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Teaching relationships education to prevent sexual abuse

Research report

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This research report was written before the new UK Government took office on 5 July 2024. As a result, the content may not reflect current government policy.

Glossary

Abstinence. The practice of abstaining from something. In this report, it refers to sexual abstinence.

Active bystander. Being an active bystander means being aware of when someone's behaviour is inappropriate or threatening and choosing to challenge it.

Boolean operators. Boolean operators are simple words (AND, OR, NOT or AND NOT) used as conjunctions to combine or exclude keywords in a search, resulting in more focused and productive results. The use of Boolean operators should save time and effort by eliminating inappropriate hits that must be scanned before discarding.

Gender-nonconforming. Someone who does not conform to prevailing cultural and social expectations about what is appropriate gender expression for their perceived gender.

Grey literature. Grey literature is information produced outside of traditional publishing and distribution channels, and can include reports, policy literature, working papers, newsletters, government documents, speeches, white papers, or urban plans.

Intersectionality. The interconnected nature of social categorisations such as race, class, and gender, regarded as creating overlapping and interdependent systems of discrimination or disadvantage.

LGBTQ+. LGBTQ+ stands for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer (or sometimes questioning), and the "plus" represents other sexual identities.

Name-calling. The use of offensive names to cause, or attempt to cause, rejection or condemnation (as of a person or project) without objective consideration of the facts. The act of insulting someone by calling them rude names.

Person-centred approach. Person-centred approaches originated in the disability sector, and are now used within the areas of mental health, aged care services, schools, within the healthcare sector, and criminal justice system. Person-centred practices are used in teams and organisations to ensure that the focus is on what matters to the people receiving support and their families. Working in this way ensures that people are truly listened to and are kept at the heart of all decision-making; how a service is commissioned, provided and organised.

Pupils with SEND. A child or a young person has special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) if they have a learning difficulty and/or disability that means they need special health and education support.

Rapid Evidence Assessment (REA). Rapid Evidence Assessments provide a structured and rigorous search and quality assessment of the evidence. They can be

used to gain an overview of the density and quality of evidence on a particular issue, support programming decisions by providing evidence on key topics, and support the commissioning of further research by identifying evidence gaps.

Search strings. A search string is the combination of all text, numbers and symbols entered by a user into a search engine to find desired results.

Sexual exploitation. An actual or attempted abuse of someone's position of vulnerability (such as a person depending on you for survival, food rations, school, books, transport or other services), differential power or trust, to obtain sexual favours, including but not only, by offering money or other social, economic or political advantages.

Sexual scripts. Sexual scripts both offer guidelines for appropriate sexual behaviour and experiences. Scripts can be thought of as “blueprints” for sexual conduct; they allow individuals to conceptualise their role in sexual encounters and serve to decrease anxiety in social interaction by enabling actors to predict and interpret each other’s behaviour.

Snowballing. Snowballing refers to using the reference list of a paper or the citations to a paper to identify additional papers.

Social-emotional learning (SEL). SEL is the process through which all young people and adults acquire and apply the knowledge, skills, and attitudes to develop healthy identities, manage emotions and achieve personal and collective goals, feel and show empathy for others, establish and maintain supportive relationships, and make responsible and caring decisions.

Victim-blaming. Victim blaming can be defined as someone saying, implying, or treating a person who has experienced harmful or abusive behaviour (such as a survivor of sexual violence) as if it was the result of something they did or said, instead of placing the responsibility on the person who harmed them.

Young adult literature. Young adult literature is a genre that is separate from children's literature. When the term first found common usage in the late 1960s, it referred to realistic fiction that was set in the real (as opposed to imagined), contemporary world and addressed problems, issues, and life circumstances of interest to young readers aged approximately 12-18.

Introduction

Background and project aims

This project builds on the findings of Ofsted's 2021 Review of sexual abuse in schools and colleges.¹ The Ofsted review commented on how prevalent sexual harassment and online sexual abuse have become for children and young people: "It is concerning that for some children, incidents are so commonplace that they see no point in reporting them." The report went on to recommend the need for:

"[A] carefully sequenced RSHE curriculum, based on the Department for Education's (DfE's) statutory guidance, that specifically includes sexual harassment and sexual violence, including online. This should include time for open discussion of topics that children and young people tell us they find particularly difficult, such as consent and the sending of 'nudes.'" - *Ofsted*

Following the publication of revised statutory guidance for relationships, sex and health education, the DfE is looking to provide further support for schools in teaching about sexual harassment, sexual violence, and violence against women and girls. The primary aim of this project was to conduct a review of evidence to inform further support for schools and to ensure that this support is based on the best possible evidence, particularly of best practice. The evidence review was conducted employing the technique of a Rapid Evidence Assessment (REA). The methodology and steps to conducting an REA are presented in the section below. As a secondary aim, this project also identified evidence gaps and areas requiring further research. Finally, another key aim of the project was the development of a list of key recommendations for further support for schools. The recommendations are based on (i) the literature reviewed, and (ii) advice, expertise and additional evidence shared by a group of sector experts formed specifically for this project (which is described as the 'Expert Group' in the rest of this report).

This report presents the results of the REA, providing a comprehensive review of evidence on teaching interventions to prevent sexual abuse, and the list of recommendations produced based on the findings of the REA and inputs from the Expert Group.

Methodology

Considering the particularities of this review – wide scope and time constraints – a flexible REA approach was adopted. Our search was targeted and systematic to maximise the relevance of the findings, and to allow us to prioritise research from a

¹ [Review of sexual abuse in schools and colleges](#) (Ofsted, 2021).

variety of sources across the literature, using a transparent and well-defined protocol and search strategy. The key steps of the REA are outlined below, but the complete protocol can be found in Annex A.

Search strategy of the academic literature

Our search strategy was based on targeting keywords present in the title (main field) and the abstract (chapter and research question level). A scoping review was initially undertaken, during which we tested different combinations of words to arrive at the final set of keywords that were used during the REA. These keywords were based on a desk-based review of related studies.

Search terms were combined into search strings using Boolean operators (AND/OR/NOT) and other database-specific search operators. Using these strings, we arrived at a long list of studies which was then screened to see if they meet the inclusion criteria outlined below.

Prioritising research questions

Based on the results of the scoping review, and given the wide scope of the project, research questions were separated into core and additional ones. Core research questions, also agreed with DfE, were targeted in both the search and review of literature. Evidence related to secondary research questions was also retrieved and discussed during the literature review, but these questions played no role in the design of the search strategy.

Inclusion and exclusion criteria

Specific inclusion and exclusion criteria were used to decide if the materials identified from our search were suitable for answering the core research questions of this project. These criteria were used to move from a long list of materials towards a short list of studies which were eventually included in the technical review. The detailed criteria can be found in the REA protocol, but the themes covered were:

- Population characteristics and context of study
- Country where the study was conducted
- Methods employed to conduct the study
- Impacts and outcomes of the study
- Date of research being published
- Writing language
- The type of study published

Expert Group

An Expert Group, consisting of eight academics and professionals with expertise in the areas of interest, supported the research. The focus of the Expert Group was to support and advise on forming the final list of recommendations. A draft of each chapter was shared with the Expert Group members and, following their review, a meeting between them and the research team was arranged. In total three meetings of 2.5 hours each took place to discuss Chapter 1, Chapter 2, and Chapters 3 and 4 together. Considering the experts' expertise, their views were treated as primary evidence and were combined with the findings of the review to finalise each chapter's recommendations after each meeting. However, it needs be noted that the recommendations do not directly represent the experts' views.

Search strategy for grey literature

The aim of the grey literature search was to fill the gaps found in the academic literature. This included policy documents, institutional reports, and programmes from different institutions, research centres and organisations such as the Department for Education, UNESCO, the Council of Europe, the National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children, SafeLives and PSHE Association.

The search strategy for the grey literature targeted the evidence gaps identified in the academic literature, thus it was less systematic and more flexible than the strategy used for the academic literature.

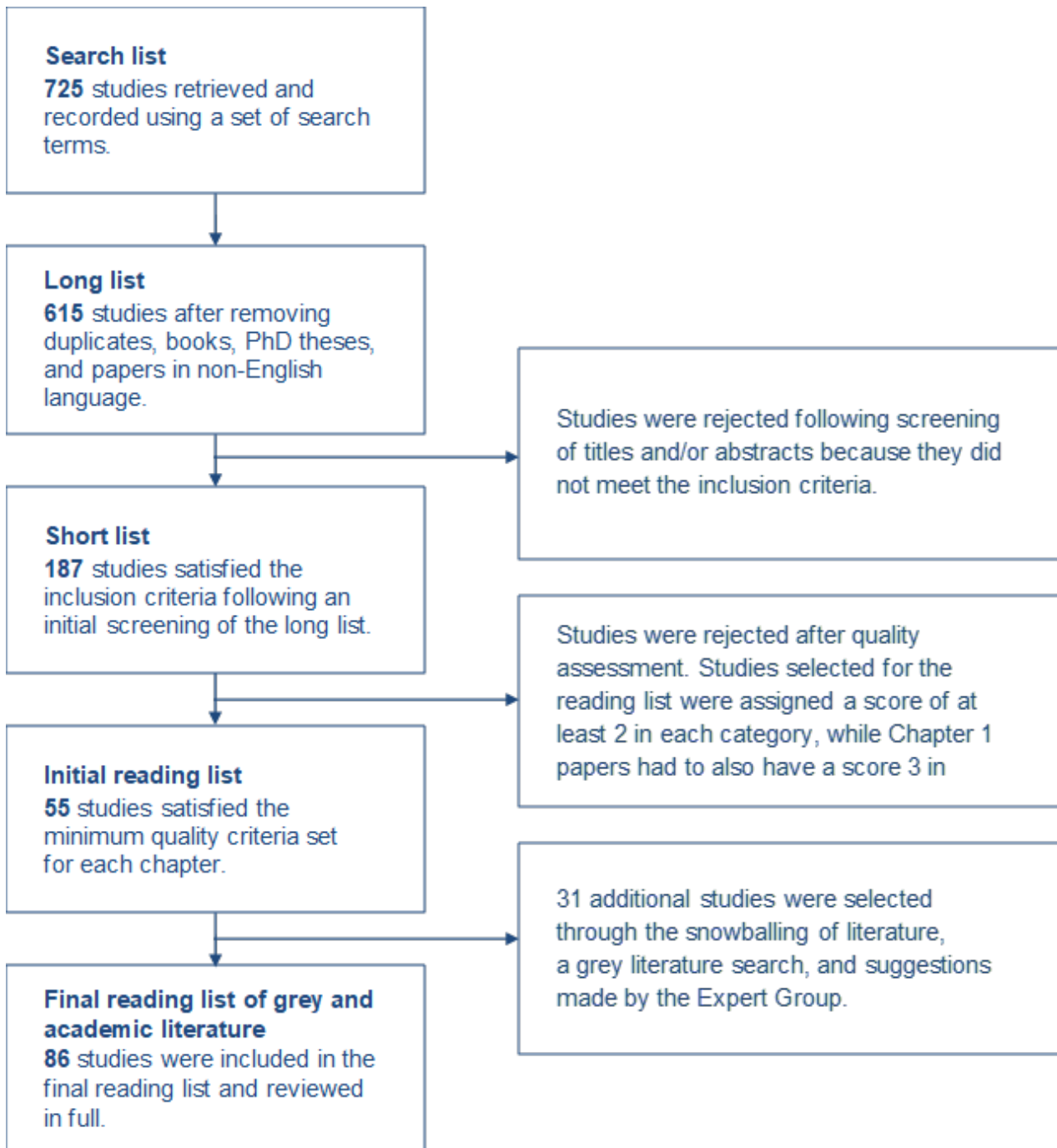
REA findings, quality of evidence and gaps identified

The REA was undertaken between March and May 2022. Based on our search strategy, we retrieved 725 pieces of literature from 9 different engines (SAGE, ABI/Inform, Project MUSE, IDEAS, SSRN, SpringerLink, Science Direct, JSTOR, and Google Scholar). We excluded 110 papers that were either duplicates, books, PhD theses or were written in any language other than English.

We obtained a long list of 615 papers, and their titles and abstracts were read and sifted based on the inclusion and exclusion criteria. We obtained 187 papers that fulfilled these inclusion and exclusion criteria. To ensure the timely delivery of this project, we further sifted titles and abstracts based on three criteria of quality score (relevance, methodology, and credibility) and came up with a final reading list of 55 papers. We further included 9 papers from snowballing and retrieved 22 pieces of grey literature – some of them suggested by the experts – to fill the gaps identified in the results of our systematic search of literature.

The Figure 1 below shows all the stages of the REA, the number of studies identified at each stage and the criteria for which research papers were excluded or included.

Figure 1: Rapid Evidence Assessment process



Assessing the quality and relevance of studies

To assess the quality of the studies included in the short list, we conducted a quality assessment of the evidence based on (i) credibility, (ii) methodology, and (iii) relevance of the study. For each category, we assigned a score between 1-3 (where 1 is the lowest score and 3 is the highest). We excluded studies with the minimum score across the three categories (i.e., 1 out of 3 in each category).

The majority of academic literature was of relevance to Chapter 1. Therefore, the selection criteria applied to screen papers for Chapter 1 were stricter than those applied

to Chapters 2, 3 and 4. Particularly for Chapter 1, we only read papers for which the relevance and credibility were both scored as 2 or above, and their methodology as 3 (which effectively restricted the review to literature reviews and REAs). For the rest of the chapters, we read all papers with a rating of 2 or above in all criteria.

Evidence gaps

The research identified was divided into four main chapters: (i) pedagogy and the whole-school approach, (ii) boundaries, consent and privacy, (iii) sexual violence and harassment, and (iv) domestic violence and non-peer abuse. Evidence gaps were identified across all four chapters, though in some cases these were more prominent than others.

Evidence related to Chapter 1 was the most comprehensive and high quality across all chapters, with all of the papers read being evidence and literature reviews. However, additional research on the impact of specific approaches (such as the use of external facilitators and resources, the impact of peer groups and involvement of students in RSE curriculum design and best practices around teaching topics which feel awkward or uncomfortable) would improve the overall evidence base and support guidance for teachers in the future. In Chapter 2, the main evidence gap related to inclusivity, particularly for pupils and young people with SEND, and how one's vulnerabilities play a role in their ability to consent to sexual acts.

In Chapter 3, gaps were identified when looking for evidence on teaching about pornography, particularly in terms of if and how pornography can be addressed in the classroom. This gap was covered by reviewing additional literature suggested by the experts and in the discussion during the Expert Group meeting. There was also a lack of conclusive figures and/or prevalence data to determine appropriate age and stage for introducing different topics related to sexual violence and harassment in the classroom. This was covered through the grey literature and the views of the experts – the latter stressing the importance of starting to introduce such discussions at the early stages of education and gradually building on them.

