

Welsh Government

Consultation - summary of responses to the RSE guidance

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Analysis of consultation responses on additional guidance for the Curriculum for Wales:
RSE

Analysis of consultation responses on additional guidance for the
CfW: Relationship and Sexuality Education

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Glossary

Acronym/Key word	Definition
ALN	Additional Learning Needs
BSL	British Sign Language
CWRE	Careers and Work-Related Experiences
CYP	Children and Young People
EOTAS	Education Other Than At School
RSE	Relationships and Sexuality Education
STIs	Sexually Transmitted Infections
UNCRC	The United Nation's Convention on the Rights of the Child

1. Introduction

- 1.1 The Curriculum for Wales framework was published on the 28th of January 2020, with consultations on additional guidance for the Curriculum carried out between May and July 2021. Before its publication, the framework was subject to broad and extensive consultation. Feedback received signalled what specific additional guidance schools and other educational settings would require in order to successfully design and realise their curriculum – and this included Relationships and Sexuality Education.
- 1.2 The draft additional RSE Code and Guidance underwent co-construction with practitioners, stakeholders and experts and went out for further feedback and consultation between May and July 2021. This provided a vital opportunity for all practitioners and other stakeholders to provide input supporting the development of the guidance.
- 1.3 Miller Research, in conjunction with Meurig Roberts and Old Bell 3, was commissioned to carry out qualitative research with children and young people (CYP) in order to collect feedback on the draft guidance document. The research took the form of a number of workshops with CYP facilitated by the research team. Findings from those workshops are presented in this report.

2. Consultation workshops

Overview of workshops

- 2.1 This report sets out the findings from five workshops held between the 30th of June and 14th of July 2021. A sixth workshop had been scheduled, but group organisers had to withdraw at short notice. The workshops were attended by children and young people (CYP) from across Wales and were facilitated by Miller Research and Meurig Roberts. A responsible adult (in most cases a youth worker or teacher) attended the workshops to ensure the inclusion and safety of participants, and to ensure that support would be available for the attendees following the workshop had any issues arisen.
- 2.2 The settings for the workshops varied, with three being held face-to-face and the remaining two held virtually via Microsoft Teams. The participants included members of youth groups from across Wales, as well as pupils from a primary school and a secondary school. This ensured the workshops engaged a range of CYP across different age groups and educational settings. In total 52 CYP participated in the workshops

Table 1: List of RSE workshops held

Workshop	Date	Target Group	Format
1	30 th June	Secondary School, Health and Wellbeing school council	Face-to- face
2	7 th July	Youth Group	Virtual
3	12 th July	Youth Group	Face-to- face
4	13 th July	Primary School, year 5 and 6 pupils	Face-to- face
5	14 th July	Youth Group	Virtual

Workshop delivery

- 2.3 The duration of the sessions was approximately an hour long, with the topics discussed covering multiple areas, such as the definition of RSE as set out in the draft guidance and Code, and the three strands of RSE; *developing and expressing identity and forming relationships, understanding sexual health and wellbeing and fostering safety and respect, being valued and supported.*
- 2.4 For those who were aged 12 and over, participants were allocated a period of time to familiarise themselves with the content, followed by an opportunity to ask questions to help their understanding. The participants were then asked to comment on the introductory texts of the strands, alongside the information in the tables setting out the content to be taught by practitioners. The table was split into two columns based on age categorisation: 'Developing years' (approximately age 8-11) and 'Adolescence' (approximately age 12-16) which helped them to see the progression. The letters A, B, C and D were added to the text in each box which helped with discussion of

the content within each of them. Where time permitted, participants were also asked to rank the boxes based on the content they deemed most relevant to what should be taught

- 2.5 For the work with younger children, we were given access to facilitate a workshop with a group of 15 learners from years 5 and 6. Full discussions were held with the school about the methodology and approach. The workshop was planned to ensure that it was in-keeping with the “Tyfu i Fyny” (Growing Up) programme, which is the framework used by the school to deliver its sexual health and wellbeing programme. Parents were also contacted to ensure that they were happy for their children to be involved.

