



SHH...  
NO TALKING:

LGBT-inclusive Sex and Relationships  
Education in the UK







# CONTENTS

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Foreword	4
Executive Summary	6
Introduction	12
Methodology	18
Young people want SRE, but they aren't always getting it	19
Young people need good quality SRE, but instead it is often of a poor standard	25
Young people are not getting LGBT-inclusive SRE, but they want it	30
SRE needs to start at a young age and be repeated frequently	39
Conclusion	43
References	44
Acknowledgements	47



## FOREWORD

On Wednesday 1 May 2013, a child born on the day of Tony Blair's first landslide victory would have turned 16. Coincidentally, or possibly in celebration of that coming of age, Her Majesty's Schools Inspectorate Ofsted produced a substantial report on that very day. It dealt with the state of personal, social, health and economic education (PSHE) in schools across England. The title of the report – *Not Yet Good Enough* – gave a clear indication of the scale of the serious concerns it set out.

On 11 February 2015, the all-party Select Committee on Education, of which I was already a member, unanimously endorsed a report calling for radical improvements to PSHE and Sex and Relationships Education (SRE). We recommended that PSHE and SRE be made compulsory in all schools and that compulsory guidance for schools (which currently dates back to 2000) should be fully updated, to ensure that PSHE and SRE are appropriately inclusive of information about same-sex relationships.

When the Government refused to give statutory status



to PSHE and SRE, and rejected or brushed over all our other recommendations, I was at a loss to understand why it should have taken it so long for it to publish such a feeble response.

It is essential that momentum is now restored, and this report highlights yet again the need for access to good quality information on SRE at school. The Select Committee has a broad remit and a busy schedule, so it may be a while before we are able to schedule another investigation into PSHE and SRE. The Department for Education has no such difficulties. It should take another, urgent, look at these questions and this report – and then, it should start acting.

### **Neil Carmichael MP**

*Chair of the Education Select Committee (2015–present)  
co-author of Life Lessons:  
PSHE and SRE in Schools*



My SRE at secondary school consisted of nothing whatsoever. In primary school I watched an animated video of a heterosexual couple having a pillow fight. This lack of or non-existent education in school has led to me

feeling unprepared for life and unaccepting of who I am. This has had a hugely detrimental impact on my personal development and mental health. I can therefore not stress enough the importance of co-operation between the Government and schools in giving all of our young people, no matter what type of school they attend and no matter what sexuality they identify as, inclusive and substantial sex and relationships education. This would create a safer environment for them, and to help create happy, confident and informed young adults.

Lauren Young, 18

One of the survey respondents



# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Sex and Relationships Education (SRE) is as essential a school subject as any other. However, SRE is not currently universally taught throughout the UK.

In England SRE is only compulsory in maintained secondary schools<sup>1</sup> which account for only 40% of secondary schools. Primary schools, academies and free schools in England do not have to teach SRE at all. The current Department for Education guidance for English school SRE policies is out of date – written 16 years ago in 2000.

The situation is the same in Wales, however Wales does not have any academy schools, favouring the community comprehensive model of education<sup>2</sup>. In Wales the most recent SRE guidance dates from 2010. It includes a section on sexual orientation, which expresses the requirement that schools should offer support and guidance to all learners, particularly lesbian, gay, bisexual and trans (LGBT) learners who feel uncertain about expressing their sexuality.

In Scotland, Relationships, Sexual Health and Parenthood Education (RSHP) is not compulsory in any type of school and, as in Wales, all state schools are comprehensives. The Government did publish its updated guidance for RSHP, *Conduct of Relationships, Sexual Health and Parenthood Education in Schools*<sup>3</sup> in 2014 for primary and secondary schools, which covers some aspects of LGBT SRE including same-sex marriage.

To better understand the current situation with regards to LGBT-inclusive SRE, Terrence Higgins Trust launched an online survey for seven weeks to coincide with LGBT History Month in February 2016. A total of 914 young people (aged 16–25) completed the survey. Young people identifying as female accounted for 43% of responses, 36% identified as male, 13% as non-binary, genderqueer or other and 8% as trans. In total 20% of respondents live in London, 15% live in the south east, 13% in Scotland and 11% in Wales.

In this report we define LGBT-inclusive SRE as SRE which covers essential topics of relevance to LGBT people as well as heterosexual people, so as to better inform them and to promote better social tolerance and understanding of difference. This includes, but is not exclusively limited to, LGBT relationships, sex and families, coming out, the

<sup>1</sup> Schools controlled by the local council.

<sup>2</sup> Llywodraeth Cymru Welsh Government, Key Education Statistics Wales 2016. [www.gov.wales/docs/statistics/2016/160427-key-education-statistics-2016-en.pdf](http://www.gov.wales/docs/statistics/2016/160427-key-education-statistics-2016-en.pdf), Welsh Government April 2016.

<sup>3</sup> The Scottish Government Riaghaltas nah-Alba, Conduct of Relationships, Sexual Health and Parenthood Education in Schools, [www.gov.scot/Resource/0046/00465948.pdf](http://www.gov.scot/Resource/0046/00465948.pdf), Scottish Government December 2014.



promotion of good sexual health and issues of gender identity – including how to support someone who may be transitioning.

## Young people want SRE, but they aren't always getting it

In total 99% of young people that responded to the survey thought that age-appropriate SRE should be taught in all schools. However one in seven young people did not receive any SRE at school at all.

Respondents stated that the potential benefits of SRE include an improved understanding of people and the world around them and a reduction in bullying, as well as being an essential mechanism to help safeguard young people.

It is clear that SRE works, it is clear that young people want SRE; yet we know that many young people just aren't getting the SRE they need. Compulsory SRE is essential if we are to move towards a situation of consistent access to, and quality of, SRE across all schools in England, Scotland and Wales.

## Young people need good quality SRE, but instead it is often of a poor standard

Half of respondents rated the SRE they received in school as either 'poor' or 'terrible'. Just 2% rated it as 'excellent' and 10% rated it as 'good'. Those respondents rating SRE quality as 'poor' are more likely to be non-cisgender<sup>4</sup> with those rating it 'fair' or 'better' more likely to be cisgender. There is a clear difference in the experiences of SRE by gender identity which must be addressed.

These findings are in line with the results of the last Ofsted inspection of SRE in schools in 2012<sup>5</sup> which showed that 40% of schools taught SRE lessons that were either inadequate or required improvement<sup>6</sup>.

SRE guidance, published in England in 2000 and Wales in 2010, is out of date. We would like to see the guidance updated so that it is fit for the 21st Century, but we need to be reassured that young people will be involved in the process, and that it is done in a timely fashion. Any updated guidance needs to be age-appropriate and LGBT-inclusive.

<sup>4</sup> People who do not have the same sex and gender but do not identify as transgender.

<sup>5</sup> The findings of this report are based on evidence from the inspections of 24 primary schools, 24 secondary schools and two special schools across all English regions between January and July 2012.

<sup>6</sup> *Not Yet Good Enough: Personal, Social, Health and Economic Education in Schools*, [www.gov.uk/government/publications/not-yet-good-enough-personal-social-health-and-economic-education](http://www.gov.uk/government/publications/not-yet-good-enough-personal-social-health-and-economic-education), Ofsted, 1 May 2013.



## Young people are not getting LGBT-inclusive SRE, but they want it

The survey found that only 5% of young people were taught about LGBT sex and relationships. However, 97% of all respondents thought that all SRE should be LGBT-inclusive and 91% thought that trans awareness should be taught in schools. The three topics most frequently covered in SRE were reproduction, safe sex and body parts. Worryingly, 75% had not learnt about consent during SRE classes.

Young people were eight times more likely to rate their SRE as 'excellent' if it was LGBT-inclusive. The more SRE topics covered, the more positive the responses. In particular, SRE was rated 'excellent' or 'good' when the topic types of sex, sex and pleasure, consent, as well as LGBT sex and relationships were covered.

## SRE needs to start at a young age and be repeated frequently

Young people were four times more likely to rate their SRE 'terrible' if they were taught it only once in their school life. Those individuals who were taught SRE across three age ranges were 20 times more likely to rate their SRE 'excellent'. Over half (61%) received SRE just once a year or less.

The survey looked at when SRE was first given and across what age ranges it was taught. Most people first received SRE at school between 11 and 15 years old. Of the 731 people who responded to the questions about age ranges, 73 of them (10%) were taught SRE in three age ranges (7-10, 11-15 and 16-18 years old).

The more frequently SRE is taught, the better the rating. What we've heard from young people is that they don't want one lesson a year on SRE or one lesson throughout their school life. More frequent lessons allow for better understanding, and for previously learnt topics to provide the building blocks for future work.

Terrence Higgins Trust believes it is the right of all young people to receive good quality, LGBT-inclusive SRE so that they are equipped with the knowledge they need to prepare them - not only for life outside the classroom, but for the rest



of their lives. Only then will they be able to make positive choices with regards to their sexual health and relationships. It is vital that young people are reassured that the feelings they have, if not hetero-normative or cisgendered, are valid.

Unless a broad range of topics with regards to LGBT-inclusive SRE are covered at school, young people's physical, sexual and mental health will continue to fall through the gaps. We want to see all young people treated as equals, no matter what their sexuality or gender. This starts with knowledge and education.

We are calling on the Department for Education in England, Education Scotland and the Department of Education and Skills in Wales to take a leading role and work with Terrence Higgins Trust, other charities, teaching unions, parents and young people themselves, to ensure that SRE is compulsory in all schools. With Government and public support, we want to ensure that young people have regular opportunities at school to discuss SRE, so that they can better understand themselves, each other and the world around them. The recommendations in this report are a starting point from which we can improve the lives of all young people, no matter which school they happen to attend.



