

**Northern Ireland Assembly Committee for Education**

**Mini inquiry into Relationship and Sexuality Education (RSE)**

**Invitation for CCEA Contributions to RSE mini-inquiry**

**Date: 22/10/2024**

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Details

The Committee for Education wishes to invite you to contribute to its upcoming mini-inquiry into relationship and sexuality education (RSE).

Please visit <https://lk.cmte.fyi/rse> for full details on the inquiry and how to respond or call 028 9052 0379.

If you have any comments please send them to us by **Tuesday 29 October 2024** at [committee.education@niassembly.gov.uk](mailto:committee.education@niassembly.gov.uk)

I attach terms of reference and themes (included below in structure of response) to support the mini-inquiry.

You may use the themes as a structure if you wish. However, if your specialist experience and expertise fall only under one or more of the themes, please submit a written briefing accordingly.

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## **CCEA Response**

### **Introduction**

**CCEA attended the Education Committee on 11<sup>th</sup> September 2024 as part of the mini-inquiry into RSE. CCEA provided a briefing paper to the committee in advance of attendance.**

### **Areas of Focus for Mini-Inquiry into Relationships and Sexuality Education (RSE)**

#### **Curriculum Integration and Content**

*Evaluate how RSE integrates across different stages of the NI Curriculum, including key areas like Personal Development and Mutual Understanding at primary level, and Learning for Life and Work at secondary level.*

*Assess the effectiveness of the statutory content and additional flexible content tailored by schools to meet specific community or pupil needs.*

#### **CCEA Response:**

Personal values are the beliefs and principles that individuals believe are important in the way that they live and work. They inform our behaviours and understanding of right and wrong. Values determine our boundaries, priorities, guide decision making and help shape how we think, act, and feel. They also have a lot of influence on how we interact with other people and build relationships. They help us make important decisions in life. Essentially, values are the standards by which we live.

RSE is a lifelong process. It is an important part of the NI Curriculum from Foundation Stage to Key Stage 4. It helps children and young people acquire knowledge, understanding and skills, and develop attitudes, beliefs and values about relationships, sexual identity, and intimacy. Effective RSE, which is taught in a sensitive and inclusive manner, encourages children and young people to value themselves as individuals and empowers them to make responsible and well-informed decisions about their lives. RSE focuses on encouraging young people to think about ways to express their sexual feelings that are in line with their values. Integral in the implementation of effective RSE is the importance of providing children and young people with a safe space to enable them to discuss sensitive issues within a value-based, gender equality and human rights framework, and in the best interests of the child.

Opinions differ on many aspects of relationships and sexuality and are often strongly held. The transition from childhood to adulthood can be complex and challenging including the risk of receiving inaccurate, incomplete, or judgement-laden information from various unreliable sources. This can affect a young person's physical, social, and emotional development. This exacerbates the vulnerability of children and young people to exploitation and other harmful outcomes.

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 by its very nature should be flexible in approach, able to respond to new and emerging issues, take into account multiple perspectives, values, rights and enable young people to embrace respect for themselves and others in a changing society. Ineffective RSE can demean and trivialise important opportunities for our children and young people to meaningfully explore issues that may have a real and lasting impact on their lives, now and in the future.

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](#)

## **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, and Level 1 and Level 2 qualifications in Preparation for Adult Life, also support progression from Key Stage 3.

CCEA has developed an RSE Progression Framework which provides a **non-statutory progression pathway in RSE** from the Foundation Stage to post-16. It shows how the different themes cover the following priority areas of RSE:

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

The themes and associated content covered across the key stages in the framework build on the statutory requirements and are aligned to international evidence-based 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 RSE Progression Framework provides guidance to schools in addressing the needs of their pupils across the curriculum in an age-appropriate way. This is supported by the range of CCEA resources available on the RSE Hub covering the key areas listed above. The supporting materials and resources on the Hub are developed on a rolling basis with Irish Medium versions of pupil facing resources also available.

## **Policy Implementation and School Compliance**

*Review the implementation and updating of school-based RSE policies, particularly considering new subordinate legislation on topics such as early pregnancy prevention and access to abortion.*

*Investigate the extent of parental and pupil consultation in developing these RSE policies.*

### **CCEA Response:**

#### **Policy**

CCEA plays no role in the development of school policy on RSE; this is the remit of the Education Authority.

