

Citizen Participation and Public Petitions Committee

5th Meeting, 2022 (Session 6), Wednesday
23 March 2022

PE1918: Improve sex education in schools

Note by the Clerk

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| Petitioner | Kate Freedman |
| Petition summary | Calling on the Scottish Parliament to urge the Scottish Government to reform sex education by updating guidance and implementing clear teaching rules, focusing on topics such as: <ul style="list-style-type: none">- Menstruation and related illnesses- Puberty- LGBT sex, including asexuality- Fertility- Pornography- Any other things that are deemed useful |
| Webpage | https://petitions.parliament.scot/petitions/PE1918 |

Introduction

1. This is a new petition that was lodged on 6 December 2021
2. After conducting a survey of 150 students in their school, the petitioner found that most people rated their period education at 1-3 out of 10. The petitioner shares their own experience as a student, where they sought out information on YouTube due to what they felt was a lacking sex education in school. A full summary of this petition and its aims can be found at **Annexe A**.
3. A SPICe briefing has been prepared to inform the Committee's consideration of the petition and can be found at **Annexe B**.
4. While not a formal requirement, petitioners have the option to collect signatures on their petition. On this occasion, the petitioner elected not to collect this information.

5. The Committee seeks views from the Scottish Government on all new petitions before they are formally considered. A response has been received from the Scottish Government and is included at **Annexe C** of this paper.
6. The Committee has also received a written submission from Testimony Adegbite which can be found in **Annexe D**.
7. A similar petition was considered by the Petitions Committee in 2014, [PE01526: Making Sex and Relationship Education in Scotland Statutory for all Schools](#). The petition was closed on the basis that the petitioners were supportive of the Scottish Government's forthcoming revised sex and relationship education (SRE) guidance; the Scottish Government has given a commitment to raise the profile of SRE when it publishes its revised guidance; Education Scotland will be tasked with monitoring and assessing the implementation and delivery of the Government's revised SRE guidance by local authorities, and the submissions received by the Committee were supportive of the current non-mandatory provision of SRE.

Action

The Committee is invited to consider what action it wishes to take.

Clerk to the Committee

Annexe A

PE1918: Improve sex education in schools

Petitioner

Kate Freedman

Date lodged

06/10/2021

Petition summary

Calling on the Scottish Parliament to urge the Scottish Government to reform sex education by updating guidance and implementing clear teaching rules, focusing on topics such as:

- Menstruation and related illnesses
- Puberty
- LGBT sex, including asexuality
- Fertility
- Pornography
- Any other things that are deemed useful

Previous action

I have emailed my MSP and received no response from them.

Background information

I have researched sex education for a year and a half. As a current student I found the education within schools to be lacking and caused me to have to look to YouTube for basic information from sex educators like Hannah Witton. It was there I found information I should have already known from school. There is a big taboo around sex which can cause lots of issues. I've struggled with my periods for years as they are very irregular. I felt very alone and confused because I didn't understand what was happening. It was only after doing research I felt confident enough to go to a doctor where I got diagnosed with PCOS. I surveyed 150 students in my school on a scale of 1-10, most people rated period education at 1-3. I am often shocked by the lack of knowledge many young people have surrounding sex and it needs to change.

Annexe B

The logo for SPICe (The Information Centre) is a purple rounded rectangle with a gradient. The text 'SPICe' is in white, bold, sans-serif font.

The Information Centre
An t-Ionad Fiosrachaidh

Briefing for the Citizen Participation and Public Petitions Committee on petition [PE1918](#): Improve sex education in schools, lodged by Kate Freedman

Brief overview of issues raised by petition

The petition calls “on the Scottish Parliament to urge the Scottish Government to reform sex education by updating guidance and implementing clear teaching rules, focusing on topics such as:

- Menstruation and related illnesses
- Puberty
- LGBT sex, including asexuality
- Fertility
- Pornography
- Any other things that are deemed useful.”

Current [statutory guidance on the conduct of relationships, sexual health and parenthood education in schools dates from 2014](#). This is statutory guidance issued under [section 56 of the Standards in Scotland's Schools etc. Act 2000](#), which local authorities should have regard to while providing sex education.

The Scottish Government has been reviewing the statutory guidance over recent years. At the time of writing, neither the new guidance, nor draft guidance, had been published.

Online resources

In September 2019, the Scottish Government launched a new online resource for Relationships, Sexual Health and Parenthood education, <https://rshp.scot>.

In launching the website, the Scottish Government said—

“Around 1,500 teaching professionals and parents contributed to the development of the resource, which was also piloted in 38 schools.

“It aims to give teachers greater confidence in having valuable and engaging age-appropriate conversations with their pupils.

“Topics include healthy relationships, consent, sexual health, reproduction, emotional well-being, equalities, gender and parenthood.”