## UK-WIDE RECOMMENDATIONS

### RECOMMENDATION:

The Governments in England, Scotland and Wales must make universal, comprehensive<sup>7</sup> SRE a statutory part of the curriculum in all schools as a matter of urgency.

### RECOMMENDATION:

Sufficient resources must be given to all Local Authorities or schools across England, Scotland and Wales by their respective Governments. This will ensure that SRE lessons are resourced appropriately and that all teachers receive good quality training on how to best deliver age-appropriate SRE.

### RECOMMENDATION:

The English Ofsted, Welsh Estwyn and Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Education in Scotland should launch inquiries into the effects of sub-standard SRE. Evidence from charities and young people themselves should be used to assess to what extent poor quality SRE is harmful to young people's physical and mental health.

### RECOMMENDATION:

The Governments in England, Scotland and Wales must ensure SRE is compulsory in all primary schools.

### RECOMMENDATION:

The Governments in England, Scotland and Wales must ensure that SRE has a curriculum which includes a broad variety of topics including LGBT issues, supporting young people's long-term physical health, mental health and general wellbeing. Teachers' unions, schools, charities and young people themselves should be consulted in the drafting of the curriculum.

<sup>7</sup> Comprehensive SRE means lessons being provided with age-appropriate content throughout pupils' development, and with clear learning objectives for all young people. It should cover the physical, mental, emotional and social dimensions of human sexuality and relationships.



## SCOTTISH RECOMMENDATIONS

**RECOMMENDATION:**  
The Scottish Government must work in partnership with the Convention Of Scottish Local Authorities (COSLA) to ensure all schools, including denominational schools, teach LGBT-inclusive SRE.

## WELSH RECOMMENDATIONS

**RECOMMENDATION:**  
The Welsh Government must require primary schools to provide SRE as part of the basic curriculum. It should also urgently implement the recommendations of the *Successful Futures* report and include SRE as part of the Health and Wellbeing section of their new curriculum, for both primary and secondary schools.

**RECOMMENDATION:**  
In Wales the SRE guidance, published in 2010, must be updated and any process to update that guidance should be transparent and inclusive of all genders and sexualities.

## ENGLISH RECOMMENDATIONS

**RECOMMENDATION:**  
The UK Government must ensure that the Education For All Bill requires all academies (primary and secondary) to teach SRE through a contractual requirement – giving it the same compulsory status as religious education.

**RECOMMENDATION:**  
The UK Government must ensure that the quality of SRE in England is improved by updating its out-of-date guidance on SRE. Any new guidance must be LGBT-inclusive, be based on best practice and must involve young people themselves in its writing.



# INTRODUCTION

SRE is as essential a school subject as any other. Lessons on sex, healthy relationships, reproduction and planned parenthood provide a safe and open space for children and young people to question and understand the world around them. Good SRE lessons empower young people to lead informed, healthy and positive relationships.

Young people need an impartial education on how to address matters such as contraception, sexually transmitted infections (STIs), HIV and teenage pregnancy in an age-appropriate manner. When young people are equipped with the knowledge they need to make informed decisions, they are more confident in having the relationships they want.

However, SRE is not currently universally taught throughout the UK. In England SRE is only compulsory in maintained secondary schools<sup>8</sup> which

account for only 40% of secondary schools. Primary schools, academies and free schools in England do not have to teach SRE at all. The situation is the same in Wales, however Wales does not have any academy schools, favouring the community comprehensive model of education<sup>9</sup>. In Scotland, RSHP is not compulsory in any type of school and, as in Wales, all state schools are comprehensives.

Throughout this report we use the overarching term SRE to refer to SRE in England and Wales and RSHP in Scotland.

<sup>8</sup> Schools controlled by the local council.

<sup>9</sup> Llywodraeth Cymru Welsh Government, Key Education Statistics Wales 2016. [www.gov.wales/docs/statistics/2016/160427-key-education-statistics-2016-en.pdf](http://www.gov.wales/docs/statistics/2016/160427-key-education-statistics-2016-en.pdf), Welsh Government April 2016.



## SRE in England

In maintained secondary schools in England, the aspects of SRE that are compulsory are part of the national curriculum for science<sup>10</sup>, and include the biology of reproduction in an assumed heterosexual context, as well as communicable diseases including STIs and HIV/AIDS. The content of SRE lessons is not prescriptive, but SRE is defined as: 'Lifelong learning about physical, moral and emotional development. It is about the understanding of the importance of marriage for family life, stable and loving relationships, respect, love and care. It is also about the teaching of sex, sexuality, and sexual health<sup>11</sup>.'

The current Department for Education guidance for school SRE policies is out of date – written 16 years ago in 2000<sup>12</sup>. The guidance lacks clarity about what is required to be taught, what should not be taught, and when SRE should be taught. There is a section on sexual orientation and sexual identity, however it includes phrases, repeated several times throughout the document, such as: 'It is not about the promotion of sexual orientation or sexual activity – this would be inappropriate teaching<sup>13</sup>.'

We welcome recent statements made by the UK Government that they will consider updating this out-of-date guidance. However, there

has been no final decision on whether or not the guidance will indeed be updated, so at present schools are still using Government guidance from the year 2000.

Supplementary independent SRE guidance was produced in 2014<sup>14</sup> by Brook, the PSHE Association and the Sex Education Forum (SEF). It provides information for schools on how to handle issues that have arisen in the last decade around technology, media, pornography and inclusive SRE. The guidance was a welcome, and much needed, addition. However, the situation still remains that that no Government guidance on SRE has been released in the last 16 years.

The Government's guidance does not address the fact that most schools do not have to teach SRE. In March 2016 the UK Secretary of State for Education, Nicky Morgan MP, refused to make SRE compulsory in all schools in England. The situation is set to worsen with the Government's *Education for All* Bill<sup>15</sup> formally announced in May 2016, which seeks 'to set the foundation for a system in which all schools are academies'. As this Bill stands, an emphasis on converting many more schools into academies will have further impact on the number of schools that are obliged to teach SRE.

<sup>10</sup> Department for Education, National Curriculum in England: science programmes of study, [www.gov.uk/government/publications/national-curriculum-in-england-science-programmes-of-study/national-curriculum-in-england-science-programmes-of-study](http://www.gov.uk/government/publications/national-curriculum-in-england-science-programmes-of-study/national-curriculum-in-england-science-programmes-of-study), Department for Education May 2015.

<sup>11, 12, 13</sup> Department for Education and Employment, Sex and Relationship Education Guidance, [www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/283599/sex\\_and\\_relationship\\_education\\_guidance.pdf](http://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/283599/sex_and_relationship_education_guidance.pdf), Department for Education and Employment July 2000.

<sup>14</sup> Brook, PSHE Association, Sex Education Forum, Sex and Relationship Education for the 21st Century: Supplementary Advice to the SRE Guidance, Department for Education and Employment (0166/2000), [www.brook.org.uk/data/SRE-supplementary-advice.pdf](http://www.brook.org.uk/data/SRE-supplementary-advice.pdf), Weaseldance design and illustration April 2014.

<sup>15</sup> UK Government, The Queen's Speech 2016, [www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/524040/Queen\\_s\\_Speech\\_2016\\_background\\_notes\\_.pdf](http://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/524040/Queen_s_Speech_2016_background_notes_.pdf), UK Government 18 May 2016.



## SRE in Wales

In Wales, SRE is compulsory in all maintained secondary schools. Guidance was published in 2010<sup>16</sup> which covers both primary (from age three upwards) and secondary schools, although the focus is on the latter. The guidance covers schools for children with special educational needs, as well as Pupil Referral Units. It includes a section on sexual orientation, which expresses the requirement that schools should offer support and guidance to all learners, particularly LGBT learners who feel uncertain about expressing their sexuality.

Primary schools must provide sex education as contained within the national curriculum in Wales, but this would just be in, for example, science lessons. There is no requirement for primary schools to provide SRE as part of the basic curriculum, as lessons on their own outside biology.

As well as the Welsh guidance on SRE, there was a *Sexual Health and Wellbeing in Wales Action Plan, 2010–2015*<sup>17</sup>. This aimed to improve sexual health, reduce sexual health inequalities and develop a society that supports the open discussion of sex, relationships and sexuality – including the teaching of SRE at school. This framework has now come to an end with a replacement yet to be released.

In 2015 an independent review of the National Curriculum for Wales was instigated by the Welsh Government. The outcomes of that review were written up in the report, *Successful Futures*<sup>18</sup>, with over 50 recommendations. One of those recommendations was that the new national curriculum in Wales should have six areas of learning and experience, one of which is health and wellbeing, where SRE is referenced. In the wake of this report, the Welsh Government has initiated a series of community engagement events entitled *The Great Debate* but has not yet responded formally to the recommendations of the report.

<sup>16</sup> Welsh Assembly Government, Sex and relationships education in schools: Guidance, [www.learning.gov.wales/docs/learningwales/publications/130425-sex-and-relationships-education-in-schools-en.pdf](http://www.learning.gov.wales/docs/learningwales/publications/130425-sex-and-relationships-education-in-schools-en.pdf), Welsh Assembly Government September 2010.

<sup>17</sup> Welsh Assembly Government, Sexual Health And Wellbeing Action Plan For Wales, [www.shnwales.org.uk/Documents/485/Strategy%20\(English\).pdf](http://www.shnwales.org.uk/Documents/485/Strategy%20(English).pdf), Welsh Assembly Government 2010.

<sup>18</sup> Professor Graham Donaldson CB, Successful Futures: Independent Review of Curriculum and Assessment Arrangements in Wales, [www.gov.wales/docs/dcells/publications/150225-successful-futures-en.pdf](http://www.gov.wales/docs/dcells/publications/150225-successful-futures-en.pdf), Scarlet Design International February 2015.



