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RELATIONSHIPS AND SEXUALITY EDUCATION IN THE NORTHERN IRELAND REVISED CURRICULUM FOR PRIMARY AND POST-PRIMARY EDUCATION

This Research Paper examines the place of Relationship and Sexuality Education (RSE) within the Revised Curriculum in Northern Ireland education. It looks at the role of the Partnership Management Board, reviews the Guidance issued to schools for its implementation and the training and materials available to teachers for its delivery. The Paper also briefly looks at the place of Personal Development and RSE in the Government's overall public health strategy

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SUMMARY OF KEY POINTS

All schools in Northern Ireland, from Foundation to Key Stage 4, are required to teach a revised curriculum that has a statutory minimum content. The revised curriculum was introduced in 2007, but schools have been preparing for its implementation since the framework was put in place in 2006 with the new requirements being phased in since 2007. The revised curriculum requires that certain 'areas of learning' be covered in all schools. 'Personal Development' forms a key element of the revised curriculum with Relationships and Sexuality Education (RSE) as an integral strand.

Given the sensitive nature of the topics covered in RSE and its central role in pupils' personal development, this paper looks at the preparations in place for schools in its delivery including:

- The role of the Partnership Management Board in providing training for senior management, Boards of Governors and teachers;
- The guidance available to schools in developing policies for RSE delivery and the need to adhere to the religious and moral ethos of the individual schools;
- The materials and teaching aids available to teachers;
- The safeguards to consider in using outside agencies to deliver aspects of RSE; and
- The role of RSE in the wider policies addressing public health.

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INTRODUCTION

The *Education (Curriculum Minimum Content) Order 2007 (Northern Ireland)*¹ provides for the statutory minimum content that must be taught in all schools from Foundation to Key Stage 4 as part of the revised curriculum². The 2007 Order describes the revised curriculum as a balanced and broadly based curriculum which:

- (a) promotes the spiritual, emotional, moral, cultural, intellectual and physical development of pupils at the school and thereby of society; and
- (b) prepares such pupils for the opportunities, responsibilities and experiences of life by equipping them with the appropriate knowledge, understanding and skills.

Relationships and Sexuality Education (RSE) forms a strand of the 'Personal Development' area of learning through the Personal Development and Mutual Understanding (PD&MU) area of learning at primary level and Learning for Life and Work (LLW) at post-primary level. Table 1 below sets out the areas of learning and their contributory elements from the 2007 Order.

Table 1: Statutory minimum requirements of learning in the revised curriculum

	Area of Learning	Contributory Elements
Foundation Stage and Key Stages 1 & 2.	Personal Development and Mutual Understanding (PD&MU)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Personal understanding and health • Mutual understanding in the local and wider community
Key Stage 3	Learning for Life and Work	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Employability • Local and global citizenship • Personal development • Home economics
Key Stage 4	Learning for Life and Work	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Employability • Local and global citizenship • Personal development

Source: The Education(Curriculum Minimum Content) Order 2007

The framework for the revised curriculum has been in place since August 2006 with the new requirements being phased in from September 2007. RSE forms an integral part of the revised curriculum by providing age-appropriate opportunities for pupils to learn about relationships with others and their own sexual and emotional development.

2.0 THE ROLE OF THE PARTNERSHIP MANAGEMENT BOARD

The Partnership Management Board (PMB) is a strategic management board which has drawn up and is responsible for monitoring and implementing the revised Northern Ireland Curriculum and Assessment Arrangements³. The PMB is made up of representatives of the Council for the

¹ Education (Curriculum Minimum Content) Order (Northern Ireland) 2007 at:

http://www.opsi.gov.uk/sr/sr2007/nisr_20070046_en_1

² Introduced in the Education (Northern Ireland) Order 2006 available at:

<http://www.opsi.gov.uk/si/si2006/20061915.htm#5>

³ Consultation and information available on DE website at:

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Curriculum, Examinations and Assessment, the Education and Library Boards, the Regional training Unit, C2K, the Council for Catholic Maintained Schools, teacher unions, teacher training institutions, the Further Education sector, the General Teaching Council for Northern Ireland, the Department of Education and the Education and Training Inspectorate.

