

# Mini-Inquiry into Relationship and Sexuality Education - Children and Young People

The Committee for  
Education

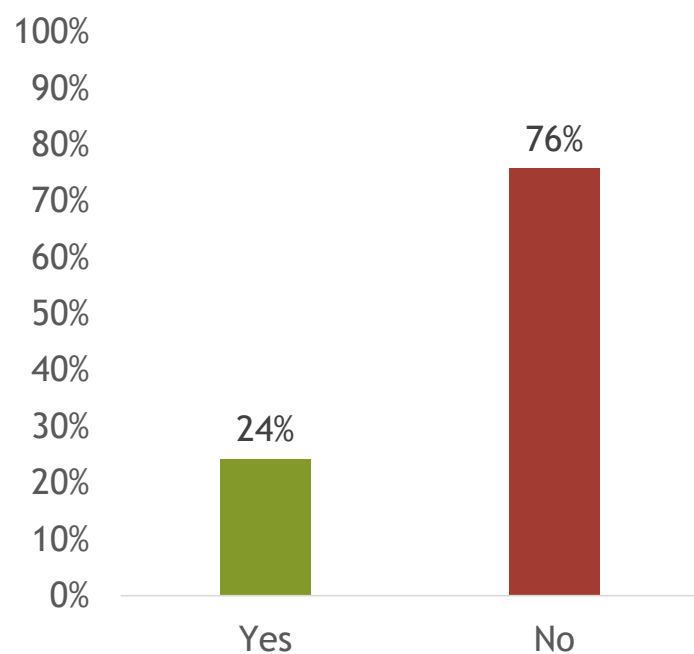
# Background Information

- ▶ 33 people responded to the survey.
- ▶ 10 respondents identified themselves as responding on behalf of the Northern Ireland Youth Assembly.
- ▶ 1 respondent identified themselves as responding on behalf of the Methodist Church Council on Social Responsibility.
- ▶ 3 respondents identified themselves as responding as a student.
- ▶ 1 respondent identified themselves as responding as a parent.
- ▶ Unless otherwise stated, all charts refer to the full sample. Due to rounding of decimal places, not all charts will sum to 100%.