CCEA has no remit to ensure that policy is implemented and that schools are compliant, as this is the role of ETI.

With regard to the new legislation introduced by the Secretary of State for NI about education on abortion, human reproductive rights and early pregnancy, CCEA was commissioned by the Department of Education to develop factual resources. The Department issued guidance on policy requirements and compliance.

Each Board of Governors must determine and keep under review its school's curriculum and associated policies in relation to RSE as a statutory component of the Personal Development and Home Economics statements of requirement at key stage 3, and the Personal Development strand of Learning for Life and Work (LLW) at key stage 4.

A school's RSE policy should be developed and reviewed through consultation with school staff, parents and pupils, and the final policy made available to them.

The RSE policy should be reviewed on an annual basis, but it may be reviewed more frequently to consider emerging issues, current legislation or DE guidance. A school should employ a self-evaluation and review process, to ensure that its RSE policy is fit for purpose, and that the implementation of its RSE programme continues to be effective.

EA training for School Governors gives an overview of the Guidance on Amendments to the Relationships and Sexuality Education (RSE) Curriculum Content and highlights their main roles and responsibilities in relation to RSE.

## Resources and Support for RSE

*Analyse the availability and utilisation of the RSE Hub and other CCEA resources intended to support RSE delivery.*

*Consider the impact of external resources like those provided by the Catholic Schools' Trustee Service and the Council for Catholic Maintained Schools on the uniformity of RSE content.*

### **CCEA Response:**

The RSE Hub provides a comprehensive repository of resources to support teaching and learning across all key stages. It includes a Progression Framework which sets out the key themes of the statutory curriculum and provides guidance to teachers on what is age - appropriate at each key stage from Foundation to post - sixteen.

Appendix 1 provides the analytics for the period June – October 2024. Please note that the Hub was under review and unavailable from December 23 until June 24.

### **The RSE Progression framework and the RSE Hub are not mandatory.**

Together the RSE Hub and RSE Progression Framework provide maximum flexibility to teachers in the selection of both topics and teaching and learning resources. CCEA recommends that teachers always review the content and ensure that it is in line with both the school's ethos and policy, as agreed by both Boards of Governors and parents.

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.

Additional resources to support teachers in delivery of RSE include:

- [INSYNC](#)
- [CCEA's Wellbeing hub](#)
- [Knowing and Growing](#) (SEN)

The Catholic Schools' Trustee Service provides support to Catholic teachers in the delivery of the Northern Ireland Curriculum. CCEA has engaged with the Catholic Trustee Service in the development of their resources and guidance for schools.

## **Teacher Training and External Providers**

*Examine the adequacy of professional training and development for teachers tasked with delivering RSE, focusing on their preparation to handle sensitive aspects of the curriculum.*

*Assess the role and quality of external providers in RSE delivery, including their alignment with scientific accuracy and educational standards.*

### **CCEA Response:**

CCEA has currently no remit to deliver Teacher Professional Learning for schools in relation to RSE. However, CCEA recognises that there is a need for comprehensive Teacher Professional Learning to ensure that teachers have both the confidence, skills and the knowledge to deliver RSE effectively. CCEA provides webinars and support sessions to launch new resources and signposts teachers to external sources of TPL, usually organisations with a specific remit to support children and young people and teachers within the education sector.

The [Training and Professional Development section](#) of the RSE Hub provides links to organisations that offer training and support for teachers and other educators, as well as parents/carers and the Board of Governors. These organisations often have specialist knowledge and experience in different areas of RSE.

There are many areas of RSE which require in-depth discussion, and it is important that teachers are provided with the space to discuss approaches and challenges with other practitioners and experts from across the many relevant sectors including health, justice, education and community.

### **School Leadership**

Many school leaders would benefit from a conference or symposium on RSE which would provide a forum for education, upskilling and forward thinking and planning. The school principal/ leadership has a vital role in promoting the benefits of effective RSE and in transforming the culture within a particular school

### **External providers**

Effective RSE is delivered by teachers within the school setting as they have a relationship with the children and young people and an understanding of individual contexts and family situations which allows them to approach topics with deeper sensitivity than an external party. RSE should not be delivered through one off lessons but through effective curriculum planning through each key stage. It is essential for schools to be confident and to ensure that teaching and learning is age-appropriate, and in line with school policy and ethos at all times. It is also important that teachers are supported by school leadership and that there is investment in TPL.

