

Scottish Government submission of 5 October 2022

PE1918/C: Improve sex education in school

Thank you for the e-mail on behalf of the Citizen Participation and Public Petitions Committee with further questions regarding the Scottish Government's response to Petition PE1918 seeking to improve sex education in schools. I apologise for the delay in responding and would like to thank you and the Committee for your patience.

The Committee was keen to understand the points raised below which I will respond to in the same order:

1. how the views of children and young people are taken on board and used to influence policy in this area;
2. when the public consultation will open and how it will be promoted to children and young people; and
3. when the Government anticipates that the revised guidance will be in place.

The existing RSHP teaching guidance makes clear schools should give children and young people an opportunity to exercise their right to identify and express their own educational needs in RSHP education. It states that in preparing programmes, it is good practice for schools to consult with children and young people and respond to their views appropriately, to ensure RSHP education meets the needs of all children and young people in the school or educational setting. It is good practice for schools to collaborate with and involve young people in the co-design of RSHP programmes in order to ensure they are kept relevant to their needs and interest.

At a local strategic level, there have been several examples of local engagement seeking views of children and young people on RSHP education policy. For example, research conducted on behalf of Glasgow City Council¹ in 2014 to gather young people's views on sexual health and relationship education highlighted young people say they would like to spend more time on RSHP education, and want teachers to

¹ [Young people's views on sexual health and relationship education in non-denominational schools in Glasgow \(Glasgow City Council, 2014\)](#)

‘get into the detail’. The topics of social media, the impact of pornography and how boys and girls relate to each other were highlighted as areas requiring more depth of discussion. In 2016, Make it Good² by NHS Tayside who wanted to get insight from young people about their romantic and sexual relationships to help inform communication of positive sexual health messages to young people especially when it comes to contraception and condom use. This works best when it is influenced by what people say their lives are like. Young people’s insight from that project pointed to the need to learn about pornography, but that to date school has not provided such an opportunity.

At a national level, the Scottish Parliament’s Education and Skills Committee investigation into Personal and Social Education³, which young people were a key contributor to, highlighted in terms of core issues, sex and relationships education is essential and must feature. To be effective this means learning which goes beyond the biology and involves talking about sex and relationships (not just watching videos and reading leaflets as is the case in some classes). The Committee received concerning evidence that for some young people, particularly LGBTI young people, sex education comes from the internet, including pornography, due to a lack of adequate provision within school. Allied with anecdotal knowledge and experience of practitioners from health boards and local authorities who work with teachers on training and support for sexual health learning, the views of children and young people gathered through such work have been at the forefront of policy makers’ minds as the RSHP policy has developed. This has led to, for example, development of a suite of teaching resources to deliver more relevant and engaging RSHP education based on what children and young tell us they want. We have also taken account of the views of children and young people gathered through the sources outlined above as we have developed the revised RSHP teaching guidance.

Preparations for the public consultation on the revised RSHP teaching guidance are almost complete and we expect to publish it shortly. The consultation is expected to run for 16 weeks. As part of the preparations to publish the consultation, we are exploring how we might best gather the views of children and young people on the revised RSHP teaching guidance to ensure their views are taken into account before it is published.

² [Make It Good \(NHS Tayside, 2016\)](#)

³ [Let’s Talk about Personal and Social Education \(Scottish Parliament, 2017\)](#)

Finally, the Scottish Government is working to have the revised RSHP teaching guidance available to school staff as early in the 2023-24 academic year as possible, subject to the outcomes of the public consultation.

I hope the Committee find this letter helpful.