

CCEA Briefing Paper for RSE Mini Inquiry

Curriculum Integration and Content - Minimum Content Order

Since the Northern Ireland Curriculum was introduced in 2007, Relationships and Sexuality Education (RSE) has been a statutory component of the following key areas of learning:

- [Personal Development and Mutual Understanding in the Foundation Stage](#);
- [Personal Development and Mutual Understanding at Key Stages 1 and 2](#);
- [Personal Development and Home Economics statements of requirement for Learning for Life and Work at Key Stage 3](#); and
- [Personal Development strand of Learning for Life and Work at Key Stage 4](#).

The Importance of RSE

RSE empowers young people to take responsibility for their own decisions and behaviours, and the ways in which they may affect others. It builds the skills and attitudes that enable young people to treat others with respect, acceptance, tolerance, and empathy, regardless of their ethnicity, race, social, economic or immigration status, religion, disability, sexual orientation, gender identity or expression. Additionally, it provides an opportunity to present sexuality in a way that also includes its positive aspects, such as love, and relationships based on mutual respect and equality.

RSE contributes to the formation of a fair and compassionate society by empowering individuals and communities, promoting critical thinking skills and strengthening young people's understanding of sometimes sensitive or controversial issues. It provides learners with opportunities to explore and nurture positive values and attitudes towards sexual and reproductive health, and to develop self-esteem and respect for human rights and gender equality.

RSE in the NI Curriculum

FOUNDATION STAGE

RSE is a statutory part of Personal Development and Mutual Understanding in the Foundation Stage.

Below are the statutory requirements relevant to RSE at this key stage.

Teachers should enable children to develop knowledge, understanding and skills in:

Personal Understanding and Health

Pupils should be enabled to explore:

- themselves and their personal attributes;
- their own and others' feelings and emotions; and
- the importance of keeping healthy and how to keep safe in familiar and unfamiliar environments.

Mutual Understanding in the Local and Wider Community

Pupils should be enabled to explore:

- their relationships with family and friends;
- their responsibilities for self and others;
- how to respond appropriately in conflict situations; and
- similarities and differences between groups of people.

Progression

As pupils progress through the Foundation Stage, they should be enabled to:

- express a sense of self-awareness;
- show some self-control and express their own feelings and emotions appropriately;
- adopt healthy and hygienic routines and understand how to keep safe;
- form good relationships with adults and other pupils;
- show independence and know when to seek help;
- show respect when working and playing together and recognise the need for rules; and
- recognise similarities and differences in families and the wider community.

KEY STAGE 1

RSE is a statutory part of Personal Development and Mutual Understanding at Key Stage 1.

Below are the statutory requirements relevant to RSE at this key stage.

Teachers should enable children to develop knowledge, understanding and skills in:

Personal Understanding and Health

- their self-esteem and self-confidence;
- their own and others' feelings and emotions and how their actions affect others; and
- strategies and skills for keeping themselves healthy and safe.

Mutual Understanding in the Local and Wider Community

- initiating and developing mutually satisfying relationships;
- responsibility and respect, honesty and fairness;
- constructive approaches to conflict;
- similarities and differences between people; and
- developing themselves as members of a community.

KEY STAGE 2

RSE is a statutory part of Personal Development and Mutual Understanding at Key Stage 2.

Below are the statutory requirements relevant to RSE at this key stage.

Teachers should enable children to develop knowledge, understanding and skills in:

Personal Understanding and Health

- their self-esteem, self-confidence and how they develop as individuals;
- their management of a range of feelings and emotions and the feelings and emotions of others; and
- how to sustain their health, growth and wellbeing and coping safely and efficiently with their environment.

Mutual Understanding in the Local and Wider Community

- initiating, developing and sustaining mutually satisfying relationships;

- human rights and social responsibility;
- causes of conflict and appropriate responses;
- valuing and celebrating cultural difference and diversity; and
- playing an active and meaningful part in the life of the community.

KEY STAGE 3

At Key Stage 3, RSE is a statutory part of Learning for Life and Work in the Personal Development and Home Economics strands.

Below are the statutory requirements, set out in bold under the Key Concepts, relevant to RSE at this key stage. Additional guidance appears in plain text. All examples are in italics.

Teachers should enable pupils to develop knowledge, understanding and skills in the following Key Concepts:

Learning for Life and Work – Personal Development Strand

Key Concept – Self-Awareness

Exploring Self-Awareness provides opportunities to consider the importance of self-confidence and self-esteem to physical and emotional/mental health throughout life.