Finally, Chapter 4 was the chapter most affected by evidence gaps, as also evidenced by the low number of pieces of literature relevant to it. There were no conclusive data suggesting the age at which children may be exposed to domestic violence and other adverse experiences related to non-peer abuse. This was discussed in the Expert Group, and experts stressed again the need to start addressing such issues in the classroom early. It was also noted that, no matter at which stage of education these discussions take place, the assumption should be that there may always be pupils in the classroom who have direct lived experience of the topics being covered. Therefore, resources for support should also be made available to them.

Chapter 1. Pedagogy, and the whole school approach context

Our screening of the search results provided a list of 37 pieces of evidence within the scope of the first chapter. These results included quantitative and qualitative evidence to inform best practices of curriculum planning, teaching interventions, and institutional approaches to RSE. We further retrieved two pieces of evidence through backward snowballing to discuss how to teach about online behaviour and two pieces of grey literature to inform teaching practices to generate a safe environment for pupils.

Curriculum planning and design

Different approaches to sex and relationships education

Pedagogic and curricular approaches to Relationships and Sex Education (RSE) may differ substantially in their underpinning outcomes of interest and their actual implementation. Ketting & Winkelmann (2013) and Mullinax et al. (2017) provide a broad overview of the different approaches and outcomes of interest in teaching sexuality education around the world. Narrow views on sexuality education focus on health and risk prevention, while more holistic approaches go beyond prevention to adopt a perspective of sexuality as a source of personal enrichment (Ketting & Winkelmann, 2013; Mullinax et al., 2017).

In England, while there is no standardised curriculum for RSE, the Department of Education and Employment firstly published a statutory Sex and Relationships Education Guidance in 2002 which provided guidelines for schools, where the importance of respecting social, cultural, and sexual diversity was highlighted (Leung et al., 2019). However, a discursive analysis of the 2014 update of the Sex and Relationships Education Guidance for England and Wales revealed an emphasis on diseases and sex and health-related risks while missing notions of personal safety and capacity to identify coercion or actual consent (Sauntson & Sundaram, 2016). It has been noted that focusing on the dangers and risks of sex and sexual relationships does not provide young people with the complete picture (Carmody, 2015). This realisation could potentially shake pupils' trust in the learning they receive

In England, under legislation passed in 2017, all pupils receiving primary education must be taught relationships education, all pupils in secondary education must be taught RSE, and all pupils in both primary and secondary education must be taught health education (Leung et al., 2019). The 2019 statutory guidance for Relationships Education, Relationships and Sex Education, and Health Education, sets out the topics to be covered at primary and secondary education (Department for Education, 2019).

According to the literature, in the US, formal sex education was, until recently, either based on abstinence-only programmes or abstinence-plus programmes. Abstinence-only

programmes focus on abstaining from sexual activity unless this takes place within exclusive adult relationships (Berglas, Constantine, et al., 2014). Abstinence-plus programmes encourage abstinence among the pupils, but they also teach safe sexual practices for those adolescents being sexually active, with the primary aim being to reduce harm and prevent diseases (Berglas, Constantine, et al., 2014).

A more recent approach is “comprehensive sexuality education”. This approach is much broader than abstinence-only and abstinence-plus programmes, and aims to provide a more holistic education to pupils. Comprehensive sexuality education covers, in addition to the topics traditionally covered in sex education, relationships, attitudes toward sexuality, sexual roles, gender relations and the social pressures to be sexually active, as well as information about sexual and reproductive health services (Leung et al., 2019).

In 2012, the Future of Sex Education released the National Sexuality Education Standards (NSES) in the US, which were updated in 2020. The NSES aim to provide schools with clear and consistent guidance on the minimum core content needed for sex education to be effective for students at all levels of education (Goldfarb and Lieberman, 2021). The NSES is based on a comprehensive approach as it covers issues related to consent and healthy relationships, anatomy and physiology, puberty and adolescent sexual development, gender identity and expression, sexual orientation and identity, sexual health and interpersonal violence. Recent data suggest that more than 40% of districts in the US have adopted the NSES (Goldfarb and Lieberman, 2021).

In New Zealand, RSE combines biophysical, sociocultural, and historical knowledge. The aim is for pupils to learn about themselves – physically, socially, emotionally – while gaining skills about satisfying relationships. According to Fitzpatrick et al. (2022), which summarises key research informing RSE policies at a national level in New Zealand, these guidelines take a very broad scope and are built up along several years with dedicated time at all levels of schooling. However, it is schools that have to tailor the implementation of these guidelines according to their local context (Fitzpatrick et al., 2022).

Robinson and Davies (2017) used qualitative findings to discuss people’s views and the importance of sexuality education since early childhood in Australia. The authors found that the Australian National Curriculum also sets nation-wide standards to be learnt along school years. Interestingly, relationships education takes place starting on personal relationships, and introducing sexuality afterwards (Robinson and Davies, 2017).

Svendsen (2017) discusses sex education in Nordic countries, particularly the political support for comprehensive sex education (CSE), and the approach taken to each part of the curriculum. Scientific and health matters are discussed as scientific facts within the topic of sexual health in biology, while cultural notions of sexual practices, personal autonomy and development are a matter of cross-subject discussion, as part of the ethics or social sciences curricula (Svendsen, 2017). This distinction has allowed a separate development of the core sexual health topics and personal, social and cultural

conceptions around sexuality. In other words, sex education is discussed as part of the mainstream curricula in different subjects, instead of having been taught in isolation. External agents have led many changes in content or pedagogies in Nordic countries. Namely, NGOs have largely contributed to outside facilitation of sex education, proposed guidance and delivered supplementary programmes in schools (Svendsen, 2017).

Content of RSE curriculum

It is noted in several pieces of literature that teaching about sexuality as a source of personal enrichment is what adolescents and young people want, and also is a more effective tool for healthy sexuality expression later in life. For instance, according to Formby and Donovan's (2020) qualitative research with young LGBTQ+ people in the UK, providing an understanding of good relationships and experiences seems much more valuable than standardised teaching on the mechanics of sexual acts (Formby and Donovan, 2020). Cense et al. (2020) interviewed 300 Dutch pupils aged between 12 and 18. Their findings suggest that understanding more about their rights, and how to indicate whether they want their relationships and sexual encounters to progress or not, is a matter of interest among students, particularly among girls. More specifically, pupils declared that dialogues and script examples of situations they could face would be of great help as part of the curricula (Cense et al., 2020).

Goldfarb and Lieberman (2021) conducted a systematic literature review of research on school-based CSE aimed at understanding the feasibility of CSE education goals.² The results of the review by Goldfarb and Lieberman (2021) show that a comprehensive approach to sex education can be very beneficial across a wide range of positive outcomes for pupils. Particularly, the evidence shows that school-based CSE can lower homophobia and homophobic-related bullying, increase understanding of gender and gender norms, improve knowledge and skills that support healthy relationships, build child sex abuse prevention skills, and can reduce dating and intimate partner violence.

Research has shown that it is beneficial when an RSE curriculum addresses other related topics, such as internet safety. According to the systematic review of youth internet safety education by Finkelhor et al. (2021), integrating internet safety into already well-established and evidence-based programmes addressing harms that can also occur offline (e.g., dating abuse, sexual abuse, bullying) can be advantageous. Teaching about healthy relationships and sexuality development provides a fundamental understanding of personal development and increases awareness about sexual exploitation. General warnings about not giving personal information, or scare tactics related to sexting, are unlikely to be effective. Instead, teaching should inform risk taking in offline and online relationships and should introduce discussions about values as well as offering

² In line with the comprehensive sexuality education definition provided above, according to Goldfarb & Lieberman (2021), CSE goes beyond abstinence-oriented content and STI prevention, covering a range of topics, including anatomy and physiology, as well as consent and relationships, puberty and sexual development, gender expression, sexual orientation, health, and interpersonal violence.

opportunities to practice interpersonal skills (Finkelhor et al., 2021). The aim is for pupils to be able to distinguish between someone who cares about them and someone who is being exploitative, and to enable critical thinking.

Programme delivery

In addition to decisions regarding the content and topics that should be covered within RSE, there are a lot of other decisions to be made related to delivery; for example, the age at which children should start receiving relationships education or RSE, the methods of delivery and how RSE teaching should interact with the rest of the curriculum.

Early and longer, scaffolded education

The systematic literature review conducted by Goldfarb and Lieberman (2021) found evidence supporting the introduction of topics related to child sexual abuse as part of early primary education. According to one of the studies examined by the authors, the Stay Safe programme for 7- and 10-year-olds in Ireland demonstrated gains in knowledge, skills and self-esteem of students, with gains being larger for younger students. Similarly, child abuse prevention programmes for the same age group in the US have been shown to, with no increase in anxiety, increase knowledge of appropriate and inappropriate touch, what to do in an inappropriate situation, and how to identify unsafe situations, showing that it is safe to discuss sensitive subjects with young children, and demonstrating the value of early education (Goldfarb and Lieberman, 2021).

According to Goldfarb and Lieberman (2021), although research suggests that the reinforcement of gender stereotypes in young children can lead to gender-based harassment, little evaluation research has looked at efforts to counteract these views. A small number of studies identified by the authors, including qualitative research and observational studies, suggest that young children can discuss and understand issues related to gender diversity, including gender expectations, gender nonconformity, and gender-based oppression. According to the authors, those studies also underline that the development of such understanding requires instructional scaffolding over a period of time and not just one session.

Goldfarb and Lieberman (2021) provided overall strong support for teaching that builds on previous lessons and grades and for programmes of longer duration, with more than a third of the studies reviewed providing related evidence. This is in line with the RSE strategy that is already followed in various countries (e.g., New Zealand).

RSE across the curriculum

Goldfarb and Lieberman's literature review (2021) also discussed different approaches to how topics within RSE can be included across the curriculum. More specifically, many of the positive outcomes that can lead to affirming and inclusive school environments occurred through the teaching of social studies, English, physical education,

mathematics, music and art. For example, one of the successful methods for discussing LGBTQ+ and gender norm topics with students was reading literature that portrayed LGBTQ+ characters in lessons outside of RSE. According to the authors, this finding is promising for schools as it provides them with flexibility, while such an approach may enable the reinforcement of important RSE topics across the curriculum, which is important due to the limited time available for RSE-centred classes. This approach is in line with the RSE strategy used in Nordic countries.

Methods of teaching

Zhou and Cheung (2022) analysed sex education curricula to understand the best approaches for teaching pre-pubescent children. One of the studies identified was an evaluation of a comprehensive curriculum used in Scotland. The evaluation aimed at understanding what clients in a young people's sexual health service, aged 13 to 18, recall about the sex education delivered to them in primary school. According to the authors, teaching methods can affect future recalling, and hence shape later behaviour. In this study, videos and discussions were the most vividly remembered teaching methods, compared to small group tasks and worksheets.

A cross-sectional study of 3,334 students (aged between 13 and 17 years old) in 10 schools in England conducted by Newby et al. (2012) identified some gender patterns in students' preferences. According to this research, girls were happy to participate in small group discussions, while boys were more in favour of less personal methods of delivery, such as videos. Additionally, pupils with earlier sexual experience were more likely to prefer mixed, rather than single-sex, activities. According to the literature review conducted by Thomas and Aggleton (2016), games and role-playing help young people to personalise content and practice their skills, such as refusing unwanted approaches or resisting peer pressures.

According to the systematic review of sex education programmes, blended learning programmes (that is, combining face-to-face teaching with digital interventions) not only offer flexibility to encourage autonomous learning, but also privacy and anonymity for young people, and opportunities for in-class customisation (Lameiras-Fernández et al., 2021). According to the authors, schools would need to have access to technical assistance to enable planning and delivery of such programmes. For example, some public-school districts in the US are supported by the privately funded Working to Institutionalize Sex Education (WISE) initiative in the curriculum planning of comprehensive sexuality programmes (Lameiras-Fernández et al., 2021).

Jørgensen et al. (2019) conducted interviews with 14 pupils aged between 13 and 15 from a UK school. These interviews suggested that using whole school or large group assemblies,³ as RSE was currently delivered in their school, were ineffective to teach and disseminate information about sex education and, in particular, sexting. Participants

³ According to the authors, this describes a situation where the whole school student body or a large group of students are gathered together to listen to material delivered from a podium.

in the research stated not feeling comfortable in front of all their peers and would rather have lessons delivered in smaller settings throughout the year.

Teachers' training

Some of the interventions reviewed in this REA suggested training for teachers, which would benefit both learning outcomes and how confident and safe teachers and students feel in the classroom. More specifically, Leung et al. (2019) conducted a comprehensive review of adolescent sexuality education across different countries and cultures. One of the findings was that despite the importance of school-based sex education programmes, there is no systematic, evidence-based training for teachers and other professionals involved in the delivery of RSE. According to the authors, training should make sure teachers gain confidence and knowledge of contemporary (rather than historical) issues and it should provide strong justification, knowledge and skills for programme delivery. Training should also enhance commitment and teachers' buy-in to the program. In the UK, an evaluation study of the "SHARE" programme showed that teachers found training to be highly beneficial as it allowed them to receive social support from colleagues, familiarise themselves with the resources and it boosted their confidence.⁴

Pound et al. (2015) summarised qualitative research on children's and young peoples' views related to RSE. One of the issues identified by participants was the poor training of their teachers on delivering the RSE curriculum and creating a safe classroom environment.

Whole-school approach

Taking a whole-school approach means committing school resources, practices and leadership towards a common aim. Such an approach to RSE requires coordination and collaboration in and out of schools. The different dimensions of school life that fall within a whole-school framework entail physical and organisational environment, curriculum design and application, and community engagement – with parents, caregivers, education agencies and other social groups (Fitzpatrick et al. 2022).

These whole-school approaches align institutional objectives with daily acts, infrastructure design, internal policies and capacity building. Supportive staff, specific school policies and enabling pupils to create peer-support groups seem to increase the likelihood of achieving an inclusive school culture; these whole-school approaches have been tested and found suitable for challenges around bullying and discrimination (Fitzpatrick et al., 2022). According to Fitzpatrick et al. (2022) coherent RSE policies should create clear procedures and provide support for disclosures and complaints, monitoring abuse, access to health services, and ensuring educational and recreational

⁴ SHARE is an evidence-informed educational resource supporting learning about relationships, sexual health and parenthood outcomes provided by NHS Health Scotland. The 22 lessons target young people aged 13-16 and focus on the knowledge, attitudes and skills to develop positive and healthy relationships. More information can be found here: <http://www.healthscotland.com/documents/4946.aspx>.

practices (e.g., sports) are inclusive. Fitzpatrick et al. (2022) also suggested that these approaches should prompt student leadership and presence in decision-making bodies. Peer support and peer mentoring contribute to improving sexuality discussion and expression. According to Formby and Donovan (2020), young people would appreciate peer support, although, at the same time, LGBTQ+ people aged between 14 and 25 in the UK felt ill-equipped to identify needs and provide appropriate support.

