

Consultation on the Curriculum and Assessment (Wales) Bill

Evidence submitted to the [Children, Young People and Education Committee](#) for Stage 1 scrutiny of the Curriculum and Assessment (Wales) Bill.

About you

Organisation: Brook / Brook Cymru

1. The Bill's general principles

1.1 Do you support the principles of the [Curriculum and Assessment \(Wales\) Bill](#)?

Yes

1.2 Please outline your reasons for your answer to question 1.1

(we would be grateful if you could keep your answer to around 1500 words)

Brook is a young people's sexual health and wellbeing charity with nearly 60 years experience of providing sexual health services to young people; and several decades of delivering relationships and sex education in schools, and training for professionals in England, Scotland, Northern Ireland and more recently in Wales.

Brook is responding to this consultation specifically on issues relating to Relationships and Sexuality Education (RSE).

RSE is a topic which teachers often report feeling ill-equipped, unskilled and unsupported to teach to a high quality. As a consequence the quantity and quality of education young people receive is often as arbitrary as the school they go to or even the class they are in. Evidence from around the world, comprehensively addressed in the UNESCO technical guidelines show the benefits of consistent, universal and good quality RSE; and the need for it to meet certain key requirements to be effective. The new curriculum provides a useful framework through which to embed RSE within school curricula and the fact that it is a mandatory topic is important to ensure universal delivery so that it can benefit all children and young people in Wales.

We recognise the value of the structure and organisation of the Curriculum for Wales. However, there needs to be a balance between the scope of schools to develop their own curricula and the need for clarity particularly in the subject of RSE. We are concerned that for teachers and schools to build and deliver their own RSE curriculum effectively they will need a clear sense of essential content that must be provided to all students. We hope that there will be a high level of specificity in the code with required knowledge and skills set out in relation to each of the eight themes in the guidance, ensuring that all children can realise their right to full understanding and knowledge of things that will affect their lives (UNCRC).

Appendix 2 of the Curriculum Guidance for Wales outlines the topics to be included within RSE, yet we feel it is vague/generic in detail and there are important topics missing in the guidance. We believe the following topics need to be included, and whilst our suggestions could fit into other categories, we feel it is important that more detail needs to be included within the Curriculum to ensure a clear, full and robust RSE is provided for all young people when developmentally appropriate and timely.

Rights and equity

This section should also include:

- Linked learning on the protected characteristics including ethnicity, religion and age.
- The need for young people to understand their own rights to knowledge, information, safety, privacy and to confidential advice and support.
- The need for children and young people to understand the right to their own body and to give or withhold consent for others to touch them.

Relationships

This section should also include:

- Information on the key characteristics of healthy relationships and how to recognise unhealthy relationships.
- The benefits, opportunities and risks of online engagement through social media and gaming.
- The legal and emotional risks of sharing naked images (Youth Produced Sexual Imagery).

- How to build supportive communities online and offline and how to develop good bystander behaviour when you recognise your peers are at risk of harm.
- How to recognise and report bullying and strategies to support friends in this situation.

Bodies and body image

This section should also include:

- How to look after your body.
- Personal hygiene.
- Exercise and healthy eating and how these can improve how you feel about yourself.

Sexual Health and well-being

This section should also include detailed learning on specific areas of sexual health including:

- Body changes at puberty.
- Menstrual health.
- The reproductive life course and an understanding of the fertility cycle.
- Pregnancy, pregnancy prevention, contraception, pregnancy choices, including abortion and parenting.
- Safer sex and STIs.
- Pleasure

Young people in secondary school also need to know:

- Where to access accurate information online about sexual health issues.
- Who they can talk to.
- That they have the right to confidential support and advice.
- The scope and limitation of confidentiality.

- Where local services are and what they can provide.

Sex and the law

This section should also include:

- What does consent mean.
- What is the age of consent.
- What can facilitate or prevent consent being freely given.
- Pornography.

While schools and teachers know a lot about their students' interests and ability it is important that curriculum design is not based on assumptions, or limited by teacher's reticence to address complex issues. The guidance and code must support schools to identify reliable sources of evidence to draw on in order to design and deliver a developmental curriculum which builds, year on year on skills and learning; is appropriate to the developmental stage of the children; and is relevant and timely; ensuring children have the information and skills that they need in advance of experiencing key milestones in their development – for example:

- knowing what to expect before experiencing the physical and emotional changes associated with puberty.
- knowing about the human reproductive cycle, fertility and contraception in advance of becoming sexually active.

Clarification is needed over how teachers will access information and learning on this, and whether specific topics, and a pathway through them at different ages will be in the RSE code and what the process will be for developing that code, and with what input from:

- Children and young people.
- Organisations that are expert in specific areas relevant to RSE (e.g. LGBT+ issues, safeguarding issues, sexual and reproductive health issues, online safety, VAWG).
- Organisations with expertise and experience of developing curricula, lessons and of delivering RSE.

The code/conduct should be co-created with all the above agencies, but schools should be encouraged to ensure that their own curricula is co-created, bringing in all members of the school community and the health/social care/youth work communities beyond the school gates to ensure the curriculum is fit for purpose and addressing the real life issues children and young people are dealing with.

Links should be provided to existing good quality guidance, toolkits, language glossaries, and curricula so that schools are benefiting from work already done and not reinventing the wheel, and to encourage a consistency of approach within and between schools.

As well as the broad values that underpin the Curriculum for Wales specific principles must be applied to RSE including, for example the need to use accurate anatomical language; the need to always point towards reliable evidence-based sources of information; the need to support learners to distinguish between matters of opinion and matters of verifiable fact; the need to ensure input from external sources and visitors will do the same.