Pupils should have opportunities to:

- **Explore and express a sense of self**, *for example temperament, feelings and emotions, personal responsibility, personal needs, aspirations, etc.*
- **Explore personal morals, values and beliefs**, *for example the origin of personal values, developing a moral framework, personal integrity, etc.*
- **Investigate the influences on a young person**, *for example peer pressure, media, social and cultural trends, fears, anxieties and motivations, etc.*
- **Explore the different ways to develop self-esteem**, *for example enhanced self-awareness, sense of security and self-worth, setting achievable targets, developing resilience, new interests and skills, learning to recognise achievement, etc.*

Key Concept – Personal Health

Exploring Personal Health provides opportunities to understand the importance of recognising and managing factors that may influence physical and emotional/mental health throughout life.

Pupils should have opportunities to:

- **Explore the concept of Health as the development of a whole person**, *for example defining what makes up a whole person, the need to develop physical, mental, social, moral, cognitive, etc.*
- **Investigate the influences on physical and emotional/mental personal health of**, *for example immunisation, personal hygiene, etc.*
- **Develop understanding about, and strategies to manage, the effects of change on body, mind and behaviour**, *for example puberty, body image, mood swings, etc.*
- **Develop strategies to promote personal safety**, *for example responding appropriately to different forms of bullying, abuse, physical violence; developing safe practice in relation to the internet, getting home; understanding and managing risk, the place of rules and boundaries etc.*

Key Concept – Relationships

Exploring Relationships provides opportunities to understand the importance of forming and maintaining relationships to physical and emotional/mental health throughout life.

Pupils should have opportunities to:

- **Explore the qualities of relationships including friendship**, *for example conditions for healthy relationships, types of relationships, healthy boundaries, gender issues in relationships, etc.*
- **Explore the qualities of a loving, respectful relationship**, *for example how choices within a relationship affect both physical and emotional development, friendships, etc.*
- **Develop coping strategies to deal with challenging relationship scenarios**, *for example sibling rivalry, caring for relatives, domestic violence, teenage rebellion, child abuse, sexism, change in family circumstances, coping with rejection, loneliness and loss, etc.*
- **Develop strategies to avoid and resolve conflict**, *for example active listening, assertiveness, negotiation, mediation, etc.*
- **Explore the implications of sexual maturation**, *for example sexual health, fertility, contraception, conception, teenage pregnancy, childbirth, etc.*
- **Explore the emotional, social and moral implications of early sexual activity**, *for example personal values, attitudes and perceptions, the Law, STIs, the impact of underage parenting, etc.*
- **Receive age-appropriate, comprehensive and scientifically accurate education on sexual and reproductive health and rights, covering prevention of early pregnancy and access to abortion.**

Learning for Life and Work – Home Economics Strand

Key Concept – Home and Family Life

Exploring Home and Family Life provides opportunities to understand the importance of the family as a caring unit.

Pupils should have opportunities to:

- **Explore the roles and responsibilities of individuals within a variety of home and family structures**, *for example, sharing roles within the family, role reversal, etc.*
- **Develop awareness of parenting skills**, *for example, how parents/carers can nurture physical, intellectual, emotional, social and moral development, etc.*
- **Investigate some of the changing needs of family members at different stages of the life cycle**, *for example, physical (including nutritional), intellectual, emotional and social needs, etc.*
- **Explore strategies to manage family scenarios**, *for example, managing changes in family circumstances such as sibling rivalry, caring for relatives, etc.*

KEY STAGE 4

RSE sits within the Personal Development strand of Learning for Life and Work at Key Stage 4.

Learning for Life and Work is a **compulsory Area of Learning** at this key stage. It helps young people develop the fundamental skills, knowledge, qualities and dispositions that are prerequisites for life and work.

Below are the statutory requirements relevant to RSE at this key stage.

Pupils should be enabled to:

- **develop an understanding of how to maximise and sustain their own health and wellbeing;**
- **reflect on, and respond to, their developing concept of self, including managing emotions and reactions to ongoing life experiences;**
- **recognise, assess and manage risk in a range of real-life contexts;**
- **develop their understanding of relationships and sexuality and the responsibilities of healthy relationships;**
- **develop an understanding of the roles and responsibilities of parenting; and**
- **receive age-appropriate, comprehensive and scientifically accurate education on sexual and reproductive health and rights, covering prevention of early pregnancy and access to abortion.**

CCEA provides a range of GCSE and vocationally related qualifications that support this Area of Learning, including GCSE Learning for Life and Work. Entry Level qualifications in Learning for Life and Work and Life Skills also supports progression from Key Stage 3.