# Relationship and Sexuality (RSE) Policies

## Have you ever been asked your opinion on your school's RSE policy/ how RSE is taught in your school?

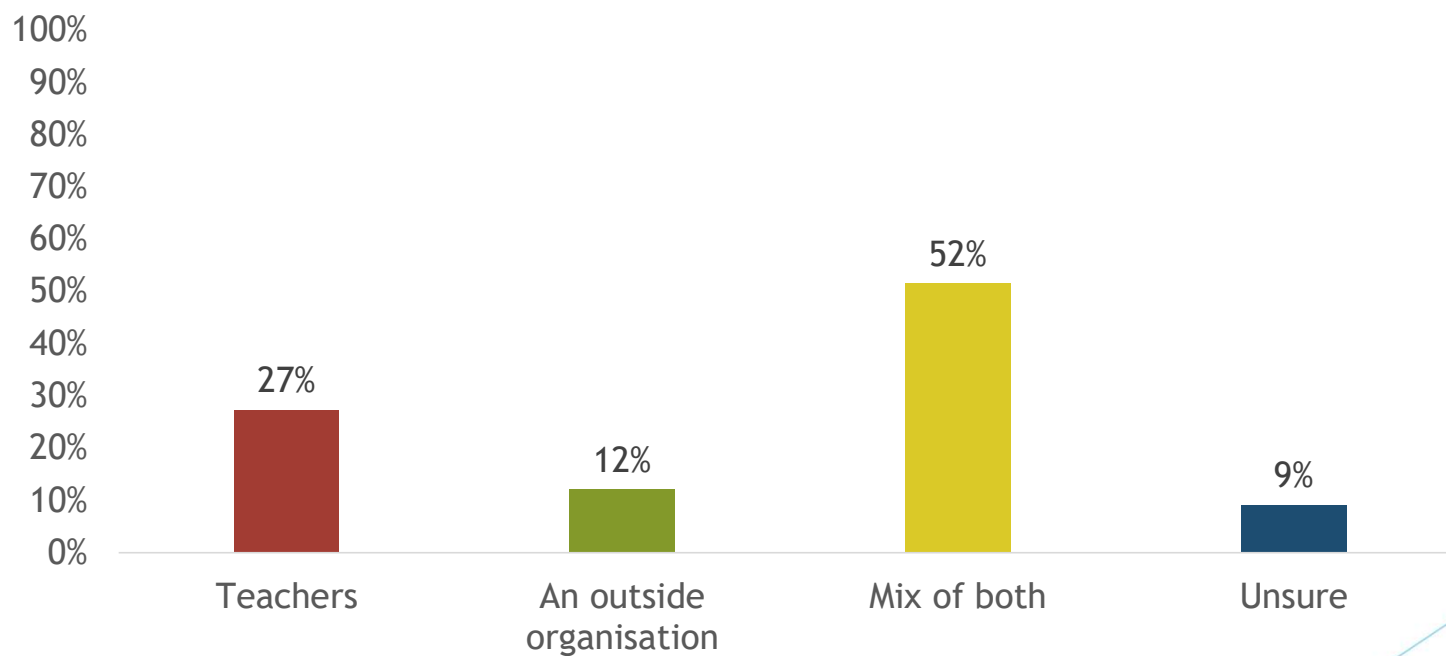


- ▶ “When asked, staff haven't confirmed the existence of [an RSE policy]. I also looked at my school's website, where all the other policies can be found, to no avail.”
- ▶ “The vast majority of Youth Assembly Members (98%) said they had not been asked their opinion on their schools' RSE policy or how RSE is taught.”
- ▶ “Another Member tried to access their schools' RSE policy on the school website. She was told it is not publicly available and is only available on request from the school office.”
- ▶ “We would usually be asked to discuss the topic, with an underlying tone of “but only if you feel like it”.”

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# Resources and Support for RSE

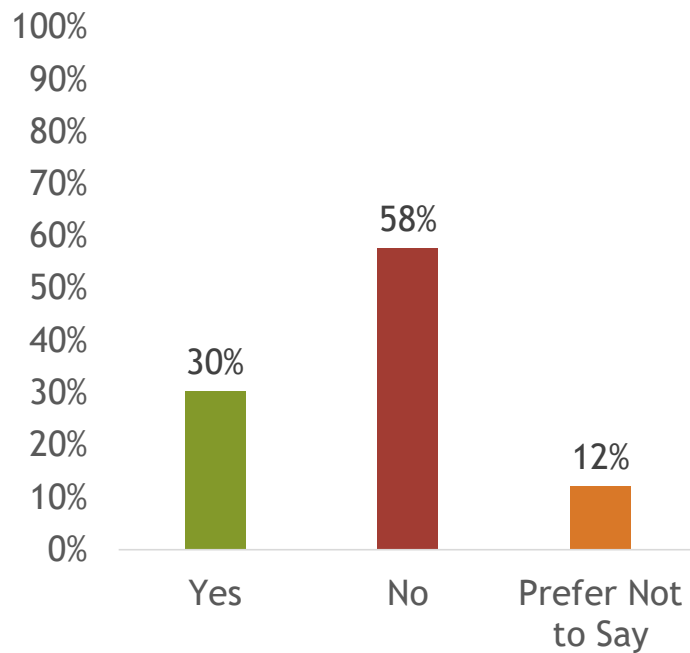
# Which of the following delivers RSE in your school?



If an outside organisation is used in your school, what do you think about this?

- ▶ “It’s more official when done by an outside organisation as it has a greater sense of legitimacy.”
- ▶ “Pupils would feel more comfortable with asking questions.”
- ▶ “I don’t feel that the message gets through to the pupils, as the talks often interrupt PE or games.”
- ▶ “The school should be more diverse in its selection of talks.”
- ▶ “One of my major concerns about outside organisations providing RSE lessons is their religious affiliations.”
- ▶ “I would not personally like it if it was a religious group providing the teaching.”
- ▶ “The Women’s Aid presentation was very outdated and irrelevant. It was held in a very large session of 180 young people. Noone felt comfortable putting up their hand or asking questions.”
- ▶ “Nexus came in and used age-inappropriate material. We were only in Form One and they were telling us about sexual consent and violent relationships. They talked about suicide too. It upset some of us.”

