



Department
for Education

Relationships Education, Relationships and Sex Education, and Health Education in England

Government consultation response

July 2025

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Introduction

This is the first update to the Relationships Education, Relationships and Sex Education and Health Education (RSHE) guidance 2019. The Department made a commitment to review the accompanying statutory guidance three years from first teaching and every three years subsequently.

The review of the guidance was announced in May 2023 by the previous government. As part of the review process the Department for Education sought initial suggestions for any changes or amendments from stakeholders. Under the previous government an independent panel was convened, with the aim of considering how age limits could be applied to certain subjects. Further to this, a new draft of the statutory guidance was published for consultation, seeking the public's views on the changes made. The consultation ran for 8 weeks, from 16 May 2024 to the 11 July 2024 and was open for any member of the public to complete.

The revised guidance is statutory (issued under Section 80A of the Education Act 2002 and section 403 of the Education Act 1996, which means that schools must have regard to it¹), and will come into force from 1 September 2026. This means that schools have until that date to revise their curriculums and policies, in line with the amended guidance, and consult parents beforehand. We have, therefore published the final version of the guidance alongside this response

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/relationships-education-relationships-and-sex-education-rse-and-health-education>, so that schools have sufficient time to do this.

The existing statutory guidance ([Relationships Education, Relationships and Sex Education and Health Education 2019 guidance](#)) will remain in force until 31 August 2026, although we encourage schools to implement the new and amended RSHE content ahead of the implementation deadline if they are able to.

¹ Health education is compulsory for all state-funded schools only, as independent schools that are not academies are already required to teach health education under their requirement to teach Personal, Social, Health and Economic Education).

Rationale and guiding principles

The update to the guidance reflects that, even in the short time since RSHE was made statutory, the world in which children are growing up has become increasingly complex, including online, and that is having a profound effect on their lives and how they build relationships.

Our guiding principles in carrying out this review remain the same as for the 2019 guidance:

- RSHE should prepare young people for the complexities of the world they are growing up in, and give them the tools to stay happy, safe, and healthy, and to act respectfully towards others and keep themselves and others safe.
- The role of parents and carers in the development of their children's understanding about these subjects is vital. Parents are the first teachers of their children.
- All of the subject content must be age and developmentally appropriate.
- RSHE must be taught sensitively and inclusively, with respect for the backgrounds and beliefs of pupils and parents.
- Schools must have flexibility to shape their curriculum according to the needs of their pupils and communities.

Consultation exercise

The Department received in total 14,369 online, emailed and postal responses to the consultation. While we received a large volume of responses, the results are still only representative of those who completed the survey so cannot be taken as representative of the views of the population in England.

The consultation responses were analysed by Nous Group using a combination text and statistical analysis approach. Nous's executive summary of responses can be found at Annex A.

Profile of respondents

Individual submissions make up 92% of responses, 8% submitted on behalf of an organisation. Of those submitting as individuals:

50% were parent / carers

25% other (not covered by the categories given)

23% teachers

7% students

6% medical professional

5% pastoral care or student support

5% school or college leader

4% designated safeguarding lead

3% school or college governor

3% N/A

Of those responding on behalf of an organisation, the majority came from schools (52%) followed by charities (17%).

Consultation responses do not necessarily represent the population view and key groups are often over- or under-represented. It should be noted that respondents were asked to self-identify (for example parent or young person) and it is possible that some may have misrepresented themselves.

Context

In considering the findings of the consultation we should recognise the following limitations.

- Participation in the consultation is self-selected. It is not a representative sample and cannot be generalised across the entire population.
- The consultation received 14,369 responses through survey, postal and email submissions. Parents/carers were the largest cohort of respondents (46% overall). 21% were teachers and 7% students. Organisational responses represent 8% of responses but may also represent the views of individuals and not the organisation as a whole. Schools (4% overall) were more strongly represented than colleges (less than 1% overall).
- The report reflects the views of respondents. It does not make any inferences, connections or add detail which has not been provided by respondents.

Summary of responses received and the government's response to the consultation

This section sets out a summary of the responses that we received. It also sets out where we have decided to make additional changes as a result of consultation responses.

The responses have been important in shaping and strengthening RSHE guidance and we are grateful to respondents for sharing their views. We have taken all responses into account and in some cases made changes to the guidance as a result.

Not every respondent submitted an answer to every question. The number of responses analysed below therefore varies from question to question. Throughout the response document, percentages are expressed as a measure of those answering each question, not as a measure of the total responses.

Due to rounding, percentage figures may not always add up to 100%.

This analysis does not include issues raised which were outside the scope of the consultation and/or the scope of the guidance.

The consultation questionnaire asked a total of 49 questions. The first 10 related to demographics. Questions 11 – 52 were related to proposed changes within the guidance, of which, 15² questions were to give an opportunity for respondents to provide additional comments to support their answer.

² Open text questions 14, 16, 19, 21, 23, 25, 27, 37, 39, 44, 46, 48, 50, 51, 52

Feedback on the Guidance

Review timetable and Structure of the guidance

Question 11: Do you agree that we move away from a rigid commitment to review the guidance every three years?

We received 14,126 responses to this question.

Answer	Total	Percent
Yes	6,956	49%
No	7,170	51%

Question 12: Do you agree that the changes to the length and style of the guidance make it easier to follow?

We received 13,855 responses to this question

Answer	Total	Percent
Yes	9,393	68%
No	4,462	32%

Consultation findings

Respondents were split on altering the timetable for reviewing the guidance with students and charities more in favour of keeping the 3-year timeframe.

68% were in favour of these changes to the length and style of the guidance. The strongest support for these changes to the guidance came from schools and teachers (73%) and the weakest support came from charities and LA's (54%).

