



31 January 2018

Call for evidence on developing Relationships and Sex Education guidance

The Department for Education (DfE) has issued a call for evidence on updating how primary schools deliver relationships education (RE) and secondary schools deliver relationships and sex education (RSE), both of which will become compulsory in all schools in September 2019. The call for evidence also includes questions on introducing Personal, Social, Health and Economic Education (PSHE).

The call for evidence is an online survey with 7 questions at:
<https://consult.education.gov.uk/life-skills/pshe-rse-call-for-evidence/>

There is a max word count for each answer of 250

The deadline for submissions is **Monday 12 February at 11.59pm**

It's really important to respond to this call for evidence

It's really important EAW members and supporters respond to this consultation making the case for gendered, high quality relationships and sex education which is a vital in tackling violence against women and girls. EAW, and in particular members of our prevention network, have been calling for this for many years and it's vital what's introduced is effective. We have produced a [briefing on preventing abuse through relationships and sex education](#) which may be useful to refer to.

How to respond

The wordcount for each answer is limited to 250, which makes it hard to cram in all the information you may want to include. If you can please include any info you have about delivering relationships and sex education, the impact of interventions in schools, the importance of a gendered approach to this subject and any examples or case studies you have which would help the DfE understand it better. You can include links to materials in your response.

EAW's response is below and we're happy for you to use any of it to help you develop your own answers. You'll see we've had to be concise – it's not easy being so brief.

Get in touch with the EAW team if you want any more information about your submission.

Question 1:

*Thinking about **relationships education in primary schools**, what do you believe are the **three most important subject areas** that should be taught for different age*

groups/key stages and why. Please include any considerations or evidence which informed your choices.

[EVAW ANSWER: 247 WORDS]

Primary school children should have dedicated curriculum time to help them understand, in an age appropriate way, the different forms of violence against women and girls because this knowledge can help prevent and protect them from abuse.

ONE: My body and my rights: bodily integrity, safety, harm, keeping secrets, privacy, body parts accurately named with no shame (critical for enabling children to speak out, and in fact a safeguarding obligation). These themes are relevant to FGM, child sexual abuse, domestic and sexual violence in the home, and the taking and sharing of private images, all of which are relevant in every local authority area in England.

TWO: Healthy interpersonal relationships: friendships, family relationships, developing equal and respectful relationships, the concept of giving consent for what happens to you and asking consent of others, dealing with conflict. Bullying behaviours should be named, discussed and challenged as unacceptable norms.

THREE: Broader 'social norms' including equality and stereotypes: equality of everyone, understanding of protected characteristics (Equality Act); how stereotypes linked to sex, gender, race, disability are used to justify abuse and violence.

It is critical that teaching is supported by strong whole school safeguarding and equalities policies, this includes: teacher training which builds confidence; school readiness to respond to disclosures of abuse; and responsiveness to parents/families.

Our views are based on: academic studies of prevalence and effective 'VAWG' prevention interventions; decades of school [work by our member organisations](#); and community based work with survivors of abuse (all available on request).

Question 2.

*Thinking about **relationships and sex education in secondary schools**, what do you believe are the **three most important subject areas** that should be taught for different age groups/key stages and why. Please include any considerations or evidence which informed your choices.*

[EVAW ANSWER: 249 words]

ONE: Healthy relationships and sexual consent: bodily integrity, rights, privacy, friendships, trust, intimate relationships including respect, equality, jealousy and control. Healthy relationships based on respect and equality, never controlling or harmful to your partner. Sexual and reproductive rights. The law on consent, seeking and giving consent, consent as ongoing – a relational process, not simply yes or no, which means the sex you have is better, with mutual pleasure. This is not the

approach taken in some films to prevent 'child sexual exploitation' which make young people responsible for their own safety.

TWO: Equality and social norms and how these link to gender based violence. Cross-curricular discussion which enables young people to recognise and reject the excuses sometimes made for all forms of violence against women and girls (including rape, domestic violence, forced marriage, honour-based violence, FGM, sexual harassment, child sexual abuse and sexual exploitation, online abuse).

