



NCCA

An Chomhairle Náisiúnta
Curraim agus Measúnachta
National Council for
Curriculum and Assessment

FAQ document for media

Relationships and Sexuality

Education Primary and Post-

Primary

Relationships and Sexuality Education (RSE)

1. What is Relationships and Sexuality Education (RSE)?

Relationships and Sexuality Education (RSE) is a key component of Social, Personal, and Health Education (SPHE). RSE involves teaching and learning about all aspects of relationships and sexuality in an age and stage appropriate manner. It is primarily concerned with helping children and young people learn how they can create and maintain healthy, positive relationships—with self, family, friends and other relationships (including as they mature, romantic relationships). You can see the curricula for primary and post-primary schools at the links below.

- [SPHE Primary](#)
- [SPHE Junior Cycle](#)
- [SPHE Senior Cycle](#)

2. Has the RSE curriculum been reviewed?

Yes, at the request of the Minister for Education, the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA) undertook a major review of RSE in primary and post-primary schools (June 2018-Dec 2019). The review included an examination of the RSE curriculum, the approach to teaching and learning, supports needed, and ways to improve the experience of RSE for students. The review engaged large numbers of students, parents, teachers, school leaders, researchers and organisations, with a view to gaining a full appreciation of the nature of young people's needs and experience of RSE. The report on the review was published in December 2019 and is available here: <https://ncca.ie/media/4462/report-on-the-review-of-relationships-and-sexuality-education-rse-in-primary-and-post-primary-school.pdf>.

3. What did the review find?

The review was comprehensive and wide reaching, and here are some of the main findings:

- **RSE provision** - The evidence from this review suggests that there is considerable variation in the provision of RSE across schools in terms of what is being taught, how it is taught, who teaches it and the time allocated to it. The review found that many students' experiences of RSE were not adequate or relevant to their needs. For most students, their experience of RSE can be summed up *as too little, too late and too biological*.
- **An integrated approach** - The review highlighted the need to create an integrated curriculum that sets out the learning for SPHE/RSE in a clear, coherent and comprehensive manner from primary to post-primary school.
- **Updated content** - The review drew attention to the importance of revisiting and updating the curriculum for RSE. In redeveloping the curriculum, the following were identified as topics needing to be addressed:
 - For primary:
 - Consent (introducing consent as a core principle relevant to all interpersonal relationships)
 - Safe use of the phone/internet
 - Different family structures, including LGBT families
 - Love and attraction, including same-sex attraction
 - Gender identity (how a person sees themselves as male/female).
 - For post-primary:
 - Consent
 - Healthy, positive sexual expression
 - The effects of the internet and social media on relationships and self-esteem
 - Pornography
 - Gender and sexual discrimination and violence
 - Social and cultural norms and expectations as they relate to relationships and sexuality
 - LGBTQI+ matters
- **Time allocation** - There is a need to review the allocation of time that is recommended for SPHE/RSE at both primary and post-primary levels to ensure that the important learning in this subject can be adequately addressed.

- **Professional Development:** The review identified a need for enhanced professional development in the area of RSE for pre-service and in-service teachers at both primary and post-primary level. The review has highlighted the unique knowledge, skills and dispositions that are needed by teachers of SPHE/RSE. This makes specialist training for educators, and in particular for upper primary and post-primary teachers, crucial.

4. What is happening as a result of the review?

Interim guidance

Developing an updated and comprehensive SPHE/RSE curriculum that meets the needs of children and young people is a priority action. However, this takes time. Curriculum development work in SPHE/RSE is taking place within the context of a wider review of the primary curriculum and senior cycle currently underway. To support the immediate needs of teachers, the NCCA has developed interim guidance in the form of online toolkits. The support materials published in these toolkits provide guidance on how the current SPHE curricula can be approached in a more holistic and inclusive way. The support materials developed to date are available here:

- [Primary](#)
- [Junior Cycle](#)
- [Senior Cycle](#)

These support materials will be added to over the coming months.

