The Role of the Youth Service in Relationship and Sexuality Education (RSE)

EA Youth Service

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The UK Government is updating the requirements for the RSE curriculum in Northern Ireland to include age-appropriate, comprehensive and scientifically accurate education on sexual and reproductive health and rights, covering contentious issues such as prevention of early pregnancy and access to abortion.

The aim of RSE is to give children and young people the information they need to help them develop healthy and caring relationships.

RSE helps to strengthen knowledge and awareness to keep young people safe. It supports young people build confidence and resilience to maturely explore sexual issues and healthy relationships. It deepens their understanding of sexual identity and build empathy, improves communication and strengthens self-awareness.

RSE provides young people with an understanding of consent and healthy relationships allowing them to talk openly about puberty, their bodies, relationships and sexual health without shame, judgement, fear and embarrassment.

The teaching of RSE remains a contentious issue and there are a range of opinions regarding RSE, including how and where it is delivered and to whom. The new RSE guidance supports schools to design their own lessons to teach children and young people about relationships and identity, sexual health and well-being, empowerment, safety and respect, but campaigners have argued that it gave prominence to LGBTQ+ themes and ignored traditional issues and family values.

RSE ensures children and young people are equipped with the knowledge, understanding, skills and confidence to cope with the many pressures and challenges of relationships in modern society. It has been argued that children and young people have a right to accurate information on matters that affect them. Therefore, they are entitled to receive education which informs them about sex and healthy relationships.

RSE helps young people become healthy, confident, resilient and empathetic individuals who can form positive relationships based on mutual trust and respect and develop their mental and emotional wellbeing.

RSE can prepare young people for the opportunities, responsibilities and challenges of adult life and supports and promotes their spiritual, moral, social, cultural, mental and physical development. Effective RSE, therefore, is important to prepare children and young people to maintain positive relationships throughout their lives.

Introduction: What is Relationship and Sexuality Education (RSE)?

Relationship and Sexuality Education (RSE) is a form of sex education which focuses on exploring the emotional, social, and physical aspects of growing up, having and maintaining relationships and learning about human sexuality and sexual health.

RSE emphasises the relational and emotional aspects of sexuality, as well as the legal, moral, and ethical issues involved. RSE covers topics such as consent, respect, diversity, equality, safety, and wellbeing.

The teaching of RSE is mandatory for all pupils of compulsory school age in Northern Ireland. All grant aided schools are required to have an RSE policy that is based on consultation with parents and pupils.

The UK Government is updating the requirements for the RSE curriculum in Northern Ireland to include age-appropriate, comprehensive and scientifically accurate education on sexual and reproductive health and rights, covering contentious issues such as prevention of early pregnancy and access to abortion.

The aim of RSE is to give children and young people the information they need to help them develop healthy and caring relationships. RSE should teach what is acceptable and unacceptable behaviour in relationships.

RSE helps to strengthen knowledge and awareness to keep young people safe. It supports young people build confidence and resilience to maturely explore sexual issues and healthy relationships. It deepens their understanding of sexual identity and build empathy, improves communication and strengthens self-awareness.[1]

RSE provides young people with an understanding of consent and healthy relationships allowing them to talk openly about puberty, their bodies, relationships and sexual health without shame, judgement, fear and embarrassment.

Good RSE helps to create a culture that embraces inclusivity and diversity, where young people feel safe, welcomed and valued.

When delivered effectively, RSE should teach young people to understand human sexuality and to respect themselves and others. It enables young people to mature, build their confidence and self-esteem. Effective RSE also supports young people, throughout life, to develop safe, fulfilling and healthy sexual relationships, at the appropriate time.

RSE supports young people to understand the benefits of healthy relationships on their emotional and mental wellbeing. This allows them to understand and identify when relationships are unhealthy or unsafe.

RSE should educate young people about facts and the law about sex, sexuality, sexual health and gender identity in an age-appropriate and inclusive way. The content should be relevant to them and their developing sexuality. When discussing these topics, it should be recognised that young people may be discovering or understanding their sexual orientation or gender identity.

Internet safety should also be addressed. Pupils should be taught the rules and principles for keeping safe online. This will include how to recognise risks, harmful content and contact and how and to whom to report issues.

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[1] https://splitbanana.co.uk/

Some young people are also exposed to harmful behaviours online, which may normalise violent sexual behaviours. A focus on healthy relationships can help young people understand acceptable behaviours in relationships.

This can help young people learn how to negotiate appropriate boundaries in different relationships. RSE can help young people understand what safe and healthy sexual relationships are and how to give and respect consent. Developing a sense of self-esteem and self-worth helps young people to establish confidence in their sexuality, gender, bodies, abilities and broader identity.

External organisations can play a supportive role in the context of RSE, by providing schools and Youth Services with additional resources, expertise, training and guidance on how to deliver high-quality and inclusive RSE.

Schools and Youth Services can work in partnership with external organisations to enhance their RSE curriculum, but they should not delegate their responsibility for ensuring that the content and delivery of RSE meets the statutory requirements and the needs of children and young people.

The teaching of RSE remains a contentious issue and there are a range of opinions regarding RSE, including how and where it is delivered and to whom. The new RSE guidance supports schools to design their own lessons to teach children and young people about relationships and identity, sexual health and well-being, empowerment, safety and respect, but campaigners have argued that it gave prominence to LGBTQ+ themes and ignored traditional issues and family values.

83 young people engaged with our research through focus groups and online discussions. 72 youth workers participated in surveys and discussions. 16 teachers from primary, post-primary and Special schools also engaged. We also engaged with lO parents of young people attending schools in Northern Ireland.

Respondents shared their knowledge and opinions and highlighted their concerns on how and when RSE should be delivered. They also discussed how Youth Services could help support vulnerable young people through engaging and innovative RSE practices.

Given the sensitivity of the research topic it was agreed that respondents would remain anonymous. Participants had mixed views on the topics relating to RSE and as to how and where it would be most effectively delivered.

There are two case studies included in the appendices which highlight good practice from youth work organisations in the delivery of RSE.

Why is RSE Important?

Good quality, clear and appropriate RSE can have a significant positive impact on the physical and mental health of young people.

Evidence suggests that RSE can play a pivotal role in delaying early sex, prevent transmission of sexually transmitted infections, prevent unintended pregnancy, empower young people to have

conversations around consent as well as support confident disclosure about sexual abuse or exploitation.[2]

RSE ensures children and young people are equipped with the knowledge, understanding, skills and confidence to cope with the many pressures and challenges of relationships in modern society. It has been argued that children and young people have a right to accurate information on matters that affect them. Therefore, they are entitled to receive education which informs them about sex and healthy relationships.