Government response

Prior to the publication of the 2019 RSHE statutory guidance, the sex and relationships guidance from the Department had not been updated since 2000. While there was no legal requirement to review the guidance every three years, the Department agreed to this timetable to guard against such a long gap being left again and to ensure that the guidance remains current.

However, the Department's view is that changing the guidance every three years is impractical, as it barely gives schools time to embed and assess the revised curriculum,

and we know that most schools update their teaching anyway. We propose to undertake a technical review every three years and a full content review every six years. The technical review will update any factual inaccuracies and new legislation but not otherwise seek to make changes to the content that schools have to teach.

Changes to the length and style of the guidance were supported by a majority of respondents. Some respondents expressed concerns that there is too much additional content in the guidance, in response to question 49 which asked about specific additions. We have made additional changes to the structure to keep the document clear and concise, including moving the curriculum tables further towards the front of the guidance.

Schools' relationships and sex education policies

Question 13: Do you agree that these changes [the changes on openness with parents] will do enough to ensure that schools are transparent with parents and that parents have sufficient control regarding what their child is learning?

We received 13,930 responses to this question

Answer	Total	Percent
Yes	9,304	67%
No	4,626	33%

Consultation Findings

Almost two thirds (67%) of parents agreed with the changes to the section on relationships and sex education policies, with some respondents saying that schools should follow this guidance and be open to feedback from parents.

Of the 33% who disagreed, some respondents thought that it did not go far enough.

Government response

We have updated this section so parents can better understand what content they can withdraw their child from and how schools will answer questions that might be deemed inappropriate for the child's age. We have maintained the additional detail contained within the consultation draft on how parents can view curriculum materials, which is now in a separate section titled "Openness with parents" (see below).

The consultation draft also introduced a new section setting out some guiding principles for the guidance. We have retained this section, which stresses the importance of transparency with parents and age-appropriateness, and have added some other key

principles based on evidence from [our 2024 research report on teaching to prevent sexual abuse](#), as well as principles endorsed by expert stakeholders, such as the Sex Education Forum's evidence-based [Principles of Good RSE](#). New principles include the importance of meaningful engagement with pupils to ensure that the curriculum is relevant and engaging, building positive attitudes and skills and promoting healthy norms about relationships, careful sequencing, participative education and a whole school approach to wellbeing and positive relationships, supported by other school policies, including behaviour and safeguarding policies.

Openness with parents

Question 15: Do you agree with our proposed approach to increased transparency on RSHE material?

We received 14,027 responses to this question

Answer	Total	Percent
Yes	10,591	76%
No	3,436	24%

Consultation Findings

76% of respondents agreed with the changes to the section on openness with parents, with some respondents saying that schools should follow this guidance and be open to feedback from parents.

24% of respondents disagreed with the proposed changes to the section on openness with parents. Some felt that the guidance needed to go further and provide more transparency, whilst others felt that there was no issue with the current level of transparency or that sharing the material without context could have negative implications such as being used by bad faith hate groups.

Government response

We have retained the revised section on openness with parents. This section builds on the content in the 2019 guidance. The section makes clear that contractual restrictions with external providers that prevent the sharing of any materials at all with parents are void and unenforceable. The guidance supports sharing materials with parents via online and offline methods, and where that is not possible for the parent, they should be able to take materials home to view them providing they agree not to copy or share further.

There is a public interest in parents being given the opportunity to see materials being used to teach RSHE and this should give them confidence that the topics are being taught appropriately and in a way that safeguards their children.

Flexibility for age limits

This section summarises feedback on age limits. Questions 17, 18, 26 - 43.

Question 17: Do you think this flexibility will help to ensure that pupils are adequately safeguarded?

We received 14,092 responses to this question

Answer	Total	Percent
Yes	6,718	48%
No	7,374	52%

Question 18: Do you think this flexibility is warranted?

We received 14,016 responses to this question

Answer	Total	Percent
Yes	10,465	75%
No	3,551	25%

Consultation Findings

75% of respondents thought that flexibility was warranted, although there were mixed views on whether the flexibility would ensure pupils would be adequately safeguarded. Some respondents commented that the guidance does not provide sufficient flexibility for teachers and schools to act preventatively when addressing safeguarding concerns.

Proposed age limits for certain relationships, sex and health education topics

Primary sex education

Question 26: Do you agree with the restriction on teaching sex education only in years 5 or 6?

We received 14,018 responses to this question

Answer	Total	Percent
Yes	7,193	51%
No	6,825	49%

Consultation Findings

Perspectives were highly varied with no clear direction from the responses. Some respondents felt that the age limits were either too high, too low or unnecessary. Some expressed that teaching sex education should be the responsibility of parents rather than schools. Other views expressed included that primary sex education should be age appropriate, that schools shouldn't be restricted in what or how they teach, and that parents should be consulted.

Secondary topics: Online and Media, Respectful Relationships, including friendships, and Being Safe

Question 28: We have placed an age limit on the following content in the secondary Respectful Relationships, including Friendships topic: What constitutes harmful sexual behaviour and why, and that such behaviour is unacceptable, emphasising that it is never the fault of the person experiencing it. This should not be taught before year 7. Do you agree with this age limit?

We received 13,970 responses to this question

Answer	Total	Percent
Yes	6,414	46%
No	7,556	54%

Question 29: We have placed an age limit on the following content in the secondary Respectful Relationships, including Friendships topic: That some types

of behaviour, including within relationships, are criminal, including violent behaviour and emotional abuse, such as controlling or coercive behaviour. Schools should not, however, teach about the details of violent abuse before Y9 as it is important that pupils are not introduced to distressing concepts when they are too young to understand them. Do you agree with this age limit?