Definition of RSE

- 2.6 When asked to read the definition of RSE, there was some confusion amongst participants with some believing the acronym to reference religious education. There was also a sentiment expressed that not enough explanation was given to the UN Conventions on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) and where RSE relates to that.
- 2.7 Although there was recognition that the guidance was aimed at practitioners implementing RSE, participants in one particular workshop felt that there was ambiguity surrounding the term ‘equity-based curriculum’ and what this meant in practice. This is despite it being viewed positively by other groups. There was also uncertainty about the meaning of the phrase ‘to advocate for self and others.’¹
- 2.8 Conversely, participants across the groups responded positively to the terminology set out in the second paragraph of the definition (see Annex A). This included the reference to how relationships and sexuality shapes the lives of others and how to seek support for

¹ Full sentence referring to the word ‘advocate’ within RSE definition: “Learners should be equipped and empowered to seek support on issues relating to RSE and to advocate for self and others.”

others, as well as themselves. The word 'empowerment' was welcomed.

- 2.9 Overall, there was a consensus across the workshops that the draft definition of RSE was satisfactory and concise, albeit with some confusion surrounding individual words and meanings.

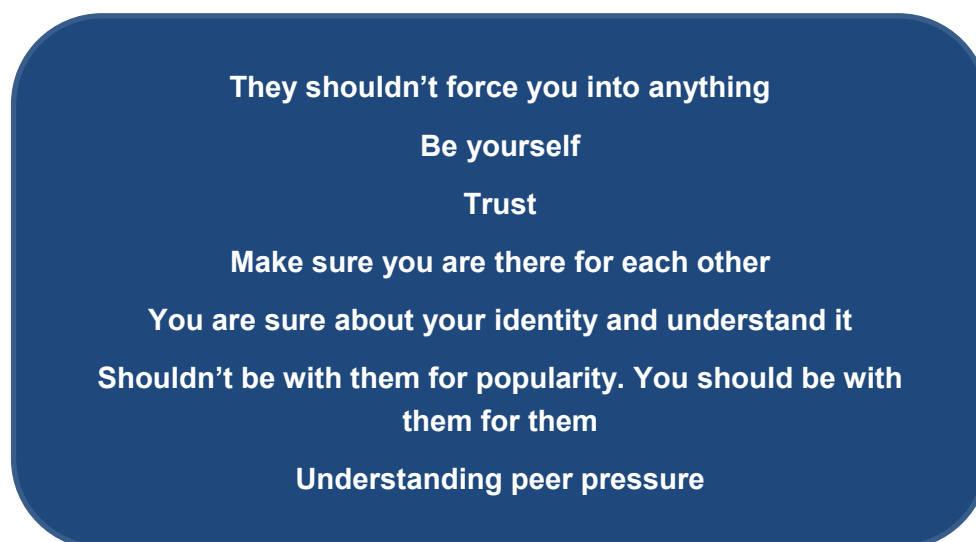
Strand 1 – Developing and expressing identity and forming relationships

Discussion of draft Guidance Introductory text

- 2.10 When asked to read the introductory text for Strand 1, participants felt the content was too wordy with too much jargon that was difficult to understand. Furthermore, it was stated there could have been greater specificity and actual examples given in the text. One such example that was raised was the reference in the fourth paragraph to supporting learners to understand how identity and individuality change over time.
- 2.11 Similar to the definition of RSE, participants struggled to understand the meaning of certain terms and phrases such as 'authentic contexts for learning'. Nevertheless, there was recognition amongst participants that the Strand text highlighted multiple aspects surrounding RSE that were previously not covered. This included the topics of body image and cultural diversity
- 2.12 One group felt that although the strands did show progression, it was important that some topics (e.g., puberty) that would be taught up to age 11 should be revisited so that learners could refresh their knowledge from what they were taught in primary school.
- 2.13 The inclusion of diversity in the text was met positively by children and young people, as based on their past experience, they felt that without its explicit reference in the guidance the topic would not necessarily be addressed by practitioners. Religious schools were cited by several groups as an example where this may be commonplace.