# Do you feel that teachers are confident when delivering RSE lessons?

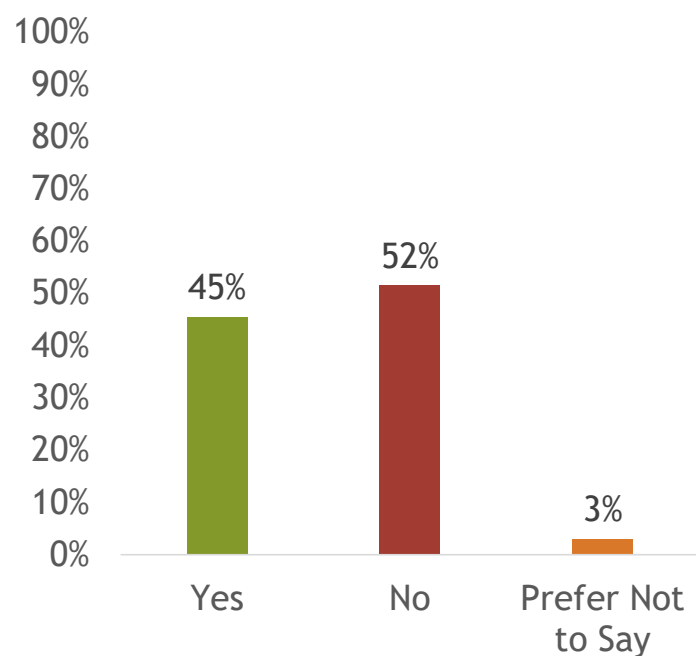


- ▶ “Quite a few have almost openly said they don't want to be here either.”
- ▶ “They'd likely be afraid of offending or saying the wrong thing... Or worse, they let their own views cloud proper scientific education.”
- ▶ “Every "RSE" lesson included an undertone of teachers not really knowing anything about what they were teaching.”
- ▶ “Many teachers view RSE (and LLW in general) as a useless subject and prefer to allow students to use it as a revision or free period.”

## Who do you think should teach RSE in schools?

- ▶ “An outside organisation”
- ▶ “Teachers, or an EA/parent approved organisation that follows a set curriculum, with clear messaging, and fully transparent lesson plans.”
- ▶ “External organisations unless there is adequate and appropriate training for teachers and inspection to ensure their approach.”
- ▶ “Teachers with pastoral responsibilities.”
- ▶ “I feel that it should be taught by the teachers as there is a level of trust between the pupils and teachers.”
- ▶ “Out of school bodies would be most effective in smaller classes rather than assembly/group activities.”
- ▶ “We need specialised teachers, properly trained, who have up to date information. There should be at least one such teacher in each school who leads on RSE.”

## Do you feel that RSE lessons provide you with life-skills required for teenagers / young adults?



- ▶ “RSE is not offered in Year 13/14 as it is not on the statutory curriculum, yet they felt it is even more important for young people aged 16-18 to continue to have opportunities to learn about RSE.”
- ▶ “RSE information is quite biased depending on the school/teacher. YA Members reported that topics aren't covered or are heavily influenced by the school ethos.”
- ▶ “RSE is not always inclusive around issues like LGBTQ+. Sometimes teachers avoid the issue as they don't want to say the wrong thing if there are LGBTQ+ kids in the class. There is an issue with confidence among teachers in tackling these issues.”

Can you provide an outline of what you have learned about in RSE at school?