We received 13,968 responses to this question

Answer	Total	Percent
Yes	6,371	46%
No	7,597	54%

Question 30: We have placed an age limit on the following content in the secondary Online and Media topic: About circulating images and information and how to safely report to trusted adults the non-consensual creation or distribution of an intimate image. Pupils should understand that making, keeping or sending naked or sexual images of someone under 18 is a crime, even if the photo is of themselves or of someone who has consented, and even if the image was created by the child and/or using AI generated imagery. Pupils should understand the potentially serious consequences of asking for naked, semi-naked or sexual images, including the potential for criminal charges and severe penalties including imprisonment. This topic should not be taught before year 7. Do you agree with this age limit?

We received 13,954 responses to this question

Answer	Total	Percent
Yes	7,232	52%
No	6,722	48%

Question 31: We have placed an age limit on the following content in the secondary Online and Media topic: The impact of viewing harmful content, including pornography, which presents a distorted picture of sexual behaviours, can damage the way people see themselves in relation to others, and can negatively affect how they behave towards sexual partners. This can affect pupils who see pornographic content accidentally as well as those who see it deliberately. The risks of inappropriate online content can be discussed in an age-appropriate way from year 7, however, the details of sexual acts should not be discussed before year 9. Do you agree with this age limit?

We received 13,973 responses to this question

Answer	Total	Percent
Yes	7,047	50%
No	6,926	50%

Question 32: We have placed an age limit on the following content in the secondary Being Safe topic: The concepts and laws relating to harmful sexual behaviour, including sexual harassment, revenge porn, upskirting and taking/sharing intimate sexual photographs without consent, public sexual harassment, and unsolicited sexual language / attention / touching. This should not be taught before year 7. Do you agree with this age limit?

We received 13,910 responses to this question

Answer	Total	Percent
Yes	7,213	52%
No	6,697	48%

Question 33: We have placed an age limit on the following content in the secondary Being Safe topic: The concepts and laws relating to sexual exploitation, grooming, stalking, and forced marriage. This should not be taught before year 7.

We received 13,918 responses to this question

Answer	Total	Percent
Yes	7,136	51%
No	6,782	49%

Question 34: We have placed an age limit on the following content in the secondary Being Safe topic: The concept and laws relating to sexual violence, including rape and sexual assault. Whilst it's important for pupils to understand the key principles around sexual offences and violence, for example the importance of understanding what consent means, schools should not teach about this in any sexually explicit way before year 9.

We received 13,902 responses to this question

Answer	Total	Percent
Yes	6,836	49%
No	7,066	51%

Question 35: We have placed an age limit on the following content in the secondary Being Safe topic: The physical and emotional damage which can be caused by female genital mutilation (FGM), virginity testing and hymenoplasty, where to find support, and the law around these areas. This should include that it is a criminal offence to perform or assist in the performance of FGM, virginity testing or hymenoplasty, or fail to protect a person under 16 for whom someone is responsible from FGM, or to take girls who are UK nationals abroad for FGM, regardless of whether it is lawful in that country. This should not be taught before year 9, except for where schools have identified a greater risk of FGM at an earlier age or have pupils who have been affected by FGM and need support. Do you agree with this age limit?

We received 13,937 responses to this question

Answer	Total	Percent
Yes	7,045	51%
No	6,892	49%

Question 36: We have placed an age limit on the following content in the secondary Being Safe topic: The concepts and laws relating to domestic abuse including controlling or coercive behaviour, emotional, sexual, economic or physical abuse, and violent or threatening behaviour. Schools should not teach about the details of violent abuse before year 9 as it is important that pupils are not introduced to distressing concepts when they are too young to understand them. Do you agree with this age limit?

We received 13,900 responses to this question

Answer	Total	Percent
Yes	6,307	45%
No	7,593	55%

Consultation Findings

There were mixed views on the age limits. Some respondents commented that content should be taught appropriately and recognised that children have access to social media at early ages so need to understand how to keep themselves safe. Some respondents stated that a lack of knowledge leaves children vulnerable to harmful situations and that FGM can affect girls younger than the proposed age limits, so leaving the age limits in has the potential to do harm. Some responses also stated that content about abuse should be taught before Year 9 in an age-appropriate manner.

Secondary topic: Intimate and sexual relationships, including sexual health

Question 38: This topic includes information about choices around sex, including about when and whether to have sex, about sexual consent, reproductive health, strategies for resisting sexual pressure, facts about contraception, facts about pregnancy and choices around pregnancy, facts about STIs and reducing risks of transmission, facts about the impact of alcohol and drugs on sexual behaviour, and information about where to get help. Explicit discussion of the details of sexual acts should only take place in so far as it is necessary to teach these topics and should not be taught before year 9. Do you agree with the age restriction on the secondary Intimate and sexual relationships, including sexual health topic?

We received 13,917 responses to this question

Answer	Total	Percent
Yes	6,599	47%
No	7,318	53%

Consultation Findings

There were mixed feelings about this age limit with some respondent agreeing and others saying the limit should be lower by 1 – 3 years.

Some respondents expressed concern that education may be too late given the age at which children encounter relevant experiences or risks.

Health and wellbeing

Closed question responses from respondents to the question whether they agree with the age limits within the Health and Wellbeing section.

Question 40: We have placed an age limit on the following content in the primary

Online Safety and Harms topic within health education: why social media, some apps, computer games and online gaming, including gambling sites, are age restricted. This should not be taught before year 3. Do you agree with this age limit?

We received 13,882 responses to this question

Answer	Total	Percent
Yes	8,576	62%
No	5,306	38%

Question 41: We have placed an age limit on the following content in the primary Online Safety and Harms topic within health education: the risks relating to online gaming, video game monetisation, scams, fraud and other financial harms, and that gaming can become addictive. This should not be taught before year 3. Do you agree with this age limit?