## RSHP in Scotland

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RSHP is not a compulsory subject in Scotland. However, in 2014 the Scottish Government did publish its updated guidance for RSHP, *Conduct of Relationships, Sexual Health and Parenthood Education in Schools*<sup>19</sup>, for primary and secondary schools. This covers some aspects of LGBT SRE including same-sex marriage. While this guidance is more up-to-date than that of other countries' guidance, it includes an entire section devoted to what it calls denominational education. The guidance seems to allow denominational schools, specifically Roman Catholic schools, which are singled out somewhat, the flexibility to make decisions locally regarding RSHP. This is worrying as young people shouldn't be left behind and unprepared for life, as well as being unprepared for sex and relationships, simply because of the type of school they attend.

## Support for SRE

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This outdated policy is set against a wave of support for SRE from parents<sup>20</sup>, teaching unions such as the National Union of Teachers<sup>21</sup> and even Pope Francis who states that: 'Sex education should provide information ...at a proper time and in a way suited to [children's] age. Young people ...should be helped to recognise and to seek out positive influences, while shunning the things that cripple their capacity for love<sup>22</sup>.'

It is abundantly clear that SRE in all schools is both needed and wanted. With such a tidal wave of support and a clear case to show the benefits of SRE you would assume that every school was teaching it. Wouldn't you?

<sup>19</sup> The Scottish Government Riaghaltas nah-Alba, *Conduct of Relationships, Sexual Health and Parenthood Education in Schools*, [www.gov.scot/Resource/0046/00465948.pdf](http://www.gov.scot/Resource/0046/00465948.pdf), Scottish Government, December 2014.

<sup>20</sup> Sex Education Forum, *One Poll*, [www.sexeducationforum.org.uk/policy-campaigns/parents-want-sre.aspx](http://www.sexeducationforum.org.uk/policy-campaigns/parents-want-sre.aspx), Sex Education Forum, September 2014.

<sup>21</sup> National Union of Teachers, [www.teachers.org.uk/news-events/press-releases-england/sex-education-schools](http://www.teachers.org.uk/news-events/press-releases-england/sex-education-schools), National Union of Teachers, 10 February 2016.

<sup>22</sup> Harriett Sherwood, *How the Papacy Tackles the Key Issues*, [www.theguardian.com/world/2016/apr/08/pope-francis-amoris-laetitia-how-the-papacy-tackles-the-key-issues](http://www.theguardian.com/world/2016/apr/08/pope-francis-amoris-laetitia-how-the-papacy-tackles-the-key-issues), *The Guardian*, 8 April 2016.

## Gallery of support for compulsory SRE

There has been a wide range of support for compulsory SRE in all schools from teaching unions, Royal Colleges, teachers, doctors, parents and young people themselves. This gallery shows some of the faces in support of making SRE compulsory.



The National Association of Head Teachers (NAHT) supports statutory Personal, Social, Health and Economic Education (PSHE) and SRE in schools. **Russell Hobby**, general secretary of NAHT says:

'Teaching children about their rights and responsibilities – especially when they are young – can take courage and this shouldn't have to be the case; the Government should back teachers by making PSHE<sup>23</sup> [and SRE] a statutory part of the curriculum.

'The Government's unwillingness to raise the status of PSHE, when so much could be achieved this way and so many expert voices believe it is so necessary just doesn't make any sense<sup>24</sup>.'

<sup>23</sup> Personal, Social, Health and Economic Education.

<sup>24</sup> Russell Hobby, NAHT support statutory PSHE and SRE in schools, [www.naht.org.uk/welcome/news-and-media/key-topics/child-protection/naht-supports-statutory-pshe-and-sre-in-schools/](http://www.naht.org.uk/welcome/news-and-media/key-topics/child-protection/naht-supports-statutory-pshe-and-sre-in-schools/), NAHT 11 February 2016.

<sup>25</sup> ATL, ATL supports Bill for compulsory PSHE and SRE in schools, [www.atl.org.uk/media-office/2015/ATL-supports-Bill-for-compulsory-PSHE-and-SRE-in-schools.asp](http://www.atl.org.uk/media-office/2015/ATL-supports-Bill-for-compulsory-PSHE-and-SRE-in-schools.asp), ATL 15 July 2015.

<sup>26</sup> RCPCH, Compulsory Sex and Relationships Education (SRE) in schools, MPs demand, [www.rcpch.ac.uk/news/compulsory-sex-and-relationship-education-sre-schools](http://www.rcpch.ac.uk/news/compulsory-sex-and-relationship-education-sre-schools), RCPCH 17 February 2015.

<sup>27</sup> FPA, FPA responds to survey that finds parents want compulsory SRE, [www.fpa.org.uk/news/fpa-responds-survey-finds-parents-want-compulsory-sre](http://www.fpa.org.uk/news/fpa-responds-survey-finds-parents-want-compulsory-sre), FPA 20 May 2013.



The Royal College of Paediatrics and Child Health (RCPCH) supports statutory SRE in schools. **Dr Hilary Cass**, President of the RCPCH says:

'There is robust, scientific evidence that when good quality SRE is taught by trained educators in schools young people are more likely to have their first sexual experience at an older age, to use contraception and to have fewer sexual partners.

'Locally, public health teams and school nurses can and do encourage schools to teach good quality SRE. Our experience is that many schools don't and are confused about how, if at all, to teach SRE. As public health and sexual health experts with local expertise in prevention, commissioning and clinical practice we would welcome the opportunity to implement good quality SRE<sup>26</sup>.'



'[There is] an overwhelming demand for statutory SRE - from teachers, parents and young people.'

'Young people have a right to information that will keep them healthy and safe. SRE forms an important part of any school's efforts to safeguard young people from abuse, and is particularly needed to protect the most vulnerable children.'

**Graham Stuart,**  
Conservative MP and former Education Select  
Committee Chair

The Association of Teachers and Lecturers (ATL) supports statutory SRE in schools. **Dr Mary Bousted**, general secretary of ATL says:

'Education professionals want PSHE and SRE to become compulsory in all schools so they can help young people to become resilient, well-rounded and confident adults. Teaching young people about sex and relationships helps them to make well-informed life choices. Parents support this, education professionals support this and, most importantly, young people want this. The Education Select Committee also recommends it is taught in schools.'

'ATL believes teachers need help to become confident in teaching PSHE in their schools through better initial teacher training in PSHE, ongoing continuing professional development and up-to-date guidance and training. PSHE should be a discrete statutory subject which reinforces life skills across the whole curriculum<sup>25</sup>.'



The Family Planning Association (FPA) supports statutory SRE in schools. **Dr Audrey Simpson**, Acting Chief Executive of FPA said, following their survey of parents with regards to SRE:

'This survey shows that parents want schools to take an active role in teaching their children about sex and relationships, and yet the Government refuses to make SRE as part of PSHE compulsory.'

'Young people are encountering online pornography from an early age. Age-appropriate SRE is vital to help them place it in a wider context. The Government needs to listen to what parents and teachers want and think again on PSHE<sup>27</sup>.'



# METHODOLOGY

Terrence Higgins Trust launched an online survey on LGBT-inclusive SRE for seven weeks, to coincide with LGBT History Month in February 2016. The survey was open to all young people aged 16-25 – in total 42% of responses were from young people aged 22-25 years old.

A total of 1,035 young people took part in the survey but not all completed it fully, resulting in 914<sup>28</sup> responses to analyse. Young people identifying as female accounted for 43% of responses, 36% identified as male, 13% as non-binary, genderqueer or other and 8% as trans.

Over 65% of respondents had attended a state school, 13% had attended an independent school and 10% had attended a grammar school. There were smaller percentages of respondents who attended academies, free schools and state religious or selective schools.

Of respondents, 20% live in London, 15% live in the south east, 13% in Scotland and 11% in Wales. Other respondents, who amounted to smaller percentages, came from other areas of England including the South West, the East Midlands, the West Midlands, Yorkshire and the Humber, the North East and the North West.

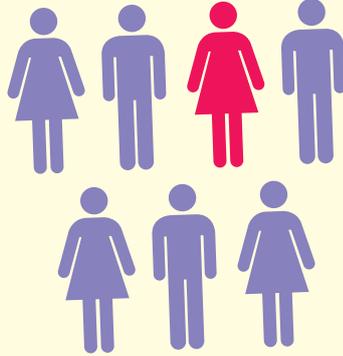
The survey was disseminated via email and social networks and through a range of organisations that work with young people such as Brook, Stonewall, the National Union of Students, Sex Education Forum and the youth wings of political parties. It was also disseminated at National Student Pride.

In this report we define LGBT-inclusive SRE as SRE which covers essential topics of relevance to LGBT people as well as to heterosexual people, so as to better inform them and to promote improved social tolerance and understanding of difference. This includes, but is not exclusively limited to, LGBT relationships, sex and families, coming out, the promotion of good sexual health, as well as issues of gender identity – including how to support someone who may be transitioning.

<sup>28</sup> 914 answered all survey questions, although some survey questions had slightly lower numbers of responses.



# Young people want SRE, but they aren't always getting it



*1 in 7 young people did not receive any SRE at school at all*

**99%**  
of young people thought age-appropriate SRE should be taught in all schools

Of the 145 young people who did not receive SRE, there were a disproportionate number who went to private, state religious and free schools. Of the 769 people who did receive SRE, a disproportionate number went to state comprehensive schools.

