

23rd October 2020

Dear Lynne Neagle MS, Chair of the Children, Young People and Education Committee,

Thank you for inviting us all to give evidence on the 8th October, and for your questions about RSE in the Curriculum and Assessment (Wales) Bill. We hope the evidence session was informative and useful for the Committee.

We wanted to write to the Committee to follow up with what we, as a collective, feel are the key considerations for Relationships and Sexuality Education (RSE) within the new Curriculum.

1. The importance of mandatory, high-quality, inclusive RSE for all learners in Wales

We welcome the Welsh Government's commitment to introducing mandatory RSE within the new curriculum for all learners age 3-16. We support the principles of the Bill relating to RSE and its intention to improve the profile, quality and consistency of the content and delivery of the subject. High quality RSE is associated with a range of positive and protective outcomes for children, young people and their communities, including increasing children's understanding of safe, consensual, equitable and positive relationships; being able to recognise abusive or controlling behaviour and know where to seek support; helping to reduce homophobic, biphobic and transphobic bullying; and helping to challenge and reform harmful gender norms and stereotypes, which are known to underpin and reinforce violence against women, domestic abuse and sexual violence.

However, legislation on RSE is crucial, as existing evidence¹ has shown that current non-statutory provision has resulted in a wide variation in the quality and quantity of RSE that children receive across the UK. Without legislative change RSE will continue to be poorly resourced, will remain a low priority for schools, be narrowly conceived, and not reflective of children and young peoples, rights, needs, questions and concerns.

Without access to mandatory RSE for all learners, including schools offering RSE to post-16 pupils, and this vital preventive and protective education, we feel that children and young people will be unable to secure the four purposes and become healthy, confident individuals.

Recommendation:

To provide mandatory high-quality, inclusive RSE to all learners in Wales, we recommend that Welsh Government commit to fully implementing all of the SRE Expert Panel recommendations²

¹ See: Renold, Emma and McGeeney, Ester (2017) [The future of the sex and relationships education curriculum in Wales: Recommendations of the Sex and Relationships Education Expert Panel](#). [Project Report]. Cardiff: Welsh Government

² Renold, Emma and McGeeney, Ester (2017) [The future of the sex and relationships education curriculum in Wales: Recommendations of the Sex and Relationships Education Expert Panel](#). [Project Report]. Cardiff: Welsh Government

2. The need for a clear and detailed RSE Code

We are supportive of the Bill which requires schools to encompass the core learning, as set out in the RSE Code, in their curriculum, which will be supplemented by statutory guidance. We feel that it is vital that the core learning set out within the RSE Code is explicit and detailed, in order for schools to have clarity about which topics should be covered within each theme.

While the 6 thematic areas (i.e. Rights and Equity; Relationships; Sex, Gender and Sexuality; Bodies and Body Image; Sexual Health and Well-being; Violence, Safety and Support) and their brief summaries (included in the Curriculum for Wales Guidance) are a good starting point, they are currently much too vague and lack specific detail of which topics should be covered within each theme. We are concerned that this lack of detail will result in an inconsistent approach and further perpetuate unequal levels of RSE provision.

It is essential that the RSE Code is co-produced with children and young people and key stakeholders as a means to not only ensure the relevance of the curriculum, but that content also is inclusive, is conscious of, sensitive and adapts to the experiences and needs of young people.

Recommendation:

For a clear and detailed RSE Code to be co-produced in consultation with key stakeholders, and children and young people.

3. A national approach for professional development on RSE, with ring-fenced funding, and a clear strategy for implementation

Making RSE a statutory part of the curriculum is a really positive start, but to achieve high quality, inclusive RSE for all, we need to ensure that it is provided by well-trained, supported and confident teachers, who can access professional learning and evidence-based resources.

We are concerned that evidence indicates that many teachers have not had adequate training to support confident and high quality RSE. Without specialist RSE training, teachers may avoid addressing sensitive or challenging issues, and there is a significant risk that the opportunity to develop inclusive content will be undermined.

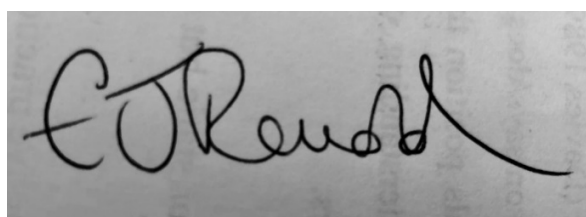
We feel it is necessary for there to be major investment in ongoing professional development on RSE, alongside a clear strategy for implementation. This must include provision for a designated RSE lead practitioner with protected hours in every school. Without this investment, we are concerned that the Minister for Education's vision for inclusive, high-quality RSE, may not be realised.

Recommendation:

Provide ring-fenced investment in professional development on RSE, supported by a national strategy for implementation and accountability.

We would welcome any opportunities to further support the Committee's work on RSE within the Curriculum and Assessment (Wales) Bill. We are all available to provide further written or oral evidence and clarification, or to answer any additional questions that the Committee may have. We are happy to be contacted individually or as a stakeholder group.

Yours Sincerely,



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Professor of Childhood Studies
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