CCEA's Role in RSE

Since 2018 the Council for the Curriculum, Examinations and Assessment (CCEA) has been commissioned by the Department of Education to develop an RSE Hub to provide a repository of resources. The Hub contains an RSE Progression Framework and primary and post primary resources which supports schools to develop appropriate programmes at each key stage. This includes supporting teachers in delivering these new elements of the curriculum alongside developing case studies which reflect good practice in RSE programmes and delivery models.

The RSE Progression Framework

To enhance the effective delivery of RSE, CCEA has developed an [RSE Progression Framework](#) on its RSE Hub.

The [RSE Progression Framework](#) provides a non-statutory progression pathway in RSE from the Foundation Stage to post-16. It shows how different themes cover the following priority areas of RSE in an age-appropriate way:

- Consent;
- Developments in Contraception;
- Domestic and Sexual Violence and Abuse;
- Healthy, Positive Sexual Expression and Relationships;
- Internet Safety;
- LGBTQ+ Matters;
- Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights;
- Social Media and Its Effects on Relationships and Self-Esteem;
- Teen Parenting; and
- Menstrual Wellbeing.

The themes and associated content covered across the key stages in this framework build on the statutory requirements and are based on thorough research of evidence-based national and international frameworks.

For primary (Foundation Stage, Key Stage 1 and Key Stage 2), the themes are:

- Relationships;
- My Body and Development (Health, Growth and Change); and
- Safety and Wellbeing (Self-Awareness, Feelings and Emotions).

For post-primary (Key Stage 3, Key Stage 4 and post-16), the themes are:

- Self-Awareness;
- Relationships; and
- Health.

The framework aligns with [The Relationships and Sexuality Education \(Northern Ireland\) \(Amendment\) Regulations 2023](#). This legislation makes age-appropriate, comprehensive and scientifically accurate education on sexual and reproductive health and rights, covering prevention of early pregnancy and access to abortion, a compulsory component of Key Stages 3 and 4 Learning for Life and Work.

The RSE Hub

The online RSE Hub provides a central repository of age-appropriate information and guidance on a range of topics aimed at providing teachers with the resources and support to increase their competence and confidence in delivering RSE. CCEA engaged with a range of stakeholders throughout the development process including Public Health Authority, NICCY, the Education Authority, Church Representatives and groups with specific expertise.

The [RSE Hub](#) contains links to existing resources and support materials that provide a repository of information for schools. It will ensure that schools have access to a range of up-to-date, relevant resources and sources of support for RSE. Schools are encouraged to use the Hub to support the delivery of RSE.

Educators can download guidance documents and existing resources, as well as new RSE resources that we have developed to help teachers address sensitive issues with their pupils. The resources provide minimum content and are designed to offer schools flexibility in their approach to the delivery of RSE. This approach will enable all schools to deliver effective programmes in line with their ethos and RSE policy, and to ensure the wide-ranging needs of our young people are met.

CCEA non-statutory resources cover a range of issues relating to:

- Consent
- Domestic violence and sexual abuse
- Healthy positive sexual expression and relationships
- Internet safety
- LGBTQ+ matters
- Menstrual wellbeing

- Sexual and reproductive health and rights
- Social media and its effects on relationships and self esteem
- Teen parenting

CCEA resources use discussion, participative, and interactive approaches to developing knowledge and skills around making appropriate choices, mitigating risk, effective communication and listening, managing manipulative situations, negotiation, challenging myths, challenging their own perceptions, demonstrating respect for different perspectives, and respecting the rights of others as well as themselves.

Teachers are encouraged to review RSE resources and links before use to check if they are appropriate for their pupils and in line with their school's ethos and RSE policy. They can adapt the resources to suit their pupils' needs.

The RSE Hub also contains a training and professional development section with links to organisations that offer training and support for teachers and other educators, as well as parents/carers and the Board of Governors.

We have provided a description of the types of RSE training each organisation offers and the different audiences they support. These organisations often have specialist knowledge of and experience in different areas of RSE. Some can provide a generic form of training that's applicable to all schools, or bespoke training specifically tailored to individual school needs relating to ethos, location, size or prior experience and learning.