*'It should be compulsory - it is a natural part of life and as denying children any other form of education is illegal, denying them RSHP<sup>29</sup> should be too.'*  
(Female, pansexual, 19-21 years old)

*'Being taught in a religious school, there was not enough (or any) education on sexual relationships, safe sex or LGBT issues.'*  
(Female, undefined sexuality, 19-21 years old)

Young people responding to the survey made it clear that they want SRE to be compulsory in all schools. Respondents stated that the potential benefits of SRE include:

- an improved understanding of people and the world around them
- it will help to reduce bullying
- it is an essential mechanism to help safeguard young people.

<sup>29</sup> Relationships, Sexual Health and Parenting Education is the name given to SRE in Scotland.



**'I would regard it (SRE) as a child safeguarding necessity.'**  
(Trans woman, bisexual, 22-25 years old)

The comments left by young people reinforced what they wanted their SRE to look like. Some respondents favoured having outside or independent SRE teachers:

**'Lessons with an outside person who could be totally comfortable and educated in all areas and would happily answer all questions would be preferable to the current situation.'**

(Trans man, bisexual, 22-25 years old)

The survey included a further set of questions which asked young people their opinions of how SRE should be taught. Apart from LGBT-inclusive SRE, young people also want their compulsory SRE to include:

- Lessons in mixed schools that are not segregated by gender.
- Lessons covering real-life situations, for example:

**'My sixth form had a few hours where we were able to question real-life older couples about sex. This was hugely valuable, but they only had heterosexual couples.'**  
(Female, heterosexual, 22-25 years old)

- An open space to talk about issues around sex and relationships as well as having an anonymous way to ask questions.

Responses to the survey reflect Ofsted findings in 2013<sup>30</sup> which reported that pupils who had been given good SRE demonstrated sophisticated personal and social skills, and could confidently and maturely discuss the issues raised in classes.

Young people want and need education at school on how to navigate certain life choices so that they can make informed decisions which are right for them. It is evident that by arming young people with correct information, they are then able to go into the world and have successful relationships, which they are ready for and want.

<sup>30</sup> Not Yet Good Enough: Personal, Social, Health and Economic Education in Schools, Ofsted, 1 May 2013.



It is clear that SRE works, it is clear that young people want SRE; yet we know that many young people just aren't getting the SRE they need. Compulsory SRE is essential if we are to move towards a situation of consistent access to, and quality of, SRE across all schools in England, Scotland and Wales.

There are a wide range of people and organisations who want to see compulsory SRE become a reality in schools in Scotland, England and Wales. Further evidence can also be found in the experiences of other countries that have compulsory SRE. The National Foundation for Educational Research conducted a survey in 2010: *Sex Education – All You Wanted to Know About How it's Taught in Other Countries*<sup>31</sup>. In nearly every country surveyed SRE is part of the statutory curriculum, though usually as part of a larger subject area – for example Health and Physical Education in Victoria (Australia), Health and Career Education in British Columbia (Canada) or Physical and Mental Health (Hungary).

In France, sex education is 'one of the core social and civil competencies to be acquired in the course of mandatory education'. In Victoria sexuality education is seen as a 'whole-school learning approach', while in Hungary, schools have 'an unavoidable duty to address the questions of sexual culture and behaviour'.

In the majority of countries, parents do not have the right to withdraw their children from SRE, though this is permitted in British Columbia, Singapore and Sweden. In Singapore, 'parents bear the main responsibility for the sexuality education of their children' and in Switzerland a recent report recommended that sex education should rely on parents as well as institutions to 'combat myths'.

It is promising to note that the Welsh Government has responded to the Successful Futures report on the national curriculum by having a series of community engagement meetings across the country. However, the Welsh Government need to respond to this report formerly and implement the recommendation that the report suggests around making SRE part of the national curriculum.

<sup>31</sup> National Foundation for Educational Research, *Sex Education – All You Ever Wanted to Know About How it's Taught in Other Countries*, [www.nfer.ac.uk/about-nfer/press/releases/sex-education-all-you-ever-wanted-to-know-about-how-its-taught-in-other-countries.cfm](http://www.nfer.ac.uk/about-nfer/press/releases/sex-education-all-you-ever-wanted-to-know-about-how-its-taught-in-other-countries.cfm)  
National Foundation for Educational Research  
International Information Unit, 1 February 2010.



Further to the work of the UK Youth Parliament in campaigning on SRE<sup>32</sup>, the Scottish Youth Parliament included the following statement in its 2016 Manifesto<sup>33</sup> (which had over 72,000 responses): 'All pupils should have access to up-to-date and effective PSHE from a primary age, which addresses lifestyle, health, relationships, equality, social justice, and citizenship.' But it is not just young people who are backing SRE, in Scotland four out of the five main Scottish political parties made manifesto commitments to LGBT-inclusive SRE. While this does not go far enough in achieving mandatory SRE, it highlights that some progress has been made in Scotland. It is important to note that the role local authorities have in setting the curriculum in Scotland is greater than in England and Wales. Previous attempts to push the Scottish Government into overhauling SRE have simply resulted in the responsibility for any change being pointed towards local authorities. However, both tiers of government need to act together for any change to SRE.

In England, the Government's Education for All Bill included a commitment to 'setting the foundation for a system in which all schools are academies<sup>34</sup>.' As academies do not have to teach SRE, this move provides additional barriers to ensuring SRE is taught to all through compulsory status. As academies must teach religious education but not SRE there is a need to examine the reasons behind this discrepancy<sup>35</sup>. Ensuring SRE is taught would not only guarantee that the Government's commitment to safeguarding being covered in all schools is delivered, but it would also result in equal access to better quality SRE as time and resources are made available to the subject.

<sup>32</sup> UK Youth Parliament, *SRE – Are You Getting It?* [www.ukyouthparliament.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/AreYouGettingIt.pdf](http://www.ukyouthparliament.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/AreYouGettingIt.pdf) UK Youth Parliament, June 2007.

<sup>33</sup> Scottish Youth Parliament, *Lead The Way, Scottish Youth Parliament Manifesto 2016-2021*. [www.d3n8a8pro7vhmx.cloudfront.net/scottishyouthparliament/pages/283/attachments/original/1457781662/Lead\\_The\\_Way\\_Manifesto.pdf?1457781662](http://www.d3n8a8pro7vhmx.cloudfront.net/scottishyouthparliament/pages/283/attachments/original/1457781662/Lead_The_Way_Manifesto.pdf?1457781662) Scottish Youth Parliament, 2016.

<sup>34</sup> UK Parliament, *The Queen's Speech*. [www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/524040/Queen\\_s\\_Speech\\_2016\\_background\\_notes\\_.pdf](http://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/524040/Queen_s_Speech_2016_background_notes_.pdf), 28 May 2016.

<sup>35</sup> UK Parliament, *The National Curriculum*. [www.gov.uk/national-curriculum/overview](http://www.gov.uk/national-curriculum/overview), 1 July 2016.



### WHY IS SRE IMPORTANT TO ME?

'I haven't had much experience with SRE. I had the basic introduction to sex education in Year 6 (at a comprehensive primary school), which consisted of watching a cartoon video of a heterosexual couple, labelling the male anatomy, and how pregnancies occur.

In secondary school (an academy) we had no formal sex education. As a girls' school, I thought this was odd. In science lessons we were taught what a condom did and, although it pains me to say, that was the extent of it. We were not taught about sexual intercourse, hygiene, other contraception, healthy relationships or even periods (which showed, I was terrified when my first ever period came around). So, a school that didn't even teach their students about heterosexual SRE was in no way near to including LGBT SRE in their curriculum.

I think it is absolutely necessary though. Inclusive SRE is a vital part of a young person's life as it teaches them not only to be safe but that they are valid. Many young people struggle with their feelings of sexuality and gender and if no one is talking to them about it, or allowing them to discuss it openly, they will internalise their worry and it will grow into something ugly and harmful for the individual. A lack of thorough SRE could also lead to an unsafe lifestyle for young people of all sexualities and genders as they become curious to explore this taboo topic. It is vital - and completely normal - to discuss inclusive sex and healthy relationships with young people.'

(Lauren, female, asexual, 18 years old)



**RECOMMENDATION:**

The Governments in England, Scotland and Wales must make universal, comprehensive<sup>36</sup> SRE a statutory part of the curriculum in all schools as a matter of urgency.

**RECOMMENDATION:**

The UK Government must ensure that the *Education For All Bill* requires all academies (primary and secondary) to teach SRE through a contractual requirement – giving it the same compulsory status as religious education.

**RECOMMENDATION:**

The Welsh Government must require primary schools to provide SRE as part of the basic curriculum. It should also urgently implement the recommendations of the *Successful Futures* report and include SRE as part of the *Health and Wellbeing* section of their new curriculum, for both primary and secondary schools.