A report based on a study undertaken in 2007⁴ found that during the planning period for implementing the revised curriculum it had been thought that the PMB should comprise of the agencies managing the process. However, following concerns about the absence of representation from principals or teachers, in 2006 – 07 it was decided to broaden the PMB to include bodies such as the General Teaching Council for Northern Ireland (GTCNI), teaching unions and principals from primary and post-primary schools. A principals' forum was also established to channel the views of principals to the PMB. The study found that the '*PMB is perceived to have been a significant and positive player in a very difficult process and to offer a model of partnership working which may bode well for the future*'⁵.

Since November 2005 post-primary principals and senior staff have been attending the 'Leading Learning' conferences co-ordinated under the auspices of the PMB by the Regional Training Unit supported by the Curriculum Advisory Support Service (CASS). The revised curriculum has been phased in since September 2007 with the rolling out of a support programme by the PMB since September 2006. The support programme was to make professional development consistent for all teachers across Northern Ireland and teachers were given up to four additional planning and training days.

In 2008, the Education and Training Inspectorate found⁶ that:

Since the time of the first ETI report, PMB has diminished in its coordination role. While members mainly report on tasks for which their organisation or sub-group is responsible, and while PMB receives support from the Inspectorate and commissions research, it does not work effectively as a forum for the strategic evaluation of the outcomes of change in curriculum and practice as a whole.

3.0 GUIDANCE FOR THE IMPLEMENTATION OF RSE

The Department of Education ("the Department") provided Curricular Guidance for schools in relation to RSE in *Circular 2001/15: Relationships and Sexuality Education*⁷. The Circular was to be used in conjunction with the Council for the Curriculum, Examinations and Assessment (CCEA) Guidance Material (2001) issued separately to primary and post-primary schools. Circular 2001/15 states that every school should have a policy setting out how the school will address RSE within each pupil's curriculum. The school policy on RSE should:

<http://www.deni.gov.uk/index/80-curriculum-and-assessment.htm>

⁴ Downing D., Martin K. and Allen S. Evaluation of the Implementation of the Revised Curriculum and Assessment Arrangements in Northern Ireland... from planning to preparation (August 2007): NFER/QUB. Full document available at:

<http://www.nicurriculum.org.uk/docs/background/NIJfinalreport041007.pdf>

⁵ *ibid*

⁶ *An Evaluation of the Implementation of the Revised Curriculum in Primary, Special and Post-primary Schools 2008* (April 2009) Education and Training Inspectorate

⁷ Relationships and Sexuality Education (RSE) Circular 2001/15 available at:

<http://www.deni.gov.uk/2001-15.pdf>

...show clear linkages with the school's pastoral care policy, and should set out the aims of the teaching programme, describing the topics that will be included, their sequencing and depth of treatment and the teaching methods and materials to be employed. The policy should be the subject of consultation with parents, and should be endorsed by the school's Board of Governors. All teachers, whether or not they are centrally involved in teaching the programme, should be aware of its details and their implications. The implementation of such a programme demands a high degree of co-ordination, co-operation and monitoring and it is recommended that schools should designate a senior member of staff to act as co-ordinator. He/she would be responsible to the school principal for oversight of the programme⁸.

The CCEA Guidance Material includes information on developing a policy framework for RSE in schools⁹, along with information on roles and responsibilities within the school for the delivery of RSE (for example senior management, Governors, teachers and parents), developing a programme for RSE and practicalities of teaching RSE in the classroom.

While there is no statutory parental right to withdraw a child from RSE classes, the Guides direct schools to try to take account of parental concerns and ultimately their wishes should be respected. Schools should attempt to make alternative arrangements if a parent wishes to have a pupil withdrawn from all or part of RSE classes. However, it is pointed out that this highlights the need for parents to be consulted on the content to be covered and the activities the pupils will undertake¹⁰.

3.1 'PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT' GUIDANCE 2007

PMB guidance has been produced by CCEA (2007) for the delivery of PD&MU at primary level¹¹ and Personal Development at post-primary level¹². Personal Development is described as:

Encouraging each child to become personally, emotionally, socially and physically effective, to lead healthy, safe and fulfilled lives and to become confident, independent and responsible citizens, making informed and responsible choices and decisions throughout their lives¹³.