A 2010 report to the UN General assembly noted: *The right to education includes the right to sexual education, which is both a human right and an indispensable means of realising other human rights, such as the right to health, the right to information and sexual and reproductive rights.*[3]

Research from the Sex Education Forum suggests that young people who receive effective RSE are more likely to report sexual abuse, delay sex until they are ready, and it is consensual, use contraception and are less likely to have an unplanned pregnancy or a sexually transmitted disease.[4]

The charity Brook notes that appropriate RSE safeguards, protects and empowers young people. Their research suggests that effective RSE reduces sexual violence, encourages disclosure and abuse, promotes safe sexual practices and fosters inclusivity and good mental health. [5]

RSE helps young people become healthy, confident, resilient and empathetic individuals who can form positive relationships based on mutual trust and respect and develop their mental and emotional wellbeing.

RSE helps prepare young people for the opportunities, responsibilities and challenges of adult life and supports and promotes their spiritual, moral, social, cultural, mental and physical development. Effective RSE, therefore, is important to prepare children and young people to maintain positive relationships throughout their lives.

Forming healthy, positive relationships helps children and young people feel safe and supported as they grow up, however being in an unhealthy relationship negatively affects a young person's health and wellbeing. They might feel anxious and nervous or not free to make their own decisions.

According to a leading RSE specialist in Sex Education it is believed that for RSE to be meaningful the people responsible for its delivery must be able to relate to the young person's future relationships and sexual health.[6]

Young people should be taught the importance of the relationships skills they will need in their adult life and how to behave and how to negotiate for the type of relationship they want.

Learning about intimate and sexual relationships builds a solid foundation of understanding and skills about relationships in general, including friendships, relationships with colleagues, with people who help us, and with the people in our community. [7]

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[2] http://www.healthylearningtorbay.eo.uk/the mes/rse-day /why-rse-is-i important/

[3] https://www.un.org/development/ desa/dpad/publicat ion/2010-report-of-the-secretary-general-to-the-general-asse mbly/

[4] https://www.hepi.ac.uk/wp-content/upload s/2021/04/Sex-and-Relationships-A mong-5 tudents-Su mmary-Report.pdf

[5] https://www.brook.org.uk/blog/why-good-rse-is-no t-only-i mporta n t-but-esse ntial/

[6] https://www.sec-ed.co.uk/conte nt/blogs/rse-a-focus-on-healthy-relationships

[7] https://www.sec-ed.co.uk/ content/blogs/rse-a-foc us-on-healthy-relationships

A recent Sex Education Forum in England focusing on RSE delivery noted that 28% of young people had not learned anything about how to tell if a relationship is healthy from their RSE at school. A further 31% said they had received lessons on this topic but had not learned enough.

Without these skills being taught in the classroom, it was questioned how young people go out into the world and navigate adult relationships with confidence. Importantly it revealed that by having a strong focus and development on relationship skills, is as or more important than facts and knowledge about sex education.[8]

Research carried out by the National Youth Agency (NYA) highlighted the vital contribution that role models play throughout the different aspects of a young person's life. Role models can take many different forms, both formal and informal, and can have a lasting impact on the young people around them.

Young people revealed that teaching staff should be knowledgeable and confident which should help young people to recognise unhealthy relationships and that young people should learn about feelings and needs that motivate their behaviour were seen as the most important aspects of RSE in schools.[9]

Young people believe that trustworthiness is one of the most important attributes of positive relationship role models. They considered teachers and youth workers to be trusted adults.[10]

High quality RSE is important to prepare young people for relationships throughout their lives. Good quality, age appropriate RSE in schools and through Youth Services can help to equip young people with the knowledge to make informed decisions and safe choices about their lives.[11]

Policy Context for RSE Northern Ireland

RSE is regulated by different laws and guidance in different parts of the UK. In England, the Relationships Education, Relationships and Sex Education and Health Education (England) Regulations 2019, made under the Children and Social Work Act 2017, make Relationships Education compulsory for all pupils receiving primary education and Relationships and Sex Education compulsory for all pupils receiving secondary education. They also make Health Education compulsory in all schools except independent schools. The Department for Education (DfE) has published statutory guidance on how to implement these subjects.

In Wales, the Curriculum and Assessment (Wales) Act 2021 makes RSE a mandatory part of the curriculum for all learners aged 3 to 16. The Welsh Government has published draft statutory guidance and a code of practice on how to deliver RSE.

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8 https://www.sec-ed.co.uk/ content/blogs/rse-a-foc us-on-healthy-relationships

9 https://www.nya.org.uk/young-people-ne ed-more-tha n-relationship-sex-education-rse-i n-the-classroom-to-achieve-the-re lationships-they-want%EF%BF%BC/

10 https://www.nya.org.uk/young-people-need-more-than-re lationship-sex-e ducation-rse-i n-the-c lassroom-to-achieve-the-re lationships-they-want%EF%BF%BC/

11 https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/Sc 70185440f0b603d20Sa9ad/Updated_impact_assessment_ -_Relationships_Education_ and_Relationships_and_Sex_ Education. pdf

In Scotland, RSE is not a statutory subject, but it is an integral part of the health and wellbeing area of the curriculum for excellence, which is the national curriculum framework for all learners aged 3 to 18. The Scottish Government has published guidance on the principles and practice of RSE.

In Northern Ireland, RSE is a compulsory part of the curriculum for all grant-aided schools, as set out in the Education (Curriculum Minimum Content) Order (Northern Ireland) 2007. The Department of Education has issued guidance on the policy and procedures for RSE.

Parents have different rights and responsibilities regarding their child or young person's participation in RSE, depending where in the UK they and the type of school their child attends.

In England, parents have the right to request that their child be withdrawn from some or all of sex education delivered as part of statutory RSE, except in exceptional circumstances, up to three terms before the child turns 16. However, they do not have the right to withdraw their child from Relationships Education or Health Education. Schools should respect the parents' request to withdraw their child, unless they have a good reason to refuse, and should provide alternative education for the child during that time.

In Wales, parents do not have the right to withdraw their child from any aspect of RSE, as it is considered a core part of the curriculum. However, schools should work in partnership with parents and carers to ensure that they are informed and involved in the planning and delivery of RSE, and that they can raise any concerns or objections with the school.

In Scotland, parents have the right to withdraw their child from any part of RSE that is not part of the health and wellbeing area of the curriculum. Schools should inform parents of their right to withdraw their child and should provide appropriate alternative education for the child during that time.

In Northern Ireland, parents have the right to withdraw their child from any part of RSE that is outside the compulsory elements of the curriculum. Schools should inform parents of their right to withdraw their child and should provide suitable alternative education for the child during that time.