We received 13,849 responses to this question

Answer	Total	Percent
Yes	8,507	61%
No	5,342	39%

Question 42: We have placed an age restriction on the whole of the primary Developing Bodies topic within health education. This should not be taught before year 4. This covers:

- growth, change and the changing adolescent body, this topic should include the human lifecycle. Puberty should be mentioned as a stage in this process.
- the key facts about the menstrual cycle, including physical and emotional changes.

Do you agree with this age limit?

We received 13,865 responses to this question

Answer	Total	Percent
Yes	7,544	54%
No	6,321	46%

Question 43: The secondary ‘Health and Wellbeing’ topic is clear that, given the sensitivity and complexity of content on ‘Suicide prevention’, direct references to suicide should not be made before year 8. Do you agree with the limit?

We received 13,684 responses to this question

Answer	Total	Percent
Yes	7,429	54%
No	6,255	46%

Government response

Following careful consideration of the responses to this consultation on flexibility and age limits, the Department has decided not to introduce age limits on certain topics in the RSHE statutory guidance but is clear on the need for content to be age appropriate. On balance, we think it is important not to restrict schools from being able to use their professional judgment over when topics should be taught for the benefit and safety of pupils. Our decision also reflects growing evidence that indicates that risks are affecting children earlier, see the examples in the box below.

The amended guidance stresses that schools are responsible for ensuring that lesson content is age-appropriate, while allowing flexibility to develop a curriculum that meets the needs of their pupils. Schools should consult parents on the content of RSHE and ensure parents are able to see all materials to be used during lessons. This should give teachers the confidence to respond to issues as they arise and give pupils the skills and knowledge they need at the right time. The revised guidance also strengthens the content on sharing materials with parents, so they are fully aware of what their children are being taught and when.

Examples of evidence of the risk affecting younger children

The 2022 Health Behaviour in School-Age Children (HSBC) reported on under-age sexual activity:

- 21% of 15-year-old respondents reported having had sexual intercourse;
- Of those boys were more likely to report the early onset of sexual activity; 13% of boys compared with 6% of girls reported their first sexual intercourse was at 12 years or younger.

In 2024 The new face of digital abuse: Children's experiences of nude deepfakes reported that:

- 13% of teenagers aged 13-17 have had an experience of nude deepfake;
- 88% of parents (of children aged 3-17) agree that children should be taught more about the risks of deepfakes,
- 92% of children aged 13-17 agree that they should be taught about the risks of deepfakes.

A survey of girls and young women aged 7 to 21 in the UK, by Girlguiding in 2024, found that:

- 59% of 13 to 21 year olds said they had seen or experienced sexual harassment. 74% of girls aged 11-16 have seen or experienced sexism, they most commonly face it online (61%), in the media (57%), in public places (51%) and at school, college, university or in their daily life (58%).
- 77% of girls aged 7 to 21 said they have experienced online harm in the last year in 2024.
- 22% of girls aged 7 to 10 said that they had seen 'rude images' online. This has doubled from 11% three years ago.

A report from the Office of the Children's Commissioner in May 2023 showed that:

- The average age for exposure to pornography is 13,
- 10% of over 1000 young people surveyed first saw pornography at age 9.

Sexual orientation and gender reassignment

Question 20: Do you agree with changes to the lesbian, gay and bisexual content in the Lesbian Gay Bisexual and Transgender (LGBT) section (note that the next section provides an opportunity to comment on text about gender identity and gender reassignment)?

We received 13,957 responses to this question

Answer	Total	Percent
Yes	5,009	36%
No	8,948	64%

Question 22: Do you agree with the proposed changes related to gender identity and gender reassignment in the guidance?

We received 14,196 responses to this question

Answer	Total	Percent
Yes	5,411	38%
No	8,785	62%

Consultation Findings

Almost two thirds (64%) of respondents disagreed with the changes to this section. Some reported that they thought the section was harmful and that not teaching LGBT content will cause unwanted, damaging feelings by suggesting being LGBT is something to be kept hidden. Respondents' opinion remains divided though, with some respondents commenting that it is ridiculous that LGBT education is still not fully compulsory and others stating that it should not be taught at all.

Just over three fifths (62%) of respondents did not agree with the changes to the content on gender reassignment. Comments include that you cannot teach about gender reassignment without teaching about gender identity, which teaching about gender identity does not lead children to question their gender but rather promotes respect and tolerance and that not teaching about it is harmful to those students experiencing gender dysphoria. Some respondents expressed concerns about how to teach about gender identity while complying with duties in the Education Act to be politically impartial.

Government response

The majority of consultation responses disagreed with the proposed changes to this section in the consultation draft and we have taken this into account.

Some people feel strongly that parents should be able to prevent their children from being taught about LGB relationships but, in order to foster respectful relationships, it is important that all pupils understand the values of respect, tolerance and kindness. The guidance continues to be clear that pupils should learn about the Equality Act and the protected characteristics during their education, including the protected characteristics of sexuality and gender reassignment. It is also right that faith schools are able to teach about this with their particular faith perspective on this topic.

The revised content encourages primary schools to include same-sex parents when teaching about families and at secondary school LGBT content should be integrated into RSHE programmes of study.

We recognise in the guidance that, beyond the facts and the law about gender reassignment, there is significant public debate. The guidance continues to advise schools that they should teach the facts and law in this area but should be careful not to endorse any particular view or teach it as fact. The guidance also reflects the effect of the recent decision of the Supreme Court in *For Women Scotland*, where the Court found that the terms 'sex', 'man' and 'woman' in the Equality Act 2010 refer to a person's biological sex.