GUIDANCE AT PRIMARY LEVEL

At Foundation and Key Stages 1 and 2 RSE is a strand of Personal Development and Mutual Understanding (PD&MU). Guidance for PD&MU¹⁴ for principals, senior managers, teachers and governors states that it *focuses attention on children's emotional development, health and safety, relationships with others and development of moral thinking, values and actions*. There

⁸ *ibid*

⁹ Guidance documents for RSE at Primary and Post-primary schools, DENI (2001) are available at: <http://www.deni.gov.uk/2001-15-2.pdf> and <http://www.deni.gov.uk/2001-15-3.pdf>

¹⁰ Personal Development: Key Stage 3 Non Statutory Guidance for Personal Development (2007) CCEA available at: http://www.nicurriculum.org.uk/docs/key_stage_3/areas_of_learning/non_statutory/ks3_personal_development_ns_guidance.pdf

¹¹ *ibid*

¹² *ibid*

¹³ Personal Development: Key Stage 3 Non Statutory Guidance for Personal Development (2007) CCEA

¹⁴ Personal Development and Mutual Understanding (2007): PMB full document at: http://www.nicurriculum.org.uk/docs/personal_development/training/PD-Guidance.pdf

are two interconnected strands of PD&MU divided into themes that deliver the nine statutory Statements of Requirement. Table 2 below illustrates the themes.

Table 2: PD&MU at Foundation and KS 1 and 2

		Themes
Strand 1	Personal understanding and Health Addresses personal and emotional issues as well as health, well-being and safety matters	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Self-awareness • Feelings and emotions • Learning to learn • Health and safety
Strand 2	Mutual understanding in the Local and Wider Community Examines issues relating to personal and social relationships, interdependence and the need for mutual understanding and respect in the community and in the wider world	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Relationships • Rules, rights and responsibilities • Managing conflict • Similarities and differences • Learning to live as members of the community

Source: Guidance for PD&MU

PD&MU is a progression of skills that are appropriate to the age and maturity of the pupils where the themes form the basis for progression to LLW at Key Stage 3 (post-primary) level.

GUIDANCE AT POST-PRIMARY LEVEL

At Key Stage 3 (post-primary), Personal Development should encompass all aspects of health including social, physical, emotional, cognitive and spiritual¹⁵. RSE at post-primary level is delivered as a strand of Personal Development within Learning for Life and Work (LLW).

Non Statutory Guidance for teachers and co-ordinators for Personal Development at Key Stage 3¹⁶ states that it *'compliments the whole school guidance provided for Learning for Life and Work and encompasses previous guidance published for Personal, Social and Health Education (CCEA, 1999) and Relationships and Sexuality Education (CCEA, 2001).'* It is based on the key concepts of self awareness, personal health and relationships.

Guidance for Key Stage 3 makes clear that RSE should be delivered in line with the values and ethos of the school and be age-appropriate bearing in mind also that children mature at different rates. It should include factual information with the opportunity for pupils to discuss any concerns they may have and should make them better able to cope with physical and emotional changes in puberty.

RSE should be delivered within a moral and values framework that allows pupils to evaluate the information they receive from other sources. The framework should be consulted on with parents within the values and ethos of the school.

¹⁵ Personal Development: Key Stage 3 Non Statutory Guidance for Personal Development (2007) CCEA

¹⁶ *ibid*

The Education and Training Inspectorate published their second evaluation of the implementation of the revised curriculum in April 2009¹⁷, based on evidence based progress during 2008. In relation to LLW it found:

The provision of Learning for Life and Work as a timetabled subject, rather than as integrated into the existing curriculum, can cause pressure on curriculum time, with varying outcomes for citizenship, employability and personal development and, sometimes, a loss of curriculum time for other subjects. Schools need to explore alternative ways of providing this entitlement.

4.0 TRAINING MATERIALS

As part of a resource pack distributed to schools by the Department in 2001, the Department distributed a Circular¹⁸ and Guidance for Primary and Post-primary Schools on teaching RSE¹⁹. The Circular and Guidance provide information to schools on the development of an RSE policy, programme and the practical elements of delivering RSE in the classroom. They also emphasise the need for RSE to be delivered in schools through a shared responsibility that includes senior management, governors, teachers, and parents. It includes information on the roles of CASS, Diocesan Advisors in Catholic Maintained Schools, the school health team²⁰ and outside agencies and individuals with expertise.