- ▶ 27 respondents answered this question, with a range of themes mentioned, including:
- ▶ Healthy Relationships & Society
  - ▶ Relationships (8)
  - ▶ Consent (12)
  - ▶ Sexual Assault (4)
  - ▶ Domestic Abuse (3)
  - ▶ Bullying (2)
  - ▶ LGBTQIA+ (5)
  - ▶ Social Media (6)
- ▶ Sexual Health & Development
  - ▶ Human Reproduction (4)
  - ▶ Puberty (3)
  - ▶ Periods (5)
  - ▶ Contraception (6)
  - ▶ STIs (3)
  - ▶ Pregnancy (4)
  - ▶ Abortion (3)
- ▶ Health and Wellbeing
  - ▶ Mental Health (3)
  - ▶ Drugs & Alcohol (4)

# Can you provide an outline of what you have learned about in RSE at school?

*“I was educated in New Zealand, whose state schools are secular. I received age-appropriate education from late primary school in relation to puberty, periods, etc. Then in secondary school we received proper sex education, inclusive of contraception, healthy relationships, where to get help if you need it, as well as identifying problem behaviour or abuse and teaching us how to keep ourselves safe.”*

*“Nada! Catholic girls' school, everything was shameful, just don't be anything other than heterosexual in a traditional relationship.”*

*“Because COVID interrupted my own learning from Year 8-10, RSE classes were very sporadic or sometimes absent for long periods of time. We did learn about abortion, homophobia, STDs and had lessons on spotting negative traits within a relationship, mostly within the context of the Christian faith and how the Catholic Church takes a view on these issues.”*

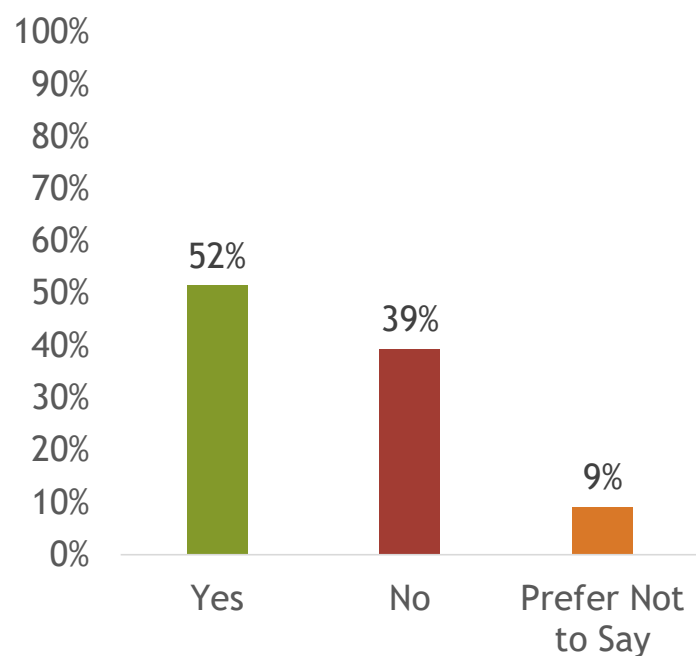
Is there anything that you would like to learn about that you have never been taught?

- ▶ Schools should talk more about rape, teenage pregnancy, and other topics that could happen to anyone and how to deal with them, instead of making it a taboo topic.
- ▶ There should be far greater importance placed on educating children together - regardless of gender - for all parts of RSE.
- ▶ We should also be far more in depth about enthusiastic consent, how to keep yourself safe online, and much more education on healthy relationship and communication behaviours.
- ▶ I'd also like to see a lot more done about self esteem, and the harmful effects of social media on mental health, and practical strategies for young people to put in place.
- ▶ Trans, gay, lesbian sexual health and other options to contraception, i.e., options for abortion or health checks things of that nature.
- ▶ Sexual harassment, sexual assault, rape - what it is, how to know when this is happening, who to contact for help.
- ▶ Misogyny & Consent
- ▶ How to recognise a toxic relationship (platonic or romantic), manipulation & gaslighting
- ▶ I think that classes should also discuss pornography, misogyny, rape, and assault, as these are issues that concern a lot of students within the country, and the first step to prevention is education.

# Diversity and Inclusion



## Do you feel that your school teaches RSE in a way that respects the different types of families and people that live in Northern Ireland?