Addressing prejudice, harassment and sexual violence

Question 24: Do you agree that the revised content on addressing prejudice, harassment and sexual violence is a helpful response to evidence of the prevalence of sexual abuse in schools?

We received 13,859 responses to this question

Answer	Total	Percent
Yes	10,674	77%
No	3,185	23%

Consultation Findings

This section was welcomed by stakeholders, with 77% of consultation respondents agreeing with its inclusion. Some respondents said that children need to be taught about these issues before the problems start and were glad to see a focus on helping pupils to

speak up. Some respondents were concerned that introducing this content to children previously unaware may cause harm.

Government response

High-quality relationships education is crucial to tackling sexual violence and abusive behaviour and has an important part to play in the Government's mission to halve violence against women and girls in a decade. New content on sexual harassment and sexual violence was welcomed by respondents, and we have strengthened this content further on the basis of evidence about the harms that young people are exposed to or at risk of.

The consultation draft of the guidance included new content on stalking, public sexual harassment, revenge porn, and upskirting. We have added additional content on financial sexual exploitation, strangulation and suffocation. We have also added content on how to increase personal safety in public spaces, recognising that sexual harassment and abuse are never the fault of the victim.

We have strengthened the content on pornography in secondary relationships education, recognising that young people increasingly turn to pornography for information about sex and that young people are viewing pornography at increasingly young ages.

We know that primary children are increasingly accessing inappropriate content online, and the new curriculum addresses this directly. The guidance allows flexibility for primary schools to teach about sexual imagery online, starting in late primary, where this is an issue in their school.

The curriculum will teach young people about the influence of incel culture and give young people the tools to analyse the norms and assumptions embedded in the content they might find online.

Health and Wellbeing

Question 45. Do you agree with changes to the Health and Wellbeing section of the guidance?

We received 13,362 responses to this question

Answer	Total	Percent
Yes	10,552	79%
No	2,810	21%

Consultation Findings

Almost three-quarters (79%) of respondents agreed with the changes in the health and wellbeing section. Some respondents commented that the guidance is correct in stating that negative feelings do not always point to a mental health concern, although other

respondents were concerned about minimising feelings that might lead to depression. Some respondents also expressed concerns about the lack of training for teachers to deliver some of the content in the health and wellbeing section.

Government response

Based on the positive response to the changes, we have kept the changes made to this section. We want to shift the emphasis so pupils recognise that worrying or feeling down are not signs of a mental health problem if they are transient, but they might be if persistent and severe. We have also added information on building resilience, coping and emotional regulation to the primary curriculum.

Suicide prevention

Question 47: Do you agree with the proposals on suicide prevention as set out above?

We received 13,424 responses to this question

Answer	Total	Percent
Yes	9,232	69%
No	4,192	31%

Consultation Findings

69% of respondents agreed with the proposal on suicide prevention. Some respondents commented that a balance needs to be struck between teaching students and exposing them to content.

Government response

We have retained the content on suicide prevention and made some further amendments to the wording so that it is clear that schools should consider how to safely address suicide prevention by consulting mental health professionals and putting in place high quality, evidence-based staff training before addressing suicide directly with pupils.

We have made clear that existing content on mental wellbeing includes content that would address suicide prevention, such as talking about emotions and looking after one's own, and others, wellbeing. We have allowed teachers to introduce the topic as soon as pupils are ready, taking into account age and experience of pupils, parents views and the confidence and skills of teachers.

We have also included content on eating disorders and self-harm and the importance of seeking specialist help.

Additional topics

Question 49: We added a number of additional areas to the statutory guidance following submissions from other government departments, stakeholders and experts. These include:

- Loneliness
- New content on gambling
- Prevalence of 'deepfakes'
- Antimicrobial resistance
- Healthy behaviours during pregnancy
- Illegal online behaviours including drug and knife supply
- Personal safety, including road, railway and water safety
- Vaping,
- Menstrual and gynaecological health including endometriosis, polycystic ovary syndrome (PCOS), heavy menstrual bleeding
- Parenting and early years brain development
- Virginity testing and hymenoplasty
- Bereavement

Do you agree with this additional content?

We received 13,808 responses to this question

Answer	Total	Percent
Yes	12,349	89%
No	1,459	11%

Consultation Findings

89% of respondents agreed with the proposed additional topics included in the guidance. Some respondents commented that they agreed with the additional content on menstruation and PCOS. Some respondents disagreed with the proposed content on healthy behaviours in pregnancy while others disagreed with the proposed content on virginity testing. Other responses stated there is too much new content proposed.

Comments made more widely included government policy generally, particularly relating to balance of school and parental involvement. Responses also focused on the practicality of the guidance and the need for specific teacher training and other additional implementation support.

Government response

DfE welcomes the support for the inclusion of these additional subjects as they will help to ensure the guidance remains useful by keeping pace with societal and landscape changes children are often required to navigate, as well as help to provide opportunities for children and young people to develop the skills and knowledge they may need for adulthood.

We know that many schools already teach these topics in order to meet the specific needs of their communities, but we also recognise that there is a concern that for some teachers this may be new and therefore have restricted capability and capacity to implement these topics.

To give teachers time to prepare to teach the new content, schools will not be expected to start teaching from the revised guidance until September 2026. We are considering how best to support teachers to deliver the content.

Public Sector Equality Duty

Question 52: Public Sector Equality Duty [PSED]. Do you have any comments regarding the potential impact of the guidance on those who share a protected characteristic under the Equality Act 2010, whether negative or positive? How could any adverse impact be reduced and are there any other ways we could advance equality of opportunity or foster good relations between those who share a protected characteristic and those who do not?