External providers can have an important role to play in the delivery of effective RSE. They should not be used to replace the role of the teacher but they can bring specific specialized knowledge and approaches to learning about a range of RSE matters. This is done best there is

good collaboration, with the content and purpose of the training agreed with relevant responsible staff within the school setting. Teachers should know the nature of content, how it is delivered and any potential challenges or issues arising.

## **Monitoring and Evaluation**

*Evaluate the mechanisms for monitoring the implementation and effectiveness of RSE, particularly the role of the Education Training Inspectorate (ETI) and any changes needed in light of recent educational reforms.*

### **CCEA Response:**

CCEA have a remit to keep under review all aspects of the Northern Ireland Curriculum and provide advice to the DE. In relation to RSE this is done through our formal and informal curriculum monitoring activities and our ongoing engagement with the DE in relation to the RSE programme and wider preventative curriculum activities.

In the context of the DE guidance, CCEA Hub and Progression Framework, ETI report, Legislative changes and various other relevant reports, it is timely to develop a strategy for RSE in NI, which would provide an opportunity to ensure a common understanding of the challenges, aims and objectives of RSE and raise societal and parental awareness of the rationale behind transformative RSE in schools and the long-term effect and implications for society, especially in relation to healthy relationships and behaviours, and topics such as respect, consent, misogyny, coercive control and domestic violence and sexual abuse, as well as the sexual and reproductive health of all our young people.

## **Stakeholder Engagement and Inclusivity**

*Review how effectively the RSE curriculum engages diverse student populations and respects the rights and beliefs of different communities, including considerations of inclusivity and scientific accuracy.*

*Assess the impact of school ethos on the impartiality and comprehensiveness of RSE delivery.*

### **CCEA Response:**

Schools are increasingly diverse spaces reflecting wider societal change. RSE guidance clearly states that a school should provide a safe, welcoming and inclusive environment; it should foster respect for difference, challenge prejudicial attitudes; and promote equality of opportunity for all pupils. If schools are to encourage young people to be confident and respectful of themselves and others, and prepare them for life after school, the teaching of Relationships and Sexuality Education should be inclusive of all differences regardless of race, age, disability, ethnicity, religion, culture, gender and sexual orientation. Schools should also recognise the diversity of family life today, particularly the fact that some children may have gay, lesbian or bisexual parents or carers, some of whom may be in a civil partnership. All staff should be sensitive and respectful of difference, ensuring that no pupil ever feels or is excluded, or experiences bullying due to their family or home circumstances

Each school has its own ethos and is required to develop its own policy in collaboration with parents, pupils, and the Board of Governors. This arrangement is therefore critical in that it will dictate the quality, content and inclusivity of the programme offered to its young people. The policy must enable every child to have access to comprehensive, scientifically accurate, current RSE, and must take account of the increasingly diverse nature of our schools. Central to RSE is the importance of providing children and young people with a safe space to enable them to discuss sensitive issues within a value-based, gender equality and human rights framework, and in the best interests of the child. Effective RSE builds the skills and attitudes that enable children and young people to treat others with respect, acceptance, tolerance, and empathy.

The United Kingdom Government, including Northern Ireland, is a signatory to the 1989 United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) and has agreed to uphold the rights of children and young people as set out in the Convention. This means that all children and young people in Northern Ireland have a right to a good quality education in accordance with the Convention.

It is important that children and young people receive accurate and up to date information on RSE issues. Resources should provide current factual information with opportunities to explore and discuss issues from different perspectives in a safe environment, facilitated by their teacher. In developing resources, guidance and supporting materials, CCEA employs Professional Associates with specific areas of interest and expertise. There is also significant expertise and knowledge with CCEA. Teaching resources, the RSE Hub and RSE Progression Framework are open to review by our stakeholder group. This group comprises experts from a wide range of organisations with vested interests in RSE, including the PHA, Health Trusts, NSPCC, Cara Friend and the PSNI (see below for a comprehensive list of stakeholders). It also includes young people's organisations. New resources, for example, on reproductive and sexual health

and rights, have been shared with the stakeholder group for feedback prior to final edits and publishing to ensure that the content is up to date and scientifically accurate. The RSE Hub is kept under regular review to ensure currency.