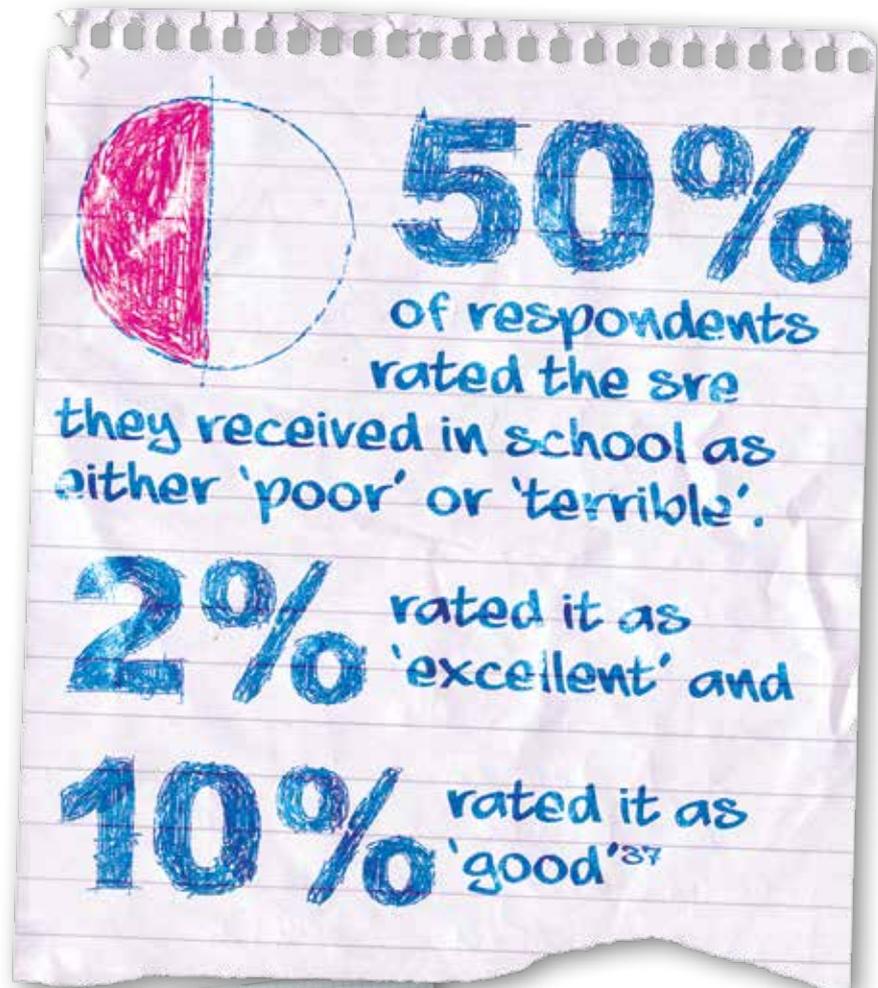
**RECOMMENDATION:**

The Scottish Government must work in partnership with the Convention Of Scottish Local Authorities (COSLA) to ensure all schools, including denominational schools, teach LGBT-inclusive SRE.

<sup>36</sup> Comprehensive SRE means lessons being provided with age-appropriate content throughout pupils' development, and with clear learning objectives for all young people. It should cover the physical, mental, emotional and social dimensions of human sexuality and relationships.



## Young people need good quality SRE, but instead it is often of a poor standard



'Teachers were too embarrassed or creepy.'  
(Female, bisexual, 22-25 years old)

'I felt some teachers were uncomfortable.'  
(Male, heterosexual, 19-21 years old)

'No discussion allowed.'  
(Non-binary, bisexual, 22-25 years old)

'Sex education was always a very awkward affair in school ...'  
(Male, bisexual, 22-25 years old)

<sup>37</sup> These percentage figures are taken from the 897 people responded to the question 'How would you describe your Sex and Relationships Education, in general?'

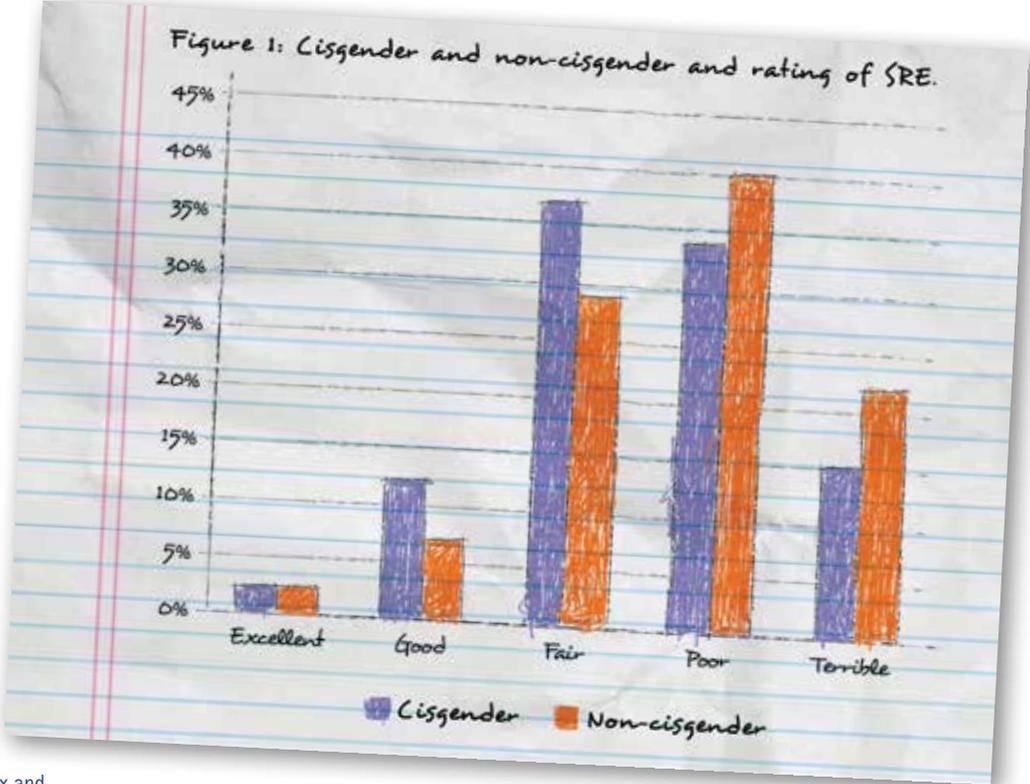


Young people also felt that awkwardness, poor teacher training and uncomfortable situations impacted the quality of SRE that they were taught with one young person stating that:

'One of the issues with sex education, where you're dealing with young children or adults, is "awkwardness". Even if a new curriculum can be introduced, some way of teacher training to combat inevitable awkwardness and uncomfortable situations would be essential.'  
 (Female, bisexual or pan sexual – not sure, 19–21 years old)

'As a gay man, understanding the female reproductive system wasn't too big of a concern for me. I feel that the sex education I received was minimal and reflective of a Section 28 era where anything other than straight and cis is not up for conversation. This has impeded my relationships.'  
 (Male, gay, 16–18 years old)

When looking at the quality of the SRE young people experienced at school, Figure 1 shows a direct correlation between quality and gender identity. Those respondents rating SRE quality as 'poorer' are more likely to be non-cisgender<sup>38</sup>, with those rating it 'fair' or 'better' more likely to be cisgender. There is a clear difference in the experiences of SRE by gender identity which must be addressed.



<sup>38</sup> People who do not have the same sex and gender but do not identify as transgender.



The findings paint a picture of the stark reality of the inadequate quality of most SRE in schools, which doesn't prepare young people for life outside the classroom and beyond the school gates. These findings are in line with the results of the last Ofsted inspection of SRE in schools in 2012<sup>39</sup> which showed that 40% of schools taught SRE lessons that were either inadequate or required improvement<sup>40</sup>.

It is notable that the new Ofsted framework, published just last year, does not reference SRE but when mentioning the range of subjects that should be covered, it does explicitly state that a local authority maintained school or an academy will receive an inadequate Ofsted rating if:

**'The range of subjects is narrow and does not prepare pupils for the opportunities, responsibilities and experiences of life in modern Britain.'**

As sex and relationships plays a large part in young people's lives, we would like to see this interpreted as giving schools inadequate Ofsted ratings if SRE is not covered properly.

SRE guidance, published in England in 2000 and in Wales in 2010, is out of date. There are concerns about the process of updating this guidance in England. We would like to see it updated so that it is fit for the 21st Century, but we need to be reassured that young people will be involved in the process and that it is done in a timely fashion. Any updated guidance needs to be age-appropriate and LGBT-inclusive. This report provides LGBT-focused evidence, which we hope the UK Government will draw upon.

Teacher training for SRE is not compulsory in Scotland, England or Wales, and many teachers are going into classrooms ill-prepared and ill-equipped to deliver high-standard, inclusive SRE lessons. Teachers lack training and confidence to address sensitive subjects or those which they perceive to be difficult to discuss with young people with 20% of PSHE teachers having no training at all<sup>42</sup>. Evidence has shown that proper training for teachers is crucial if SRE is to be effective<sup>43</sup>. If SRE becomes statutory in all schools, this challenge will be overcome as teachers must be trained and equipped to discuss SRE. The Government should be accountable and responsible for SRE and it should ensure that it is taught in all schools - and taught well in all schools.

<sup>39</sup> The findings of this report are based on evidence from the inspections of 24 primary schools, 24 secondary schools and two special schools across all English regions between January and July 2012.

<sup>40</sup> *Not Yet Good Enough: Personal, Social, Health and Economic Education in Schools*, Ofsted, 1 May 2013.

<sup>41</sup> *Ofsted School Inspection Handbook*, August 2015.

<sup>42</sup> *Not Yet Good Enough: Personal, Social, Health and Economic Education in Schools*, Ofsted, 1 May 2013.

<sup>43</sup> National Confederation of Parent Teacher Associations, National Association of Head Teachers and National Governors Association, *Sex and Relationships Education: Views From Teachers, Parents and Governors*, October 2010.



While SRE at school often continues to be of poor quality, charities and organisations from the voluntary and community sectors are filling the gap. External providers such as Brook, SEF and Terrence Higgins Trust, who go into classrooms and speak with young people, can bring additional benefits and expertise.

What is clear is that current SRE requires improvement; whether that's taken from Ofsted reports, from the evidence provided here or from statistics around the number of STIs among young people in general. We must not continue to fail our young people. We must listen to them and deliver what they want and need in terms of good quality comprehensive SRE which is LGBT-inclusive.

'I have taken part in volunteering in schools talking about relationships and gender outside of what many people perceive to be the norm. The response I got was phenomenal. Kids and young adults need and want to learn more than they are currently taught, they want to know about the diversity of people, they want to know that they are normal. It's not enough to know that a penis in a vagina can create a baby, and I strongly believe that teaching such a limited view of sex is detrimental and leads to unhealthy ideas about self and relationships that take years to untangle for some people. People will end up experimenting sexually, but with a prior knowledge they're much better equipped to do so safely (both emotionally and physically). Everyone deserves the opportunity to have these discussions and develop their own ideas.'

