

Kirsty Williams announces focus on healthy relationships in major reforms to 'Relationships and Sexuality' education

Following a [review](#) of the subject by an expert panel led by Professor Emma Renold, Professor of Childhood Studies at Cardiff University, the Education Secretary has announced that this area of study will become Relationships and Sexuality Education (RSE) – a statutory part of Wales' new curriculum which will be in place from 2022.

At present, SRE is a statutory part of the basic curriculum in Wales but it is down to schools to decide their approach to the subject and this sometimes doesn't stretch beyond the biological aspects of human relationships.

RSE represents a major departure from these traditional approaches because it broadens this area of study and places an emphasis on forming and maintaining healthy, happy and fulfilling relationships.

Learners will also be given a much broader understanding of sexuality that is fully inclusive of LGBTQI+ learners and includes wider issues such as consent, domestic abuse and respecting diversity.

The decision to change the focus of this area of study to relationships and sexuality, as well as the decision to make it statutory, reflects its immense importance in terms of how learners understand themselves, each other, their community and society.

When Wales' new curriculum is in place in 2022, RSE will become statutory from the age of 5 to 16, but learners will not be taught about topics for which they are not developmentally ready.

RSE would simply continue with the same approach as the Foundation Phase in Wales (for children aged 3-7) which ensures that children learn about relationships with friends and family and how to stay safe.

Recognising that these changes must be accompanied by the right training and support for teachers, the Education Secretary also announced that there would be changes to SRE training in both initial teacher education and within the existing workforce.

To kick-start this process, £200,000 will be made available to education consortia so they can begin the process of identifying professional learning needs in this area. A further £50,000 has also been awarded to Welsh Women's Aid to develop resources and training for schools.

The Education Secretary joined learners at Ysgol Casnewydd in Newport to see how they are working across the curriculum to understand issues such as

gender and sexual equalities and rights.

Kirsty Williams said:

“The days of traditional sex education are long gone; the world has moved on and our curriculum must move with it.

“Sex should never be taught in isolation for the simple reason that it is about so much more than just sex; it’s also about relationships, rights and respect and that must go hand in hand with a much broader understanding of sexuality. Anything less does a disservice to our learners and teachers.

“The fact is relationships and sexuality shape our lives as well as the world around us. They are a fundamental part of who we are and how we understand ourselves, each other and society.

“By creating RSE as a statutory area of study in our new curriculum for Wales, we will support our young people to develop healthy relationships, maintain good mental health and keep physically and sexually safe.

“Of course, thirty years on from the introduction of Section 28, we will also ensure that RSE is fully inclusive of all genders and sexualities and meets the needs of LGBTQI+ learners.

“Crucial to all of this will be ensuring that our teachers have the knowledge and confidence to provide the RSE our learners deserve. That’s why we’re providing to ensure that we get the training and professional development right.

“Thirty years ago Margaret Thatcher denounced local education authorities for teaching children that “they have an inalienable right to be gay”. I want all our learners to know that they have an inalienable right to be happy – this is the driving force behind the changes we’re proposing.”

Professor Emma Renold said:

“I am delighted that the expert panel’s recommendations have been met with such unequivocal enthusiasm by Kirsty Williams. Embracing and implementing the panel’s evidenced-based vision to transform Relationships and Sexuality Education, from effective pedagogy to teacher training, will, over time, ensure a relevant, engaging and high quality RSE that meets the needs of all children and young people.

“Underpinning the new curriculum with the core principles of rights, equity, inclusivity, protection and empowerment makes for a very promising future for RSE in Wales and takes forward some of

the best practice already underway in primary and secondary schools in Wales, and internationally.”

While Relationships and Sexuality Education will become statutory as part of the new curriculum when it is rolled out in 2022, the change in name will be actioned as part of a refresh to guidance for the current curriculum. It is intended for this guidance to be published early next year.

As well as reflecting this name change, the guidance will provide schools with greater support on a range of topics such as education for LGBTIQI+ learners and prevention of violence against women and domestic abuse.

More information

Current Provision for Sex Education in Schools

All secondary settings in Wales, including special schools and pupil referral units, have the statutory obligation to provide sex education to their learners.

Sex education forms part of the “basic curriculum” in Wales (alongside Personal and Social Education (PSE) and Work Related Education). Schools are able to decide on the content and approaches they use when delivering the basic curriculum.