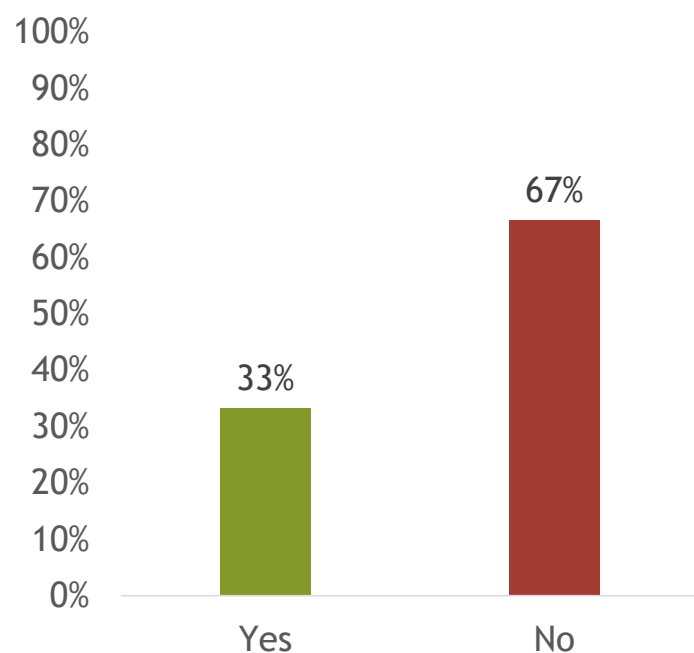


- ▶ A lot of the "example" stories in the booklet make sure to be gender neutral.
- ▶ Our school refuses to acknowledge anything outside of the Christian married man and woman.
- ▶ I think they skirt around sensitive subjects a little and prefer to let outside organisations take the burden. We haven't really covered any controversial topics.
- ▶ Its not that they don't respect the different types of families, it's just that they barely mention them at all.



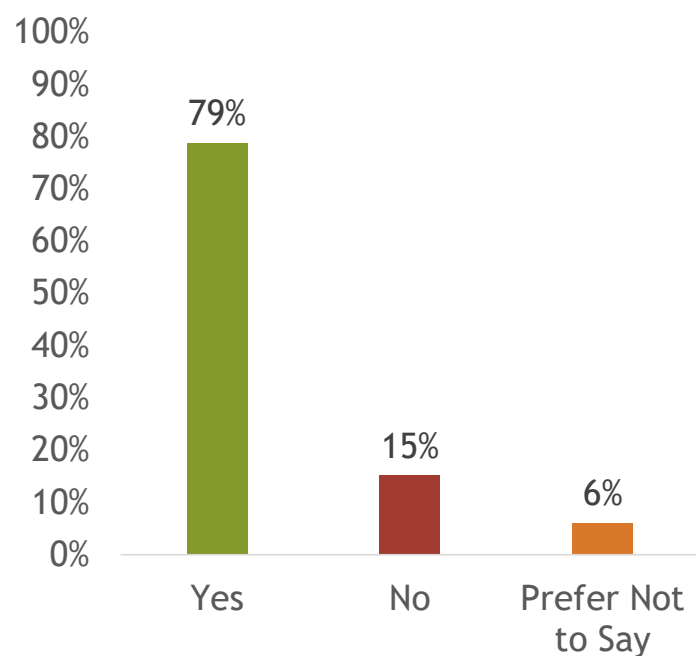
Opt-Out

## Do you believe that parents should be able to opt out of their children being taught RSE in schools?



- ▶ It's better to be well informed than to be ignorant.
- ▶ You learn important life skills that keep you safe. These may be uncomfortable but it is still important to learn about them.
- ▶ As they are most likely not getting taught it at home and it is something that really needs to get taught.
- ▶ If there is abuse in the home a parent could prevent their child from learning that they are experiencing abuse. Also if a parent is homophobic or transphobic they could prevent their children learning about LGBTQ+ relationships, which would be particularly damaging for LGBTQ+ kids.
- ▶ We wouldn't let a parent opt their child out of geography because they believe the earth is flat.

## Do you believe that a child should be consulted on whether they wish to be removed from certain RSE classes, regardless of their age?