(Trans man, bisexual, 22-25 years old)

'There was no talk of relationships, consent, LGBT issues, sex and pleasure or anything else that would help with the mental anguish that sex can cause in teenagers. It was purely a lesson in the mechanics of sex, pregnancy and safe sex.'

(Male, heterosexual, 22-25 years old)



**RECOMMENDATION:**

The UK Government must ensure that the quality of SRE in England is improved by updating its out-of-date guidance on SRE. Any new guidance must be LGBT-inclusive, be based on best practice and must involve young people themselves in its writing.

**RECOMMENDATION:**

Sufficient resources must be given to all Local Authorities or schools across England, Scotland and Wales by their respective Governments. This will ensure that SRE lessons are resourced appropriately and that all teachers receive good-quality training on how to best deliver age-appropriate SRE.

**RECOMMENDATION:**

In Wales the SRE guidance, published in 2010, must be updated and any process to update that guidance should be transparent and inclusive of all genders and sexualities.

**RECOMMENDATION:**

The English Ofsted, Welsh Estwyn and Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Education in Scotland should launch inquiries into the effects of sub-standard SRE. Evidence from charities and young people themselves should be used to assess to what extent poor quality SRE is harmful to young people's physical and mental health.



## Young people are not getting LGBT-inclusive SRE, but they want it

only **5%** of young people were taught about lgbt sex and relationships.

**97%**<sup>44</sup> thought all sre should be lgbt-inclusive.

**8** young people were eight times more likely to rate their sre as 'excellent' if it was lgbt-inclusive.

**91%**<sup>45</sup> thought that trans awareness should be taught in schools.

of the 54 people who didn't think that trans awareness should be taught in schools, virtually all of them were cisgendered (91%).

'The lack of inclusive SRE made it a lot harder coming out at school.'  
(Trans woman, queer, 16-18 years old)

<sup>44</sup> A total of 787 out of the 810 people who responded to this question.

<sup>45</sup> Of the 816 people who responded to this question.



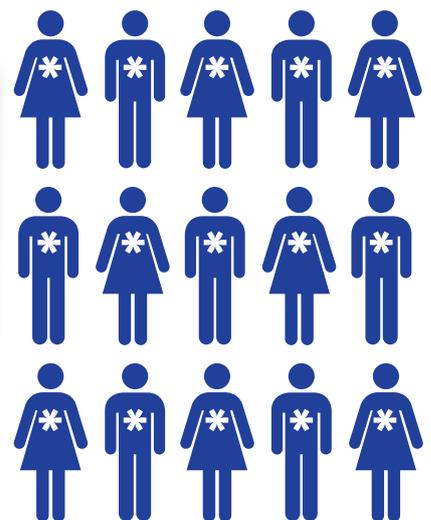
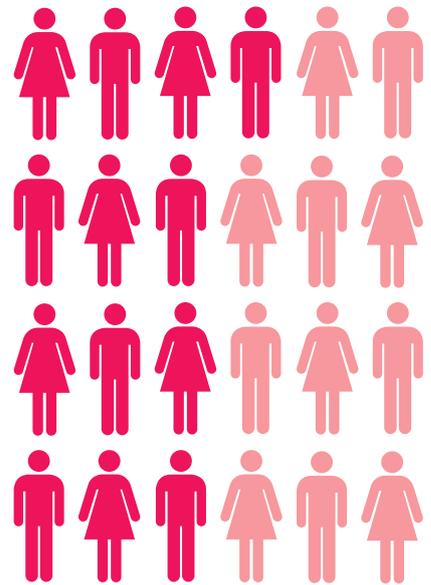
The survey included a set of questions which asked about specific topics covered in SRE lessons at school, both primary and secondary, and whether or not these topics were adequately covered.

- 97%<sup>46</sup> do not recall gender identity being covered in school.
- 93% of respondents were not taught about issues related to trans people in school.
- 161 out of 163<sup>47</sup> (98.8%) non-cisgendered<sup>48</sup> young people were not taught about issues related to trans people in school.
- Only 24, out of 818 people who answered the question, were taught about gender identity, nearly half of whom attended a state comprehensive school.
- Only 15 people, out of 817 who answered the question, were taught about trans issues.

97%

93%

98.8%



'LGBT+ teaching. It's a serious must. Kids go around never really knowing what to do with people of their gender/sex because there is literally nothing. It's not even mentioned. It's terrifying how erased we are.'  
(Non-binary/demiboy, bisexual, 16-18 years old)

<sup>46</sup> Based on 818 respondents.

<sup>47</sup> Of the survey respondents, 175 were non-cisgender, however 163 of those answered the trans-related SRE questions.

<sup>48</sup> Everyone who didn't identify as male or female was counted as non-cisgendered.



# LGBT issues

## the missing link

'No reference to LGBT-related sex ed, no reference to HIV beyond scientific dimensions. Disproportionate focus on teenage pregnancy.'

(Male, gay, 22-25 years old)

'Sex and relationships education needs to be about sex as a consensual act between any two adults and needs to be about complexities of human experience including monogamy, polyamory and gender identity. The fluidity of sexual orientation needs to be addressed.'

(Male, gay, 22-25 years old)

98%

When it comes to trans issues, 98% of the 817 young people who responded to this question, do not recall having covered issues relating to trans people during their SRE.

'I believe that more definitely needs to be done and young people need to be made more aware of the different kinds of relationships that happen in this day and age. I am a bisexual female and while in school, partly due to the fact we weren't being taught about it, I felt I couldn't be open about myself, and in effect got bullied greatly because people didn't understand or didn't like the idea I was who I was.'

(Female, bisexual, 19-21 years old)

'I believe that the LGBT community as a whole is ignored in SRE, and this has a major detrimental effect on LGBT teens coming out. If students were taught at a younger age, they would be more comfortable being themselves and bullying based on sexuality would reduce.'

(Male, gay, 22-25 years old)

'I sort of felt like it was assumed that I would have received some information about the mechanics of it, even if it was lacking about emotional impact. I really didn't. SRE was used to single me out as the only lesbian in my year group (I am originally from rural East Yorkshire) and bully me, and although I was having sex with women from the age of 13, I didn't actually know if what I was doing was "sex" or what "counted" as lesbian sex and I had no idea how to do it safely. I wish I had even once received the message that it was alright to be a lesbian; I was told that it was alright to be a man before I was ever taught that it was alright to be a lesbian, which is in no small part why I transitioned. I received no information about lesbian sex and I had no way of finding it out.'

(De-transitioning woman, lesbian, 22-25 years old)



## Diversity of topics in SRE

The three topics most frequently covered were reproduction, safe sex and body parts, with 81–87%<sup>49</sup> being taught them.

The two topics least frequently covered were:

- LGBT-inclusive sex and relationships: 95%<sup>50</sup> of respondents **had not** learnt about it.
- LGBT reproduction including in vitro fertilisation (IVF): 96%<sup>51</sup> of respondents **had not** learnt about it.

 **75%**

A total of 75%<sup>52</sup> had **not** learnt about consent.

'It bothers me that consent was not covered.'  
(Female, bisexual, 22–25 years old)

'CONSENT!  
The main focus was on women preventing rape. LGBT issues were ignored completely.'  
(Female, bisexual, 16–18 years old)

'There was no discussion about consent which is absolutely critical. Nor was there discussion about pressures to conform and what is considered "normal".'  
(Female, queer, 22–25 years old)

When it comes to HIV, three in five respondents either did not remember receiving information on HIV in school (32%<sup>53</sup>) or didn't receive information on HIV in school (27%<sup>54</sup>).

'Only the very basic heterosexual relationships were covered and only vaginal sex. By the time safe sex was taught two girls of 14 had already given birth. There was no inclusion of LGBT people and there was no mention of HIV, so the fact that outdated stigma is still around is no surprise.'

(Male, gay, 16–18 years old)

**89%**

89%<sup>55</sup> of respondents **had not** learnt about sex and pleasure.

'It should be focused on that sex is perfectly healthy and great fun, not something taboo that shouldn't be discussed.'  
(Male, heterosexual, 19–21 years old)

<sup>49</sup> Of the 831 respondents.

<sup>50</sup> In total, 59 out of 831 were taught about LGBT-inclusive sex and relationships.

<sup>51</sup> In total, 34 out of 831 were taught about LGBT reproduction including in vitro fertilisation (IVF).

<sup>52</sup> Of the 831 people who responded to this question.

<sup>53</sup> Of the 826 respondents.

<sup>54</sup> Of the 826 respondents.

<sup>55</sup> Of the 831 people who responded to this question.



State religious schools had lower proportions of pupils reporting having been taught a variety of SRE topics. This included safe sex, sex and pleasure, consent, teenage pregnancy, the contraceptive pill, the morning after pill, condoms, STIs and oral sex.

The more SRE topics covered, the more positive the responses. In particular, SRE was rated 'excellent' or 'good' when the topics included types of sex, sex and pleasure, consent as well as LGBT sex and relationships.