Department of Education Northern Ireland

RSE is a mandatory part of the curriculum for all pupils of compulsory school age in Northern Ireland. The Department of Education provides guidance on RSE that reflects the ethos of schools and considers the views of parents and pupils. The Education Authority adopt the DE guidance.

There is considerable variation in the effectiveness and range of approaches taken by schools in delivering RSE, especially on the more sensitive aspects of the topic.

In 2023, the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland amended the RSE curriculum to comply with the legal requirements under the Northern Ireland (Executive Formation etc) Act 2019, which aimed to implement the recommendations of the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination of Women **(CEDAW).**

This amendment sought to ensure that children and young people in Northern Ireland are educated with scientifically accurate information in relation to their sexual and reproductive health and rights, without advocating a particular view on any moral and ethical considerations.[12]

On 1 September 2023, the Department of Education launched a consultation on proposals for Regulations that would prescribe the circumstances in which, at the request of a parent, a pupil may be excused from receiving age-appropriate and scientifically accurate education on sexual and reproductive health and rights covering prevention of early pregnancy and access to abortion, or specified elements of that education. The consultation closed on 24 November 2023.

With the proposed new changes on how RSE will be delivered within the education system in Northern Ireland, it is still unclear as to where exactly the EA Youth Service sits in this new legislative framework. The DE consultation that recently took place focused on schools and did mention the delivery of RSE in non-formal education.

The Department of Education engaged directly with all educational stakeholders to seek their views. Interestingly, young people accounted for 0.86% of the total respondents.[13]

The DE's Guidance clearly states that the teaching of RSE must be done in an age appropriate and developmentally appropriate way and must have regard for the religious background of the pupils and their families. Therefore, schools can select what they teach from the DE Guidance and justify their selection regarding age and faith.

Schools should also ensure that the content and delivery of RSE is sensitive to the needs and readiness of individual pupils and that it is differentiated and personalised to support their learning. Schools should use a variety of teaching methods and resources that are engaging, interactive and relevant to the pupils' experiences and interests. Schools should also assess the pupils' learning outcomes and evaluate the impact of RSE on their knowledge, skills, attitudes and behaviours.

The Curriculum

In Northern Ireland, RSE is mandatory for all pupils of compulsory school age. All grant-aided schools are required to have an RSE policy that is based on consultation with parents and pupils.

It is the responsibility of the Board of Governors of each school to ensure that a comprehensive programme is delivered which meets the needs of its pupils and aligns with its RSE policy.

The statutory curriculum for Personal Development and Mutual Understanding at primary level and the Personal Development strand of the Learning for Life and Work area of learning at post-primary level, includes high level prescribed content for RSE at each key stage which is the minimum entitlement that all children and young people must legally receive.

Teachers can provide a balance of experiences drawn from a list of examples prepared by the Council for the Curriculum, Examinations and Assessment (CCEA) .[14]

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[12] https://hansard.parliament.uk/Lords/2023-06-28/debates/EE806ESA-F07F-4873-8D2F-DB3B63DA879F/RelationshipsAndSexualityEducation(NorthernIreland)(Amendment)Regulations2023

[13] https://www.education-ni.gov.uk/sites/default/files/consultations/education/Consultation%20Response%20Report.pdf (pgS)

[14] https://www.education-ni.gov.uk/sites/default/files/consultations/education/Consultation%20Response%20Report.pdf

Within non-formal education settings, RSE tends to be explored in Sexual Health programmes.

United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child

The rights of children and young people are protected and supported by the UNCRC rights. The UN note that effective and high-quality RSE ensures that children and young people experience their rights, including the following:

- The right to non-discrimination (Article 2}.
- The right to be heard, express opinions and be involved in decision-making (Article 12).
- The right to access information (Article 17).
- The right to experience the highest attainable health, access to health facilities, preventative health care, and family planning education and services (Article 24).
- The right to an education that support all children to develop and reach their full potential and prepare children to be understanding to others (Article 29).
  The right to government protection from sexual abuse and exploitation (Article 34) .[15]

Challenges in Delivering RSE

RSE, when delivered, should be suitable and age appropriate to all children and young people, regardless of gender and sexuality. It should also be accessible to those with special educational needs and disabilities.

It has been recognised that RSE should be delivered in collaboration with parents and guardians, accounting for religious or cultural sensitivities. Crucially, it must also provide children and young people with the information and advice they want and need .[16]

Recent consultations in Northern Ireland indicate that young people want to have a say in the development of an RSE curriculum and how it is delivered.

Research has shown that young people want teachers or youth workers who are enthusiastic about teaching RSE, experienced in talking about sex and sexual health, are non-judgmental and approachable and are respectful of the young people they are working with.17

Young people at a recent consultation event noted that their experiences of RSE at school were limited, lacked purpose and were not delivered in a way that reflected their needs. One young person

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[15] https://www.chIldcomwales.org. uk/ our-work/policy-positions/rela tionships-and-sexuality-e ducation-rse/#:~:text=Effe ctive%20and%20high%2Dquality%20 Re lationships,de cision%2 Dmaking%20(A rtic le%2012)%3B

[16] https://www.barnard os.org.uk/sites/default/files/uplo ads/involve -us-respect-u s.pdf (pg7)

[17] Pound, P., Denford, S., Shucksmith, J., Tanton, C., Johnson, A. M., Owen, J., ... & Campbell, R. (2017). What is best practice in sex and relationship education? A synthesis of evidence, including stakeholders' views. BMJ open, 7(5), e014791.

stated: *It was embarrassing. The teacher was awkward and uncomfortable and didn't seem to want to be there. We were taught what the school wanted us to know not what we needed to know.*

A recent study noted that for many young people their right to RSE was not being met by their school and less than a quarter believed that adults trusted them to make their own choices about relationships and sex.[18]

A recent consultation commissioned by Barnardo's, revealed that many young people believed that being taught RSE by teachers could be awkward. This is because it is difficult for teachers to protect their confidentiality, privacy and boundaries.[19]

It was also suggested that young people appreciate being taught RSE by specialist external educators. They often feel more comfortable being taught RSE by someone from outside of their school, for example a specialist external visitor. [20]

Many young people find it is less embarrassing, providing them with greater confidentiality, which can result in a higher quality of delivery.[21] Young people also find being taught by peer educators less embarrassing, as they have mutually respectful relationships and a sense of affinity with them.

Barriers to Delivering RSE

In Northern Ireland there has been opposition to the implementation of RSE in schools. The main thrust of the opposition arises from serious concerns over the exposure of children and young people to sexually explicit content which does not consider moral or spiritual concerns.