THREE: Media and cultural representations of sex and gender, including pornography, and abuse committed in online contexts. Recognising conflicting media and cultural messages about equality and consent. Pornography 'narratives' which commonly portray women as submissive and men as dominant, including the portrayal of women as inciting and/or wanting violence, and perpetuate racist stereotypes. The public and private sharing of explicit material online, as related to the law and to consent. Enabling young people to recognise online harassment and shaming.

All again need to be supported by strong teacher training and school policies. [Our views are based on academic evidence and our members' experiences.](#)

Question 3.

*We are particularly interested in understanding views on Relationships Education and RSE which are specific to the **digital context**. Are there important aspects of ensuring safe online relationships that would not otherwise be covered in wider Relationships Education and Relationships and Sex Education, or as part of the computing curriculum?*

[EVAW ANSWER: 221 words]

Every young person at school now is a "digital native" and it is critical that all teachers and school leaders take an approach to and talk about the online world as spaces that everyone is entitled to be in. Similarly, young people should discuss in 'RE/RSE' lessons how behaviour and actions directed at other people online are real, can hurt and harm, and that there are personal, social and legal consequences to them just as in the physical world.

It is critical that teaching in this area is backed up by and explicitly connected to school safeguarding and equality policies. Young people should know that the school will take seriously reports of online harassment, image-based abuse ("revenge porn") and sexual harassment taking place online. School leaders, teachers and governors need to understand how young people use online spaces, and need ongoing training in the law and guidance in this area.

Regarding child sexual exploitation and "online grooming", we are concerned about interventions based on films which tell young people what to watch out for and how to "stay safe". These interventions may be traumatising for some children, they may encourage young people to believe that they are partly responsible for detecting and then avoiding harm. It may inhibit disclosure of abuse.

[More evidence](#) available on request (including Children's Commissioner work and more).

Question 4.

*We are also interested in understanding more about how schools communicate with **parents** on Relationships Education and RSE and are able to make informed decisions that best meet the needs of their children. This includes a **right to withdraw** their child from sex education within the RSE subject but not from sex education in the national curriculum for science. **How should schools effectively consult parents so they can make informed decisions that meet the needs of their child, including on the right to withdraw? For example, how often, on what issues and by what means?***

[EVAW ANSWER: 226 words]

Schools should include and be responsive to parents' views and questions regarding RE/RSE teaching. At a minimum, the school's "offer" in this area should be available on the school website, referred to when new parents visit, mentioned at parents evenings and in other school communications in a positive way. All teachers should have training so they feel confident to take questions parents might ask and be able to reassure. This commitment to schools reaching out, being open and responsive to parents is important because RE/RSE teaching that names and discusses abuse can lead to disclosures of abuse in the home.

Alongside openness with parents, schools should be clear in their policies and practice that children and young people have a right to information and knowledge about their bodies and relationships. While some limited possibility for parents to seek to withdraw their children may remain, it should be remembered that the FGM guidelines for health workers and schools already include withdrawal from sex education as an indicator of risk. The same thinking should be applied to other forms of violence against women and girls – schools should be encouraged to note any withdrawal and consider it alongside any other matter of concern.

No argument regarding school status (as independent, 'free', academy or faith) should have any bearing on commitment to RE/RSE teaching or the offer of parental withdrawal.

Questions 5, 6 & 7. are all PSHE related; 7 significantly alludes possibly to exemptions

PSHE is a planned programme of school-based educational opportunities and experiences that deal with the real life issues children and young people face as they grow up, typically covering personal wellbeing and economic wellbeing. We are considering whether to make PSHE compulsory alongside Relationships Education and RSE.

We know that many schools are already teaching these subjects well and are using their professional judgement to design a curriculum that suits the needs of their pupils. We are interested in understanding the content you think children should be taught as part of PSHE.

Question 5.