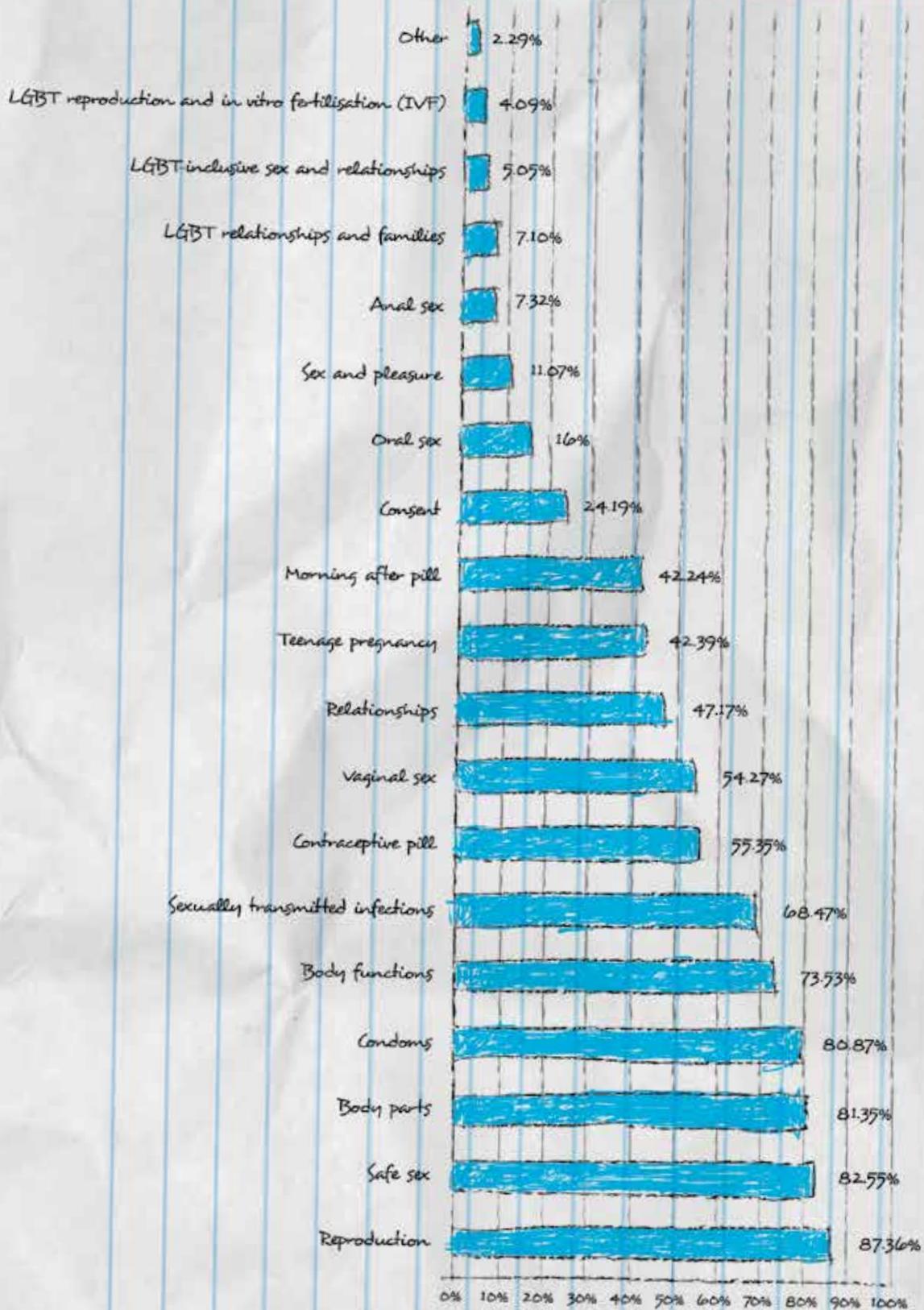
Young people were twice as likely to rate their SRE as 'good' if it had covered sex and pleasure.

**'There was no focus on female pleasure, no mention of female orgasm, no discussions about gay or bisexual women, they were barely discussed and only in relation to HIV and gay sex.'**  
**(Female, bisexual, 22-25 years old)**

The survey findings reinforce that a greater variety of topics covered during SRE is directly linked to a better rating. All topics should be covered in an age-appropriate way from, for example, HIV to anal sex to consent. LGBT-inclusive SRE should be mandatory and should cover subjects such as issues relating to trans people, LGBT relationships and families, and LGBT reproduction including IVF. Young people have told us loud and clear what sort of SRE they want and need in order to protect themselves from poor sexual, physical and mental health.

Providing the resources to ensure that LGBT-inclusive SRE is delivered well, no matter which school an LGBT young person attends, is crucial.

Figure 2: Which topics were covered in your SRE?  
Please tick all that apply





## BASIC SRE NEEDS TO BE LGBT-INCLUSIVE

'With regards to the SRE which I received at school from Years 6-12, overall I felt it was fairly good covering most of the important areas such as STIs, different types of protection, methods of contraception and the biology around sex. However, as I discovered my sexual orientation more, I realised that I had not been adequately prepared for my specific sexual orientation. There was a lack of SRE which is specific to different sexual orientations and genders. For example, HIV prevention, transmission, and Post-exposure prophylaxis (PEP) was not covered in a lot of detail, but contraceptives including emergency hormonal contraception and the morning after pill were included in every SRE block of sessions every year I received SRE.'



'Overall, there is a lack of LGBT-specific SRE being taught in schools which addresses issues and concerns faced by LGBT people with regards to their sexual health! This could potentially be a huge problem for LGBT people as they go through their lives. Without the correct information, they could potentially make ill-informed choices regarding their sexual activity, which in turn would impact on their mental health and wellbeing. LGBT young people might not feel that their sexual orientation or gender is important as it is not covered during their SRE at school, which could be detrimental at a time when they might already be confused about their identity and who they are. It is healthy for young people to be able to discover themselves and their sexual orientation and/or gender, but we need to be able to provide them with all the information to be able to do so safely. This starts with including LGBT-specific SRE within the wider SRE curriculum.'

(Andrew, male, gay, 21 years old)



A number of respondents raised concerns about the impact that inadequate SRE has on the physical, sexual and mental health of young LGBT people. A specific question on mental health was not included in the survey but the strength of comments being shared by young people reinforces that this is an area that needs to be highlighted.

**'I wasn't taught anything about being LGBT+ in school and this caused me huge issues with my mental health all the way through. It wasn't until I got to university that I was able to tackle my fear of coming out.'**  
**(Female, pansexual, 22-25 years old)**

We must now ensure that every school across England, Scotland and Wales teaches high quality LGBT-inclusive SRE, covering the range of topics required to ensure that young people have the knowledge and confidence they need to understand, and to make decisions about, not only their own lives but also the lives of others around them.

Current guidance in both England and Wales (published in 2000 and 2010 respectively) doesn't cover developments that have happened in society and in technology. The advances in technology that we have witnessed even in the last six years include the prevalence of smartphones and dating apps, and the way these have affected people's relationships. Although sexual orientation is mentioned, details of topics not limited to LGBT SRE but which would speak to some LGBT pupils as well as heterosexual pupils are not mentioned – for example, same-sex marriage, IVF and anal sex.

Similarly guidance in Scotland<sup>56</sup>, published in 2014, suggests that the purpose of RSHP education is to: 'Provide knowledge and understanding of healthy, safer, respectful and loving relationships, sexual and emotional health and wellbeing, and the nature of sexuality. A focus on relationships throughout RSHP education is vital in order to encourage discussion and critical thinking about young people's rights and to promote questioning of gender stereotypes and gender inequality. During these discussions, use of gender neutral and non-judgemental language is good practice and is highly recommended to ensure that children and young people feel included at all times and are embraced as full members of the school community.'

<sup>56</sup> *The Scottish Government Riaghaltas nah-Alba, Conduct of Relationships, Sexual Health and Parenthood Education in Schools*, [www.gov.scot/Resource/0046/00465948.pdf](http://www.gov.scot/Resource/0046/00465948.pdf), Scottish Government, December 2014.



This also helps to challenge some of the negative gender norms that exist in society which place unnecessary pressure on young people.'

This Scottish guidance, although not perfect, is the most up-to-date of all three countries and includes words around gender neutral language as well as inclusivity. However, there is no direct reference to different LGBT topics, and there needs to be a much greater emphasis on sex and pleasure, different types of sex and consent.

Current guidance used in England, Scotland and Wales must be updated to be more prescriptive with regards to the breadth of SRE subjects to be taught as well as increasing the number of LGBT-inclusive topics included. Only then can we ensure that no child is left behind or unprepared, regardless of their gender or sexuality.

**RECOMMENDATION:**  
The Governments in England, Scotland and Wales must ensure that SRE has a curriculum which includes a broad variety of topics, including LGBT issues, supporting young people's long-term physical health, mental health and general wellbeing. Teachers' unions, schools, charities and young people themselves should be consulted in the drafting of the curriculum.



## SRE needs to start at a young age and be repeated frequently

young people were four times more likely to rate their sre 'terrible' if they were taught it only once in their school life<sup>57</sup>. **x4**

**x20** those individuals who were taught sre across three age ranges were 20 times more likely to rate their sre 'excellent'.

**61%**<sup>58</sup> over half received sre just once a year or less.

The findings reinforce that starting SRE early and repeating throughout the duration of school life improves young people's experiences of SRE.

*'I feel that the earlier SRE is begun, with new information at each age group, then the safer people will be.'*

*(Male, gay, 22-25 years old)*

<sup>57</sup> Compared to those who were taught it once a week.

<sup>58</sup> Of the 524 people who responded to this question.