Sell et al. (2021)'s systematic review of CSE identified whole-school approaches that were supported by external project implementers or managers (i.e., not pupils' usual schoolteachers). The authors found evidence that intervention activities occurring outside the usual classroom, including activities falling within the whole-school approach, strengthened student empowerment. Whole-school approaches affect pupils' life outside the class and can change how young people engage with each other in a broader context (Sell et al., 2021).

Keddie and Ollis (2021) reviewed government efforts in Australia to promote uptake of whole-school approaches to addressing gender-based violence. The authors identified four factors that affected schools' engagement: situated factors (a school's setting and history), professional factors (team value and commitment), material factors (budget, infrastructure and resources), and external factors (like local and national policies). Thus, supporting each of the above factors at a school level, depending on each school's needs, may lead to a higher uptake of whole-school approaches and more successful implementation (Keddie and Ollis, 2021).

A safe space for students

The review of qualitative publications conducted by Pound et al. (2015) revealed that students participating in this research needed a safer environment and felt vulnerable during the teaching of RSE. Some students (mainly girls) couldn't discuss their thoughts freely because of embarrassment and fear of their classmates' remarks. Consequently, teachers should consider how to create a safer environment.

According to Formby and Donovan (2020), an arts-based approach to relationships education which ran in the North of England facilitated the discussion of sensitive topics, while still exposing pupils to scenarios of sexual encounters and the social context. These activities can build on different contexts, but facilitators (from third sector organisations) who delivered the programme found activities based in visual images, e.g., hand-drawn comic strips or photography-based activities, particularly interesting. These activities allowed students to distance themselves from the images they were creating and feel safe, yet still prompted exploration of their image, body and story. Facilitators and students were also satisfied with drama-based activities that used role-play to enable communication with a lower degree of embarrassment but allowed pupils to rehearse power or consent speak.

Research from Cense et al. (2020) found that pupils appreciated concrete scripts and examples that equipped them for situations they may encounter. Additionally, small groups and real-life stories (audio-visual or written) increased students' willingness to engage in the discussion (Cense et al., 2020). Just as in using images or drama, young adult literature is used to teach a variety of skills, including sexual behaviours, and shape the views of pupils towards violence. A review studying the use of literature within school-based sex education revealed that in-class discussion about the behaviour of violent male characters provides the opportunity to critically explore these attitudes and untie aggressive behaviours from masculinity (Palmer and Hirsch, 2022).

Cense et al. (2020) also found that students are interested in explaining situations that their friends have encountered. However, teachers need to find the right balance between comfort and easing to promote interaction while maintaining seriousness, to avoid treating the discussion as a matter of fun and small talk and discouraging pupils from opening up (Cense et al., 2020). Similarly, some migrant girls in Nordic countries reported, during 12 group and individual interviews, feeling uneasy and uncomfortable if boys or teachers participated in making fun of issues or questions raised during discussions around sexuality education topics. Findings suggested that, given the uncomfortable space they found in class, these girls appreciated personal meetings with the school nurse as a safer space to raise their questions (Honkasalo, 2017). On a related topic, Cense et al. (2020) highlighted the importance of considering what questions can (or cannot) be asked publicly, giving space for anonymous questions and, at a higher level, supporting social safety by bearing in mind the existing social dynamics during sexuality education lessons. Participants in this research, 300 Dutch pupils aged 12 to 18, said they appreciate the option to ask questions anonymously, as well as to work with available stories (written stories or stories portrayed through films), and in small groups to feel safer when discussing sensitive topics (Cense et al., 2020).

Sex and relationships education can entail discussions and teaching about sensitive topics which may relate to pupils' past experiences, beliefs or misconceptions. For this reason, the PSHE Association (2018) recommends that teachers work on the basis that in any discussion of sensitive topics, at least one pupil may have relevant experience or may find it personally sensitive. Teachers must enable some distance between pupils' lives and the scenarios being discussed by using hypothetical contexts, stories or clips. However, the PSHE Association (2018) also suggests that teaching methods should create opportunities for pupils to express their views. These should include whole-class discussions, but also small groups, personal encounters with the teacher or anonymous boxes to raise questions or concerns, and signpost resources outside the school.

Teaching for inclusion – making teaching relevant to all groups

According to the RSE policy guidelines in New Zealand, introducing gender and sexuality diversity is important not only in facilitating self-exploration and enabling personal

autonomy, but also to address bullying and educational outcomes (Fitzpatrick et al., 2022). At the same time, literature shows that pupils do want a curriculum that is LGBTQ+ inclusive (Lameiras-Fernández et al., 2021; Pound et al., 2015).

The literature suggests that sexual minority students are more likely to suffer bullying and abuse leading to a high risk of isolation, school absence, and worsened physical and mental health outcomes (Gegenfurtner and Gebhardt, 2017). These negative outcomes can be lessened if schools create a safe climate that teaches students to respect and appreciate diversity. According to Gegenfurtner and Gebhardt (2017), RSE that informs children about the risks and difficulties faced by sexual minority students will contribute to a climate where students feel secure. The authors also proposed that a safe school climate should be an important part of school inspections.

The evidence reviewed by Goldfarb and Lieberman (2021) suggests that curricula that are inclusive of pupils' sexual orientations, identities and expressions reduce homophobic bullying and harassment and increase safety for LGBTQ+ students. Additionally, curricula designed to reduce homophobia and focused efforts to increase acceptance of transgender and gender-nonconforming people can be effective. For example, programmes that involved LGBTQ+ guest speakers resulted in reduced homophobic attitudes, reduction in stereotyping, and increased empathy and appreciation (Goldfarb & Lieberman, 2021). On the other hand, it should be noted that if methods to address stigma or homophobia are based on highlighting differences and vulnerability, they may act as a reinforcement for inequality and stereotypes. Instead, using inclusive terminology or representing diversities can increase the efficacy of sex education (Cense et al., 2020).

A practice encouraging inclusion in the classroom is using literature to prompt empathy for LGBTQ+ characters, as it appears to increase the feeling of connectedness. Using literature as such has also shown to help pupils explore their own sexual identities (Palmer and Hirsch, 2022). According to Goldfarb and Lieberman (2021), the use of literature featuring LGBTQ+ characters has also resulted in lowered homophobia and homophobic behaviours both at the elementary and high school levels.

According to the literature, focusing on heterosexual relationships in sex education promotes the idea that domestic violence is only a heterosexual problem, and leaves many young people unaware of the issues and how to deal with abuse in non-heterosexual relationships (Formby and Donovan, 2020). However, role-based or participatory activities can tailor the stories to LGBTQ+ people in such a way that become helpful for those with previous personal experiences. The drama activities described by Formby and Donovan (2020), for instance, replicated television programmes. These programmes would receive phone calls and queries from the audience about their (hypothetical) romantic relationships. In these activities, pupils would have to support them, while examining and learning about relationship dynamics.

Teachers must be aware of the underlying dynamics of the class, which includes gender, but also popularity or ethnic identities, because these hierarchies or power dynamics affect which questions can be asked publicly or how safe students feel in certain discussions (Cense et al., 2020). However, according to Svendsen's (2017) review of sex education in the Nordic countries, sex educators should be wary not to reinforce biased representations of sexual norms and attitudes in "other cultures" as this could lead to racist bullying.

More generally, whole-school approaches ensure a comprehensive approach to inclusion across different dimensions at school. These include members of staff themselves being supportive, promoting pupils' engagement and peer-support, as well as embedding in the curriculum inclusive activities that increase the probability of successfully improving the experience of LGBTQ+ pupils at school (Fitzpatrick et al., 2022).

Rights-based approaches and psycho-social education

Rights-based approaches

Berglas et al. (2014) discuss a rights-based approach to sexuality education in their interviews with US and international sexuality education experts. A rights-based approach is underpinned by the shared belief that sexuality, sexual health, sexual rights and gender are topics that have to be raised jointly to facilitate pupils to be responsible and make informed choices in their sexual lives.

Key principles of a rights-based approach include:

- Recognising young people's right to self-determination, including expressing their sexuality, deciding when to be sexually active, and having a safe and pleasurable sexual life;
- Providing young people with agency to acknowledge and speak about their own needs whereas simultaneously respecting the rights and needs of others;
- Affecting pupils' wellbeing in a positive way (that is, not stressing only negative or harmful aspects of sex such as unintended pregnancies or STIs);
- Inspiring the empowerment, sexual assertiveness and civic engagement of pupils;
- Paving change in the delivery of sex education, particularly through experiential and participatory learning that directly involves the pupils in the learning process and supports them to reflect on their personal experiences

It has also been noted that while a rights-based approach is not focused on preventing harms (e.g., STIs), it can be more effective in reducing harms due to providing young people with the means to make rational decisions about reducing risk through their own behaviours.

Goldfarb and Lieberman (2021) also presented findings motivating rights-based and social justice frameworks when teaching topics related to sexuality and sexual health. A social justice approach is defined by the authors as an approach using the concepts of human rights and equality through which to challenge power, privilege and structural systematic discrimination against marginalised communities. There is evidence suggesting that such an approach is well-founded and can be applied across the curriculum and all grades, can lead to increased awareness of gender and sexual orientation equity as well as, in general, more positive attitudes about sexual rights, such as understanding that a person always has the right to stop or refuse sexual intercourse with their current partner (Goldfarb and Lieberman, 2021). The programmes reviewed by the authors included a one-shot music-based programme focused on attitudes related to racism, a year-long multimedia programme on gender equity, a 12-session programme applying a rights-based approach to sexuality education, and literature classes on oppression, diversity, LGBTQ+ issues and marriage equality.

Social-emotional learning

Research has shown that social-emotional learning (SEL) can deliver academic and behavioural outcomes that can contribute to real-life benefits for students of all ages (Goldfarb and Lieberman, 2021). Particularly, Durlak et al. (2011) presented findings from a meta-analysis of 213 SEL interventions delivered at all stages of children's education, i.e., from pre-school to secondary education, in different countries. SEL programmes target self-awareness, social awareness and relationship skills. According to the authors, these competencies help pupils act according to their beliefs and values, care for others, and take responsibility for their actions and behaviours instead of being driven by external factors. Their findings showed that the SEL programmes delivered positive outcomes across several categories, including better attitudes toward self and others (e.g., self-esteem, prosocial beliefs about violence, and better attitudes toward schools and teachers), reduced conduct problems and emotional distress, and improved social skills, such as identifying emotions, decision-making and problem-solving skills. Based on the above study, among others, Goldfarb and Lieberman (2021) suggested that it is essential for SEL competencies to be integrated into any school-based RSE programme and also be measured in programme assessments.

Using external resources

As discussed earlier, external agents, such as NGOs, have led many changes in RSE content and pedagogies in Nordic countries by providing guidance and supplementary programmes in schools (Svendsen, 2017). Our search identified very limited literature assessing the impact of the use of external resources and facilitators on RSE delivery. Lloyd (2018) examined the impact of domestic violence on children and their education and how they can be supported within the education system through a literature review. Based on the studies reviewed, the authors suggested that although external facilitators

have specialist knowledge, expertise and experience of discussing sensitive topics with young people, teachers have a better understanding of the circumstances of their students. Consequently, the authors suggested that a collaboration between teachers and external facilitators may be beneficial as it will combine the strengths of all professionals.

The evidence on who should teach content in sex education is still slightly mixed. Dutch pupils declared being content with their own teacher in sex education and appreciated having someone self-confident and trustworthy. However, preferences for external facilitators may vary due to cultural circumstances and built-in prejudices towards the subject (Cense et al., 2020). Some of the children and young people who participated in the qualitative research reviewed by Pound et al. (2015) stated their preference to be taught by people other than their own teachers because of blurred boundaries and lack of anonymity. Additionally, the students who participated in this research were positive about sexual health experts and peer educators.

Regarding students with SEND, it is noted that additional resources and further support should be provided for their teaching. Collaborations with other relevant organisations and professionals (such as care organisations, sexual services and specialist health services) can prove useful to better identify the needs of these young people and tailor the curriculum to them (McCann et al., 2019).

The impact of parental attitudes

Children's knowledge about sex and relationships is inevitably affected by inputs received from parents, peers, schooling, media or culture, which means that they are exposed to informal stereotypes about sex and relationships since early childhood (Robinson and Davies, 2017). While young people do receive informal learning and sexual socialisation from very early in life, UNESCO stresses the importance of school-based sex education to complement the role of parents by providing appropriate learning environments and tools (Mullinax et al., 2017). In line with this view, based on interviews and focus groups with 300 Dutch students aged 12 to 18 years old, Cense et al. (2020) concluded that school-based sex education is of great importance especially for those who lack adequate information at home, given that available information on the internet does not guarantee comprehensiveness or reliability (Cense et al. 2020).

At the same time, community connections, including connections and partnerships with parents and caregivers is part of a whole-school approach to sex education (Fitzpatrick et al., 2022). This approach suggests ensuring that engagement also happens at school events, which should welcome a wide and diverse set of families and community structures (Fitzpatrick et al., 2022).

Young people in Australia shared that some parents feel more comfortable knowing that their children will receive sexuality education at school rather than having to discuss

related topics with their children (Carmody, 2015). While parents do want their children to receive adequate information about sex, sexual health and sexual relationships, many of them do not feel well-placed to provide this sort of information. Carmody (2015) noted that this may indicate parents' own lack of sex education, which can perpetuate an 'intergenerational silence between parents and their children'. Nonetheless, some of the people interviewed noted that parents do need to be better educated about relationships and violence more broadly, so they can have honest discussions with their children.

Based on the above discussion and evidence, engaging with parents to ensure consistency and complementarity may be beneficial. However, backlashes can happen if school and parent views are not aligned. In these cases, parental attitudes can produce fear of potential repercussions and undermine early childhood educators' willingness to engage in actual sex education (Robinson and Davies, 2017).

Based on the literature, taboos around sexuality within the family context play an important role on children's approach to sex education, their learning and how they participate in school-based education. Particularly, according to Robinson and Davies (2017) who undertook a qualitative research with Australian children aged 3-11, their parents and teachers, some parents actively misinform their children or negatively perform peer-pressure on other parents if their children are informed about topics related to relationships, sexuality and sex at an early age. Those parents are usually driven by concerns about disrupting childhood innocence.

In Latvia, Laganovska and Kviese (2021) conducted a survey of 72 teachers working with students with intellectual disabilities. More than 50% of teachers in this survey reported that parents did not show interest in their children's sexuality education (Laganovska and Kviese, 2021). Systematic collection of evidence shows that families of adolescents and young people with SEND tend to be worried (though not always and not all of them) that if they become sexually active this will pose a risk to their safety and may result in abuse or another form of harm (McCann et al., 2019). McCann et al (2019) stressed that this further intensifies their need for accessing sex and relationships education, but teachers should be trained to address their families' concerns or disagreements, primarily by highlighting the ability of people with SEND to consent to sexual activities as well as the positive impact relevant education can have on their lives.