Although the CCEA provides materials and guidance for teaching RSE, schools should ensure that the resources used are consistent with the ethos of the school. While the emphasis should be on positive aspects of relationships and sexuality, *'teachers should not avoid discussion of sensitive issues such as contraception, abortion, HIV/AIDS and other sexually transmitted diseases, homosexuality and pornography. Discussion of such issues in the media and elsewhere is so common that many pupils will already be aware of them'*²¹.

Implementing the RSE programme, particularly at Post-primary level will involve more than one teacher as areas covered will be dealt with in other subject areas²².

In relation to curriculum organisation the 2001 Guide states that:

One of the difficulties schools face is how to integrate RSE into the curriculum. The primary curriculum offers opportunities to develop an RSE programme in a holistic and cross-curricular way. Issues can be integrated with specific topics, discussed in subject-related contexts, addressed through health education, pastoral work and at assembly time as well as during visits from the school nurse, local doctor or other agency. It is important, therefore,

¹⁷ *An Evaluation of the Implementation of the Revised Curriculum in Primary, Special and Post-primary Schools 2008* (April 2009) Education and Training Inspectorate. Full Report available at:

http://www.etini.gov.uk/revised_curriculum.pdf

¹⁸ Relationships and Sexuality Education (RSE) Circular 2001/15

¹⁹ Guidance for Primary Schools: Relationships and Sexuality Education (2001): DENI available at:

<http://www.deni.gov.uk/2001-15-2.pdf> and Guidance for Post-primary Schools available at:

<http://www.deni.gov.uk/2001-15-3.pdf>

²⁰ School health team comprises the school doctor, school nurse and health visitor.

²¹ Relationships and Sexuality Education (RSE) Circular 2001/15

²² *ibid*

for schools to consider the links that exist between RSE and the other curricular areas at each key stage.

The 2001 Guide points out that the selection of teaching resources is vital to the success of the programme and that there are a great many resources available for the teaching of RSE. These *'reflect a wide range of morals and values and offer a variety of teaching strategies and activities'* and the Guide advises that *'great care must be taken to ensure that the resources which are used in a school are appropriate for the target audience and reflect the aims and objectives of the RSE programme, especially the school's agreed morals and values framework.'* The Guide provides a checklist to help schools to select the most appropriate resources, including making sure it is consistent with the school's RSE policy and morals and values framework.

Additional resource and support materials include²³:

- INSET and Continuing Professional Development units which include specific units for the implementation of Personal Development;
- Thematic Units showing how elements of Personal Development can be supported and delivered in the context of general learning areas. Those units written for Personal Development can be used as stand alone units of work and will be another available resource to schools;
- Bespoke textbooks being developed by commercial publishers, which are in line with the Northern Ireland Curriculum.

In addition schools are encouraged to use:

- Existing resources already being used to deliver Personal Development programmes in schools. Much of this material can continue to be used or amended and supplemented to create a more holistic approach to personal Development;
- External organisations whose work is related to aspects of Personal Development.²⁴

4.1 ON-LINE MATERIAL

The PMB website has areas dedicated to online material to support teachers in delivering PD&MU and LLW.

Primary level

For PD&MU teaching notes are provided for each of the strands of learning on the Living Learning Together²⁵ site to support teachers in planning, teaching and assessing PD&MU.

Post-primary

At post-primary level Personal Development is delivered through a programme called 'InSYNC'²⁶. The online material includes a resource folder and CD Rom produced by the

²³ Personal Development: Key Stage 3 Non Statutory Guidance for Personal Development (2007) CCEA

²⁴ Personal Development: Key Stage 3 Non Statutory Guidance for Personal Development (2007) CCEA

²⁵ Living Learning Together on Northern Ireland Curriculum website at:

http://www.nicurriculum.org.uk/key_stages_1_and_2/areas_of_learning/personal_development/living_learning_together/home.asp

²⁶ InSYNC on Northern Ireland Curriculum website at:

<http://www.nicurriculum.org.uk/search/results.asp?cx=012767609913867686750%3Avpetvjw8hzc&cof=FORID%3A11&q=Insync&sa=#1055>

CCEA and Education and Library Boards. The programme is built around the following 10 themes:

1. Health and the Whole Person
2. Feelings and Emotions
3. Managing Influences and Making Decisions
4. Self Concept
5. Managing Change
6. Morals, Values and Beliefs
7. Learning about Learning
8. Safety and Managing Risk
9. Relationships and Sexuality
10. Drugs Awareness

The InSYNC website states that:

... research has shown that health promotion and, in particular, the development of emotional intelligence are vital to the well-being of young people. Emotional intelligence is a person's ability to recognise their own feelings, those of others and be able to manage their own health, emotions and relationships effectively.