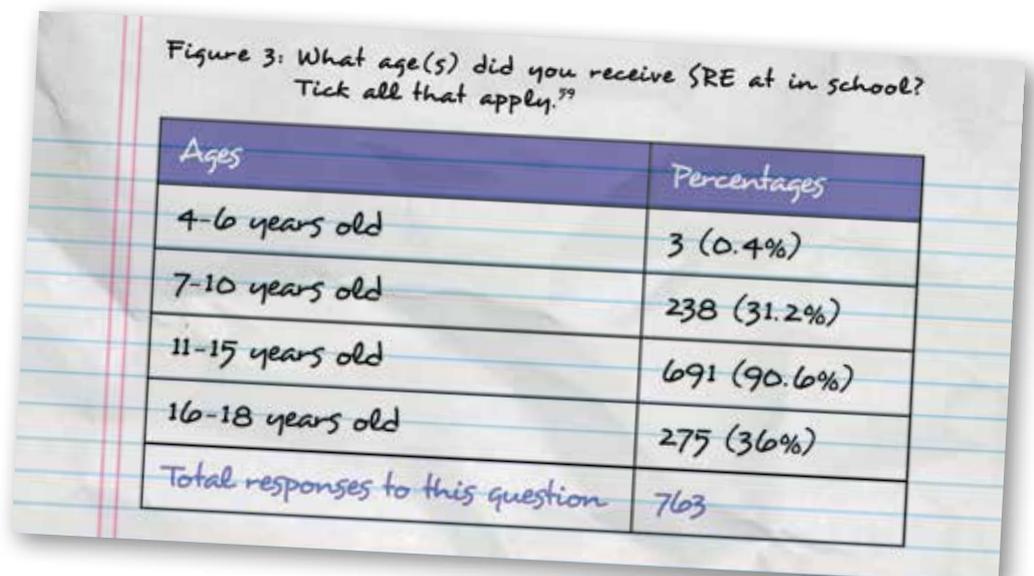


The survey looked at when SRE was first given and across what age ranges it was taught.

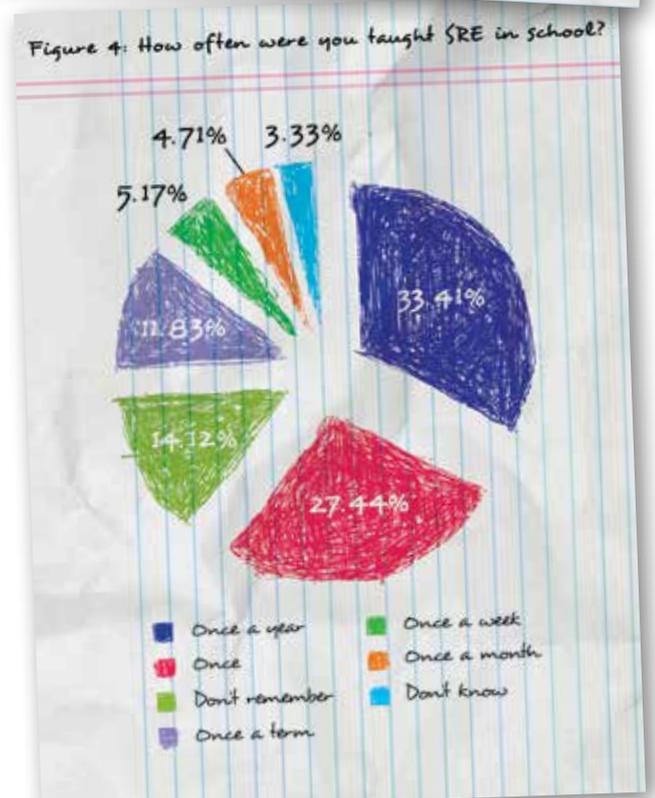
- Most people first received SRE at school between 11-15 years old.
- Of the 731 people who responded to the questions about age ranges, 73 of them (10%) were taught SRE in three age ranges (7-10, 11-15 and 16-18 years).

11-15

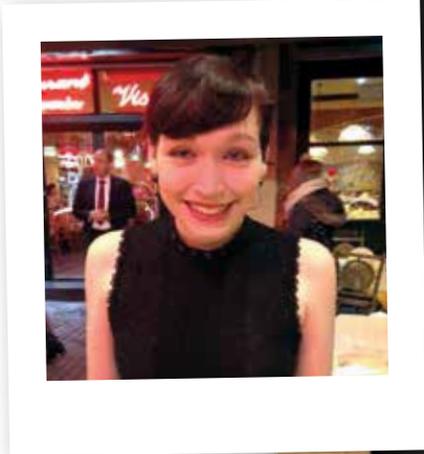
10%



Looking at how frequently SRE lessons were taught in school, of the 871 people who answered the question 45 (5%) received SRE as frequently as once a week.



<sup>59</sup> The percentages don't add up to 100 because multiple answers were possible.



## FALLING THROUGH THE GAPS

'My family moved around a lot while I was growing up, so I attended various schools. I only remember receiving SRE in one of them and it covered contraception, pregnancy, STIs, menstruation and childbirth - but nothing in much detail. Male students were not made to attend classes that were seemingly 'irrelevant' to them, such as those on menstruation or those on childbirth. In addition to this, I never received any education about gender identity, homosexuality, bisexuality or indeed any form of relationship. There was also no discussion of consent. I definitely feel that coming out of the closet would have been easier had I been made to feel that homosexuality was normal and accepted, and I feel that regular sex and relationships classes are an easy and efficient way to do this. Not only would inclusive education help those on the LGBT spectrum to feel at ease about their own identity, but it would encourage other children to show solidarity, and not to bully those who are different.'

(Amy, female, lesbian, 22 years old)



The more frequently SRE is taught, the better the rating. What we have heard from young people is that they do not want one lesson a year on SRE or one lesson throughout their school life. More frequent lessons allow for better understanding, and for previously learnt topics to provide the building blocks for future work.

Young people were also asked how long their SRE lessons lasted – 1 hour to 1 hour 30 minutes long seem to be the optimal lesson duration for best ratings. Shorter lessons – less than 1 hour – were rated worse.

The findings also show that starting SRE younger, at primary school, from age four onwards and receiving it across three age ranges is much more successful.

The age that schools start teaching SRE varies, with some countries starting as young as four (Ireland) or six (Norway) but other countries, such as Finland and Japan, delaying it by several years.

However, in primary level (ages three to 11) SRE tends to avoid specific reference to sex, with several countries first mentioning it in the 10–12 age range. As students get older the curriculum content becomes more sophisticated. In Norway, for example, 12 to 13-year-olds talk about diversity in sexual orientation, and in Finland 15-year-olds receive an introductory sexual package including a condom<sup>60</sup>.

As well as this the Cochrane Report<sup>61</sup>, which looked into school-based programmes for the prevention of child sexual abuse, found that teaching primary school children about sexual abuse may help them report abuse happening to themselves. The findings are the result of a Cochrane review of data from trials of prevention programmes in the USA, Canada, China, Germany, Spain, Taiwan and Turkey. Using data from 24 separate trials involving almost 6,000 children around the world, researchers found that pupils who are taught about preventing sexual abuse at school are more likely than others to report their own experiences of abuse.

Further to this, in June 2016, the United Nations recommended that SRE becomes mandatory in UK schools. This is part of the United Nations Committee of the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) verdict on the UK's child rights record<sup>62</sup>.

**RECOMMENDATION:**  
The Governments in England, Scotland and Wales must ensure SRE is compulsory in all primary schools.

<sup>60</sup> National Foundation for Educational Research, *Sex Education – All You Ever Wanted to Know About How it's Taught in Other Countries*, [www.nfer.ac.uk/about-nfer/press/releases/sex-education-all-you-ever-wanted-to-know-about-how-its-taught-in-other-countries.cfm](http://www.nfer.ac.uk/about-nfer/press/releases/sex-education-all-you-ever-wanted-to-know-about-how-its-taught-in-other-countries.cfm) National Foundation for Educational Research International Information Unit, 1 February 2010.

<sup>61</sup> Sally Weale, *Sexual Abuse Education Helps Children Report Offenders*, [www.theguardian.com/education/2015/apr/16/sexual-abuse-education-helps-children-report-offenders](http://www.theguardian.com/education/2015/apr/16/sexual-abuse-education-helps-children-report-offenders) The Guardian, Thursday 16 April 2015.

<sup>62</sup> Committee on the Rights of the Child [www.humanism.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/CRC\\_C\\_GBR\\_CO\\_5\\_24195\\_E.docx](http://www.humanism.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/CRC_C_GBR_CO_5_24195_E.docx), United Nations, 3rd June 2016.



## CONCLUSION

Terrence Higgins Trust believes it is the right of all young people to receive good quality LGBT-inclusive SRE so that they are equipped with the knowledge they need to prepare them – not only for life outside the classroom, but for the rest of their lives. Only then will they be able to make positive choices with regards to their sexual health and relationships. It is vital that young people are reassured that the feelings they have, if not hetero-normative or cisgendered, are valid.

Unless a broad range of topics with regard to LGBT-inclusive SRE are covered at school, young people's physical, sexual and mental health will continue to fall through the gaps. We want to see all young people treated as equals, no matter what their sexuality or gender. This starts with knowledge and education.

We are calling on the Department for Education in England, Education Scotland and the Department of Education and Skills in Wales to take a leading role and work with Terrence Higgins Trust, other charities, teaching unions, parents and young people themselves to ensure that SRE is compulsory in all schools. With Government and public support, we want to ensure that young people have regular opportunities at school to have SRE so that they can better understand themselves, each other and the world around them. The recommendations in this report are a starting point from which we can improve the lives of all young people, no matter which school they happen to attend.

Without these steps we are going to fail another generation of young people, especially those who define themselves as LGBT+<sup>63</sup>.

'Sex is huge part of our lives and growing up. It's pretty much a basic function. Gender identity and sexuality play an even bigger role and people are poorly educated on these subjects, which in turn leads to segregation and prejudice.'  
(Male, gay, 16–18 years old)

<sup>63</sup> LGBT+ includes the many definitions that people may want to use to describe their sexuality – if it is not heterosexual – and/or gender – if it is not cisgender.



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# Notes

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