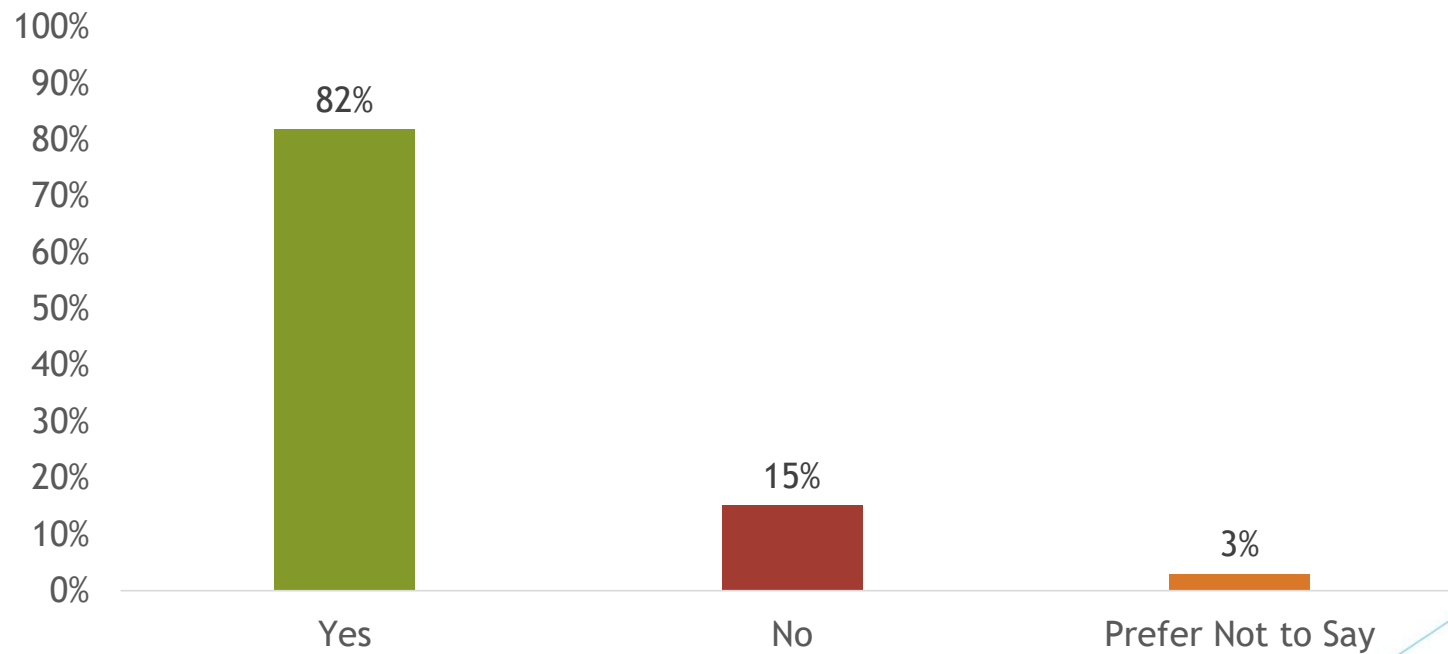


- ▶ Young people may simply not have a full grasp of the topic and may not be able to take it on board wholly and treat it as a joke.
- ▶ [Young people] can't make informed decisions on what they should learn if they haven't learned it, or perhaps not yet been in a position where they would have benefitted from that knowledge.
- ▶ At a certain age everyone should have to have RSE.
- ▶ To say they shouldn't choose is to treat a child as a second-class citizen with less rights than adults.