Adapting relationships education for pupils with SEND

Pupils with SEND usually have less opportunities to receive sex education (especially education suited to their circumstances) than their peers without such needs (Grove et al., 2018; McDaniels & Fleming, 2016; Strnadová et al., 2021). There is, however, a growing body of research – encompassing programme evaluations and literature reviews – providing suggestions and examples of good practice for ensuring that relationships education is accessible to pupils with SEND.

In terms of curriculum design and delivery, involving pupils in curriculum design and adopting a person-centred approach places pupils with SEND at the centre of the teaching process and ensures that the curriculum is delivered in a way that enables pupils' relationship and sexuality needs to be addressed (McCann et al., 2019). According to McCann et al. (2019) the findings of one of the studies reviewed by them (based on interviews with 16 peer educators) suggested that peer educators may be beneficial in educating students with similar needs about forming and maintaining relationships, developing relationship skills and accessing networks and community resources. The study also suggested that the role of peer educators can benefit the individual by developing their own knowledge and increasing their confidence and self-esteem. However, the authors of the specific study concluded that further research is needed to identify the actual impact of such peer educators.

Language is another important aspect affecting pupils' engagement with the curriculum. Examples of good practice discussed by McCann et al (2019) include avoiding long sentences and abstract concepts that can hinder the understanding of the pupils, as well as scheduling short teaching sessions to avoid their fatigue (González et al., 2018) and introducing information slowly with several repetitions until pupils can fully comprehend it (de Wit et al., 2022). The use of multimedia and online resources is also known to be beneficial, especially when it includes features such as text to speech, repetition of content on demand, and a safe space for learning to navigate the internet and social media (Grove et al., 2018).

The available literature also provides us with a number of suggestions on how to further support the engagement of pupils with SEND. These include: giving them space to define their sexual identity themselves, providing them with information about sexual orientation and ways to express their sexuality, and supporting them in making informed decisions about their sexual life (De Wit et al., 2022).

Finally, the literature review conducted by McCann et al (2019) showed that there are wider benefits for pupils with SEND who are effectively included in the RSE curriculum, such as: boosting their self-esteem, developing positive feelings and better knowledge of issues related to their sexuality as well as their personal safety, and informing their decision-making capacity, especially in areas related to consent and personal boundaries.

The impact of involving pupils in curriculum design

Evidence from the available literature showed that involving pupils in curriculum design is particularly important for pupils with SEND, as this can ensure that there is provision for their learning needs during the design process and that the delivery of the curriculum is suited to their circumstances (McCann et al., 2019). McCann et al. (2019) further mentioned that, to develop an RSE curriculum that truly reflects the needs of these

pupils, it is of critical importance to involve, alongside the pupils, health professionals and special education teachers.

Similarly, for sexuality education practices to be effective, UNESCO promotes student-centred approaches to planning, hence being sensitive to different concerns and identities, and supporting their active participation to increase the relevance of learning (Cense et al., 2020). The Education Review Office (ERO) in New Zealand also recommends that schools involve pupils in decision-making and engage students' organisations in making school and curriculum-wide decisions (Fitzpatrick et al., 2022).

Teaching topics which feel awkward or uncomfortable

It is acknowledged that teachers may feel uncomfortable engaging in discussions with their pupils about recognising their own and others' sexual desires and how this relates to consent (Clonan-Roy et al., 2021). Evidence from the literature review conducted by Clonan-Roy et al. (2021) suggested that, to overcome this discomfort, teaching staff should start seeing themselves as being the source of accurate information for their pupils, which is important for the latter's positive development. To that end, teachers need to also be able to recognise and challenge topics and discussions that can prove damaging for young people (e.g., curricula that, instead of ending rape culture, promote it – see relevant discussion in Chapter 3).

Recommendations

Below we present a list of recommendations related to pedagogy and approach to teaching RSE. The recommendations were developed based on the evidence reviewed and presented above, as well as on the views of the Expert Group.

Recommendation 1: RSE is most effective when begun early

The literature provides evidence that relationships and sex education can be more effective when introduced early in a child's life before sexual activity begins.

Recommendation 2: The RSE curriculum should support young people to build and maintain positive, healthy relationships and cover a broad range of topics underpinning relationships nowadays

The RSE curriculum should follow a comprehensive sexuality education approach. The aim of this broader approach should be to support young people to build and maintain positive, healthy relationships of all kinds through teaching about the emotional and physical aspects of relationships, sex, sexuality and sexual health. Together with learning to recognise, build and maintain positive, equal and consensual relationships, the curriculum should equip young people to recognise negative, non-consensual, and

abusive relationships and situations. The curriculum should also provide pupils with the information needed to access appropriate advice and support for themselves or others.

However, it should be clarified that, within the above concepts, the focus should be on how to prevent pupils from developing harmful behaviours rather than how to protect oneself from abuse. Additionally, gender equality should be emphasised within the curriculum as it can create the foundations and skills for healthy relationships as well as prevent abuse and harassment. Finally, the RSE curriculum should also cover contemporary issues that are key aspects of young people's relationships. One specific topic suggested by the literature is internet safety, which can be integrated into the topics of dating abuse and sexual abuse prevention.

Recommendation 3: Teaching staff should receive training on all aspects of RSE, equipping them with good understanding of RSE curriculum and pedagogy, and additional confidence

Teaching staff should receive training in RSE pedagogy, including how: to create a safe learning environment; assess learning to ensure teaching is relevant and appropriately sequenced, and that progress has been made; and handle questions and facilitate discussion on sensitive issues. This, together with training that increases and regularly updates specific subject knowledge, will increase teacher confidence in teaching all aspects of RSE, including more sensitive topics and contemporary issues (e.g., online abuse and relationships). Subject leads should receive additional training in planning and sequencing RSE within the broader RSHE/PSHE education curriculum, particularly with respect to health education.

Recommendation 4: RSE design should include pupil consultation and young people's voices need to be at the centre of curriculum design

Pupil consultation during the designing of the RSE curriculum is a promising approach that can be very helpful in ensuring that RSE reflects all pupils' needs (particularly in terms of being inclusive of different identities, be they sexual, cultural or educational), what matters to young people and their ideas and opinions. It is important that schools' approach facilitates pupils' voices being heard and taken into account when designing, adjusting or improving the RSE curriculum.

Recommendation 5: The curriculum should incorporate education that builds on previous lessons and has a longer duration

The evidence reviewed suggests that education that builds on previous lessons and has a longer duration is more effective than one-off modules. A promising method is to ensure that values from the RSE syllabus are present across the whole curriculum to provide students with a comprehensive learning of key values and avoid confusion created by conflicting information and messages.

Recommendation 6: A whole-school approach should be adopted by schools to enhance learning as well as support pupils

The values and key lessons learned as part of RSE should be reflected and reinforced in the wider school context, outside of RSE lessons. Creating clear procedures for safeguarding, disclosure and support for victims are crucial elements of a whole-school approach. Finally, another consideration is how RSE interacts with other topics discussed within PSHE, where teachers can discuss key foundations of RSE (such as gender equality) within lessons about health, careers and other aspects of everyday life.

Recommendation 7: The RSE curriculum and delivery should be inclusive, particularly in relation to LGBTQ+ issues and needs of children with SEND

Evidence from the available literature indicates that in some places the curriculum focuses on heterosexual relationships, which leads to the experiences of some students not being reflected within the curriculum. Additionally, research suggests that curricula that are inclusive of pupils' sexual orientations, gender identities and expressions reduce homophobic/transphobic bullying and harassment, and increase safety for LGBTQ+ students. Whole-school approaches to ensure a comprehensive approach to inclusion and using literature featuring LGBTQ+ characters are two of the methods proposed in the literature.

There is also a need to increase the relevance of RSE for children with SEND by adding differentiation to RSE teaching and delivery while also allowing those students to become active participants in lessons. A lack of SEND-appropriate resources for teachers has been identified as a gap that needs to be filled to enable them to make their teaching more inclusive. Finally, using appropriate and inclusive language and examples, e.g., portraying young people from marginalised groups, is also suggested to allow learning for all students.

Chapter 2. Boundaries, consent, and privacy

In this chapter, we discuss privacy, boundaries and consent, and outline practical approaches within sex and relationships education as described in the literature reviewed.

Our evaluation of the search results retrieved 18 pieces of evidence within the scope of this chapter. We included three pieces of academic literature through backward snowballing and three pieces of grey literature to fill in the gaps of teaching about consent in ways that acknowledge young people's vulnerabilities.

A broad range of evidence was available about teaching and discussing sexual consent and communication, including teaching examples and programme evaluations. The evidence on the interaction between power imbalance and consent was also extensive, but mainly focused on how relationships between girls and boys are affected by gender expectations. In understanding vulnerability, while some qualitative evidence was available for sexual minorities, there was a gap in the literature about pupils with SEND. Teaching guidance relevant to pupils' vulnerabilities in broad terms was used to cover for this gap. The evidence on challenging stereotypes also included some interesting examples for teaching. Evidence on making consent education relevant for all pupils showed that RSE examples about seeking and giving consent tend to use solely heterosexual relationships as their reference, excluding other sexual identities such as LGBTQ+. Particularly for students with SEND, evidence suggests that teaching about consent should cover a wider scope of topics, such as anatomy of the human body and the use of reproductive organs, considering that RSE curriculums designed for students with SEND currently tend to have a strong focus on shielding them from risk and harm. While academic literature did not clearly identify age ranges for when it is appropriate to introduce the concept of consent to children, teaching guides provided some broader directions.

Teaching and discussing sexual consent and communication

Available literature indicated that young people approach sexual encounters and consensual relationships in a social context, framed by gender and peer expectations (Coy et al., 2016), but they may actually feel awkward about actively seeking consent (LeCroy et al., 2021). However, violations of personal boundaries and sexual consent also intersect with structural inequalities (against women, LGBTQ+ people and sexual minorities) and result in different degrees of violence and coercive practices (de Heer et al., 2021).

Carmody (2015) interviewed over 50 young Australians aged between 16 and 25 years old to understand their exposure to different sexuality education lessons during primary school and secondary school and assessed their feelings, opinions and experiences. Research participants mentioned that, while they did acquire a broad understanding of

consent through sexuality education, they lacked the skills to actively communicate about sexual intimacy with their partners, including clarifying what they were mutually consenting to each time. They also mentioned not having the ability to reflect in the moment of sexual intimacy on whether the acts taking place are truly something they feel comfortable with and enjoy. Therefore, Carmody (2015) notes that awareness of one's personal desires and the effect these can have on a partner are necessary for young people to be able to decode consent. In a study looking at what students in Australia desire from an RSE programme, 1,258 pupils aged between 14 and 18 years old expressed their preference for additional discussion and teaching about consent within RSE (Waling et al., 2021).

Following their qualitative study with adolescents in England, Coy et al. (2016) suggested that young men can recognise when there is a lack of consent in sexual encounters with young women, but also may use pressure to override it. According to the research, young men see this pressure as part of what is expected from men in sexual relationships. The authors' primary research examined perceptions of consent in real-life situations. This research, carried out on behalf of the Office of the Children's Commissioner, included the release of several video diaries in which people explained situations legally defined as rape. The stories included some contextual information aiming to understand adolescents' judgement about consent under different scenarios.

Two main findings resulted from the research by Coy et al. (2016). First, people's perceptions about consent violations tend to be blurred when seen through the prism of alcohol consumption, previous relationships, pornography and/or peer pressure. Second, the authors found that while the behaviour of girls tended to be more scrutinised when issues would arise around consent, boys would instead gain social status from the transgression of social norms. Interestingly, the majority of adolescents who participated in the research focused on the action of giving consent and disregarded the importance of seeking and receiving it. The authors also clarified that young men and young men also experience challenges, but these are mostly around peer expectations about sexual behaviours (e.g., seeking approval by demonstrating their experience). Reinforcing social norms of masculinity, this also translates into girls suffering pressure from male peers across an increasing "continuum of non-consensual sexual practices" (Coy et al., 2016, page 93). Hence, to avoid harmful stereotypes and competitive masculinity, Coy et al. (2016) argued that teaching consent should build on exploring and challenging pupils' pre-existing assumptions about people's behaviour based on their gender, expectations for/from peers' behaviour as well as victimisation, while it should also offer an open forum for discussion.

An evaluation of interest within the given context is the evaluation of the Guy Talk programme in the US, which focused on boys aged between 14 and 17 years old. Through the delivery of a 10-hour curriculum, the programme targeted children's understanding of gender role expectations, emotions management and the building of positive peer support. Single-sex group discussions between male adolescents about

peer pressure and masculinity were very well rated among participants, as they valued not feeling shy or uncomfortable in front of girls (LeCroy et al., 2021).

This single-sex approach needs to be considered alongside the findings from the literature review conducted by Sell et al. (2021), according to which mixed (female and male) environments provide a good opportunity for children to recognise gender stereotypes. The studies included in their review featured discussions around topics that provoked emotional responses, such as pornography or cheating on a partner, but also sports-based activities with adequate facilitation. On the other hand, follow-up surveys and quantitative analysis of data from the Guy Talk programme showed that participants had enhanced behaviours such as condom use and peer assertiveness (i.e., “saying no to peer pressure to have sex if I don’t want to”). They had also learned to respect a lack of consent, but the programme was less impactful on participants’ broader attitudes towards women (LeCroy et al., 2021).

Finally, a qualitative content analysis of sex education textbooks used in the US conducted by Clonan-Roy et al. (2021) identified teaching examples that can help pupils understand issues around consent. One of them included sharing written or virtual dialogues and practical examples about how to discuss consent. The authors especially supported focus being placed on respecting the boundaries of others instead of on safeguarding one’s own boundaries, particularly making sure that boys understand that responsibility lies with them to comprehend and respect their partners’ desires and preferred ways to experience pleasure. The importance of shifting focus from safeguarding to respecting boundaries is supported by the findings of the Talk About Toxic survey results (SafeLives & On Our Radar, 2020), where it emerged in the responses of young people that they would like to have greater clarity around which behaviours are acceptable and which are not in a romantic relationship. The proportion of male survey respondents requesting that was also higher than the proportion of female ones (63% compared to 46%). Other examples shared by Clonan-Roy et al. (2021) included developing young people’s skills on the basis of seeking rather than refusing consent, and making clear to young people that consent needs to be constantly revisited and cannot be treated as irrevocable if granted.