### **Stakeholder Engagement**

Since 2019, CCEA has 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. Northern Ireland Youth Assembly
25. NSPCC
26. Parenting NI
27. Parentkind
28. Presbyterian Church in Ireland (TRC)
29. Presbyterian Church in Ireland /Stranmillis College
30. PSNI
31. QUB
32. Safeguarding Board for Northern Ireland
33. The Catholic Schools Trustee Service
30. TEO (Ending Violence Against Women and Girls)
31. TRC
32. Ulster University - HYAR project

### 33. Women's Aid

CCEA staff 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 is represented on the Research Oversight Group of Ulster University's Healthy Young Adult Relationships (HYAR) Research Project. This project used resources from CCEA's RSE Hub and RSE Progression Framework, in its work with young people, to identify characteristics and components of user-informed interventions designed to increase knowledge and skills about healthy and unhealthy relationship practices.

CCEA has addressed the concerns of specific groups and has taken 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 is committed to continuous engagement with all the above groups. CCEA has also engaged with both national and international groups regarding RSE to ensure that we can benefit from current international guidance available to support effective RSE in changing societies.

## **Legislative and Rights-Based Considerations**

*Consider the implications of national and international rights standards on the delivery of RSE, including the rights of children to have access to comprehensive health education and the rights of parents to influence their children's education within legal frameworks.*

### **CCEA Response:**

CCEA acknowledges both national and international rights standards and has endeavored to ensure that the key recommendations have been taken on board in our development work, particularly in the development of the RSE Progression Framework. Specifically, CCEA has taken account of the work of United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO); United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC); Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission (NIHRC) and Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW).

CCEA's RSE work needs to look outside Northern Ireland to give consideration to emerging issues in RSE education and innovative and appropriate approaches to addressing the needs of children and young people. It is essential to refer to national and international evidence-based research and guidance in the formation of key policies in education.

For example, UNESCO's International Technical Guidance on Sexuality Education is evidence and research-based guidance to assist policymakers, educators and curriculum developers. It was developed through a process designed to ensure quality, acceptability, and ownership at the international level, with inputs from experts and practitioners from different regions around the world. The Guidance is voluntary in character, as it recognises the diversity of different national contexts in which sexuality education is taking place, and the authority of governments to determine the content of educational curricula in their country.

### **Strengths of using UNESCO's International Technical Guidance on Sexuality Education**

1. UNESCO is a well-respected organisation with a global reach and access to expertise around the world in different educational contexts.
2. UNESCO provides global and regional leadership in education, strengthens education systems worldwide and responds to contemporary global challenges through education with gender equality as an underlying principle. Its work encompasses quality educational development from pre-school to higher education and beyond.
3. The International Technical Guidance on Sexuality Education is evidence and research-based guidance developed through a process designed to ensure quality, acceptability, and ownership at the international level, with inputs from experts and practitioners from different regions around the world.
4. UNESCO updated the content to respond appropriately to the contemporary needs of young learners, and to provide support for education systems and practitioners seeking to address those needs.
5. The Guidance is firmly grounded in numerous international human rights conventions that stress the right of every individual to education and to the highest attainable

standard of health and well-being. These human rights conventions include the Universal Declaration on Human Rights; the Convention on the Rights of the Child; the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights; the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women; and the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.

6. The Comprehensive Sexuality Education Advisory Group comprised technical experts from across the globe, working in the fields of education, health, youth development, human rights, and gender equality. It included researchers, ministry of education officials, young people, Non Government Organisations programme implementers and development partners.
7. The Guidance provides opportunities to acquire comprehensive, accurate, evidence-informed, and age-appropriate information on sexuality.
8. The Guidance emphasises the need for programmes that are informed by evidence, but adapted to the local context, and logically designed to measure and address factors such as beliefs, values, attitudes, and skills which, in turn, may affect health and well-being in relation to sexuality.

