

Online Survey re NCCA RSE Review - Draft Responses

The approach

Across all stakeholders, there was strong agreement that RSE needs to be more than information about biological aspects on 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.

Introduction

Please fill in the following information before continuing to the questionnaire

1. Please indicate how you are responding to this survey.



Parent/Guardian etc

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

Strongly Agree

Agree

Disagree

Strongly Disagree

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

- the focus on the 'enjoyable aspects of relationships' is misguided and reflects a 'sex is for pleasure' approach in the Review, as promoted by UN bodies like the WHO. Sex is enjoyable, but is a superficial aspect - sex can lead to great unhappiness (e.g. a one night stand) and a long term reduction in well-being
- RSE education shouldn't revolve mainly around the sexual aspects of relationships – this will lead to the early sexualization of children, which is completely inappropriate
- sexual relations can only improve well-being and bring true happiness in a committed relationship – this should be the focus of RSE, not just consent or enjoyment

- the rights of children and their empowerment is over emphasized in the Review; parents' rights over their children's education during school years should be spelled out and respected in the Review

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

- The moral and spiritual dimensions of relationships are an essential part of a truly holistic approach; these are serious omissions in the 'holistic' approach, which is very flawed
- Sexual relationships can result in pregnancy with huge moral consequences - it must be pointed out that this is the natural outcome of a sexual relationship

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?

Strongly Agree Agree Disagree **Strongly Disagree**

6. 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

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

- Parents on every level are by far the most important people in a child's life. Nobody has a right to remove parent's wishes and values as regards the education and formation of their children, above all in the highly sensitive area of sexual relationships

- It is also vital to respect the ethos of a school, including its religious ethos, which provides the moral and spiritual context for sexual relationships

- Integrating 'a one size fits all' RSE curriculum into SPHE would ride roughshod over delivering RSE education in accordance with the values of parents and the ethos of schools

- parents need to be consulted about the detailed RSE curriculum to be produced following the Review, with a new round of consultation publicized by the media – parents were not aware

Creating the right 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?

Strongly Agree

Agree

Disagree

Strongly Disagree

9. 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

- the conscience rights of teachers not to teach RSE content which exposes children to explicit sex education material or teaches about sexual activities apart from a heterosexual relationship must be respected
- while training on the relationship aspects of RSE or consent have some value, the approach seems heavily focussed on the sexual aspects of relationships

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

- Parents and school boards in each school need to be consulted about the RSE curriculum, and their approval required for the specific RSE curriculum being taught in a school so that they can support it if appropriate
- consideration should be given to

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 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?

Strongly Agree Agree Disagree **Strongly Disagree**

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

- 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 – sexual behavior can have life changing consequences
- given the proposed 'holistic' sex is for pleasure approach to RSE, it can only be assumed that supports for parents and schools would be steering them in this kind of approach
- parents are sovereign over their children and their education as stated in the Irish Constitution, and support for RSE with different values or a different worldview of sexual relationships should not be imposed on parents or schools

13. 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. The Review needs to set out in detail the RSE content proposed for each age group so that people 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.