Understanding the interaction between power imbalance and consent

As discussed above (Coy et al., 2016), findings from an intervention among English adolescents indicated a heavily gendered view about consent – boys’ poor behaviour is taken as inevitable, whereas girls’ behaviour tends to be scrutinised. Adolescents participating in the study seemed to understand the concept of consent, but when real life situations were introduced, the process of negotiating consent was seen as less straightforward. Similarly, Sundaram and Sauntson (2016) suggested that gendered expectations and behaviours form pupils’ understanding of consent – hence gender

should be central to any approach teaching topics around intimacy, consensual relationships and violence.

For example, a review of material and policies relevant to RSE in Northern Ireland showed that the bodies and sexuality of young females are depicted as requiring protection in order to be shielded from potential risk and harm (Wilkinson, 2021). As such, female bodies are seen as passive recipients of other people's behaviours and young females are deprived of their sexual agency, including their capacity to desire, seek pleasure and consent to sexual acts.

An empirical study conducted in Australia by Robinson and Davies (2017) on introducing elements of sexuality education in early childhood showed that children between 5 and 8 years old participating in the research already understood the concept of romantic love. They could also acknowledge relationships that were significant for them and recognise that emotions they develop for somebody else may not always be mutual. Activities used to engage children in the research included: (i) pop up images of different relationship scenarios such as a date and a wedding, to ask children what they considered appropriate in each context, (ii) scenarios of two boys chasing and kissing a girl as opposed to two girls chasing and kissing a boy to consider how consent is seen through the lens of gender and how power relates to one's gender, and (iii) discussions about what respect means and examples of when people are respectful and disrespectful. The authors concluded that, considering the impact of gender identities on children's understanding around consent and taking into account that pupils start exploring sexual relationships during adolescence, early intervention ensures that young people are aware of what consent entails before they find themselves in situations where they have to negotiate it.

On the other hand, Sell et al. (2021) conducted a systematic review of evidence on sex education addressing gender and power. All reviewed interventions presented at least one explicit lesson, topic or activity covering gender or power in sexual relationships – e.g., harmful notions of masculinity or femininity affecting behaviours, or power inequality in sexual intercourse. Despite not directly addressing the idea of consent, in-school reflection and critical awareness of harmful gender roles were two of the main mechanisms showing to have impact on students – e.g., promoted willingness to change, non-violent attitudes and improved class climate. Remarkably, students increased their appreciation that multiple masculinities can be possible (i.e., differing from traditional social norms of masculinity) and were encouraged to revisit their own behaviours when they felt that these identified with harmful stereotypes.

Finally, Haberland (2015) reviewed several interventions taking place across the globe to understand the importance of discussing gender and power in sexuality and health education. Although outcomes of interest were mainly narrowed to STI prevention and unintended pregnancies, a few interesting points about how to incorporate reflections on gender and the role of power into teaching practice were observed. Firstly, a common

characteristic across successful programmes was stimulating critical thinking about how gender norms and power operate, including critically examining, analysing and discussing: (i) images of women and girls in visual media and music, (ii) practices that can be harmful, such as early marriage, (iii) power disparities due to economic or age differences, and (iv) gender stereotypes' impact on how males and females express their sexuality. Additionally, writing exercises and short case studies were used to promote individual reflection on relationship types and the role of power in personal relationships. One of the interventions included teaching about equal abilities between males and females, though it did not seem to encourage young people's consideration of power in their relationships. Instead, what did work was fostering self-esteem and self-power among students. Several programmes reviewed by Haberland (2015) tried to highlight the importance of empowerment and valuing oneself – emphasising gender pride, one's individual potential, and, if the local context required it, tying these together with ethnic or racial pride to increase pupils' sense of self-worth.

Understanding vulnerability, including SEND

Consent may be understood differently according to one's sex and gender (Barter et al., 2009). The PSHE Association's Teaching about consent Guidance (PSHE Association, 2022) urges teaching staff and practitioners to bear in mind that young people's prior or initial approach to consent can be heavily gendered. Moreover, pupils' sexual orientation, gender identity, socio-economic or cultural background, and educational needs and disabilities also shape their comprehension of consent and their vulnerability to non-consensual situations (PSHE Association, 2022).

When introducing consent, the PSHE Association Guidance suggests avoiding activities or teaching approaches that aim to induce shock or guilt in pupils, focusing instead on actions that can be taken so pupils can keep themselves and others safe and healthy. RSE and teaching about consent should inform pupils with increased vulnerabilities where and how to access support, both in school and in the wider community. However, it should also encourage all young people to share their concerns when they feel that one of their classmates is at risk. Similarly, the PSHE Association Guidance recognises that some people may have greater vulnerability for different reasons, including age and personal development, and that extra care is necessary when their peers establish relationships with them. When forming a relationship, an individual should consider any asymmetry of power or knowledge and what impact this can have on the other individual's capacity to consent to an activity.

In group discussions, young LGBTQ+ people have also shared their concerns about the vulnerabilities resulting from their sexual identities. In focus groups conducted by de Heer et al. (2021) in the US, participants commented that not being 'out' can be used as a means for coercion. For instance, partners in an abusive relationship can threaten disclosure. On the other hand, young people also reflected that being 'out' can lead to unwanted sexual attention, intrusive approaches and consent violations in community

events. Some of these participants declared that they had experienced pressure or coercion coming from the assumption that they should always be interested in or looking for sex. This ambivalence towards sharing one's sexual identity or not is very well aligned with the findings of Haley et al. (2019) from conversations they had with Trans and Non-Binary young people also in the US. Interlocutors shared that the ability to maintain agency about their identity was an important matter of concern for them. They also acknowledged that respecting one's own or another's privacy and boundaries should also apply to the use of language (e.g., how to refer to one's self or one's body).

Challenging stereotypes, misogyny, racism or other forms of prejudiced assumptions

Underlying power dynamics in the classroom (i.e., pupils' relationships and how these are influenced by their gender, or race or socioeconomic background) affect outcomes of sexuality education interventions (Sell et al., 2021). The initiatives discussed below approach RSE as a lens through which adolescents and young people can become motivated to question dominant gender norms and relevant stereotypes.

Given the extent to which the internet, the media and external resources affect children and adolescents' views and access to information, Ragonese et al. (2017) argued that sex education should be media-informed. According to the authors, sex education should enhance media literacy of pupils, teaching them to identify sexual stereotypes related to gender, race or other categories as seen in the media, challenge them and be able to identify their purpose (e.g., advertising).

In her academic literature review, Haberland (2015) discussed teaching interventions that successfully approach gender and power, drawing attention to power dynamics and less obvious forms of harassment, such as more subtle forms of sexual harassment. The author stressed the need to provide teachers with specific content for teaching and to include in the curriculum activities and vocabulary to explore stereotypes and inequalities in intimate relationships among pupils. Haberland (2015)'s review also highlighted the importance of promoting self-worth, self-efficacy and one's own power, including gender or racial pride. The author presented an example that included reading the work of Black female writers to foster young women's pride in being Black and female.

The rights-based approach to sexuality education discussed by Berglas, Angulo-Olaiz et al. (2014) also provides examples of how to raise awareness about widespread stereotypes among pupils. Following focus groups with high-school adolescents discussing their sexual relationships, the authors suggested that the curriculum of sexuality education should aim to challenge gendered norms. This can be achieved by encouraging male teenagers to reflect on the societal pressures imposed on them about engaging in sexual intercourse and enabling them to decode how these relate to social constructions of manhood, and the impact this is having on the decisions they make about their sexual life and activities. On the other hand, sexuality education should

prompt young women to reconsider their perceived notions of womanhood and be encouraged to break free from social norms presenting them as passive recipients of others' behaviours, instead leading their own lives as they wish (e.g., using birth control, being career-driven). There is also a need to reconsider examples commonly used in RSE curricula, such as depicting females as victims of violence and males as the perpetrators, as this risks solidifying the gendered inequalities RSE seeks to prevent. Instead, the authors suggested raising issues of power imbalance and encouraging dialogue with both boys and girls.

Making consent education relevant for all pupils

Qualitative findings from de Heer et al. (2021) indicated that consent among LGBTQ+ youth has been overlooked in sexual education curricula as well as in activist movements such as #MeToo. Besides the fact that a large portion of literature and evidence around sexual consent focuses on heterosexual and cisgender encounters, participants in their focus groups argued that consent among queer communities bears unique complexities. According to participants, sex in queer relationships encompasses a wide spectrum of practices, that may or may not be seen as sex by both partners (de Heer et al., 2021). Additionally, participants mentioned that queer individuals lack references or scenarios that can be relevant to situations they may encounter. Finally, participants also mentioned that current curricula are purely technical – i.e., focused on puberty, the reproductive system, contraception methods and diseases (de Heer et al., 2021), an issue affecting young people of all gender identities and sexual orientations.

Trans and Non-Binary young people have also declared a strong preference for consent and the emotional aspects of romantic relationships to be part of the curriculum. In interviews conducted by Haley et al. (2019), Trans and Non-Binary young people highlight the importance of defining consent in ways that are representative of everyone's experiences. Excluding the experience of Trans and Non-Binary people from the content taught in traditional sex and relationships education has resulted in feelings of shame, unworthiness and in their subsequent disengagement from the teaching taking place (Haley et al., 2019). Pupils and parents, but also healthcare affiliates in this study, suggested that education with Trans and Non-Binary children should start with acknowledging that their identities and bodies are valid and worthwhile.

Discussions about consent were also seen as quite limited by interviewees, who suggested that a broader scope would be more useful. First and foremost, interviewees said that teaching about consent should cover more than heterosexual relationships between cisgender people and refer to a range of intimate acts. Secondly, Trans and Non-Binary pupils said they would like further tools to adequately enforce their privacy, boundaries and communication – providing them, for example, with references about how to refer to their bodies or how to identify verbal abuse and invasive questions. Disclosure of one's Trans and Non-Binary identity is a unique challenge encountered by young people and participants in Haley et al.'s research suggested that it is important to

be taught how to disclose it while maintaining one's personal agency during that moment, regardless of the romantic or sexual nature of a relationship (Haley et al., 2019).

More broadly, Wilkinson (2021) suggests that it is important to use inclusive language in sex education to effectively show that everyone, regardless of their sexual orientation, are equally entitled to sexual pleasure and sexual exploration. For RSE to be truly inclusive, she argues that sex and gender discussions should not follow the rigid and binary connotations that female equals girl and male equals boy. Instead, she suggests that RSE has to embrace all sexual identities, including queer, intersex, asexual and nonbinary, and allow pupils to become confident in the identities they have chosen for themselves.

Pupils with SEND

Because of pre-existing conceptions about the needs of young people with SEND – including for example that they need to be constantly watched over and that the expression of their sexuality can either be heightened (hypersexual) or missing (asexual) – RSE curriculums designed for them tend to have a strong focus on risk and harm, and leave aside the positive aspects of sex such as discussions about desire, pleasure and intimacy (McCann et al., 2019).

Due to this limited scope of RSE for young people with SEND, programme evaluations have shown that young people with SEND are more likely to lack basic awareness of the human body's anatomy, its capacity, as well as of the reproductive process. It is therefore important to include a wider introduction about these topics – for example which are the reproductive organs in the two sexes and how they operate, and what it means to be sexually healthy – so young people with SEND can comprehend what consent entails and how personal boundaries relate to their own bodies (Grove et al., 2018). Depending on the degrees of disability, pupils' educational needs can be extremely heterogeneous and include a number of knowledge gaps, such as the ones mentioned above. Therefore, it is important to teach sexuality as broader than just sexual acts, including flirting, kissing, etc. (Löfgren-Mårtenson, 2012).

Age and stage appropriate introduction of topics related to consent

The age and stage at which to introduce the concept of sexual consent to children is a topic of much debate – for example, social research shows that many parents are concerned about childhood innocence (Robinson and Davies, 2017). It also stands out that definitions as well as complex terms within the field of sex education, such as consent, can be confusing for young children. However, academic literature does not address, per se, the question of when it is appropriate to introduce the concept of consent to children.

The Relationships Education, Relationships and Sex Education (RSE) and Health Education statutory guidance (Department for Education, 2019) state that pupils should be introduced to behaviours such as being kind to others, being considerate and showing respect, acting in honesty and truthfulness, and seeking and giving permission during the early stages of education. Central to this approach is the need for pupils to comprehend what personal privacy means and how it relates to one's personal space and establishing their boundaries, including in their day-to-day physical contact with others. Teaching about consent is then introduced only in secondary education.

The PSHE Association (2022) Guidance suggests consent be explored in contexts relevant to pupils' lives, but without a direct reference to pupils' personal experiences. Commenting on fictional scenarios instead of actual ones can enable pupils to distance themselves from what is being discussed in the classroom, which reduces the risk of disclosures in an inappropriate setting or re-traumatising pupils. For pupils below the age of 7, PSHE Association (2022) Guidance suggests an introduction to the idea of permission, including examples of how to respond to uncomfortable physical contact, when they should ask for permission and how to be polite. At KS2 (7 to 11 years old), the PSHE Association Guidance introduces more explicit ideas about privacy and personal boundaries in friendships and wider relationships. At this stage, more types of encounters can be discussed, including online content and interaction as well as different types of physical contact.

The PSHE Association (2022) Guidance recommends that pupils start exploring sexual consent in greater depth in KS3 (11 to 14 years old) when adolescents are introduced to social expectations, readiness, managing requests and becoming aware of the law. This concept, at this stage, is also linked to the individual's autonomy, their values and right to pleasure. Finally, at KS4 (14 to 16 years old), the guidance delves deeper into intimacy and pleasure, accurate information for self-exploration (e.g., readiness for sex, online activity, motivations), and the impact of pornography on young people's expectations and relationships. KS3 touches on pupils' capacity to give sexual consent and the pressures they may undergo, while KS4 makes use of specific examples such as maturing relationships, drug and alcohol misuse, attitudes towards assault and victim-blaming.

The qualitative study with adolescents in England conducted by Coy et al. (2016) suggests there is a turning point around the age of 15, when adolescents appear more likely to identify scenarios in which there is a lack of consent. According to the authors, people are likely to have started having sexual experiences by then, hence their understanding changes from purely conceptual to practical and experiential.

Understanding the historical and social context around consent

It is evident from the available literature that women's sexuality is still often depicted in popular culture as depending on men's recognition in order to be validated, depriving

women of their own sexual self-expression and experimentation. As discussed in Chapter 1, research suggested that RSE curricula usually lack discussion about the concepts of desire and pleasure (as discussed in Chapter 1), which in turn can lead to objectification of the female body and can create confusion about what consent really entails (Lameiras-Fernández et al., 2021). Such depictions of female sexuality can be the result of wider social, political or religious contexts. Wilkinson (2021) applied feminist critical discourse and content analysis to examine official government circulars, legislative text and RSE policy guidance in Northern Ireland. The authors concluded that, despite attempts to make RSE education more inclusive, the curriculum still perpetuates gender inequalities and rigid approaches to sexual orientation.