The Sex and Relationships Expert Panel

Giving learners the tools they need to maintain good physical, emotional and mental health and well-being is a priority if we are going to support them to achieve and maximise their life chances. This is a key priority in the Welsh Government’s Prosperity for All strategy and Education in Wales: Our National Mission.

To support these aims, the Cabinet Secretary for Education asked Professor Emma Renold from Cardiff University to chair an expert panel on Sex and Relationships Education. The panel was remitted to identify opportunities for children, young people and practitioners to inform the future SRE curriculum as part of the Health and Well-being Area of Learning and Experience.

The Report of the Sex and Relationships Expert Panel

The SRE Expert Panel published their recommendations on the 13th December 2017. They made 11 recommendations.

The panel’s recommendations included that this subject area should be renamed Sexuality and Relationships Education and that it should be a statutory part of the new curriculum for all learners aged 3-16. To support this it was also recommended that specialist professional learning opportunities be created for the education workforce, both for those in initial teacher training and those already practicing.

Relationships and Sexuality Education in the new curriculum

The Cabinet Secretary for Education will be accepting the recommendation that this area of study will be a statutory part of the new curriculum.

Both the Expert Panel report and Estyn's recent thematic review of healthy relationships education (published in July 2017) provided evidence that schools needed greater support to provide consistently high quality RSE. By including RSE within the new curriculum, it is intended to signal the greater importance being placed on this area of study and encourage improvements in provision.

A change in name – Relationships and Sexuality Education

It has been decided, in discussion with the chair of the expert panel, that the name of this subject should be changed to "Relationships and Sexuality Education" (RSE). "Relationships" has been placed first to emphasise the importance of healthy relationships as a central topic within this area of study.

"Sexuality" has been included in the name of this area of study to move it into line with the World Health Organisation's definition of 'sexuality education', which encompasses the cultural, historical, biological and social factors that impact on how we establish relationships.

Relationships and Sexuality Education for Younger Learners

The Cabinet Secretary will be accepting the recommendation that Relationships and Sexuality Education should be provided to learners from the point they enter the education system. Relationships and Sexuality Education will be statutory within the new curriculum from the age of 5, as this is the age of statutory schooling.

All Relationships and Sexuality Education provided for children and young people must be appropriate to their age and developmental stage.

Delivery of Relationships and Sexuality Education for younger learners is likely to reflect current provision, which is delivered as part of the Foundation Phase's Personal and Social Development, Well-being and Cultural Diversity Area of Learning. Within this area of learning children learn about relationships with family and friends and how to keep safe.

Professional Learning

Professional learning will be crucial to translating the intentions of curriculum reform into practice, including future provision of Relationships and Sexuality Education. 'Education in Wales' reinforces our commitment to developing approaches to professional learning to ensure that all schools are better able to plan for curriculum change.

Inclusive RSE

At its core, Relationships and Sexuality Education acknowledges we are all

different and have different needs. Through improved professional learning for RSE we will ensure that our teaching profession can better support all learners, including those that identify as LGBTQI+.

The parental right to withdraw from Relationships and Sexuality Education

There are no plans to change the principle of a right to withdraw.

Schools with a Religious Character

There is currently a statutory duty on schools to provide teaching regarding sex education which is appropriate to the age and religious background of their learners.

There are no plans to change the duty for schools, including those with a religious character, to provide Relationships and Sexuality Education that is consistent with their ethos.

Annex – The Sex and Relationships Education Expert Panel

The Cabinet Secretary for Education convened the Sex and Relationships Education Expert Panel in March 2017. The group met 5 times over the summer and autumn. Their report was published on 13 December 2017.

The report and associated research paper can be found at the following links:

The panel was chaired by Professor Emma Renold, Professor of Childhood Development at Cardiff University. The panel membership was drawn from a range of stakeholders:

- Welsh Women's Aid
- BAWSO
- Public Health Wales
- Barnados Cymru
- Hafan Cymru
- Principle Youth Officers Group Wales
- Children's Commissioners Office
- Wales' Police Forces (All Wales School Liaison Core Programme)
- Estyn
- National Safeguarding Board
- NSPCC Cymru
- South West Grid for Learning
- Schools Health Research Network
- Schools
- Stonewall Cymru
- Learning Disability Wales.