- 2.14 One of the groups felt that more introductory teaching on LGBT+ issues should be undertaken in primary schools due to the changes in the maturity of learners at that age.
- 2.15 From the work produced by the primary learners on the work sheets (see Annex E for method), they identified a range of issues they thought were important to be covered in this strand. The words/phrases produced by the learners matched closely with the aim and content outlined in this strand for 8 -11 year olds in relation to positive relationships, living in a diverse society and social norms but less focus on social and cultural norms

Figure 1: Topics listed by primary school learners that they would want to be covered in Strand 1



Discussion of Table

- 2.16 There was a strong consensus within one particular group that the terminology in Box A under the heading Adolescence (see Annex B) could be altered, amending the word 'equitable' with 'positive' and/or 'healthy' when referring to consensual and loving relationships. There was also agreement that the detail covered in Box A was insufficiently detailed, not delving into elements such as domestic abuse. Once again, CYP were concerned that this lack of detail would make

practitioners susceptible to ‘skimming’ over the important discussion points.

Strand 2 – Understanding sexual health and wellbeing

Discussion of draft Guidance Introductory text

- 2.17 Overall, participants were critical of the introductory information set out in Strand 2. The use of the terms ‘experiencing’ and ‘authentic contexts’ were deemed vague and confusing. The general terminology used in the early part of the text was deemed to contain too much jargon and referenced subjects beyond RSE. For instance, the wording of “how living things grow” reminded participants of plant biology, rather than people or young adults. Furthermore, one participant stated that the term life cycle “makes me think of a butterfly instead of puberty.”
- 2.18 However, there was consensus that the second two paragraphs of the text were more coherent and easier to understand, with a clear focus. In particular, there was support for an emphasis on understanding the outcomes of the decisions made relating to sexual health and relationships.

Discussion of Table

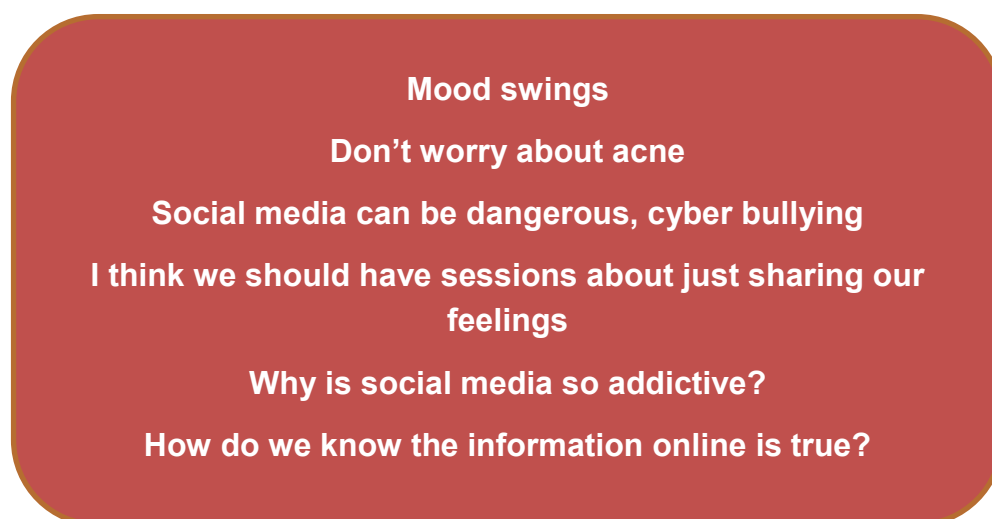
- 2.19 The response to the content set out in the tables was supportive, with participants encouraged by the inclusion of certain topics that were hitherto not part of the current Personal and social education framework (PSE). They reflected positively on the use of the term ‘mutual respect’ as they felt it was easy to understand. On the other hand, the use of the word “outlook” led to some confusion with some participants stating it made them think of the email server instead of referring to a particular viewpoint. The use of the word “consent” was supported strongly, as this was described as an important element of a healthy relationship. There were questions from participants as to whether the content set out in the table in Strand 2 would be taught to

both groups of boys and girls together or separately, with the view that it should be together.