These broad ranging and fundamental issues include a lack of age-appropriate material, exposure and indoctrination into unscientific political ideologies and harm caused by the normalising of underage sexual activity.

For some in Northern Ireland there is a perception that the legislative amendments for RSE, lack regulatory oversight, appropriate safeguarding mechanisms and parental consent. Such an imposition, it is argued would mean that RSE is highly detrimental to the health and innocence of children and young people.

In June 2023, the Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission released a report called *Relationships and Sexuality Education in post-primary schools in Northern Ireland: a compelling casefor reform.* This report resulted from an investigation into the provision of RSE in Northern Ireland.

The Commission recommended that the Curriculum minimum content order (NI} 2007 be changed to *make age-appropriate, comprehensive and scientifically accurate education on sexual and reproductive health and rights a compulsory component of the curriculum for adolescents, covering prevention of early pregnancy and access to abortion.*

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[18] https://www.qub.ac.uk/research-centres/CentreforChildrensRights/CCRFilestore/Filetoupload,l005261,e n.pdf

[19] https://www.barnardos.org.u k/sites/defaulI/files/uplo ads/involve -us-respect-u s.pdf

[20] https://www.barnardos.org.u k/sites/ defaulI/files/uplo ads/involve -us-respect-u s.pdf

[21] Institute for Public Policy Research (IPPR) (2014), Young people, sex and relationships: the new norms, IPPR: London. Accessed online December 2017: https://www.ippr.org/publications/young-people-sex-and-relationships-the-new-norms They conducted a survey with a representative sample of 500 18 year olds.

The report claimed that: *some schools actively contributed to the shame and stigma surrounding unplanned pregnancy and abortion, by making statements such as abortion is not a means of contraception and those who knowingly engage in casual sex must bear the consequences of their actions.* It also stated that: *two-thirds of post-primary schools promoted abstinence in their sex education policies and concluded that many schools in Northern Ireland do not meet human rights standards to which government is bound.* [22]

Some churches and Christian organisations raised concerns about this report, including the framing of different views on gender and sexuality as being inherently problematic. Positive examples of RSE provision, they noted, including, Love for Life, which delivers RSE to more than 30,000 young people in Northern Ireland, were not referred to in any meaningful way.

It is also worth noting that the report's recommendations, are not legally binding and that the NIHRC did not speak to teachers, students, governors or parents or observe the teaching of RSE in the classroom. [23]

The Transferor Representatives' Council (TRC) which represents the Church of Ireland, Presbyterian Church and Methodist Church in education, noted that it was highly concerning that the NIHRC is advocating that RSE can be delivered in the classroom in a way which is value-neutral and outside the parameters of a school ethos.

The DE consultation acknowledged that parents are the first teachers of their children, having the most significant influence in enabling their children to grow and mature and to form healthy relationships.

It recommended that schools should work closely with parents when planning and delivering any new RSE curriculum. This safeguarding procedure involving parents may not apply to RSE in youth work where participation is voluntary.

It has been shown that a lack of training is a key barrier to teachers delivering RSE which is compounded by a lack of statutory teaching resources and a fear of external criticism, especially from parents and guardians. Teachers also noted that the teaching of RSE was sometimes restrictive and reflected the values and beliefs of Boards of Governors.

Youth workers have also expressed concerns about the level of training available to them and this impacts on their ability to support vulnerable young people. They also reported resistance or opposition from some parents and guardians, communities or faith groups who may have different views or expectations on how RSE is delivered.

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[22] Relationships and Sexuality Education in Post Primary Schools in Northern Ireland: A Compelling Case for Reform, Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission, June 2023.

[23] Changes to RSE in Northern Ireland, David Smuth, 3rd August 2023. Evangelical Alliance at https://www.eauk.org/ news-and-views/relationships-and-sexuality-e duca tion-in-ni-is-c hanging-he res-how-you-can-respond

Young Persons' Perspective

Young people reported that they wanted to learn about RSE topics at the right time. They noted that RSE currently placed too much emphasis placed on friendships and relationships and not enough on puberty, LGBTQ+ issues or the physical and emotional changes young people experience. This, they noted, left many young people feeling ill prepared for the challenges of adolescence and adult life.

Through RSE, young people wanted to access timely information that met their learning styles, safeguarding them from harm, delivered in a non-judgmental manner and protecting their health and wellbeing. One young person noted that: *The lack of RSE in school means many of us are naive about sex and sexual health issues leaving us vulnerable and unprepared.*

Young people described receiving too little RSE and called for additional support to keep them informed of RSE messages as they grow up. Young people noted that RSE when it was delivered was limited and often did not include the importance of healthy relationships or outline the warning signs of unhealthy relationships. It was noted by one young person that: *RSE lessons in school were not relevant or helpful.*

Young people also reported that schools were more interested in the academic curriculum and placed less emphasis on preparing young people for real life challenges and issues.

Some young people noted that schools were reluctant to educate them on LGBTQ+ issues, abortion or other controversial topics as these did not align with the school ethos. One participant stated: *Young people have different needs, identities and experiences and these are not being addressed in RSE.*

Young people reported that they wanted RSE delivered in a way that was engaging and helped them meet the challenges of adult life. Many claimed that they preferred youth work learning techniques in the delivery of RSE as schools did not deliver effective RSE lessons. One young person noted: *Youth workers are more responsive to our needs and understand our issues better than our teachers.*

Young people suggested that they should be provided with sufficient information and support in RSE to enable them to make safe choices and avoid unhealthy relationships. This, they noted, would give them opportunities to develop skills to manage their lives effectively. One young person noted: *The less young people know the more risks they are likely to take that is why we should be learning RSE.*

Young people also reflected that RSE should teach young people to learn to understand and respect themselves and others. They wanted to have a greater understanding of religious and cultural differences and identities and want to learn about other's views and opinions.

A clear message from young people was that they wanted to be listened to and engaged in any future curriculum developments, either formal or non-formal. It was suggested that current RSE delivery did not meet the needs of young people and failed to address sexual health, relationships and identity and left many feeling isolated and disempowered.

One young person stated that: *Schools and teachers assume we are all heterosexual and fail to recognise that LGBTQ+ young people are at greater risk of abuse and bullying.*

A young person who identified as LGBTQ+ noted that the RSE curriculum was neither inclusive nor diverse and that schools failed to address the needs of certain communities of young people, including LGBTQ+ young people, those with a disability and other vulnerable groups. He stated: *The curriculum and schools do not support our needs and we feel we are not included or valued.*

It was also reported that the RSE curriculum did not allow young people to explore different cultural or religious perspectives relating to sexual health and relations.