While some schools will have an existing curriculum that can be adapted and teachers with the skills and knowledge to deliver RSE, others will be starting from a much lower level.

Teachers will need training both in appropriate pedagogy, in the basic knowledge, and in the design and delivery of developmental curriculum. RSE can generate a wide range of views and values within the classroom, keeping the classroom safe for all learners is essential. When dealing with issues to do with relationships safeguarding issues can arise that need sensitive management.

It is essential that schools have a lead teacher who can attend comprehensive training, spend time designing the curriculum, selecting appropriate resources and cascading their learning to the team of teachers who will deliver the lessons; and that all teachers delivering RSE are supported to undertake their own training and directed to expert training providers.

There is nothing within the legislation to address the need for training, nor for a lead teacher.

1.3 Do you think there is a need for legislation to deliver what this Bill is trying to achieve?

(we would be grateful if you could keep your answer to around 500 words)

The experience from all parts of the UK is that when RSE is not a statutory topic many young people miss out altogether or have a very inadequate experience of RSE. Mandating RSE within the curriculum is necessary.

However, it is not sufficient in itself to ensure good quality, universal delivery. A comprehensive code which sets out all the elements and topics to be included, a developmental pathway through the topics, and provision for teacher training (as noted in the above question) are fundamental to ensuring all young people realise their entitlement to this essential subject.

2. The Bill's implementation

2.1 Do you have any comments about any potential barriers to implementing the Bill? If no, go to question 3.1

(we would be grateful if you could keep your answer to around 500 words)

Schools and teachers are under extreme pressure not just to deliver a comprehensive curriculum, but with all the pastoral and organisational aspects of school life. Without sufficient ring-fenced off timetable time for teachers to understand and develop appropriate curricula, training in areas they are unfamiliar or unconfident in it is likely that some aspects of the curriculum will not get the priority and attention they need. The experience from across the UK is that RSE is often one of those topics.

Teachers need time, resource and training to deliver RSE well, and without that implementation will remain patchy and quality inconsistent.

In some schools there may be resistance to RSE from teachers or other members of the school community. Many myths circulate about the content of RSE, which can create a great deal of anxiety. Clarity about the purpose, benefits and protective outcomes of RSE; and of the timing and content of what will be taught must be clearly communicated to school communities, school leadership and teachers to engage and enthuse everybody about positive reason for making RSE a mandatory subject.

2.2 Do you think the Bill takes account of these potential barriers?

(we would be grateful if you could keep your answer to around 500 words)

We do not think the barriers identified above are explicitly dealt with in the legislation.

A recognition of the importance of training and a commitment to funding it is vital.

Other elements of the potential barriers to implementation, around resistance to RSE must be addressed through guidance including guidance on consulting with parents, and working with the wider community.

3. Unintended consequences

3.1 Do you think there are there any unintended consequences arising from the Bill? If no, go to question 4.1

(we would be grateful if you could keep your answer to around 500 words)

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4. Financial implications

4.1 Do you have any comments on the financial implications of the Bill (as set out in Part 2 of the [Explanatory Memorandum](#))? If no, go to question 5.1

(we would be grateful if you could keep your answer to around 500 words)

There is a cost to implementing a quality RSE curriculum. Each element of it has a cost implication:

- Training for a lead teacher and potentially team of teachers in every school in: appropriate pedagogy, subject knowledge, classroom strategies, appropriate resources and exercises, useful assessment tools.
- Off-timetable time (teaching cover costs where necessary) for teachers to attend training, cascade training to colleagues, read and understand the guidance, develop the curriculum, select classroom resources, liaise without outside agencies.
- The direct cost of inviting in outside agencies from expert organisations to supplement the curriculum with specialist knowledge.
- The cost of translating existing RSE materials into welsh.
- The cost of purchasing teaching resources.

- Time to plan and deliver consultations with students, staff, parents to ensure whole school engagement with the curriculum.

5. Powers to make subordinate legislation

5.1 Do you have any comments on the appropriateness of the powers in the Bill for Welsh Ministers to make subordinate legislation (as set out in Chapter 5 of Part 1 of the [Explanatory Memorandum](#)). If no, go to question 6.1.

(we would be grateful if you could keep your answer to around 500 words)

RSE has been made a mandatory requirement in the new Curriculum for Wales in response to evidence of need amongst children and young people in Wales, and evidence from around the world of benefit to young people's physical, emotional and sexual health, their safety and wellbeing, of delivering a comprehensive RSE curriculum.

However RSE remains contested in some quarters and there is a concern that subsequent governments could use the subordinate legislation to reduce the impact of the topic through a watered down code and guidance, or even to remove the statutory status of RSE.

6. Other considerations

6.1 Do you have any other points you wish to raise about this Bill?

(we would be grateful if you could keep your answer to around 1000 words)

1. Disabled Children and Young People

There needs to be specific emphasis on the rights of disabled young people and those with Additional Learner Needs to have good quality RSE. While these children and young people are at higher risk of abuse, they are often deprived of the education that could help them recognise and report abuse that is taking place. It is also vital that their education is based in the understanding that they have the full rights to relationships that are safe, happy and enjoyable and will experience the same emotional and physical changes as their

peers during puberty and adolescence and may need tailored education and support to manage those experiences and to thrive.

2. Do not reinvent the wheel

Every context is different and it is vital that schools and communities feel ownership of their RSE curriculum. This will be most likely if children and young people, teachers and school leadership, local sexual health experts, youth workers, social workers all have input into the curriculum. However, much good work has already taken place in schools in Wales, in other parts of the UK, and further afield. Schools should not feel that they are starting with a blank slate and should be encouraged to draw on existing practices and resources. Any structures or fora that encourage teachers to share good practice will accelerate the pace of change.