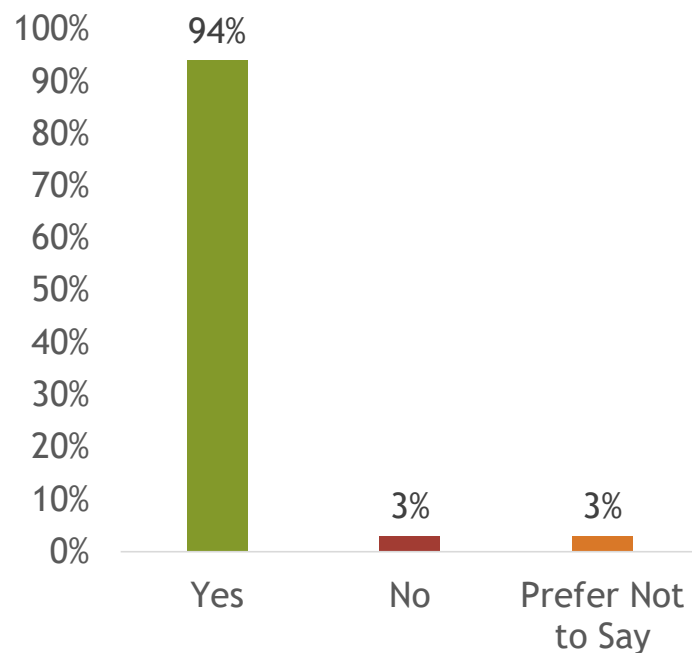


Consent

# Does your school include education on consent in its RSE lessons?



# Do you believe consent education is an important element of RSE?

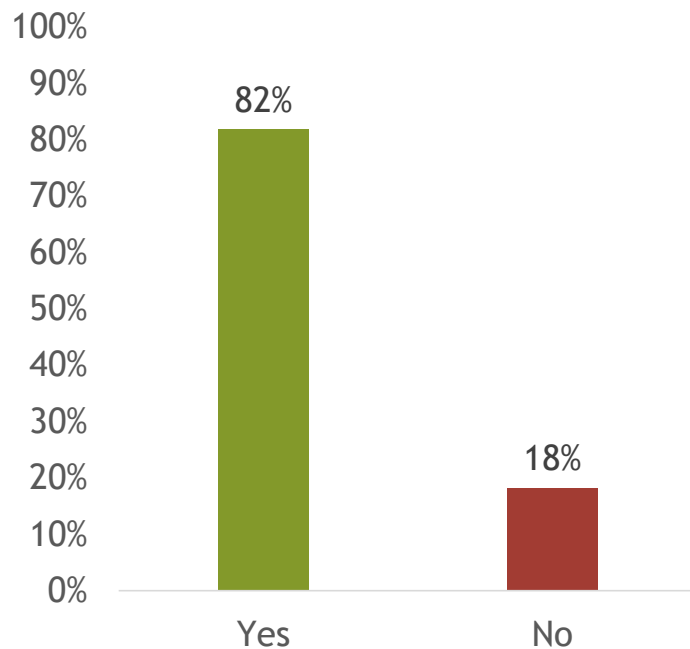


- ▶ Many people in this generation are not aware of what consent is and don't respect the opposite sex.
- ▶ We're all sick of it. The cup of tea video made us all really uncomfortable.
- ▶ The majority of people still believe it has to be a violent situation to count as non-consensual.
- ▶ in order to reduce violence you need to start with educating young boys.
- ▶ I feel safer seeing others police their friends' behaviours surrounding consent.
- ▶ Consent is fundamental to healthy emotional and physical relationships and should start from children are born.

# Making Changes

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# Do you think there is a need for changes to RSE in Northern Ireland?



- ▶ It should be ran every two weeks for one term. The curriculum should be inclusive and not so heavily focused on heterosexual relations.
- ▶ It should also be done by trained, willing professionals, and it should be the child's choice whether or not they want to do it, not the parents.
- ▶ RSE should be delivered by teachers, from a set, multi agency approved curriculum, with set lessons/topics and be fully transparent with parents. It should also be inspected, and evaluated. RSE education should be woven through every single year of education from P1 to the last year of secondary school.

Finally, if you have any other general comments about RSE please include them here:

- ▶ I believe that more needs to be done to insure that children's voice is heard in RSE lessons and that their opinion is respected whatever it may be.
- ▶ YA Members asked about the role of ETI - How do we know if RSE is being taught or taught well?
- ▶ We don't need this mini-inquiry, we should have had a new curriculum a long time ago.
- ▶ Homophobia is rampant, In schools especially. Anything we can do to help LGBTQIA+ students must be done as hate grows in our country, it creates a country of fear, segregation and bigotry.
- ▶ Getting input from mature young people would make sure RSE focuses on what's actually relevant to us and addresses our real concerns