- 2.20 When asked to rank the boxes within the table, participants frequently considered the content set out in Box A to be the most important element of the Strand. Importantly, there was consensus from participants across the workshops that recognising the characteristics of positive, healthy relationships as set out in Box A should be caveated with an understanding of the characteristics of negative, abusive and harmful relationships as well. Participants felt this would serve as a point of comparison and was deemed important as they felt children needed to be aware of what is unhealthy as well as healthy. Furthermore, participants claimed that teaching about positive relationships alone presented an unrealistic view of relationships, as not all relationships are positive and thus the guidance would not be adequately preparing students for the reality of negative relationships later on in life. On this subject, participants felt there was a tendency for practitioners to be patronising and that the topic should be taken more seriously.
- 2.21 Overall, there was agreement that Box B in Strand 2 was clear to understand. Participants were pleased with the inclusion of the term 'online' as well as 'offline' as they felt that the virtual aspect of having sexual experiences was an important part of life today. Participants stated the importance of covering this at an earlier stage in children's lives when compared to previous teachings of RSE, given that CYP have access to online content at an early age.
- 2.22 Box C was met with positively, with the note that well-being was not mentioned and potentially should be included. The absence of the menstrual cycle in this Box was also noted as a missing component. Participants responded positively to the explicit mention of hormones in Box C, which they felt was not included in the previous curriculum. The reference of 'throughout adulthood' was regarded as a worthy inclusion given that hormones can affect emotional and physical health continually.

- 2.23 Participants stated that the content of Box D was easy to understand. Furthermore, it was ranked as the second most important element following Box A. Participants considered having knowledge of sexual reproductive health including STIs and fertility as essential in the teaching of RSE. Specifically, participants referenced the need for male infertility to be talked about more given the tendency to predominately focus on female infertility when discussing the topic.
- 2.24 As for Box E, the insertion of 'reliable sources' was seen as notable and something they felt needed to be taught in schools. Participants viewed this as closely linked to the issue of women's safety and the wider topic of healthy relationships. Participants also interpreted a link with the topic of consent and stressed the importance of learning about it when growing up.
- 2.25 When ranking the importance of different content when teaching RSE at primary school level (that is, the boxes under the heading of Developing Years, approximately ages 8-11) there was a level of consensus amongst the participants. Learning skills to manage self-care and personal hygiene, as well as reproductive health, was deemed to be of high importance. Similarly, developing knowledge and understanding of how reproductive organs develop was ranked highly. Similarly to the adolescence stage, the content surrounding reliable sources was ranked lower at the developing years stage by the participants.
- 2.26 As previously identified this workshop was delivered taking account of school policies in this area. The work produced by the learners on what they wanted to see included in RSE reflected some of the topics within each of the content boxes. Phrases and content produced by them identified areas concerned with puberty, personal hygiene, relationship and information and support. There was however less identification concerned with reproductive production including menstrual health.

Figure 2: Topics listed by primary school learners that they would want to be covered in Strand 2



Strand 3 – Fostering safety and respect, being valued and supported

Discussion of draft Guidance Introductory text

- 2.27 Participants felt that the introduction text for Strand 3 was succinct and easy to understand, with a sense that the content was more 'user-friendly' than the introductory text for Strand 2 due to sentences that flowed and read better. There was a positive response amongst participants to certain terminology used in the text. This included the wording 'safe and respected' and 'violence against women, domestic abuse and sexual violence' which participants felt included all forms of discrimination. Some participants expressed the desire for domestic abuse to come first in the latter phrase, so as to highlight its importance. They also felt that this highlighted the importance of the balance between teaching on the one hand, and the opportunity to discuss choices with them on the other.
- 2.28 Nevertheless, the strand title wording was questioned, specifically 'fostering' which participants concluded could be interpreted as referring to CYP exclusively in the fostering system. The use of the word 'promoting' was suggested instead. Furthermore, due to the length of the intro text, participants stated that it would benefit from

being broken up into more paragraphs. Participants also felt that the meaning of 'concept of consent' needed to be explained. As was the case with the other two strands, the use of 'authentic contexts' was criticised with the suggestion of 'safe environment' to be used in its place.