*Thinking about **PSHE in primary schools**, what do you believe are the **three most important subject areas** that should be taught and why? Please include your reasons for choosing each subject area or evidence to support your suggestions.*

[EVAW ANSWER: 190 words]

The EVAW Coalition would like to see more discussion about the content and mode of delivery of PSHE, as distinct from Relationships Education / Relationships and Sex Education. We know that the additional curriculum components which would be part of PSHE, such as mental health and drugs/alcohol awareness, are likely to fit well and add value to RE/RSE teaching. However, we also believe strongly that what is sought through compulsory RE/RSE, which amounts to a cultural change in our schools around issues of preventing abuse, requires a 'whole workforce' change, with all teachers, leaders and other workers equipped and confident to talk about and respond to abuse issues when they arise. If making PSHE compulsory would create this shift we will support it, but we remain concerned that PSHE, and therefore RE/RSE, becomes the domain of a few teachers, this will never achieve the 'whole school approach' we advocate for.

Choosing three most important PSHE subject areas at primary school level we would say the same as in question one above: (1) my body and my rights; (2) healthy interpersonal relationships; (3) broader 'social norms' work on equality and stereotypes.

Question 6.

*Thinking about **PSHE in secondary schools**, what do you believe are the **three most important subject areas** that should be taught and why? Please also include your reasons for choosing each subject or evidence to support your suggestions.*

[EVAW ANSWER: 203 words]

The EVAW Coalition would like to see more discussion about the content and mode of delivery of PSHE, as distinct from Relationships Education / Relationships and Sex Education. We know that the additional curriculum components which would be part of PSHE, such as mental health and drugs/alcohol awareness, are likely to fit well and add value to RE/RSE teaching. However, we also believe strongly that what is sought through compulsory RE/RSE, which amounts to a cultural change in our schools around issues of preventing abuse, requires a 'whole workforce' change, with all teachers, leaders and other workers equipped and confident to talk about and respond to abuse issues when they arise. If making PSHE compulsory would create this shift we will support it, but we remain concerned that PSHE, and therefore RE/RSE, becomes the domain of a few teachers, this will never achieve the 'whole school approach' we advocate for.

If choosing three most important subject areas at secondary school level we would say the same as in question two above: (1) healthy relationships, sexual consent and mutual pleasure (2) equality and stereotypes and how these link to gender based violence; (3) media and cultural representations of sex and gender, including pornography, and abuse committed in online contexts.

Question 7.

*How much **flexibility** do you think schools should have to meet the needs of individual pupils and to reflect the **diversity of local communities and wider society** in the content of PSHE lessons in schools?*

[EVAW ANSWER: 250 words]

When RE/RSE or PSHE are delivered by schools, they should of course take a flexible approach to the needs of different pupils, especially those with special educational needs or disabilities where some differentiation may be required. Girls with SEND are disproportionately subjected to domestic and sexual violence, and their right to good RE/RSE should be prioritised with school leaders and governors reviewing regularly the delivery of this.

Regarding the local community, schools and their leaders are best placed to know and understand their pupils' needs and should be able to tailor and adapt content to some extent, but they must not be entitled to use school status (independent, free, academy, subject specialist), faith or lack of local ethnic diversity, for example, to limit teaching on women's or LGBT equality, or on the different forms of violence against women and girls (including FGM and forced marriage which are known to be relevant all over England).

We oppose exemptions for faith schools from any part of core RE/RSE/PSHE teaching, including the seeking of permission to teach heterosexual "marriage" as a preferred institution, or the requirement for women and girls to be modest, or omitting sexual and reproductive rights. These are all deeply related to ideas about women and girls' particular responsibility to be 'pure' and to be sexual-gatekeepers who can then be 'blamed' for sexual harassment and assault. All children and young people in England have the right to learn about their rights and about the law on violence, consent and equality.

To make your submission go to <https://consult.education.gov.uk/life-skills/pshe-rse-call-for-evidence/>

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