## Impact of Withdrawal Policies

*Study the effects and prevalence of policies allowing parental withdrawal from RSE, and their impact on student access to essential health education.*

### *CCEA Response:*

Withdrawal is only permissible within a very small range of circumstances and relates only to the recent changes in the Minimum Content Order in relation to age-appropriate, comprehensive, and scientifically accurate education on sexual and reproductive health and rights, covering prevention of early pregnancy and access to abortion. The Department has consulted widely on Regulations about the circumstances in which, at the request of a parent, a pupil at key stages 3 and 4 may be excused from Article 5(1A) education required by the change made to the curriculum, or specified elements of it.

The DE guidance in [Circular 2024/01 - Guidance on Amendments to the Relationship and Sexuality Education | Department of Education](#) sets out clearly the conditions for withdrawal. For pupils in years 8, 9, 10 and 11 the circumstances are where a parent makes a request for a pupil to be excused from Article 5(1A) education or a specified element of it by confirming which elements of the education, the pupil should be excused.

For pupils in year 12 the circumstances are, where a parent makes a request for a pupil to be excused from Article 5(1A) education or specified elements of it by confirming which elements of the education the pupil should be excused from and confirms that the pupil does not object to being excused.

It is essential that young people have access to teaching and learning in relation to RSE and the preventative curriculum to develop values, an understanding of respect, relationships, health, human experience, and societal issues. Effective RSE supports children and young people in developing their thinking and judgment, leaving them better equipped to deal with the many issues which inevitably arise during adolescence and adult life. The school provides a safe environment for discussion which helps children and young people to express concerns, raise questions and build knowledge and self-confidence.

It is good practice for schools to discuss with parents and, as appropriate, with the pupil, the reasons for their decision to withdraw from this element of RSE, and the implications of that decision, including receiving potentially inaccurate or unsafe information second hand from their peers or from dubious sources on the internet. These risks may be mitigated through education by parents in the home instead, but it should be recognised that not every parent is knowledgeable, confident, or competent in delivering this education in a safe and accurate way, and within a safe environment.

It should be noted that the implementation of any opt-out provisions should be such that they do not result in children missing any wider areas of the RSE curriculum, e.g., regarding healthy positive relationships, consent, and internet safety.

## Violence against Women and Girls

*Reflect on the recommendations for the school system of the Gillen Review of Serious Sexual Offences and consider the role that RSE might play in developing consent education to reduce sexual violence, particularly against women and girls.*

### **CCEA Response:**

The Gillen Review has established the links between effective Relationships and Sexuality education and Violence against Women and Girls. It is essential that children and young people are taught about respect, acceptable and unacceptable attitudes and behaviours including misogyny, coercive control, violence, and sexual abuse.

### Relevant CCEA Resources

CCEA have developed a range of resources for primary and post-primary schools relevant to Gillen recommendations on matters such as consent, personal space, boundaries, appropriate behaviour, relationships, myths surrounding serious sexual offences, fears of homophobia and transphobia, gender identity and sexuality, and understanding the consequences of posting on social media.

In relation to the role that RSE might play in developing consent education to reduce sexual violence, particularly against women and girls, CCEA have published the following resources.

<a href="#">Consent</a>	<b>Foundation Stage</b>	Unit 1: Privacy and Consent
	<b>Key Stage 1</b>	Unit 1: Privacy and Consent Unit 2: Privacy and Consent Online
	<b>Key Stage 2</b>	Unit 1: My Body, My Choice Unit 2: The Meaning of Consent, How to Give Consent, How to Say No and How to Seek Help
	<b>Post-primary</b>	Unit 1: Consent in Relationships Unit 2: What Does Consent Mean and Why is it Important in a Healthy Relationship? Unit 3: Stereotypical Behaviour – The Impact on Consent Unit 4: Male Privilege and Misogyny Unit 5: Consent in a Sexual Relationship Unit 6: Consequences of Non-Consent in a Sexual Relationship