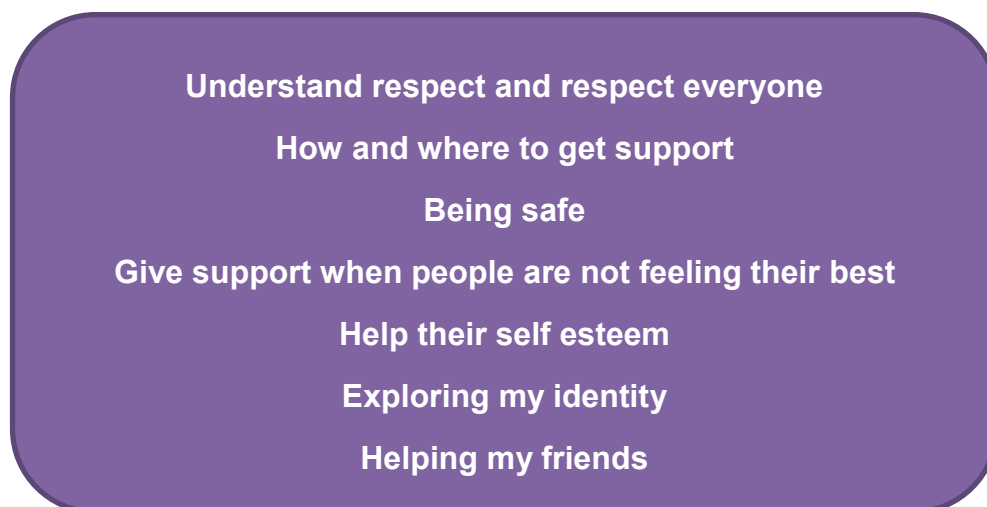
- 2.29 There was a concern that Violence to Women, Domestic Abuse and Sexual Violence should make specific reference to the issue affecting not just women but also men.

Discussion of Table

- 2.30 When asked to look through the content set out in the table of Strand 3, participants felt it was generally straightforward and to the point, covering the basics that needed to be taught in school without any major omissions. Box A refers to a how we respond to behaviours which are discriminatory, disrespectful, and harmful. Participants interpreted this to include 'cat-calling' and approved of its inclusion as a "step in the right direction" towards the wider need to be respectful and to raise awareness that it is a criminal offence. The term 'a sense of responsibility was received positively in this context.
- 2.31 Participants felt the area covered in Box B was relevant, specifically gathering the correct information online given the unreliability of sources in that space. It was suggested by participants that the phrase 'to learn about oneself' should be changed 'to learn about yourself'.
- 2.32 There was agreement across the workshops that both boxes C and D were straightforward, concise, and easy to understand. Some participants felt that Box C was the right space to add in the importance of protection during sex. Participants stated, in reference to Box D, that there was a widespread lack of awareness amongst learners their age of the laws in place to protect from discrimination, violence, abuse, and neglect, and therefore, were pleased at its inclusion in the guidance.

- 2.33 In terms of the ranking of the boxes in Strand 3, Box C, understanding the nature of consent in all relationships, not just sexual, was considered to be of high importance, with participants interpreting it as part of the wider theme of protection. It was stated that the topic of how to say no to sex without guilt should be covered as part of this. This topic of consent was also viewed as the most important aspect of the Strand when taught at the developing years phase, which includes elements such as the right to privacy, bodily autonomy, and keeping safe.
- 2.34 Participants ranked Box B to be the second most important but felt there was a need for examples of reliable and evidence-based sources of information to be provided to CYP.
- 2.35 Participants felt that although the document talked about laws that would protect individuals, it was not clear how individuals would learn skills and techniques to deal with aggressive and bullying behaviour if they were targeted for being a member of the LGBTQ+ group.
- 2.36 When Primary school learners explored what content should be included in this strand, they identified a range of themes, although as described earlier the word “foster” did cause some confusion as it was believed that this was related to children who had been fostered. Here the content learners deemed relevant clearly matched the columns around this age group in relation to equity and respect, support, safety but nothing related the issue of laws to protect individuals.

Figure 3: Topics listed by primary school learners that they would want to be covered in Strand 3



3. Additional Information

RSE Content

- 3.1 To provide context for the information set out in the three strands, participants were first asked to lay out what they should be included in RSE as part of the new Curriculum for Wales. Participants agreed that there needs to be more diversity within the subject matter beyond heterosexuality, with gender identity and different sexualities incorporated into lessons. Identifying and recognising the signs of healthy and unhealthy relationships, including domestic, physical, and sexual abuse was highlighted as important as part of protecting CYP.
- 3.2 Participants thought that teen pregnancy needed to be rethought to not just focus on preventative methods but also on how and where to receive support and help following conception. In RSE, participants deemed a need for more emphasis on contraception, specifically the types of pill, its potential side effects, and the different reasons for taking it, so as to help people advocate for it. The general topics of puberty and consent were also discussed, as was debunking common myths on the subject.
- 3.3 Many of the groups requested that once the final published guidance and code are completed that a CYP friendly version should be published simultaneously.