The RSE Hub was suspended pending review in December 2023 and reinstated on 7 June 2024. There were no fundamental changes to the Hub as a result of the review. Some information was updated and obsolete links removed. The findings from the review were that CCEA have followed a detailed and evidence-based approach to the development of age-appropriate resources and guidance for RSE. In addition, materials have been developed by drawing on expertise, evidence and practice and there has been a high level of engagement with key stakeholders at all stages. That engagement has provided stakeholders with opportunities to review draft materials, provide alternative perspectives, and where appropriate CCEA has reviewed and enhanced the material. The RSE Hub will be kept under annual review and development.

CCEA Teacher Webinars.

CCEA have delivered a number of webinars to support teachers in their delivery of RSE, Learning for Life and Work, and Period Dignity.

Topics covered in RSE webinars included:

- Information on the Belfast Health and Social Care Trust training 'RSE Ready',
- Whole School RSE Policy and RSE in Practice;
- Teaching controversial issues;
- Using the RSE Hub and resources to support the delivery of RSE topics.

Period Dignity and Menstrual Wellbeing webinars covered:

- An overview of the Period Dignity Scheme

- Promotion of the Ethos of Period Dignity
- Development of a Period Dignity/Menstrual Wellbeing Policy
- Period Dignity and Menstrual Wellbeing Education and Learning
- Links across the NI Curriculum and to wider school life
- Period Products (Free Provision) Act (Northern Ireland) 2022

The webinars included examples of good practice from practitioners from mainstream and SEN. CCEA is currently preparing further examples of how schools have approached the delivery of RSE in different contexts across NI. This will include SEN.

Stakeholder Engagement

Since 2019, CCEA have been engaging with a wide range of stakeholders in the development of the RSE Hub, progression framework and RSE resources and supporting materials. We have shared materials at various milestones throughout this journey and have received positive feedback from the following groups:

1. Barnardo's
2. Belfast City Council
3. Belfast Trust, Regional RSE Teacher Training Programme
4. C2K
5. Cara-friend
6. Crossgar Free Presbyterian Church
7. Denominational Education Board
8. The Christian Institute
9. Church of Ireland
10. Common Youth (formerly Brook NI)
11. DE
12. EA (Child Protection Service, Equality and Diversity, Head of Equality and Human Rights)
13. Equality Commission for NI
14. Evangelical Alliance
15. Informing Choices NI (Formerly FPA)
16. Love for Life
17. Methodist Church
18. Middletown Centre for Autism
19. National Children's Bureau (NCB)
20. Nexus
21. NICCY
22. Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission
23. Northern Ireland Youth Forum
24. NSPCC
25. Parenting NI
26. Parentkind
27. Presbyterian Church in Ireland (TRC)
28. Presbyterian Church in Ireland /Stranmillis College
29. PSNI
30. TEO (Ending Violence Against Women and Girls)
31. Ulster University

CCEA are also members of the Gillen Education and Awareness Group, the Online Safety Committee and contribute to Strategic Objective 5 of the NI Sexual Health Action Plan (ensure evidence-based sexual health, consent and relationship information is available to school-aged children, adolescents and young adults).

CCEA has addressed the concerns of specific groups and has always adopted an open and constructive approach to the issues raised; for example, CCEA has responded by additional fact checks, and conducted research and exploratory discussions to ensure that CCEA's resources are balanced, fair, and aligned with the NI curriculum.

CCEA are committed to continuous engagement with all of the above groups. CCEA has also engaged with both national and international groups regarding RSE to ensure that we can avail of all the current international guidance available to support effective RSE in changing societies.

Forward Work Plan

The following resources are all under development.

- Violence Against Women and Girls (VAWG)
- Male Victims of Domestic Abuse
- Masculinity and the Influence of Positive Role Models
- The Active Bystander Approach
- Upskirting, Downblousing, Cyberflashing and Sextortion
- Endometriosis and PCOS
- Perimenopause and Menopause

In the future CCEA will also be developing supporting materials and resources on child sexual exploitation.

CCEA commissioned Cinemagic to produce the following short films:

- Period Dignity for primary schools
- Period Dignity for post-primary schools
- Consent for post-primary schools

These films are currently with the CCEA Multimedia team who will add subtitles and sign language to increase accessibility and inclusivity. They will be published on the RSE Hub and Period Dignity Hub in the near future.

CCEA are developing a new section of the CCEA website on 'The Preventative Curriculum' to bring together all relevant areas of education such as RSE, mental health and wellbeing, online safety, addiction and substance abuse, and period dignity.

This approach will illustrate the interconnections across Relationships and Sexuality Education and other key strands of work including Mental health, Online safety and Ending violence against women and girls. It will provide comprehensive communication to all CCEA's key audiences on why all of these issues are important for our society and how they are interconnected.