Consultation Findings

There were mixed views on the potential impact of the guidance on those with a protected characteristic, with some saying it would have a positive impact and others stating it would have a damaging impact. Some respondents thought that the guidance would have a positive impact on those with the protected characteristic of sexual

orientation. Others thought it would have a negative impact on those with the protected characteristics of sexual orientation or gender reassignment.

Some respondents talked about the importance of ensuring safeguarding remains at the forefront of the guidance. To reduce the adverse impact of the guidance respondents suggested looking at relevant evidence and talking to teachers and experts.

Some suggestions were made about how focusing on life skills and decision-making is more important to advancing equality of opportunity, and fostering good relations between those who share a protected characteristic and those who do not, than focusing on knowledge and information.

Government Response

We have taken this feedback into account. The 2025 RSHE guidance includes more of a focus on skills, including around working through disagreements and managing conflict. It also includes additional content on sexual violence, recognising that this is often gendered but that schools should not treat boys as the problem and should recognise that they too can be victims of sexual violence.

The section on LGBT has been amended as set out above, and we have retained separate sections on SEND and religion and belief.

Every school in England has existing legal obligations under the Equality Act 2010 to not discriminate unlawfully on the grounds of a protected characteristic. The guidance clearly states that pupils should understand the importance of equality and respect and learn about the law relating to the protected characteristics by the end of their secondary education.

The guidance also creates space for teachers to allow balanced debate to take place on contentious issues.

Annex A: Nous Group Executive Summary

Overview

This report summarises feedback received from respondents in the Government Consultation - Review of the Relationships Education, Relationships and Sex Education (RSE) and Health Education Statutory Guidance. This consultation sought views on proposed revisions to the Relationships Education, Relationships and Sex Education (RSE) and Health Education statutory guidance 2019 to ensure it:

- covers all essential curriculum content
- supports high quality teaching which is inclusive and meets the needs of pupils
- supports schools to develop an open and positive relationship with parents, complementing the role of parents as the primary educators of their children.

Findings should be reviewed considering the following limitations:

- Participation in the consultation is self-selected. It does not represent the population view.
- The consultation included a strong representation from parents/carers (46% of the 15,369 responses). This can 'drown out' other voices in overall statistics. Although the absolute number of responses was lower from other groups, this reflects the smaller cohort in the population at large. For example, the 52 local authority organisational responses are low in absolute terms but represents a good number given that there are only 317 local authorities in England.
- The consultation may overrepresent critical responses. The consultation was voluntary and deliberately sought information on how to improve the Guidance. Individuals who are content with the Guidance may have chosen not to respond.
- Most free-text responses did not answer the Department's specific question. They instead provided general reflections on the Guidance. The consultation sought specific feedback on the Guidance's content, including age limit changes. This formed the basis of most closed text questions. Across all open text questions, respondents frequently spoke more generally about whether they agreed with Government policy. This may have influenced their response to closed text questions.
- The report reflects the views of respondents as they have been provided only. It is not possible to make any inferences, connections or add detail where respondents have not provided this information.

The consultation has shown that topics considered in the survey are highly debated, with broad agreement to content changes and mixed views on age limits.

The analysis indicates there are mixed views on the proposed general changes, content changes and age limits, the position the Department should take and the potential implications of the proposed Guidance.

Respondents agreed with changes to the length and style of the Guidance and were mixed about changes to the rigid requirement to review the Guidance.

- There was no clear majority perspective on the move away from a rigid commitment to review the Guidance every three years (51% disagreed).
- Respondents agreed that the changes to the length and style of the Guidance make it easier to understand and follow (68% agreed).
- Respondents shared a range of perspectives in free text about whether the Guidance would have a positive or negative impact on those with protected characteristics.
- Respondents shared comments stating a position on government policy and that the guidance is harmful in overall feedback. Responses also referenced topics missing from the Guidance.

Respondents agreed with many of the proposed changes to content

- Respondents agreed with many of the proposed changes to content including the 'Schools relationships and sex education policies', 'Openness with parents', 'Addressing prejudice harassment and sexual violence', 'Health and Wellbeing', 'Suicide prevention' and 'Additional topics' topics. (67% - 89% agreement).
- Respondents expressed mixed views on the 'Flexibility for age limits' section (75% believed flexibility is warranted but 52% disagreed the flexibility would ensure adequate safeguarding of pupils).
- Respondents disagreed with the changes to content in the 'Sexual orientation' and 'Gender reassignment' topics (64% and 62% disagreement respectively).

Respondents expressed mixed views on age limits³

Respondents expressed mixed views on age limits for most topics including:

- 'teaching sex education only in years 5 or 6',
- 'teaching of harmful sexual behaviour',
- 'secondary respectful relationships content',
- 'circulating images',
- 'sexually explicit materials',
- 'concepts and laws relating to harmful sexual behaviour',
- 'concepts and laws relating to sexual exploitation',
- 'concepts and laws regarding sexual violence',
- 'concepts and laws regarding female genital mutilation (FGM), virginity testing and hymenoplasty',
- 'violence abuse content',
- 'secondary intimate and sexual relationships content',
- 'Health and Wellbeing – Developing Bodies',

³ Please note that this report treats anything with a <56% majority as providing 'mixed views'.

‘Health and Wellbeing – Suicide prevention’

Respondents agreed with the age limits on: ‘Health and Wellbeing – Social media, apps etc.’ and ‘Health and Wellbeing – Online gaming, scams, fraud etc.’ (62% and 61% agreement respectively).

Analysis of responses from specific stakeholder groups revealed some differences in perspectives

There were no major differences in responses to the feedback on general changes across the different groups.

Those interested in ‘Alternative provision and special schools’ were generally more positive about content changes, while members of ‘Charities and local authorities’ were generally more negative.