<p><a href="#"><u>Domestic and Sexual Violence and Abuse</u></a></p>	<p><b>Post primary</b></p>	<p>Unit 1: Relationships and Domestic Abuse  Unit 2: Types of Domestic Abuse  Unit 3: Identifying Domestic Abuse  Unit 4: Domestic Abuse and Its Impact  Unit 5: Online Abuse and Sexting  Unit 6: Domestic Abuse and the Law  Unit 7: Violence Against Women and Girls (VAWG)</p>
<p><a href="#"><u>Health Positive Sexual Expression and Relationships</u></a></p>	<p><b>Post Primary</b></p>	<p>Unit 1: The Characteristics of Positive Relationships  Unit 2: What Makes a Relationship Romantic or Sexual?  Unit 3: How Do I Recognise an Unhealthy Relationship?  Unit 4: Managing Relationship Issues</p>
<p>Additional resources (working titles only) under development include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Male Victims of Domestic Abuse</li> <li>• Masculinity and the Influence of Positive Role Models</li> <li>• The Active Bystander</li> <li>• Upskirting, Downblousing, Cyberflashing and Sextortion</li> </ul>		

## Appendix 1

### RSE Hub – Web Stats.

Period: 1 June – 11 October 2024

Page Views and Sessions:

Title	URL	Sessions	Page Views
RSE Hub	<a href="#">Relationships and Sexuality Education (RSE)   CCEA</a>	2,041	2,766
RSE – Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights	<a href="#">Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights   CCEA</a>	251	352
RSE Progression Framework	<a href="#">Relationships and Sexuality Education Progression Framework   CCEA</a>	575	682
<b>Totals</b>	N/A	2,867	3,800

Document Downloads:

### RSE – Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights

Title	URL	Downloads
Key Stage 3: Prevention of Early Pregnancy PDF	<a href="https://ccea.org.uk/document/22369">https://ccea.org.uk/document/22369</a>	40
Key Stage 3: Prevention of Early Pregnancy PPT	<a href="https://ccea.org.uk/document/22370">https://ccea.org.uk/document/22370</a>	30
Key Stage 4: Prevention of Early Life Pregnancy PDF	<a href="https://ccea.org.uk/document/22374">https://ccea.org.uk/document/22374</a>	9
Key Stage 4: Prevention of Early Life Pregnancy PPT	<a href="https://ccea.org.uk/document/22375">https://ccea.org.uk/document/22375</a>	21
Key Stage 3: Abortion and Access to Abortion in Northern Ireland PDF	<a href="https://ccea.org.uk/document/22368">https://ccea.org.uk/document/22368</a>	38
Key Stage 3: Abortion and Access to Abortion in Northern Ireland PPT	<a href="https://ccea.org.uk/document/22371">https://ccea.org.uk/document/22371</a>	25
Key Stage 4: Abortion and Access to Abortion in Northern Ireland PDF	<a href="https://ccea.org.uk/document/22372">https://ccea.org.uk/document/22372</a>	33
Key Stage 4: Abortion and Access to Abortion in Northern Ireland PPT	<a href="https://ccea.org.uk/document/22373">https://ccea.org.uk/document/22373</a>	16
Unit 1: Understanding Sexually Transmitted Infections (STIs) PDF	<a href="https://ccea.org.uk/document/15052">https://ccea.org.uk/document/15052</a>	24
STIs Pre-Lesson Quiz PPT	<a href="https://ccea.org.uk/document/15048">https://ccea.org.uk/document/15048</a>	10
STIs Post-Lesson Traffic Light Activity PPT	<a href="https://ccea.org.uk/document/15049">https://ccea.org.uk/document/15049</a>	6

Unit 2: Understanding HIV and AIDs PDF	<a href="https://ccea.org.uk/document/22357">https://ccea.org.uk/document/22357</a>	24
HIV and AIDS Pre-Lesson Quiz PPT	<a href="https://ccea.org.uk/document/22358">https://ccea.org.uk/document/22358</a>	6
HIV and AIDS Post-Lesson Quiz PPT	<a href="https://ccea.org.uk/document/22359">https://ccea.org.uk/document/22359</a>	3

Total document downloads: 285

**RSE Progression Framework:**

<b>Title</b>	<b>URL</b>	<b>Downloads</b>
RSE Progression Framework PDF	<a href="https://ccea.org.uk/document/10716">https://ccea.org.uk/document/10716</a>	276