Resources

The NCCA has created online 'portals' where current and future resources in SPHE/RSE can be accessed by teachers and school leaders. These resources have been carefully selected to support teachers in planning for teaching and learning in SPHE. They are not a prescriptive list of teaching resources as each teacher/school and class will decide what resources are best suited to their needs. These resources have been selected because they were developed

by a State agency or organisation with a proven educational track record in the area of SPHE/RSE. The resources have been carefully mapped against the learning outcomes /learning objectives of the SPHE curricula to facilitate planning. You can view these at the links above under the section 'Resources for Teaching and Learning'.

5. How is the curriculum developed? Who decides?

In NCCA, curriculum development work is carried out on behalf of Council by boards and development groups. To provide a strong, representative and responsive basis for its curriculum development work, NCCA establishes development groups to undertake specific tasks in curriculum areas or subjects. Members of development groups are nominated by the partners in education and include representatives of teachers, school management and parents. In addition, two members are co-opted through a process that involves a public call for expressions of interest. Two development groups support NCCA's current work on RSE, one for the primary curriculum and a second for the post-primary curriculum. The groups' members bring a wide range of relevant experience and expertise, as illustrated at:

<https://ncca.ie/en/about-ncca/boards-and-development-groups>

Decisions about what to include in the curriculum are based on research, best practice and deliberation, as well as extensive consultation with parents/guardians, principals, teachers and children/young people themselves. To find out more about our structures, visit <https://ncca.ie/en/about-ncca/about-us/what-we-do/>.

6. What can we expect from a new curriculum?

The topics and learning outcomes for an updated SPHE/RSE curriculum have not yet been decided. However, as mentioned above, the review of RSE highlighted certain topics as being important in the new curriculum. During the review, there was agreement on the need to move towards a more comprehensive and holistic approach to RSE. In addition, there was agreement that SPHE/RSE should be relevant to the needs of children and young people today and inclusive of diverse identities and backgrounds. Curriculum updating will be reflective of these recommendations, which were set out in the Final Review Report (NCCA, 2019). Furthermore, in developing the curriculum, significant work goes into ensuring that

learning is age-appropriate for the child/young person at any given stage of their learning. In NCCA, curriculum development is a highly consultative process that involves engagement with a range of stakeholders, including parents.

7. When can we expect a revised SPHE curriculum?

The NCCA is committed to developing an updated curriculum for SPHE (inclusive of RSE) spanning both primary and post-primary education. Work on updating the junior cycle SPHE/RSE curriculum starts soon, and a draft updated junior cycle specification will be available for public consultation in early 2022. When this work is completed, the focus will move to senior cycle and the primary curriculum. As the work at primary and post-primary develops, there will be a great deal of engagement with the key education stakeholders as well as opportunities for public consultation. All this feedback informs the final curriculum. Keep an eye on our website to find out about developments and to have your say.

8. Will all schools teach it?

There is a national curriculum for SPHE (including RSE) that is taught across all primary and post-primary schools. The curriculum is developed by the NCCA for all school settings.

9. Do parents have a say in all of this?

Yes, parents are the primary educators of their children and important partners in curriculum and assessment developments. The NCCA always seeks out and listens to the voice of parents and will continue to do this as an updated SPHE/RSE curriculum is developed. Parents have a voice through two main channels. Firstly, the National Parents Council, (Primary and Post Primary) is a member of the NCCA Council and is represented on all boards and curriculum development groups, including the SPHE/RSE development groups. In addition, NCCA involves parents in conversations and consultations as draft specifications are developed. This is facilitated in a variety of ways – through bilateral meetings with representative groups, focus group meetings, public consultation events, surveys and written submissions, all of which are publicised via the NCCA website and social media channels.

10. How can I find out more about developments in RSE?

To keep up to date with information about the developments in RSE visit our website www.ncca.ie and follow our social media accounts (Twitter @NCCAie, Instagram @NCCA_irl and Facebook @NCCA).