‘Charities and local authorities’, ‘Student support or pastoral care member’ and ‘Designated safeguarding leads’ generally expressed greater disagreement with age limits.

Respondents whose ‘Gender at birth is not the same as current’ overwhelmingly (99%) disagreed with the proposed changes to gender identity and gender reassignment in the guidance.

1.1 Context

The Department for Education (the Department) has developed guidance to advise what it is appropriate to teach in RSE and health education, and at what age, to ensure all content is factual and age appropriate. The Department released the Review of the Relationships Education, Relationships and Sex Education (RSE) and Health Education statutory guidance (the Guidance) Draft for Consultation in May 2024. The consultation sought views on proposed revisions to the Relationships Education, Relationships and Sex Education (RSE) and Health Education statutory guidance 2019. It aimed to ensure the guidance:

covers all essential curriculum content

supports high-quality teaching which is inclusive and meets the needs of pupils

supports schools to develop an open and positive relationship with parents, complementing the role of parents as the primary educators of their children.

The consultation was open from 16 May 2024 to 11 July 2024. Respondents were able to provide input through an online system, by email or by post.

This report summarises feedback received from respondents. It includes feedback on the Guidance which may inform finalised changes. It also explores key issues relating to the topic of Relationships Education, RSE and Health Education from the perspective of stakeholder groups that the Department has selected. This provides the Department with targeted insight to inform wider work.

1.2 Considerations and limitations

Section 2 of the full report provides further detail on the consultation methodology. The consultation has several limitations which should be considered when reviewing the findings. These include:

- **The survey response dataset does not represent the population view.** Participation in the consultation is self-selected. It is not a representative sample and cannot be generalised across the entire population. The findings should be viewed considering the demographic composition of respondents.
- **Absolute response numbers for distinct cohorts to not allow the same level of deeper analysis.** The consultation received 14,369 responses through survey, postal and email submissions. Parents/carers are the largest cohort of respondents (46% overall). Fewer teachers (21% overall) and students (7% overall) responded to the consultation overall. This is unsurprising given their lower overall numbers in the population at large. Organisational responses represent 8% of responses but may represent significantly more individual views. Schools (4% overall) were more strongly represented than colleges (less than 1% overall). These numbers are low in the context of number of responses but high in the context of the total number of organisations in England – there are fewer schools than parents in England. It is therefore important to avoid underweighting the insights from smaller respondent cohorts as many both represent wider voices and account for a smaller grouping in society at large.
- **The consultation design may misrepresent respondent perspectives.** The consultation may overrepresent critical or negative responses. The consultation was voluntary and deliberately sought information on how to improve the Guidance. Individuals who are content with the Guidance may have chosen not to respond.
- **Many free-text responses did not** directly answer the Department's specific questions. They instead provided general reflections on the Guidance. The consultation sought specific feedback on the Guidance's content, including age limit changes. This formed the basis of most closed text questions. Across all open text questions, respondents frequently spoke more generally about whether they agreed with Government policy. This may have influenced their response to closed text questions.
- **The report reflects the views of respondents as they have been provided only.** It does not make any inferences, connections or add detail where it has not been

provided by respondents. The report does not make recommendations or tell the Department what to do based on the respondent feedback.

1.3 Feedback on the Guidance

The consultation primarily sought feedback on the content of the Guidance. All closed text responses have been analysed across different demographic views and supplemented with open text insights from a random representative sample of respondents to achieve a 95% confidence rating (n=525).

The consultation has shown that the topic of Relationships, SRE and Health Educations has several different sub-topics within it which are highly debated, particularly in relation to age limits and gender questioning children. Responses indicate broadly positive views about the proposed changes to the guidance, although there were mixed views regarding age limits and negative views regarding proposed changes to the Sexual orientation and Gender reassignment sections. Mixed views were shared throughout on the position that the Department should take in the Guidance and the wider policy position it should take.

There were many instances where open text comments did not directly answer specific questions. They instead provided the respondent perspective without providing feedback on whether the Guidance did or did not deliver on this perspective, for example “Protect Trans kids” (with no further information or feedback given).

The consultation also sought specific feedback on proposed changes to the Guidance. Across all consultation questions, respondents also spoke more generally about the substantive position taken by the Department and potential implications of the Guidance.

1.3.1 Feedback on general changes

The consultation sought specific feedback on general changes and overall feedback. This used both closed and open text questions.

Respondents expressed mixed views on the move away from a rigid commitment to review the Guidance. Respondents agreed with changes to the length and style of the Guidance. Free-text comments were also left in relation to the protected characteristics and the overall feedback.

Respondents' views included:

- 51% disagreed with the move away from a rigid commitment to review the Guidance every three years.
- 68% agreed the changes to the length and style of the Guidance make it easier to understand and follow.
- Respondents shared comments that the Guidance will have a positive impact on those with protected characteristics. Other respondents shared that the Guidance would have a negative impact on those with protected characteristics. Comments

were left regarding the impact on members of the LGBT community.

- Respondents shared comments stating a position on government policy and stating that the Guidance is harmful. Respondents also shared comments on topics missing from the Guidance.

1.3.2 Feedback on content changes

The consultation sought specific feedback on changes to the content, this used both closed and open text questions. Respondents also provided other views in open text questions and agreed with many of the proposed changes. However, they expressed mixed views on the 'Flexibility for age limits' section and disagreed with changes to the 'Sexual orientation' and 'Gender reassignment' section.