Whether schools or teachers use this website or any other resource is a matter for those schools and teachers. For example, some schools may prefer to use the Scottish Catholic Education Service’s [God's Loving Plan](#).

The role of teachers

The Curriculum for Excellence is intended to provide a high degree of flexibility, with schools and teachers having agency to provide a curriculum that is aimed at the individual learners and communities they serve.

Personal and Social Education Review

Last session, the [Scottish Government undertook a review](#) of the provision of Personal and Social Education (PSE) in schools. The final [PSE Review report and recommendations](#) was published in January 2019.

This review considered the delivery and content of PSE, including “how the issue of sexual consent is taught within relationships, sexual health and parenthood (RSHP) education from early learning through all stages of school education”. The review recommended that any update of the statutory guidance on RSHP “includes appropriate guidance to ensure that consent education is age and stage appropriate and reflects the

issues that are facing children and young people, especially from online influences.”

Parliament’s work

Last session, the [Education and Skills Committee undertook a short piece of work on PSE in 2017](#). This inquiry influenced the review noted above.

In 2014, the Public Petitions Committee considered [PE1526: Making Sex and Relationship Education in Scotland Statutory for all Schools](#).

Ned Sharratt
Senior Researcher
16/12/2021

The purpose of this briefing is to provide a brief overview of issues raised by the petition. SPICe research specialists are not able to discuss the content of petition briefings with petitioners or other members of the public. However, if you have any comments on any petition briefing you can email us at spice@parliament.scot

Every effort is made to ensure that the information contained in petition briefings is correct at the time of publication. Readers should be aware however that these briefings are not necessarily updated or otherwise amended to reflect subsequent changes.

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Annexe C

Scottish Government submission of 6 January 2022

PE1918/A – Improve sex education in schools

Thank you for your e-mail of 9 December 2021 on behalf of the Citizen Participation and Public Petitions Committee regarding Petition PE1918 seeking to improve sex education in schools. I am replying as I am responsible for relationships, sexual health and parenthood (RSHP) education policy in the Scottish curriculum.

The Scottish Government is committed to ensuring all children and young people receive high quality RSHP education, an integral part of the health and wellbeing area of the Scottish curriculum, which has been in place since 2010. The curriculum is not mandatory, it is up to teachers to decide which resources they use to deliver relevant and engaging learning. However, we are specific about the need for children and young people to gain knowledge appropriate to their age and stage of education. The aim of RSHP education is help children and young people build positive, safe and healthy relationships as they grow older and content should be delivered in a nonjudgemental manner, within a framework of sound values and an awareness of the law, including that on sexual behaviour.

There are many resources available to teachers to help them deliver meaningful RSHP learning. One such resource, www.rshp.scot, was developed and published by a collaborative partnership of health boards and local authorities, to help improve delivery of the existing curriculum. It provides teachers with a valuable resource to support children and young people's learning and understanding in RSHP education. The resource provides teachers with factual information about sexual and reproductive health, in a nonjudgemental manner, to enable children and young people to make informed decisions about their lives. In developing the resource, it was ensured learning outcomes remained age appropriate in all Curriculum for Excellence levels.

All of the content available from this online resource was quality assured and peer reviewed by a partnership of educators, health professionals

and third sector organisations. The resource was also informed by extensive feedback over the 2018/19 academic year. Draft content was posted online during 2018 and educators, parents and carers were encouraged to comment and use the drafts. This allowed for a process of review and refinement until final content was agreed and the resource was published in September 2019. As well as an open process that allowed anyone to contribute, a number of schools were recruited as pilot settings. During this period the resource was informed by over 1,000 primary and secondary teachers and piloted in 38 schools across the country.

In terms of the areas highlighted in the petition, the resource contains age appropriate learning activities covering each of these areas as well as a host of other areas deemed suitable in delivering holistic, age appropriate RSHP learning. I have included links to these below:

- [Menstruation and related illnesses](#)
- [Puberty](#)
- [LGBT sex, including asexuality](#)
- [Fertility](#)
- [Pornography](#)

However, the use of these resources remains a matter for individual schools and teachers to decide on, based on the needs of the pupils in their classroom.

The Scottish Government is also committed, through recommendations of both the PSE Review and LGBTI Inclusive Education Working Group, to updating the current RSHP teaching guidance. We have consulted over 30 key stakeholders and have made good progress in revising the current teaching guidance, to ensure it is fit for purpose. It is expected the revised guidance will be issued for public consultation in the New Year.

Annexe D

Testimony Adegbite submission of 8

December 2021

PE1918/B – Improve sex education in schools

As a teenager myself I believe the sex education teaching in schools to be quite under developed, which is why I am emailing in support for Kate Freeman's petition to change the sex education system.