Young people themselves sometimes appear to be aware of socioeconomic influences on gender inequality. Having conducted focus groups with young people in adolescent sexual relationships, Berglas, Constantine et al. (2014) identified unclear expectations when consent is interwoven with other socioeconomic aspects. For example, when one partner spends money during a dating relationship, this risks translating into pressure for the other partner to consent to a sexual relationship in return.

Following her interviews with young Australians, Carmody (2015) stressed the importance of recognising young people as sexual agents. In a discussion that is relevant to curricula beyond Australia, she mentioned that sexuality education needs to challenge existing social perceptions and make it clear through the curriculum that sexual interest and sexual behaviours can be expected during one's puberty and transition into adulthood. That way, young people can also become more aware of the responsibilities attached to them becoming sexually active and how crucial it is to look after their partners in their intimate relationships.

Recommendations

Recommendation 8: Teaching about permission, privacy and boundaries should be introduced in early years

Teaching about permission and privacy in early years' education can create a smooth transition to introducing a more in-depth discussion about consent and respecting other people's boundaries at later stages. Starting early can also be beneficial to the socio-emotional learning of pupils (see Chapter 1), enabling them to develop socio-emotional skills such as empathy, compassion and kindness, which they can later use to learn to respect others' feelings and boundaries. The use of simple examples can ensure that young children understand the applicability of lessons learnt in the classroom, e.g., asking permission to share one's toys.

Recommendation 9: Teaching consent should be subsequent to exploring and challenging gendered expectations and their sources

Consent violations can be rooted in gendered expectations about sexual behaviours and assumptions of sexual encounters. Pupils are raised with specific notions about womanhood and manhood, which can have a negative effect when they attempt to define their position in their personal relationships. Therefore, pupils need first to be made aware of gender roles and stereotypes. They also need to realise that such notions can be equally harmful for both females and males and suppress the expression and rights of different sexual identities such as LGBTQ+. Pupils should be also encouraged to critically identify how they have built such notions (e.g., through the media, pornography, peer pressures, etc.) and encouraged to question them. Teaching consent should be based on such premises and promote healthier, non-binary approaches to sexuality, but the discussion about gender stereotypes cannot be restricted to consent alone.

Recommendation 10: The RSE curriculum should teach young people to actively seek consent

Lessons about consent and boundaries should highlight the importance of actively seeking consent and understanding that consent can be denied and constantly renegotiated, and this should always be respected, as well as that consent is not implied within any context (e.g., previous sexual relationship). Pupils should be facilitated to seek and negotiate consent as part of their daily school interactions (e.g., such as through play), so they can later make use of these skills in their intimate relationships. In line with developing socio-emotional skills as mentioned in Recommendation 1, the curriculum needs to include verbal as well as non-verbal ways of negotiating consent, especially considering that most often consent is communicated non-verbally in an intimate encounter.

Recommendation 11: Lessons about consent should include specific examples of situations that pupils can relate to

The introduction of specific examples of consent seeking and consent violation in lessons in different forms (e.g., stories, images, videos) can enable the class to explore different scenarios without feeling pressurised to reflect on their own experiences to avoid re-traumatisation. Evidence suggests that pupils' self-identification with stories or characters can drive behavioural change. The effect of this identification also works in terms of the negative consequences there can be from being a member of a group (e.g., identifying harmful gender stereotypes or toxic relationships). Therefore, examples need to cover instances where consent is breached that are relevant to pupils' everyday experiences, including, for example, in the online environment where pupils interact daily (e.g., non-consensual image sharing online). It is very important for pupils to understand that violation of consent does not mean that the victim did not safeguard their boundaries well enough, especially to avoid pupils with prior experiences of violence and abuse blaming

themselves. To achieve that, teachers need to be enabled (e.g., by being provided with action plans) to create safe spaces in the classroom while such discussions take place, and relevant sources of support should be signposted to pupils after each such discussion.

Recommendation 12: Examples about consent should promote equality, diversity and inclusion

The examples used in lessons about consent and boundaries should cover a wide spectrum of situations and be relevant to all students, including but not limited to different sexual identities, students with educational differences and students with different cultural backgrounds. Some flexibility needs to be retained depending on the consistency of each classroom and the dynamics of the wider community within which the school operates (e.g., the existence of socioeconomic inequalities, sharp differences in cultural norms, etc.). Instead of having a standardised set of examples to select from, teachers should be given the skills to be able to adjust examples shared with their class.

Chapter 3. Sexual violence and harassment

In this chapter, we discuss evidence from the literature on effective teaching techniques to ensure that young people are clear about what is and what is not acceptable behaviour and why, how to teach about intersectionality and sexual harassment or violence, as well as how to teach about the impact of pornography on sexual behaviour and sexual expectations.

Our search retrieval provided 25 pieces of evidence relevant to this chapter. Our systematic search found prominent gaps in the evidence around teaching about pornography, and the academic and grey literature did not show conclusive figures about pupils' life experiences and specific ages and stages to start teaching. We further included 2 pieces of academic literature through backward snowballing and 8 pieces of grey literature to partially fill in this gap. The absence of robust nationwide data is due to unreported (or late reporting) of bad experiences. Instead, one can rely on observational data and case studies to get a sense of the prevalence of peer abuse, harassment and online sexual behaviour to inform early interventions.

Effective teaching to ensure young people understand acceptable and unacceptable behaviour

Throughout this report, we discussed the importance of understanding gender roles and stereotypes as a core part of RSE. According to Sell et al. (2021), it is these gender norms that support the underlying assumptions about what is or what is not acceptable sexual behaviour. However, according to Schneider and Hirsch (2020), sexuality education in schools usually falls short on sexual violence, and programmes to prevent sexual violence are taught independently from sex and relationships education.

Whitehead (2012) spoke about four preconditions for sexual abuse to occur: (i) having motivation to abuse, (ii) overcoming external inhibitors, (iii) overcoming internal inhibitors (e.g., values or feelings, and familiar or social punishment), and (iv) overcoming resistance from the victim. The evidence reviewed on sexual violence prevention approaches the phenomenon from three perspectives. First, teaching to avoid future perpetration. Second, teaching protective skill-building and behavioural changes for potential victims. And third, encouraging active bystander behaviour.

Schneider and Hirsch (2020) carried out a literature review on sexuality education to prevent sexual violence perpetration. The authors found these courses should point towards four risk factors. The first risk factor is sex, gender roles and expectations, including own beliefs and peers' behaviours. In line with Sell et al. (2021), Schneider and Hirsch (2020) found gender and sexual norms tied to potentially harmful behaviours and expectations. These include sexual desires portraying sexual violence, hostile behaviours towards girls and women, and adherence to traditional male behaviours – which translate into peer and romantic relationships based on different levels of pressure, conflict and

aggression. On this basis, the authors argued that CSE aimed at addressing sexual violence should be *gender-transformative*, i.e., teaching to appreciate and explore expressions of gender, and challenge cultural expectations, stereotypes and inequities that affect decision-making (Schneider and Hirsch, 2020).

The second risk factor is child-abuse experiences or exposure. The systematic review of in-school interventions conducted by Schneider and Hirsch (2020) found that giving children the tools to recognise signs of abuse, name their bodies and body parts, and learn about privacy increased protective behaviour and chances to disclose abusive experiences. Considering privacy, interventions should still include the ability to disclose relevant information or report unwanted attention with trusted adults (Schneider and Hirsch, 2020). It is untrue to suggest that most victims go on to be abusers later in life, but Schneider and Hirsch's (2020) found that adverse experiences in early childhood can affect impulsivity or emotional skills in later development.

The third risk factor is previous sexual behaviour. In addition to exposure to violent sexual encounters, which shapes future expectations, the research review found that impersonal sexual encounters and early sexual initiation affect people's perceptions about power in relationships (Schneider and Hirsch, 2020). Young people become more likely to display needs to demonstrate masculinity and heterosexuality, which encourage harmful behaviours that can lead to sexual violence perpetration (Schneider and Hirsch, 2020). Building on these findings of their review, the authors suggested a broad structure of a CSE programme that includes skills for decision-making in sexual situations, self-assessing sexual initiation, health risks and regular activity.

The fourth risk factor relates to social-emotional intelligence, including personal and interpersonal emotional skills. Schneider and Hirsch (2020) also found that teaching social and emotional skills contributes to sexual violence prevention. Specifically, such teaching contributes to students' ability to acknowledge their own and others' emotions, manage and express their feelings, and show empathy (Schneider and Hirsch, 2020). Durlak et al. (2011) conducted a meta-analysis of 213 studies discussing interventions in elementary and middle schools. The authors defined social-emotional programmes as those that facilitate learning about how to manage emotions, recognise others' views, establish healthy relationships, be responsible in decision-making and be constructive in peer-relationships. This review of papers found that students who participated in such programmes had better social behaviours, fewer behavioural problems overall and lower emotional distress than those who did not participate in these interventions.

In terms of applied practice, McElwain et al. (2016) evaluated an in-school intervention for pupils aged between 14 and 18 years old in the US. This programme included group activities, such as discussions and brainstorming aimed at teaching adolescents about healthy romantic relationships, and role games to support them to identify unhealthy dynamics. For instance, one of the activities involved a game in which students were given red and white flags to identify whether dating scenarios were abusive. The

evaluation of this programme, called RS+, found increased individual empowerment (ability to manage challenges in one's own life) and a decrease in self-reported display of aggressive behaviours.

Reading and discussing young adult literature of different kinds (e.g., fiction, stories) that portray specific views and examples of gender roles has the ability to encourage and discourage violence, including sexual violence (Palmer and Hirsch, 2022). As mentioned in Chapter 1, a systematic review by Palmer and Hirsch (2022) on school-based interventions showed in-class debates about physical and sexual violence can teach pupils to recognise harmful ideals of masculinity and identify them in their lives.

For pupils' protective behaviour, survey analysis and interviews by Santelli et al. (2018) showed that sex education in high school that targets sexual violence and assault prevention (particularly refusal skills) reduces physical sexual abuse in college. The authors concluded that these findings were very well aligned with in-school interventions to teach practices of self-defence. One of these interventions was introduced to schoolgirls aged 7 to 17 in New Zealand. Schools taught pupils basic skills to use their bodies and voices to keep their friends, but also themselves, safe. These techniques included teaching how to recognise good and bad touching, but also active bystander behaviour and help-seeking. This intervention delivered positive outcomes for pupils in terms of physical skills, self-esteem, confidence in disclosing abuse and actively seeking help (Jordan & Mossman, 2018; Santelli et al., 2018).

The Hedgehogs Programme is an educational initiative aimed at preventing child sexual abuse. The programme targets children in primary schools in England and has five key objectives: (i) build children's confidence to ask questions and seek information, (ii) teach them about their bodies, (iii) equip them to better understand risky situations and actions to protect themselves, (iv) develop awareness to trust adults and seek help, and (v) promote awareness about the programme among parents to support their children's learning (Whitehead, 2012).

The pilot of the programme was delivered in three primary schools in England and included five key lessons. The first lesson taught pupils to appreciate diversity by encouraging giving and receiving nice comments in class – appreciating that themselves and their classmates are beautiful and different. The second lesson taught pupils practical features of their bodies and how to recognise body development. The third was aimed at teaching how to listen and respect refusal, as well as develop their own refusal skills. This lesson was built around the activity called *traffic lights*. Pupils were strolling around the class, and the facilitator would shout an action (e.g., handshake, pat on the shoulder). Pupils would have to perform the action with one of their peers around them, and they would sign how they felt using red, amber and green paper cards. The last two lessons were focused on recognising uncomfortable situations, strategies for self-protection and finding reliable adults to seek help (Whitehead, 2012).

According to the evaluation of the programme's pilot, children's confidence in asking questions grew along as lessons progressed, with children becoming more interested and curious, asking more questions both in school and at home, and children reported feeling increased confidence in talking to trusted adults. Despite being taught in isolation, teachers in charge of delivery identified how pupils were able to link the programme's content with other relevant school subjects (Whitehead, 2012). In line with the above findings, the literature review by Thomas and Aggleton (2016) suggested that participatory methods, games and role-playing contribute to pupils integrating information such as refusal skills and resisting peer and social pressure.

Several pieces of evidence also mentioned the importance of third parties in sexual violence and understanding acceptable behaviours. For instance, Santelli et al. (2018) concluded that sexual assault and violence prevention should take a life-course perspective before, during, and after college, and incorporate not only sexual refusal skills, but also bystander training. Similarly, the systematic review of teen dating violence curriculum by Wilson et al. (2019) suggested that sex education should include guidance on how to face changing relationships with family, peers and partners, and these should include skill training about how to intervene as an *active bystander* if they witness violent behaviours. Lastly, being an active bystander seems to also be the result of inclusive approaches to sex education. For instance, quantitative findings from the systematic review by Epps et al. (2021) showed that LGBTQ+ inclusive sex education motivated teachers and pupils to intervene when witnessing homophobic abuse.

Corresponding to young people's needs – identified gaps in RSE

In her interviews with young Australians about their sexual intimacy, Carmody (2015) identified that young people were not adequately informed by school about what sexual assault and other forms of relationship violence can entail. Particularly, young people did not realise that sexual assault can more frequently occur between people familiar to each other instead of strangers. Therefore, young people were not well equipped to handle violent incidents taking place in their intimate relationships with their peers, even more so when these were not heterosexual relationships and the power imbalance was harder to identify.

To address these knowledge gaps, young people shared that they would prefer RSE to focus more on verbal and non-verbal communication between partners, with particular attention to instances where these two collide. This was especially related to the difficulty young people usually face to communicate verbally during intimate situations, while at the same time one's feelings about a given situation can change quickly (Carmody, 2015). Focus group discussions with young Australians suggested that teaching RSE would benefit from the form of role-playing of potential situations young people can find themselves in. According to participants, these would provide them with the opportunity to reflect and identify in advance suitable strategies to address those situations. Some

interviewees also suggested having scheduled visits at schools during which people who have experienced violence could share with pupils the effect this has had on them.

Young people with SEND

In their engagement with young adults with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) in the UK, Hannah and Stagg (2016) found that pupils with ASD did not have the same opportunities compared to the rest of their peers. While their peers could access peer groups and engage in friendly conversations to further discuss the content taught to them, ASD pupils suffered from social anxiety engaging with social groups. This meant that pupils with ASD didn't have the opportunity to engage in discussions and identify any deficiencies in the curriculum. In this research, ASD participants also showed a lower understanding of what inappropriate sexualised behaviours consist of. Questionnaire scores showed a significant gap of knowledge, not covered in the curriculum, which would sometimes result in perpetrating stalking or harassment without being aware of the gravity of these (Hannah and Stagg, 2016).