InSYNC helps schools create learning opportunities that allow pupils to not only acquire knowledge but also to develop values, attitudes, skills and emotional intelligence.

5.0 TEACHER TRAINING

The implementation of the revised curriculum began in 2005-2006 with in-service training (INSET) for principals. This was co-ordinated by the Regional Training Unit (RTU). There was also initial INSET for curriculum leaders and teachers. INSET led by CCEA was also provided for 15 post-primary schools participating in a Key Stage 3 pilot study.

CASS provides support through each of the Education and Library Boards. The service offers training for teachers in the Revised Curriculum in both out centres and schools on an ongoing basis.

The targeted guidance published in 2007 focuses on the implementation of PD&MU Key Stages 1 and 2²⁷. It includes the following advice for senior management and governors:

Some of your school's teachers may believe that they are inadequately trained in active learning strategies, or they may initially feel uneasy discussing some areas of PD&MU with children. Your school must address this issue by providing training opportunities for your teaching staff such as in-service courses, directed time after school and staff development days.

An Education and Training Inspectorate Report²⁸ found that there was good progress in many schools in the implementation of the Revised Curriculum, but highlighted some areas for

²⁷ Personal Development and Mutual Understanding for Key Stages 1 & 2 (2007) PMB

²⁸ An Evaluation of the Arrangements for the Implementation of the Revised Northern Ireland Curriculum in Primary, Special and Post-primary Schools 2006-2007 (February 2008): Education and Training Inspectorate. Full document available at: http://www.etini.gov.uk/revised_ni_curriculum-2.pdf
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improvement including the finding that some of the training, in particular for school principals, had not been sufficiently successful in preparing them to lead the implementation of the revised curriculum in their schools²⁹.

The Department asked the PMB to make changes that will support governors, principals and teachers in the delivery of the 2008-09 implementation programme. Improvements that have been implemented include the principals' forum which is expected to improve communication with head teachers, direct budgets for schools for revised curriculum training and providing principals with additional resources to lead implementation within schools.

The PMB has identified Personal Development/LLW and Thinking Skills and Personal Capabilities as two key areas of the revised curriculum. The PMB website states that the ethos behind them '*should be embedded in every subject and teaching process*'³⁰. However, a Circular issued to all schools in the Southern Education and Library Board (SELB) in September 2008 informed them that the SELB would no longer be subsidising a Post Graduate Certificate in Personal Development in '*preparation for the continued introduction of the Revised Curriculum with the focus on Pastoral Care and Personal Development*. The course is run by SELB in partnership with the University of Ulster. Teachers are still invited to complete the course, but at a personal cost of £570 for each of the two modules which are intended to equip teachers with the skills to facilitate Personal Development to all age groups.

6.0 OUTSIDE RESOURCE PROVIDERS

The 2001 *Guidance for Post-primary Schools*³¹ acknowledges that schools may wish to make use of the expertise and skills of education and health professionals from statutory or voluntary organisations or individuals. Any activities undertaken should complement the ongoing Personal Development curriculum and follow up activities should be undertaken by their teachers. A list of questions that schools should ask outside agencies before allowing them access to the school, or pupils to visit their premises are reproduced in the Guide with the permission of the Health Promotion Agency for Northern Ireland. These are:

- Does the agency/individual have a specified Child Protection Policy?
- How will the issue of confidentiality be dealt with?
- Are resources such as videos/tapes/role plays appropriate?
- Has the agency/individual worked with any other schools?
- Does the agency/individual have a clear set of aims and objectives as well as lesson plans?
- Has the agency/individual read any relevant school policies and are they prepared to adhere to them (especially the ethos, morals and values of the school)?
- Do parents know the agency/individual is being used by the school?
- Will teachers be present?
- Will the input be monitored?
- Will pupils be asked how the session/class went?
- Can the school terminate the work if the classes or sessions are deemed inappropriate?