How RSE is taught

- 3.4 Participants highlighted that when they had been taught RSE in school they had been divided into groups of males and females for certain elements of the lesson. There was consensus amongst participants that all learners should learn everything necessary regardless of gender and thus in any future application of RSE, groups should not be divided.
- 3.5 In terms of delivery, participants felt that a handful of practitioners need to be specially trained on the subject and subsequently teach all

lessons on RSE. Participants felt that in the past practitioners had been uncomfortable teaching RSE and thus had rushed or missed entire key elements on the topic. In reference to the guidance, there were questions as to whether it was suitably adapted to CYP with learning disabilities and additional learning needs.

- 3.6 Throughout the pandemic, the participants had been under the impression that RSE lessons had been completely forgotten about in school settings. They emphasised the need for them to be re-prioritised and be given as much importance as other academic subjects. In general, it was commented that RSE needs to be spread out across multiple lessons in detail instead of being covered in one short session.

Annex A – Definition of RSE

Relationships and Sexuality Education (RSE) Statutory Guidance and Code

Background

The curriculum for RSE will be delivered within the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC). By doing this your school will be working to improve your position – so you can fully enjoy your rights and live-in societies that acknowledge and respect those rights.

Definition of RSE

A rights and equity based RSE curriculum helps ensure that all learners can develop an understanding of how people’s faith, beliefs, human rights and cultures are related to all aspects of RSE and how these rights can contribute to the freedom, dignity, well-being and safety of all people. Therefore, schools and settings should discuss RSE in the context of the Rights protected by the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child.

RSE should support learners to develop the knowledge, skills and values to understand how relationships and sexuality shape their own lives and the lives of others. Learners should be equipped and empowered to seek support on issues relating to RSE and to advocate for self and others.

Question

Group or
organisation.....

Do you think that the definition of RSE is clear?

If No, please add in anything you think should be included.

Annex B – Strand 1 – Developing and expressing identity and forming relationships

This strand provides authentic contexts for learning that, and experiencing how, people of all ages are both unique individuals and members of families, various groups and communities.

Learners should be given the opportunity to understand the different roles that they can play, both with their peers and with the adults in their lives, to develop their self-confidence, to have the confidence to speak up for themselves and to speak out in defence of others. At the appropriate period, their understanding of others and their ability to empathise should be supported to grow.

As learners develop, they can begin to explore how people’s identity and individuality can be influenced and shaped by their personal experiences, interactions, and relationships with others.

Gradually learners should be supported to understand how aspects of identity and individuality, including LGBTQ+ diversity, sex, gender and sexuality, develop and change over time. Being able to identify and value the things that connect individuals is as important as understanding the things that make us different and unique.

Having an awareness of how opinions about others are formed can help to develop a considered view of oneself as well as a celebration of diversity among others.

Developing years (approximately age 8-11)	Adolescence (approximately age 12-16)
How demonstrating empathy, kindness and compassion are key characteristics of a positive relationship.	A. Characteristics of equitable, consensual and loving relationships.
An understanding of what characterises the nature of different families and range of relationships.	B. An understanding of the importance of connections with others and how these contribute to shaping our identity.
An understanding of the characteristics and value/benefits/challenges of living in a diverse society	C. Valuing safe, healthy and equitable relationships in a range of contexts (including marriage, and all types of civil partnership).
An awareness of how social and cultural norms, roles and stereotypes shape perceptions around body-image, behaviour and health.	D. An understanding of how social and cultural norms shape feelings about body image, behaviour and health and strategies to counteract.
	E. How and why attitudes towards diversity are changing (including gender and sexual diversity)

Annex C – Strand 2 - Understanding sexual health and wellbeing

This strand provides authentic contexts for learning about how living things grow, reproduce, and have a life cycle.

Early on in this development, you will experience contexts for understanding the importance of maintaining personal health and well-being,

As you develop, teaching and learning should focus on exploring how physical changes have an impact on your well-being and relationships.

It should also focus on developing understanding of the possible outcomes of the decisions made relating to sexual health and relationships.