In another study involving interviews with people with learning disabilities, an additional issue identified was the use of social media and the online environment (Schaafsma et al., 2017). Participants aged between 15 and 52 and were receiving care from a specialised organisation. To some extent, using social media to get introduced to others and form relationships is seen as an advantage compared to in-person interaction, considering it allows people with learning difficulties to reflect and respond in their own time. Nonetheless, the authors identified that pupils with intellectual disabilities using social media to get to know people and form relationships need to be taught first about the ways each platform is used, the dos and the don'ts, as well as the differences between social networks and dating sites.

Preparing pupils with SEND for their sexual lives builds on the understanding of their needs. These can include the lack of social interactions and difficulty in understanding another's body language. The aim is to eventually equip pupils to be able to make informed decisions about their sexual intimacy. Based on the evidence, skill-building should be two-fold. First, to avoid inappropriate behaviours in ways that can harm others, and second, to prevent them from putting themselves in situations they do not fully understand and in which they can be hurt (González et al., 2018; Hannah & Stagg, 2016).

Teaching effectively about intersectionality and sexual harassment or violence

The European Institute for Gender Equality defines intersectionality as an 'analytical tool for studying, understanding and responding to the ways in which sex and gender

intersect with other personal characteristics/identities, and how these intersections contribute to unique experiences of discrimination.⁵

Survey analysis carried out by Carrera-Fernández et al. (2021) aimed to understand the links between gender expression and violence against people with diverse sexual orientations, gender and cultural, racial or ethnic identities. Participants were 623 Spanish adolescents aged between 13 and 18 years old. The regression analysis suggested a strong link between own gender expression and violent behaviour. Their results showed that students with higher attachment to masculine stereotypes expressed more negative attitudes towards sexual and cultural diversity – including feelings of discomfort against non-normative gender expressions or prejudiced views against immigrants. Additionally, hostile sexist attitudes were an accurate predictor of (self-reported) violent behaviours against trans and gender diverse people, as well as rejection of minority ethnic groups.

Based on the above findings, Carrera-Fernández et al. (2021) suggested that RSE should consider all the different dimensions of identity, including gender, sexual orientation, and race or ethnicity. The authors argued that teachers should challenge normative identity categories and include examples that recognise different personal identities and relationships, and value other ways of being. According to Carrera-Fernández et al. (2021), identity topics should be present across the curriculum. RSE should make sexual and cultural diversity visible to reduce stereotypes, as well as to promote positive attitudes and behaviours such as sensitivity to others.

Based on research in Australia, van Leent (2019) found that teachers' personal preferences, agendas and beliefs shape teachers' actions and their chances of including information about diverse sexualities. Interviews with Australian teachers showed they did not have a consistent response to diversity queries, sexual expression or conflicts. Teachers were largely influenced by the idea of childhood innocence (young children should not know about these topics yet as they are too young) and heteronormativity. Several teachers interviewed were unsure of the approaches they were taking but seemed keen on addressing topics about homosexuality or gender diversity if clear policy guidelines backed their daily practice, instead of leaving it to follow their intuition or will (van Leent, 2019).

A rapid review of evidence examining the experiences of LGBTQ+ people receiving school-based RSE showed that young people would like RSE curriculum to be diverse and inclusive for all identities and sexual orientations, not assuming heterosexuality, and addressing healthy behaviours and contraceptive advice for all types of relationships (Epps et al., 2021). Additionally, Epps et al. (2021) argued that to engage male students fully with the RSE curriculum, toxic masculinity must be taken into account. One of the studies reviewed by Epps et al. (2021) found that male teenagers in the UK (16 to 17 years old) wanted safe spaces to discuss sexuality, reflecting their desire to tackle

⁵ Intersectionality. European Institute for Gender Equality. <https://eige.europa.eu/thesaurus/terms/1263>

stereotyped behaviours – but with support and protection from name-calling, peer abuse and rejection (Epps et al., 2021).

Finally, Balter et al. (2021) emphasised the importance of social justice values as part of sex education curriculum and lessons. The authors discussed that, in the Canadian case, sex education usually incorporates some insights on respecting diversity and inclusion, and argued that attention should be drawn to anti-oppression and anti-racism to promote justice and healthy development.

Teaching about the impact of pornography on sexual behaviour and expectations

Mainstream pornography is becoming increasingly available and easily accessible, but also more violent. Pornography usually portrays harmful sexual encounters that affect expectations and beliefs around sex, including sexism, homophobia, disrespect, unrealistic bodies and harmful views about power or sexual consent (Ollis, 2016). A content analysis of mainstream pornography reported by Hamilton-Giachritsis et al. (2017) found that more than 4 out of 10 sex scenes involved violence towards women, more than half portrayed power imbalances and dominance scenarios, and in 20% of these scenes, women initially showed discomfort (that, then, changed to pleasure).

Formby and Donovan (2020) undertook surveys and focus groups with around 100 LGBTQ+ people aged between 14 and 25 who participated in sex education programmes. In this research, pornography came up as the most common source of online sex education. However, research shows that when young people access pornography uncritically and the representations of sexuality found in it are left undiscussed, pornography can have negative impacts on their expectations and behaviours.

Following a questionnaire study with 900 secondary education pupils in Spain, Castro et al. (2021) found a positive correlation between accessing pornographic material and holding sexist beliefs, sexting as well as cyberstalking their partners for both boys and girls aged between 13 and 19.⁶ These practices were normalised among pupils and seen as legitimate parts of having an intimate relationship. For example, both boys and girls did not consider cyberstalking as a form of harassment; on the contrary they thought this to be a way of expressing their feelings while at the same time guarding their relationship. Similarly, a research briefing on the impact of pornography by Hanson (2020) showed that pornography use affected young people's sexual scripts and attitudes.⁷ Studies reviewed by the author have found increased levels of sexual coercion

⁶ According to the authors, cyberstalking originates from traditional methods of harassment and stalking. The aggressor exercises domination over the victim through intrusion in their intimate life, which is repetitive and disruptive.

⁷ According to the author, sexual scripts are people's templates of typical and acceptable sexual interactions.

and aggression following higher pornography use. In line with the above findings, Castro et al. (2021) argued that pornography maintains and supports notions of patriarchal inequality and violent sexuality for young people where male pleasure is placed at the centre of intimate interactions, whereas female pleasure is only seen as of secondary importance.

Ollis (2016) collected qualitative data from teachers and students participating in a pilot intervention in three secondary schools in Australia and provided an evidence-based discussion about pornography in RSE. The programme specifically addressed respectful relationships, pornography, and objectification of girls and women. It was a film-based intervention that promoted students' thoughts about mainstream sexualised content (in music and videos) so that they reflect on how it shapes their behaviours and expectations.

Vandenbosch and van Oosten (2017) conducted quantitative analysis of a survey carried out in the Netherlands among adolescents (13 to 17 years old) and young adults (18 to 25 years old) to assess the importance of informing a critical approach to explicit content. Participants in this research were asked whether their sex education classes had taught them something about how to approach sexually explicit images and movies on the internet as a measure of whether they have received porn literacy education.⁸ The regression analysis conducted by the authors suggested that individuals who undertook porn literacy education, despite still consuming sexually explicitly internet material, were less likely to have views of women as sex objects.

The systematic review conducted by Sell et al. (2021) on gender and power suggested that bringing up for in-class discussion topics like pornography was likely to provoke emotional responses among students and provided a productive in-class context for reflective practice and recognition of gender stereotypes.

Ollis (2016) described RSE as a reality check on what is already available for children outside school. Ollis suggests that sex education which includes inclusive information about sexual arousal for pupils, as well as sex education which makes reference to pornography, may reduce the need for children to turn to pornography to get information. Levin and Hammock (2020) conducted a survey with Canadian students reflecting on the sex education they had received while at school. These findings suggest that discussing sexual pleasure can support pupils to identify when something is not pleasurable and when not to consent.. (Levin and Hammock, 2020).

⁸ Porn literacy interventions aim to provide a comprehensive understanding about porn – including discussions about the unrealistic and degrading portrayal of sex and characteristics of the industry (Vandenbosch and van Oosten, 2017).

Pupils' life experiences and appropriate age to introduce different topics

More than 60% of pupils under 15 years old in the UK have been exposed to online pornography, which shapes their further personal development and approach to relationships (Hamilton-Giachritsis et al., 2017).

Peer sexual violence and harassment are happening in many schools across the country and the world. While more up-to-date data were not identified in this review, data from 2010 shows that in the UK, almost one out of three girls between 16 and 18 years old reported non-desired sexual touching in school settings, more than 4 out of 10 girls between 14 and 17 reported having suffered sexual violence in partner relationships, and above 70% of young people between 16 and 18 years old reported sexual name-calling at least a few times a week (Women and Equalities Committee, 2016). Additionally, almost 1 out of 3 teachers in secondary schools in the UK reported witnessing sexual harassment in their school at least once a week, and over 60% declared observing sexist language on a weekly basis in their school (UK Feminista and National Education Union, 2017).

According to Hamilton-Giachritsis et al. (2017), almost 50% of girls aged 14 to 17 in the UK reported having sent sexual imagery online in 2015, and 42% of these girls saw the pictures being distributed against their will. Police statistics about online sex crimes, including harassment, grooming and other types of coercion, report victims being older than 12 in a great majority of the cases (Finkelhor et al., 2021). A systematic review of studies on multiple forms of sexting among youth revealed that sexting prevalence increased with age. However limited prevalence and understanding of sexting were found before the age of 12 years old (Madigan et al., 2018).

Girls aged 12 to 15 years old participating in focus groups conducted by Ringrose et al. (2021) reported undesired requests for sexual imagery by teenage boys – either male peers, romantic partners, or other known or unknown people on social media. From a discussion with Year 10 boys, the authors outlined gendered patterns that motivate these requests and pressure: male peers are assumed to be more sexually active, hence boys believed they have to actively request (and push) girls to send sexual images. Ringrose et al. (2021) argued that boys display normative masculinity by engaging in these requests. According to Coy et al. (2016), boys gain even more recognition by distributing the images they receive, despite being humiliating to female peers.

The literature review by Schneider and Hirsch (2020) suggested that it is not only a matter of the experiences of violence to inform the appropriate stage to discuss these topics, but also a matter of the risk factors that determine future violent behaviours. These risk factors, further discussed in the first section of this chapter, include previous adverse experiences, early sexual behaviour, attachment to harmful gender stereotypes and poor social-emotional intelligence skills. The authors discussed the importance of teaching about children's bodies, their privacy and how to disclose feelings or situations

with trusted adults. Importantly, however, since exposure and attachment to gender roles and stereotypes can start very early, the authors argued that teaching should emphasise how to seek and get permission for something, and how to share and play with peers as part of an age-appropriate introduction to healthy relationships since kindergarten (Schneider and Hirsch, 2020).

The two main barriers to implementing relationships education in early childhood settings (0 to 5 years old) identified by Balter et al. (2021) in Canada are fear of parental reactions and lack of consistent policy guidance. The authors argued that children need to learn early about boundaries and personal safety, as well as understand that these are topics that can be discussed with adults so they can recognise and disclose sexual abuse. The age-appropriateness of school-based interventions to violence includes discussing respecting diversity and equality in preschool (Council of Europe, 2018).

According to a collection of papers to prevent violence against women and domestic violence, primary-aged students should be able to define bullying and teasing, while different forms of sexual abuse, including online, should be addressed in secondary education (Sundaram and Stenson, 2022).

The impact of education about harassment and violence on school culture

In several sections in this report, we mentioned how holistic institutional approaches can support personal development and positive behaviours through consistent action at different levels. However, targeted interventions, or specific in-class practices, also benefit the school culture and environment.

Baams et al. (2017) suggested that sex education that is LGBTQ+ inclusive is an important signalling about the awareness of sexual diversity and a safer school climate – so children know that is a safe space. These authors studied the content of sex education in six different high schools in the Netherlands to see whether different topics or extensive teaching changed the overall environment in the educational settings. Their quantitative findings indicated that extensive sex education (i.e., more variety of topics covered) increased male peers' willingness to intervene when witnessing LGBTQ+ name-calling.

Similarly, findings for LGBTQ+ pupils in British schools by Epps et al. (2021), suggested that inclusive sex education, recognising sexual matters and concerns of LGBTQ+ young people, created a safer and more comfortable school environment. According to one of the reviewed interventions, the whole school became more tolerant and a culture of support was established as both teachers and students were more confident to intervene when witnessing homophobic violence.

Recommendations

Below we present a list of recommendations related to teaching methods and approaches to sexual violence and harassment. It should be noted that some of the recommendations discussed in previous chapters, i.e., pedagogy and approach to teaching RSE as well as how to teach consent, would also be relevant in reducing the risk of sexual violence.

Recommendation 13: RSE should deconstruct harmful gender stereotypes and tackle generalised cultures of harassment and normalisation

Sex education should seek to challenge harmful gender stereotypes among children and address contexts of normalisation of aggressive behaviours and harassment. There is promising evidence on the importance of sex and relationships education in promoting active bystander behaviours, both among pupils and teachers, to stand up against negative behaviours they may witness.

Recommendation 14: RSE should promote empathy and emotional literacy

Sex education should support children to develop emotional skills from an early age for them to understand the role of emotions in their relationships. School environments that promote empathy and emotional literacy contribute to creating more supportive spaces for students, and this will also contribute to healthier and more satisfying relationships.

Recommendation 15: RSE should include teaching about pornography

Evidence has shown that pornography can contribute to young people normalising harmful behaviours and abusive cultures, as well as developing unhealthy expectations about their sexual encounters. The curriculum should include teaching on how to critically approach pornographic content and encourage a holistic view on the industry, including understanding the industry and the behaviours it encourages.

Recommendation 16: RSE should teach students to appreciate and respect diversity

RSE should promote understanding of a diverse range of identities and characteristics, promote sensitive behaviour towards others, and develop a shared understanding of respect. All aspects of diversity are important here, but one to highlight is LGBTQ+ inclusivity. RSE that is LGBTQ+ inclusive can motivate students and staff to be ready to intervene if they witness discrimination or violence, making the whole environment safer and more comfortable for everyone. It is important to go beyond diversity based on protected characteristics to also include other aspects of diversity, particularly body diversity.

Chapter 4. Domestic violence and non-peer abuse

In this chapter, we discuss the literature identified and reviewed around the life experiences of young people in order to inform an age and stage appropriate curriculum. We discuss experiences of honour-based violence, Female Genital Mutilation (FGM), forced marriage, coercion, grooming and sexual exploitation. We also discuss how to support young people who have experienced or witnessed domestic violence. It should be noted that our search of the literature identified notably fewer sources for Chapter 4 than any other chapter. In general, the evidence around this topic is limited.