A teacher from a large post-primary school noted that changes in demographics meant that schools had to cater for a wider range of faiths and cultural identities and that RSE lessons needed to be carefully planned, inclusive and appropriate for all pupils. This, she stated, was challenging for teachers as many teachers were awkward or embarrassed when delivering RSE lessons already.

Young people noted that teachers were often reluctant to talk about sensitive issues and they wanted more dedicated time in school to talk about these sensitive themes to raise awareness and keep young people safe and healthy.

Young people reported that they wanted more information on contraception, STIs, the age of consent, teenage pregnancies, pornography and other risk-taking behaviours. These issues were rarely discussed through RSE at school it was suggested.

Some recognised that this was challenging for schools and required parental consent, however, many believed it was an important milestone in their development. One young person noted: *Making us aware of these issues will keep us safe and healthy and allow us to understand what good relationships look like.*

Young people noted that the lack of RSE at school ensured that they were less likely to confide in friends and family if they were having relationship problems. Some suggested that this could have an impact on their sexual health and future relationships. It was suggested: *RSE does not prepare us to make positive choices. Many of us struggle and our mental health suffers.*

Many believed that teachers were inaccessible to them to discuss sensitive issues and others simply did not want to discuss their concerns with teachers. One young person noted: *At my old school we were not willing to talk to teachers about sex, gender or relationships for fear of being labelled or stigmatised.*

Youth work, it was suggested, provided young people with opportunities to mix with people from different backgrounds, beliefs and values. Young people reported that they wanted RSE to have a discussion-based and practical learning emphasis, incorporating inclusion and diversity, which reflects youth work methodologies and values.

Young people stated that youth work was better placed to inform young people about sexual health and relationships, protecting them from child sexual exploitation, unwanted pregnancies and STIs and gender related issues.

Youth centres were viewed as safe spaces where young people would be more willing to talk and explore sensitive issues. One young person noted: *I would feel more comfortable discussing sexual health and relationship issues with a youth worker as they can be trusted to listen and support me.*

Other young people noted that learning about RSE in a youth centre would provide them with opportunities to explore sexual health and relationship topics in an inclusive way that met their needs and was being denied to them at school.

It was also noted that RSE delivery in youth clubs should be age appropriate and delivered based on the needs of young people.

Young people recognised the complexities of delivering RSE to a changing and more diverse population. However, many were keen to learn about other religious and ethnic perspectives around RSE and believed that youth work was well placed to deliver on this.

It was also claimed that young people were not always comfortable discussing sensitive topics in front of their friends, peers and teachers in school. One young person noted that she struggled discussing sexual health and relationship themes in front of boys in her class. Others reflected that same sex classes would allow young people to learn better.

Some young people noted that they would prefer RSE programmes in youth clubs to be same sex depending on the sensitivity of the topic.

Youth Work Perspective

Youth work can give young people an opportunity to meet their friends and other young people beyond their family and communities, opening them to mixing with people from different backgrounds and with different values, beliefs and aspirations.

Non-formal education is an ideal vehicle for dealing with sensitive issues such as RSE. Youth work provides safe and supportive environments for young people to explore and discuss topics and uses a range of innovative and interactive methods to engage young people and facilitate learning.

Youth workers noted that they could address the specific needs and experiences and challenge the stereotypes of different groups of young people, such as LGBTQ+, ethnic minorities and Newcomers, and young people with additional needs or a disability.

Youth workers use strength-based approaches to promote the rights and responsibilities of young people in relation to their sexual health and wellbeing and refer young people to appropriate sources of information and support when required.

Youth workers stated that effective RSE delivery happened when working in partnership with schools, parents, health professionals and other agencies to ensure a consistent and coherent approach to delivering RSE.

Youth workers suggested that RSE delivery was based on need and followed evidence-based practice to support delivery that complied with local area plans and legal considerations.

Effective delivery they noted should be inclusive, using diverse materials and language that reflect the reality and diversity of young people's lives and respect their rights, choices and identities. They also noted that it was important to provide accurate and relevant information.

It was suggested that engaging and creative methods supported different learning styles, and these included: discussions and feedback, games, role plays, debates, group work and presentations.

However, it was noted that some youth workers lacked sufficient training and resources to support high-quality RSE delivery and did not have adequate knowledge and confidence in the subject to support its impact on a young person's development.

They also suggested that there was a lack of consistent approaches to RSE delivery across different settings and agencies. It was noted that delivery in a non-formal education setting enables youth workers to reach vulnerable and marginalised young people in a safe and inclusive space.

Some youth workers struggled to address sensitive and controversial topics, such as pornography, LGBTQ+ issues, consent or sexual violence in a way that met the needs of young people.

It was also reported that some faced challenges whilst engaging and meeting the diverse needs and experiences of different groups of young people, such as those with disabilities, ethnic minorities or LGBTQ+ young people.

Many youth workers reported that they had never received training or support in the delivery of RSE programmes. Those youth workers who had received training in RSE delivery did so from an external source or previous employment position.

Despite this, most youth workers revealed that they would be confident or very confident in delivering RSE programmes to children and young people.t

Youth workers suggested that a lack of training and support in delivering RSE was the biggest barrier or challenge they faced in delivering RSE programmes. Personally, and morally, youth workers, did not seem to have an issue in delivering RSE programmes to young people.

Others suggested that resistance from parents and guardians and lack of time or resources restricted their ability to deliver on this topic.

One youth worker noted: *Over-protective parents are one of the biggest barriers, but their kids are influenced by social media irrespective of what parents think and so they need a trusted adult who can help them make life decisions in a non-judgmental way. The key to the success of any RSE programme is quality training and it should not be based on religious belief.*

Whilst most youth workers were confident in delivering RSE, they did express concerns that different gender young people may want that same gender youth workers to deliver RSE in their youth centres, which is not always possible due to the practicalities of staffing and resourcing constraints.

Youth workers indicated that RSE programmes should be delivered through group work with young people or through sexual health outreach teams or both. Some suggested that RSE programmes should be delivered through the youth work curriculum and through targeted needs based 1-2-1.

Youth workers responded that the delivery of RSE programmes in the Youth Work Curriculum should be targeted at certain cohorts or groups to minimise the risk of these young people making inappropriate or harmful decisions.

Youth workers also agreed that RSE delivery should be age appropriate and targeted at the post-primary, teenage age group and vulnerable cohorts of young people.
Several youth workers stated that vulnerable young people should be targeted, supported and prioritised to protect them from child sexual exploitation, abusive relationships and domestic violence.

It was also suggested that RSE delivery should be needs led and specific to the needs of the group or individual being worked with rather than adopting a blanket top-down approach. Several youth workers believed that RSE should be age appropriate and delivered where there was an identified need by young people.