²⁹ *ibid*

³⁰ PMB website at: http://www.pmbni.org.uk/news_stories/0906/great_expectations.asp

³¹ *The Use of the Expertise of Agencies and Individuals* (p13) in *Guidance for Post-primary Schools: Relationships and Sexuality Education* (2001): DENI.

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- Are evaluations carried out by the agency/individual and if so will the school have access to them?

7.0 INTER-DEPARTMENTAL CO-OPERATION

Circular 2001/15: Relationships and Sexuality Education issued to schools by the Department in 2001 refers to the Ministerial Group on Public Health whose first priority was children's and young people's health. Departments had been asked to draw up action plans to develop 'an integrated, comprehensive strategy for improving the health of children and young people'. The guidance on RSE was seen as an integral and important aspect of the Department of Education's Health Action Plan³².

The Advisory Working Groups and steering group involved in the development of CCEA's 2001 Guides on RSE comprised the Department, DHSSPS, DHSS Trusts, Diocesan Advisers Office, ELBs, the Health Promotion Agency and Initial Teacher Training.

7.1 SEXUAL HEALTH PROMOTION STRATEGY AND ACTION PLAN 2008-2013

The Health Promotion Strategy and Action Plan 2008 – 2013 acknowledges the importance of the role of education in schools in achieving the targets set in their Action Plan:

It is clear that schools have an important contribution to make in influencing and developing young peoples' sexual health and wellbeing through the delivery of effective Personal Development in the revised curriculum, including Relationship and Sexuality Education (RSE). Effective RSE in schools, and the work of the youth service, support young people in developing the knowledge and skills to enable them to make informed and responsible decisions about sexual health issues.

There are five Action Areas relating to sexual health where DE is named as a delivery partner. These are laid out in the table below.

Action Area: Prevention		
Action 1	Timescale	Delivery Partners
To develop a phased sexual health public information campaign which is accessible to all groups and aims to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> (i) promote sexual health and wellbeing; (ii) raise awareness of specific sexual health issues, including HIV/AIDS with particular focus on those most at risk; (iii) to tackle discrimination and stigma associated with HIV, STIs and sexual orientation. 	Medium Term (up to 3 years)	Department of Health Social Services and Public Safety (DHSSPS), Health Promotion Agency (HPA), Department of Education (DE) , Health and Social Care (HSC), and voluntary and community organisations.
Action 5	Timescale	Delivery Partners
To continue to implement guidelines	Ongoing	DE and voluntary and

³² Relationships and Sexuality Education (RSE) Circular 2001/15
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on Relationships and Sexuality Education (RSE).		community organisations.
Action 6	Timescale	Delivery Partners
To issue and implement NICE Guidelines on prevention of Sexually Transmitted Infections (STIs) and under 18 conceptions.	Short/Medium Term (1–3 years)	DHSSPS, HSC, DE and voluntary and community organisations.
Action 7	Timescale	Delivery Partners
To provide opportunities for young people in school and youth settings to develop the skills they need for life to support them in appropriately managing their relationships, including sexual lifestyles.	Short/Medium Term (1–3 years)	DE , DHSSPS, and HPA.
Action 13	Timescale	Delivery Partners
To ensure that appropriate sexual health training which takes account of the needs of Section 75 groups is made available to teachers implementing RSE guidelines and youth workers involved in sexual health promotion.	Short/Medium Term (1–3 years)	DE , Education and Library Boards and voluntary and community organisations.

A Factsheet on RSE in schools updated in January 2007³³ provides information for teachers on training materials and resources and gives contact details for information and service providers for young people. It is published by *Sexual Health Information* which is a partnership between the Family Planning Association (NI) and the Health Promotion Agency for Northern Ireland (Regional Public Health Agency since 1 April 2009 as part of RPA). The factsheet is updated at intervals with the previous factsheet having been published in December 2005.

³³ Relationships and Sexuality Education in Schools (January 2007): fpa and HPA available at: http://www.fpa.org.uk/Files/main_content/PDFNIRelationshipsandsexualityeducationinschoolsJanuary2007.pdf