Developing years (approximately age 8-11)	Adolescence (approximately age 12-16)
The knowledge and understanding of how reproductive organs develop in a human body and the processes of reproduction, including what supports menstrual health and wellbeing.	A. How to recognise the characteristics and positive aspects of healthy relationships which include mutual respect, consent; and shared outlook.
A gradual awareness in understanding that there can be both intended and unintended outcomes of developing relationships, including offline and online	B. Knowledge and understanding that there can be both intended and unintended outcomes of having sexual experiences including offline and online.
The knowledge and understanding of how puberty triggers significant physical, emotional, social, and cognitive changes for everyone.	C. The knowledge and understanding of how hormones continue to affect emotional and physical health throughout adulthood.
The skills needed to manage self-care, personal hygiene and the importance of menstrual well-being and reproductive health for everyone.	D. The knowledge and understanding of the causes, symptoms and impact of conditions and illnesses connected to sexual and reproductive health such as fertility, sexually transmitted infections and linked to menstrual health and wellbeing.
The ability to understand that there are many reliable sources of information and support.	E. The ability to identify reliable sources of information and how to seek support and facilitate self-care.

Annex D – Strand 3 – Fostering safety and respect, being valued and supported

This strand provides authentic contexts for learning and experiencing that everyone needs to be cared for to grow and thrive.

You have a right to be safe and respected within an environment, which provides for that. As learners, you will develop understanding of the impact of different types of behaviour on others – both what you say and what you do - and the importance of self-regulation to ensure all peers rights are respected.

You should be taught that you have a right to be free from all forms of discrimination, violence, abuse and neglect is enabled by trusted adults who support your safety, as well as through legal protections that exist for all including consideration of the Violence against Women, Domestic Abuse and Sexual Violence.

You will be able to understand the concept of consent and be confident to draw upon available support if you are concerned about safety. You will also develop the ability to behave in a respectful and supportive way.

Developing years (approximately age 8-11)	Adolescence (approximately age 12-16)
An understanding of the importance of equity and respect in all interpersonal behaviours including online and to recognise when to challenge and seek support.	A. A sense of responsibility to others including how we respond to behaviours which are discriminatory, disrespectful and harmful including online.
How to seek support for oneself and offer support to others.	B. The ability to identify reliable and evidence-based sources of information, including online, and to learn about oneself, feelings, bodies and relationships with others.
An understanding of the right to privacy, bodily autonomy and the importance of consent and keeping safe, including online.	C. An understanding of the nature of consent in sexual relationships within different contexts, including online
An awareness that there are laws in place to protect us from discrimination, violence, abuse and neglect.	D. An understanding of laws that are in place to protect us from all forms of discrimination, violence, abuse and neglect.

Annex E – Primary Workshop

Draft Curriculum for Wales guidance and code for Relationships and Sexuality Education (RSE)- Health and Well-being Area of Learning and Experience.

Background

The Health and Well-being Area of Learning and Experience provides a holistic structure for understanding health and well-being. The fundamental components of this Area are physical health and development, mental health, and emotional and social well-being

What is RSE?

RSE should support learners to develop the knowledge, skills and values to understand how relationships and sexuality shape their own lives and the lives of others. Learners should be equipped and empowered to seek support on issues relating to RSE and to advocate for self and others.

Workshop

Objective

To seek the view of pupils on the topics areas they think need to be included in the new RSE guidance.

Approach

1. Go over the class agreement
2. Pupils will be asked to work in small groups of 3/4 in number to respond to the following question.

Script

We are helping the Welsh Government and schools write some ideas about what could be included in the new curriculum about relationships and sexuality education guidance.

We want you to think and tell us about what you would like to see included.

Some of these issues you may have learnt about already, but others might be new, and you would like to know more about them.

You have been provided with magazines pages and other pictures which you can cut up and stick on the large sheets of paper. If there isn't a picture that represents what you think, then you can either draw your own picture or just write it down on the sticky pad and put it on the sheet.

3. Each group will look at least one of the following issues:
 - A. Understanding yourself and making positive relationships
 - B. Understanding the importance of sexual health and well being
 - C. Being valued, keeping yourself safe and respecting others
4. *(Subject to school agreement)* As a last activity, they will be asked to work individually to come up with any questions that they would like answered which they have thought of as they were doing this workshop. They will be placed in a box and answered in another short session with the group before the end of term.

5. Materials

Large sheets of paper, range of magazine pages, pens/pencils, scissors, and sticky notes.

6. Time allocated.

1 hour 30 mins