However, other youth workers believed that RSE should be open to all children and young people regardless of age and gender, with one youth worker believing that RSE is relevant to all.

This was supported by another youth worker who stated: *If it is to be delivered, it should be open to any child and young person. Every child and young person who engage or don't engage within our services are at potential risk of danger from difficult relationships, inappropriate relationships or sexual activity.*

Youth workers suggested that any Youth Service RSE programmes should have parental consent for children and young people to participate as is required in schools.

There was a general belief that parents have the right to know what young people are learning in Youth Service RSE programmes. It was noted by several youth workers that family religious beliefs may be a barrier in allowing young people learning RSE. It was stated that parental consent is required for all Youth Service programmes anyway and this should be no different.

National and International Examples of RSE Youth Work

In Ireland, there has been significant development in recent years by youth organisations in proactively promoting health and wellbeing among young people. The National Youth Health Programme (NYHP) has been to the forefront of this in developing several initiatives, including the Health Promoting Youth Service Initiative.

NYHP is a strategic partnership of The National Youth Council of Ireland (NYCI), The Department of Children and Youth Affairs (DCYA) and the Health Service Executive (HSE). It identifies the youth sector as: *a forum through which young people, especially those who leave school early, can be offered a range of opportunities to develop their personal skills and enhance their confidence.*

It sees youth work as having an important role to play in addressing many of the sexual health issues of young people, through direct work with them. It also has a role to play in influencing factors at contextual and policy levels through advocacy, participation, partnerships and policy development.

The focus has been on addressing a broad range of health issues with young people in a holistic way and has paved the way forward for organisations to take a more proactive role in addressing the sexual health needs of young people.

In Ireland, Youth Services such as the Sexual Health Centre and the Irish Family Planning Association (IFPA) provide RSE programmes that are interactive, participatory and tailored to the needs and interests of young people. They also offer sexual health services, information and referrals, and work with schools, youth groups and other organisations to promote RSE and sexual health awareness.

RSE is part of the new curriculum in Wales. From September 2022 schools in Wales must teach RSE from on a phased basis. The Children's Commissioner for Wales supports the inclusion of Relationships and Sexuality Education in the Curriculum and Assessment (Wales) Act 2021, believing that this law will make sure all children and young people have opportunities to develop their understanding of relationships and sexuality.

The Welsh Government is committed to the implementation of RSE in education and learning, so that children and young people are empowered and have an understanding and skills necessary so that they can make informed choices and to be happy, healthy and safe.

This allows practitioners to design and develop a curriculum tailored to their learners' needs, making connections and developing authentic contexts for learning across the curriculum. The new draft RSE code means that schools will be empowered to create their curriculum and whole-school approaches that are tailor-made for their pupils, ensuring that all learners can engage in RSE in ways that are appropriate, relevant and meaningful for them.

This mandatory RSE Code supports schools to design their RSE around broad inter-linking learning strands. The content is set within the context of broad and interlinked learning strands, namely:

- Relationships and identity.
- Sexual health and well-being.
- Empowerment, safety and respect.

The Welsh Government is committed to covering the following themes in RSE: relationships, rights and equity, sex, gender and sexuality, bodies and body image, sexual health and well-being and violence, safety and support.

To assist schools and youth settings in their planning of RSE, these themes are interwoven into the learning strands. Across the learning strands, curriculum content in RSE must be inclusive and reflect diversity.

It must include learning that develop learners' awareness and understanding of different identities, views and values and a diversity of relationships, gender and sexuality, including LGBTQ+ lives. Learning about rights and equity runs through all the strands, as well as embedding learning and experience through a rights-based approach to the learning.

The Welsh government announced that RSE will now be compulsory. Parents will no longer have the means to withdraw their children from these classes. This was tested in a trial run in 2021 and has become statutory in 2022. The new curriculum is now called Religion, Values, and Ethics.[24]

In Sweden, Youth Services such as the Swedish Association for Sexuality Education (RFSU) and the Swedish Federation for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer and Intersex Rights (RFSL) offer RSE programmes that cover topics such as sexual diversity, gender identity, consent, pleasure, sexual

[24] https://www.gov.wales/sites/default/files/publications/2022-01/curriculum-for-wales-relationships-sexuality-education-code.pdf

rights and violence prevention. They also provide training and support for teachers, parents and health professionals and advocate for inclusive and comprehensive RSE policies and practice.

In New Zealand, Youth Services such as Family Planning and Rainbow Youth collaborate with schools and communities to deliver RSE programmes that are culturally responsive, evidence-based and youth-led. They use a variety of methods, such as workshops, online resources, peer education, mentoring and counselling, to engage young people in RSE and to address their diverse needs and experiences.

In the Netherlands, Youth Services such as the Rutgers Foundation and the GGD Municipal Health Service provide RSE programmes, materials and training for schools, parents and professionals. They also offer sexual health services, counselling and support for young people. The Netherlands has one of the lowest rates of teenage pregnancy, abortion and STI's in the world, and high levels of sexual satisfaction and well-being among young people.

In Kenya, Youth Services such as the African Youth Alliance and the Straight Talk Foundation have implemented RSE programmes that combine school-based and community-based interventions, such as peer education, youth-friendly clinics, radio shows and magazines. These programmes have been shown to increase young people's knowledge, attitudes and behaviours related to sexual and reproductive health and help reduce the incidence of unwanted pregnancy, HIV and gender-based violence.

In Colombia, Youth Services such as Profamilia and the Red Cross have delivered RSE programmes that use participatory and interactive methods, such as games, role plays, debates and group discussions. These programmes have been effective in improving young people's self-esteem, communication skills, critical thinking and decision-making abilities, as well as their awareness and prevention of sexual risks and rights violations.

Conclusion

RSE is a vital part of the curriculum that equips children and young people with the knowledge and skills to make informed and responsible decisions about their relationships and sexuality.

However, RSE is also a complex and controversial topic that requires careful consideration of the views and needs of various stakeholders, including parents, teachers and most importantly, children and young people themselves.

RSE in Northern Ireland faces specific challenges and opportunities, given the political, religious, and cultural diversity of the region, as well as the recent changes in the legal framework and the curriculum requirements.

Therefore, RSE should be delivered in a way that is respectful, inclusive, and sensitive to the needs and experiences of all young people, regardless of their background, culture or identity.

RSE is about equipping young people with support, knowledge and guidance in how they manage relationships and stay safe.

RSE can benefit from the involvement and contribution of youth work, which can provide a safe, supportive and participatory space for young people to explore and express their opinions and experiences on RSE topics and to access accurate and relevant information and support services.

Youth work also helps children and young people develop critical thinking, communication and decision-making skills, as well as fostering positive attitudes, healthy relationships and values towards themselves and others.

