2019.

The NCCA wishes to thank the various organisations, individuals and schools who have participated in the review to date. After this phase of consultation, a final report containing the advice on future directions will be completed and issued to the Minister for Education and Skills.