Respondents agreed with many of the proposed changes to content

More than half of respondents agreed with proposed changes to content in many of the sections of the guidance. This includes:

- 67% of respondents agreed with changes to the 'Schools relationships and sex education policies' section. Respondents commented that schools should engage parents as described and be open to feedback.
- 76% of respondents agreed with changes to the 'Openness with parents' section. Respondents commented that parents need complete access to the resources and content used when teaching their children about RSE.
- 77% of respondents agreed with the revised content in 'Addressing prejudice, harassment and sexual violence'. Respondents expressed agreement with the section of the Guidance in open-text comment.
- 79% of respondents agreed with changes to the 'Health and Wellbeing' section. Respondents commented that the Guidance is correct in stating that negative feelings does not necessarily mean there are mental health concerns.
- 69% of respondents agreed with the proposal on suicide prevention. Respondents commented that a balance needs to be struck between teaching students and exposing them to content.
- 89% agreed with the additional content. Respondents commented that they agreed with the additional content on menstruation and PCOS.

Respondents expressed mixed views with the 'Flexibility for age limits' section

Respondents expressed mixed views on the proposed 'Flexibility for age limits' section. This includes:

- 52% of respondents disagreed that the flexibility would ensure adequate safeguarding of pupils. Respondents commented that the Guidance does not provide sufficient flexibility for teachers and schools on when to act preventatively when addressing safeguarding concerns.
- 75% of respondents believed flexibility is warranted.

Respondents disagreed with changes to content in the 'Sexual orientation' and 'Gender reassignment' section

A majority of respondents disagreed with proposed changes to content in the 'Sexual orientation' and 'Gender reassignment' section. This includes:

- 64% of respondents disagreed with changes to the content in the 'Sexual orientation' section.

Respondents commented that they believe the LGBT content should be mandatory.

- 62% of respondents disagreed with changes related to gender identity and gender reassignment. Respondents commented that schools should teach gender identity, as students will experience gender dysphoria and be harmed by this.

1.3.3 Feedback on the age limits

The consultation sought specific feedback on age limits. This used both closed and open text questions, respondents also provided other views in open text questions.

Respondents expressed mixed views on the majority of age limits. Respondents did express disagreement with age limits on some 'Health and Wellbeing' topics (social media apps etc. and Online gaming, scams, fraud).

NB: Please note we have treated anything with a <56% majority as providing 'mixed views'.

Respondents expressed mixed views on age limits on most topics

Respondents expressed mixed views on the age limits on a majority of topics. This includes:

- 51% agreed with restriction on teaching sex education only in years 5 or 6. Respondents commented that the age limits were too high, while others commented they were too low.
- 54% disagreed with the age limit set for the teaching of harmful sexual behaviour. Respondents commented. Respondents commented that age-appropriate delivery needs to be in the guidance surrounding intimate relationships, as children should understand that consent is necessary for all types of sexual acts.
- 54% disagreed with the age limit on the teaching of secondary respectful relationships content. Respondents commented that the concept of consent should be introduced earlier.
- 52% agreed with the age limits set on the teaching of circulating images content. Respondents commented that content on pornography should be taught appropriately.
- 52% agreed with the age limits set on sexually explicit materials content. Respondents commented that children have access to social media at early ages so need to understand how to keep themselves safe earlier.
- 52% agreed with the age limit set on the teaching of concepts and laws relating to

harmful sexual behaviour. Respondents commented a lack of knowledge leaves children vulnerable to situations.

- 51% agreed with the proposed age limit on concepts and laws relating to sexual exploitation. Respondents commented a lack of knowledge leaves children vulnerable to situations.
- 51% disagreed with the proposed age limit on the teaching of concepts and laws regarding sexual violence. Respondents commented a lack of knowledge leaves children vulnerable to situations.
- 51% agreed with the proposed age limit on the teaching of concepts and laws regarding FGM, virginity testing and hymenoplasty. Respondents comments a lack of knowledge leaves children vulnerable to situations.
- 55% disagreed with the proposed limit on the teaching of violent abuse content. Respondents commented a lack of knowledge leaves children vulnerable to situations.
- 53% disagreed with the age restriction on secondary intimate and sexual relationships content.
- 54% agreed with the age limit on 'Health and Wellbeing' – 'Developing bodies'. Respondents commented on agreement with the language challenges to the developing bodies section of the Guidance.
- 54% agreed with the age limit on 'Health and Wellbeing' – 'Suicide prevention'. Respondents commented on agreement with the proposed changes regarding suicide content.

Respondents agreed with age limits on two 'Health and Wellbeing' topics.

Respondents agreed with age limits on two 'Health and Wellbeing' topics (social media apps, etc. and Online gaming, scams, fraud). These included:

- 62% of respondents agreed with the age limit on 'Health and Wellbeing' – social media, apps etc.
Respondents commented on disagreement with the proposed changes regarding online content.
- 61% of respondents agreed with the age limit on 'Health and Wellbeing' – Online gaming, scams, fraud etc.

1.4 Analysis of key issues relating to specific stakeholder groups

The report also considers issues relating to Relationships Education, RSE and Health Education for six stakeholder groups across all open and closed text questions:

- alternative provision and special schools
- designated safeguarding leads
- charities and local authorities
- students
- student support or Pastoral care member

- schools and teachers.

Additionally, the report analysed the stakeholder group:

- gender at birth is not the same as current.

Analysis for this group addresses responses for Question 22 and Question 23 only.

The views of the seven stakeholder groups on the Guidance for Relationships Education, RSE and Health Education highlighted some similarities and differences:

- There were no major differences in responses to the feedback on general changes across the different groups.
- Those interested in Alternative provision and special schools were generally more positive about content changes, while members of Charities and Local authorities were generally more negative.
- Charities and Local authorities, Student support or Pastoral care member and Designated safeguarding leads generally expressed greater disagreement with age limits.
- Respondents whose Gender at birth is not the same as current overwhelmingly (99%) disagreed with the proposed changes to gender identity and gender reassignment in the guidance.



Department
for Education

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