Youth work can complement and enhance the formal RSE curriculum by offering a more flexible, interactive and learner-centred approach, as well as addressing the specific needs and interests of different groups of children and young people, such as those with special educational needs or a disability, those from minority ethnic backgrounds or those who identify as LGBTQ+.

Recommendations

RSE should be seen as a lifelong learning process that empowers young people to develop their personal and social skills, to respect themselves and others and to enjoy healthy and fulfilling relationships and sexuality.

To achieve this, RSE should be based on the best available evidence and follow the international standards and guidelines to support quality delivery. Some of the key recommendations for RSE in Northern Ireland are:

- To ensure that RSE is comprehensive, age-appropriate and scientifically accurate, covering a wide range of topics, such as sexual and reproductive health and rights, prevention of early pregnancy and access to abortion, consent, diversity, equality, safety and wellbeing.
- To ensure that RSE is consistent and coherent across all education settings in Northern Ireland and is aligned with the statutory curriculum and the guidance issued by the Department of Education.
- To ensure that RSE is participatory and learner-centred, involving young people in the planning, delivery, and evaluation of RSE, considering their views and needs.
- To ensure that RSE is respectful and inclusive, recognising and celebrating the diversity of young people's identities, cultures, and experiences and challenging any forms of stigma or discrimination.
- To ensure that RSE is supported and resourced, providing adequate training and professional development for teachers and youth workers, as well as engaging and consulting with parents, guardians and other stakeholders.
- The implementation of RSE professional learning workshops, to support youth workers to prepare for the new RSE statutory curriculum and guidance in Northern Ireland.
- The development of an RSE framework for the delivery of RSE in Youth Services which should include multi-agency working which includes statutory and voluntary bodies.
- The Youth Service should have a stronger focus on developing a greater awareness and understanding of building healthy relationships and recognising unhealthy behaviours amongst young people. This will empower them to make good choices for themselves, build their confidence and be more self-aware. This can also positively impact friendships and family relationships.

- Youth Services should ensure that any external organisation they work with is reputable, professional and aligned with their values and ethos. They should also consult with parents and guardians before inviting any external organisation to deliver RSE.
- RSE should be delivered proactively through targeted programmes with specific aims and objectives to young people.
- Provide relationship support and guidance to young people in a way chosen by young people.
- Model positive respectful relationships and explore the difference between healthy and unhealthy relationships.
- Support young people to understand and navigate online and offline worlds.

By implementing these recommendations, RSE in Northern Ireland can become a more effective and meaningful educational experience for young people, which can have a significant positive impact on their physical and mental health, their academic achievement, and their prospects.

RSE can also contribute to the promotion of a more inclusive, respectful, and peaceful society, where all young people can thrive and realise their full potential.

Appendix 1- Case Study

Cardiff YMCA - The Healthy Relationship Project

The Sexual Health Outreach Team (SHOT) has been delivering a targeted sexual health service for young people, through Families First funding since 2013. It provides targeted 1-1 support and group sessions for young people at risk in relation to healthy relationships and rights and responsibilities regarding sexual behaviour including advice on sexual health that follows best practice.

SHOT provides training and advice to other professionals who work with young people, in schools and in the community, so that they can provide appropriate, quality support for young people and ensure that young people have access to best practice advice and information in relation to sexual health and behaviour.

The Outreach Team collaborates with other professionals to ensure that young people have access to services that are appropriate to the nature and level of their needs. They provide targeted 1-2-1 support and group work for young people about their sexual health and relationship needs, dependant on the need which includes youth clubs, training providers, schools, colleges, young people's hostels and other youth organisations.

Support is provided to young people, who have many different diverse sexual health and relationship needs, which protects them against and the risk of child sexual exploitation, pregnancy testing, 511 screening, healthy relationships, gender and trans issues.

The need for this project was identified through the co-ordination of the C-Card (Condom Card) Scheme working in partnership with Public Health Wales. The vision for SHOT was to fill in the gaps in provisions around sexual health and relationships.

Young people were asking for more support and in many cases, professionals did not have the capacity, specific knowledge or confidence to provide it within their job roles. The young people were central in identifying the need for specific one to one support and support accessing local sexual health services such as the NHS Department of Sexual Health.

Young people are involved from the initial meeting, with the planning of sessions, locations, session duration and timeframe. Each session is reviewed, and young people can reflect on their learning and plan for the following session with their outreach worker. At the end of the intervention each young person completes an evaluation, their input feeds into the project as it is constantly monitors and evaluates the services to ensure best meet the needs of young people.

Each young person completes and initial assessment such as the Outcome Ladder at the beginning of intervention which is reviewed after6sessions and at the final session. This allows the team to identify distance travelled regarding learning and to identify any additional areas of work or pathways to sign post on.

All data is logged on a Charity Log system so the team can track engagement, progression and individual evaluations of the service. Each contact is logged, and this information provides important data that enables them to continually monitor and evaluate. Young people have opportunity to contribute to an annual consultation, which directly feeds into the development of the scheme.
The Outreach team use a variety of methods and approaches when working with young people, as each young person is different, with different needs, learning styles and backgrounds. The

fundamental approach is voluntary involvement, person centred, and user led. We have been adaptable, flexible and are driven by young people's needs.

The project is outreach in nature, and it spans across many different settings such as schools, homes and in the community, predominantly one to one but they also deliver group sessions, delivering in formal, non-formal and informal learning. Young people are encouraged to engage in active and reflective learning, to be involved in their own learning process and embed their learning into real life situations.

There have been lessons learned, one for example is that the Outreach team have always offered a flexible engagement timeframe and have never set a limit on intervention, however during one stage they had a long waiting list we tried to offer a more structured intervention.

The Outreach team tried to implement a 6-session intervention but found that due to the varying needs of young people and the importance of building a trusting relationship due to the nature of the work involved this just was not feasible for many young people.

Some young people need more time, some need the learning to be covered more than once and in different ways to enable effective comprehension, awareness and ability to use their learning in real life situations. So, SHOT reverted to an unlimited timeframe for intervention. The service ensures appropriate provision for the following priority groups:

- Young people at risk of Child Sexual Exploitation.
- Young people displaying inappropriate sexual behaviour.
- Young people in or on the edge of care and care leavers.
- Young people who are not in education, employment or training.
- Disabled young people, including those with physical, sensory and learning disabilities.
- Young people with emotional and mental health problems.
- Young people who identify as LGBT+.

One of the major outcomes for young people is that it can develop a greater awareness of relationships, by understanding healthy relationships and identifying personal or increasing their awareness of unhealthy behaviours or traits and they are empowered to make good choices for themselves, build their confidence and be more self-aware. This can also positively impact friendships and family relationships.

One of the key benefits for the staff, organisation and volunteers are that partnerships and multi-agency working is paramount in this project, so that close working relationships with other professional organisations, such as health, children's services, police and teachers.
https://www .ewe.wales/site/index.php/en/accreditation/the-quality-mark-for-youth-work-in-wales/the-quality-mark-examples-of-good-practice/the-healthy-relationships-project

Appendix 2 - Case Study

B4uDecide

B4uDecide is an organisation that is tasked with supporting and delivering on the Irish Government framework for sexual health and wellbeing and it is one of several national policy priority programmes situated within the national Strategy and Planning function of the Health Services Executive in Ireland. The initiative aims to encourage young people to make healthy, responsible decisions about relationships and sexual health, with the aim of delaying early sex.

B4uDecide is an education initiative developed by the HSE Crisis Pregnancy Programme, in partnership with the Department of Education and Skills, the National Youth Council of Ireland, Parent line and members of the Donegal Youth Council with implementing Ireland's first framework for sexual health and wellbeing, the National Sexual Health Strategy 2015 - 2020.

The organisation has a co-designed website, which consulted with over 200 young people in its development, which includes specific recommendations, suggestions, advice and short videos.

The website offers direct access to young people and is supported with Relationships and Sexuality Education Resource Materials for Teachers and a similar set of resource materials for Youth Workers.

The initiative aims to reach out to parents, to encourage and help them to communicate with their teenage children about relationships and sexual health. Open communication between parents and teenagers about such issues can have a very positive impact on teenagers' attitudes, decisions and behaviour.

It is committed to the delivery of research, funding initiatives including crisis pregnancy counselling services, RSE programmes, communications campaigns, information provision and policy initiatives. Importantly this organisation supports and provides guidance to children and young people and youth workers in the implementation and delivery RSE programmes.

The organisation believes that RSE plays a critical role in supporting and preparing young people for the transition from adolescence to adulthood. They believe that young people receive a myriad of conflicting messages, from their friends, peer groups and the media, about sexuality and sexual behaviour, with much of the information being untrustworthy, inappropriate and harmful.

They also welcome opportunities to learn relationship skills and to have open discussions with their peers, teachers and youth workers in a safe, secure environment, such as at school or youth clubs.

The focus for these lessons is the 14-16-year-old age group, although youth workers are free to use them with other groups if doing so is in line with their organisation's RSE policy.

These youth led RSE programmes are planned in consultation with parents. Parents must be informed of the content of the RSE programme and be provided with opportunities to see any materials, including websites and DVDs, which will be used. They may find the b4udecide.ie website a useful starting point to begin discussions in the home with their teenage children about relationships and sexual health.

It is generally recognised that youth is a time in life when one is most likely to be healthy. Therefore, the challenge for youth work is to build on this natural advantage. Sexual health is an integral part of young people's general health and requires the same attention as other health issues.

Youth organisations, therefore, have a key role to play in addressing the issue of sexual health with young people. It has been recognised that youth workers can respond to young people's sexual health needs by:

- Linking with parents and schools to promote a co-ordinated and holistic approach to relationships and sexual health development.
- Developing young people's personal skills, life-skills, communication, decision-making, negotiation, confidence building, through sexual health education and promotion.
- Supporting sexual health work within the organisation by providing supportive environments in which this work can take place and by supporting youth workers in carrying out this work with young people.

  Developing policies, procedures and guidelines to support sexual health work at organisational level, ensuring that appropriate policies and procedures are in place to support everyone involved.

https://b4udecide.ie/help-support/about/

Recommendation Action Plan

Recommendation	Action Required
To ensure a holistic approach to RSE, future provision will cover a range of issues including sexual and reproductive health and rights, sexual health and wellbeing, discussions on consent, embracing diversity and equality and addressing issues related to safety and wellbeing.	• Youth Service will develop tailored RSE programs that are comprehensive, age-appropriate and evidence-based. • Youth Service will provide training and support for staff members to facilitate quality RSE delivery and establish partnerships with relevant organisations and professionals to enhance resources and expertise in addressing diverse RSE needs. • Regular consultation with stakeholders, including young people, parents, and guardians, will also help ensure that RSE programmes are inclusive and responsive to the needs of the community.
Person/ Team Responsible Curriculum Team. Training Team. Senior Youth Officers and Regional Team leads.	Progress Indicators Increased partnership working. Improved health and wellbeing. Increased personal and social development. Improved physical and emotional wellbeing. Increased self-worth. Improved relationships with others.

Recommendation	Action Required
To ensure that RSE is interactive and tailored to all learners, it should actively engage young people in the process. This means involving them in the planning, implementation and assessment of RSE initiatives, considering their perspectives and requirements throughout the process.	• Youth service will adopt participatory approaches that actively involve young people in the planning, delivery and evaluation of RSE programmes. • Opportunities will be created for young people to voice their opinions and preferences, incorporating their feedback into the design of RSE initiatives, and providing platforms for them to actively participate in discussions and activities related to RSE.
Person/ Team Responsible Participation Team. Curriculum Team. Training Team. Information and Data Team. Senior Youth Officers and Regional Team leads.	Progress Indicators Improved access to learning opportunities. Improved social and life skills. Increased resilience. Increased communication skills. Increased feeling of value and empowerment.

Recommendation	Action Required
To guarantee that RSE is respectful and inclusive, it must acknowledge and honour the diverse identities, cultures and experiences of young people while actively confronting any instances of stigma or discrimination.	• Youth Service will develop and implement inclusive and culturally sensitive RSE programs that acknowledge and celebrate the diversity of young people. • Youth Service will develop resources that reflect different identities, cultures and experiences. • Safe and inclusive spaces will be provided for open dialogue where any instances of stigma or discrimination are addressed and challenged.
Person/ Team Responsible Curriculum Team. Participation Team. Senior Youth Workers and Regional Team leads.	Progress Indicators Improved relationships with others, including those from different backgrounds. Reduction in bullying. Improved health and wellbeing. Improved emotional wellbeing. Increased resilience and independence.

Recommendation	Action Required
Youth Service will enhance awareness and understanding of fostering healthy relationships and identifying unhealthy behaviours among young people.	• Youth Service will develop and implement targeted programmes focused on educating young people about healthy relationships and recognising signs of unhealthy behaviours.
Person/ Team Responsible Training team. Curriculum Team. Senior Youth Workers and Regional Team leads. Participation Team.	Progress Indicators Improved relationships with others. Improved health and wellbeing. Improved emotional wellbeing. Increased resilience and independence. Improved skills and knowledge. Reduction in risk-taking behaviour.