Our systematic search delivered 4 relevant papers to the research questions of this chapter. We further retrieved 13 pieces of grey literature and 5 academic papers through backward snowballing to inform the approach to pupils' life experiences and effective interventions for children and young people that have witnessed or suffered domestic abuse. Even with these additions, evidence remains scarce.

Life experiences of young people to inform appropriate age and stage of intervention

Sundaram and Stenson (2022) reviewed a collection of papers on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence. These papers included several research articles, but also the State Reports by the Group of Experts on Action against Violence against Women and Domestic Violence (GREVIO). Based on their review, the authors argued that age-appropriate approaches to interventions aiming to prevent violence should entail both formal and informal education. Teaching practices should target stereotyped gender roles, explicitly address violence against women, and cover topics on mutual respect and the right of personal integrity.

Honour-based violence, female genital mutilation and forced marriage

The concept of honour-based violence includes a wide range of forms of pressure, intimidation or control to protect the community or the family honour, including FGM and forced marriage (GREVIO, 2019).

According to the charity FORWARD, 137,000 girls and women are currently at risk of FGM in the UK.⁹ Girls can suffer FGM between infancy and 15 years of age, usually before starting puberty (PSHE, 2021). According to Sex and Relationships Education Advice, the summer after finishing primary school is a crucial period for girls at risk of FGM (Sex Education Forum et al., 2014).

⁹ For more information see: forwarduk.org.uk

In 2016, the Forced Marriage Unit faced more than 1,400 cases of potential forced marriages, and more than 750 cases in 2020 despite pandemic lockdowns.¹⁰ According to the UK Home Office, a forced marriage is where one or both people do not consent to the marriage and pressure or abuse is used. The Report on Honour-Based Violence by the UK-wide charity SafeLives (2017) included a case study of a girl whose marriage was arranged at the age of 8. The Forced Marriage Unit in the UK reports that around 15% of cases of forced marriage involve a victim under the age of 16, and 11% between 16 and 17 years old (SafeLives, 2017). According to the Forced Marriage Unit, the use of the term “victim” refers to people at risk of being forced, people currently going through a forced marriage and also those who have already been forced.

Abusers in honour-based violence can be a broad network of people within the community. For this reason, practitioners with different roles (GPs, teachers, Local Authorities) should be aware of the roles of family or group members. Community members could actively contribute to or passively witness the abuse because they fear similar abusive behaviours, thus they may hinder cooperation and victim care (SafeLives, 2017).

According to the baseline evaluation carried out by the GREVIO, teaching staff in Sweden are especially trained to identify risks around honour-based violence. Their training includes forced marriage, as well as other types of family pressure and control over girls and boys whose gender or sexuality expression may not be accepted by their families as it may affect their perception of honour (GREVIO, 2019). Parental and community engagement are central to the Swedish policy against honour-based violence, including engagement from schools with newly arrived families. These families are invited to meetings so that schools can introduce equality principles about men and women and girl’s autonomy into wider communities (GREVIO, 2019). Other practices discussed in this report that are in place to minimise the risk of honour-based violence include the existence of girls’ groups in school and parents’ meeting groups.

For in-school practice, the Programme of Study for PSHE Education (PSHE Association, 2020) suggests introducing the ideas of love and commitment (including but not limited to marriage) in early Key Stage 2 (7 to 11 years old). In KS3, between 11 and 14 years old, pupils would be taught how this should be based on free will, without coercion or threats. The legal aspects of forced marriage, consequences, and where to find support and assistance, are proposed to be introduced in Key Stage 4 (i.e., 14 to 16 years old) (PSHE Association, 2020).

Several pieces of evidence discussed in this report highlighted the importance of teaching about the parts of one’s own body and of making clear their privacy (Haley et al., 2019; PSHE Association, 2022), while also teaching capacity to talk about them with trusted adults if necessary (Schneider and Hirsch, 2020). This understanding of one’s

¹⁰ Forced Marriage Unit statistics 2020. <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/forced-marriage-unit-statistics-2020/forced-marriage-unit-statistics-2020>

own body equips pupils with the knowledge to identify abusive practices at the right time and protect from other types of honour-based violence.

The Council of Europe Report on Female Genital Mutilation and Forced Marriage (2017) described how beliefs and behaviours are shaped by an early comprehension of gender, human rights and relationships, hence the education curriculum should cover these topics in early childhood to be a powerful tool in preventing honour-based violence. Pupils should be taught how to challenge harmful stereotypes, power imbalances and risky social or cultural norms (Council of Europe, 2017). Haberland (2015), further discussed in Chapter 2, found that teaching and promoting self-worth and self-efficacy was a powerful tool to empower young girls from disadvantaged backgrounds or with protected characteristics to be active members of society. Similarly, the report by the Council of Europe (2017) suggested that increasing civic participation of girls can contribute to ending these practices – encourage engagement, support organised efforts to raise awareness, increase agency and rights advocacy for themselves and across their communities.

Coercion, grooming and sexual exploitation

Academic and grey literature suggested that experiences of grooming or sexual exploitation can happen early in primary or high school. According to Hamilton-Giachritsis et al., (2017), experiences of sexual abuse of children and young people remain under-reported and actual figures of online and offline abuse cannot inform exact spikes in these events.

Hamilton-Giachritsis et al., (2017) conducted interviews and questionnaires with young people aged between 15 and 19 years old who had experienced sexual abuse to explore the nature of the abuse, the short and mid-term impact, specific technology elements and the nature of professional involvement. Participants in the research were aged between 4 and 17 years old when they first experienced sexual abuse – including offline and online harassment and grooming. One girl reported being approached by unknown adult males when she was 9 years old while playing a videogame. They asked her to provide naked images, and she accepted because of being uninformed about their significance.

According to Ringrose et al. (2021), several schoolgirls of different ages reported requests for nudes and sexual imagery through social media by unknown adult men. One Year 9 girl defined unwanted solicitation of images as common in social media for girls of their age. Some of these solicitations were initiated with unwanted sexual image sharing from males, very often unknown adults. Year 8 girls who participated in the research of Ringrose et al. (2021) reported receiving unwanted sexual imagery from boys of other schools they had never met.

Despite the absence of conclusive figures, schools cited in the 2014 Inquiry into child sexual exploitation in Rotherham reported pupils being groomed from the age of 11 by older men, and highlighted children can be sexually exploited through the internet by the

age of 8 (Coram Life Education, 2017). The Sex Education Forum presented the Outside the Box programme, which is an early intervention (targeting kids aged 11 or older) to prevent sexual exploitation. Again, one of the guiding principles of the programme is the equipment of vocabulary and skills that pupils need to recognise pressures and risk of exploitation.¹¹

The Teaching Guidance for Sexuality Education by UNESCO introduces the definition of gender-based violence at early childhood, between 5 and 8 years old, and that it can happen at any place, at school, at home or in public areas. This evidence-informed guidance introduces ideas as part of knowledge-, attitudinal-, and skill-based learning. Proposed learning objectives include definition of child sexual exploitation between 5 and 8 years old, examples of abuse and online exploitation between 9 and 12 years old, and lessons about gender differences that can lead to exploitation or unequal treatment. Examples of violence when pupils are between 9 and 12 years old include bullying, harassment, coercion and domestic violence. The underlying principle of the UNESCO Guidance is that gender stereotypes are at the core of different types of violence, and pupils older than 15 should be able to identify how gender inequality and power imbalances affect risk of coercion (UNESCO et al., 2018).

Effective interventions to support young people who have experienced or witnessed domestic abuse

Domestic abuse and violence can have harmful effects on young people's development or learning outcomes. This type of abuse can be experienced both directly and indirectly as children can be severely affected by observing situations of violence, even if they are not directly involved. There is evidence that the duration of the experience of domestic abuse can have a longer-lasting burden on children's stress than the nature of the abuse itself (Lloyd, 2018).

The review by Lloyd (2018) on the impact of domestic violence on children and young people differentiated between the symptoms experienced by children aged up to 4 years old, children up to 10 years old, and young people aged between 11 and 16. For older cohorts (5 to 10 and 11 to 16), the author identified a wide range of symptoms and signs related to domestic abuse, including school-related behavioural problems (such as aggressions, hyperactivity, or hypervigilance), stress-related conditions and eating problems. The impact of domestic violence may vary across genders, with girls tending to internalise symptoms (withdrawal and anxiety) and boys externalising violence and antisocial behaviour to their peers. Lloyd (2018) reported that research with young people showed that pupils should be involved in solution seeking as this will support them cope. Pupils reported feeling doubly disadvantaged if they were not involved in addressing their personal situation.

¹¹ Outside the Box. Sex Education Forum. <https://www.sexeducationforum.org.uk/outside-box>

To equip pupils with the ability to identify risks and abuse within a relationship, teaching must be inclusive of all sexualities and forms of relationships. LGBTQ+ people, aged between 14 and 25 who participated in the study by Formby and Donovan (2020) argued that they had always felt that domestic violence was a matter of concern only for heterosexual couples. Research participants in the same study also felt they had been ill-prepared to identify abusive dynamics and forms of domestic violence within their relationships.

Besides support pathways, in-class interventions must be tailored to the nature of pupils and class dynamics. For instance, Fox et al. (2014) suggested that very participative approaches in classes with a majority of boys that are aggressive to female peers is unlikely to work well. According to the authors, teachers should balance allowing students to freely express their opinions, while also managing these opinions, especially when they may cause upset to others. (Fox et al., 2014).

Tailoring the content and format of RSE programmes is time and resource intensive, and usually requires a deep knowledge about the pupils' lives (Fox et al., 2014). However, academic literature suggests that teachers sometimes lack understanding of the work to identify and support signs of abuse at home. Besides signposting and introducing pathways for support seeking in-school, relying on external expertise to discuss sensitive topics contributes to in-house skill-building for teachers to be able to develop and gain confidence along time (Lloyd, 2018).

According to Panisch et al. (2020), trauma and maltreatment may lead to isolation of children with previous adverse childhood experiences and negatively affect their personal relationships. The authors reviewed interventions to inform how trauma is addressed in young people's sexuality and sexual health programmes. Trauma-informed sexual health education programmes aim to acknowledge the experiences of pupils and consider them when preparing courses. The interventions reviewed by Panisch et al. (2020) covered different types of traumas, including abuse, dating violence, harassment, rape, consent violations and coercion. The way to introduce these experiences varied, from discussions within the curricula to films addressing cycles of violence or sexual abuse. Trauma-informed interventions aim at supporting children with adverse experiences to avoid self-blame and engage more effectively with content related to sexual and romantic relationships and experiences.

According to the literature reviewed by Panisch et al., 2020, many sexual health programmes reinforce feelings of fear and shame. Fear-based approaches tend to be ineffective, negatively affect children's learning and promote re-traumatisation (Panisch et al., 2020). Instead, trauma-informed sexual health interventions follow a strengths-based, skills-oriented approach. Such approaches can facilitate a more inclusive and supportive learning environment for all children, including those with adverse experiences by focusing on empowerment, developing skills for building healthy relationships and exploring positive forms of sexual expression.

One of the systematic reviews presented by Lester et al. (2019) aimed at studying the responses of children who had suffered or witnessed domestic violence to psychoeducational interventions. These interventions included informing about resources, signposting and providing support to cope for pupils aged 3 to 18. These interventions were delivered in school or day-care settings by teachers, counsellors and therapists, and included pre-school therapeutic day treatments. The authors found that group interventions (compared to individual or familial programmes) improved mental health outcomes for these children (Lester et al., 2019).

Stakeholders consulted in this report highlighted intersectionality once again. Sector-wide discussions in Lester et al. (2019) suggested that different underlying conditions, or personal circumstances, severely affect how adverse childhood experiences change pupils' outcomes. Family circumstances (for instance, having siblings, living with the abusive relative or not), as well as disabilities, could reinforce the burden on pupils with adverse childhood experiences. Teachers should be aware of pupils' circumstances at home or within the community, e.g., whether they come from low-income families or have caring responsibilities, as these factors could promote children's social isolation (Lester et al., 2019).

Finally, according to Sundaram and Stenson (2022), educational materials should recognise structural inequalities and discriminations from an intersectional perspective (including age, disabilities, racial identities or legal status), and pupils should be involved as partners in prevention. The State Reports by GREVIO stressed that both students' awareness and teachers' usage of materials should be monitored.

Recommendations

Recommendation 17: Teaching should avoid fear, guilt and shame, and be culturally responsive

Teachers may explicitly mention violence or abuse as interventions may include watching informative films or useful resources, but teaching approaches should be based on exploration and development, and avoid practices based on fear or self-blame. Culturally responsive teaching should acknowledge the circumstances of pupils and peers and how children and young people grow as active members of the community.

Recommendation 18: Teaching practices should consider the broader context in which young people live

School policies and teachers' practices should consider pupils' environment and experiences. Teachers should consider how pupils may need specific resources or face specific circumstances, even if not clearly made explicit. Schools should work alongside the wider community to enable structural approaches to prevention and general awareness.

Teaching should be on the assumption that there are children in the classroom with direct experience of what is being taught and this is the best rule-of-thumb for achieving sensitive coverage of topics.

Consolidated list of recommendations

- RSE is most effective when begun early
- The RSE curriculum should support young people to build and maintain positive, healthy relationships and cover a broad range of topics underpinning relationships nowadays
- Teaching staff should receive training on all aspects of RSE, equipping them with good understanding of RSE curriculum and pedagogy, and additional confidence
- RSE design should include pupil consultation, and young people's voices need to be at the centre of curriculum design
- The curriculum should incorporate education that builds on previous lessons and has a longer duration
- A whole-school approach should be adopted by schools to enhance learning, as well as support for pupils
- The RSE curriculum and delivery should be inclusive, particularly in relation to LGBTQ+ issues and needs of children with SEND
- Teaching about permission, privacy and boundaries should be introduced in early years
- Teaching consent should be subsequent to exploring and challenging gendered expectations and their sources
- The RSE curriculum should teach young people to actively seek consent
- Lessons about consent should include specific examples of situations that pupils can relate to
- Examples about consent should promote equality, diversity and inclusion
- RSE should deconstruct harmful gender stereotypes and tackle generalised cultures of harassment and normalisation
- RSE should promote empathy and emotional literacy
- RSE should include teaching about pornography
- RSE should teach students to appreciate and respect diversity
- Teaching should avoid fear, guilt and shame, and be culturally responsive
- Teaching practices should consider the broader context in which young people live

Annex A: Rapid Evidence Assessment protocol

This section sets out the research questions, the search strategy and the inclusion criteria that were used to decide if the retrieved studies fit into the evidence review. Once the research protocol was agreed upon, the next step was to search the literature and arrive at a “long list” of relevant studies. The studies included in the long list were then subject to a review of titles and abstracts and were screened based on the inclusion criteria. The screening process led to a “reading list” of studies that were read in detail. While reading the papers in the reading list, we recorded the relevant information of selected studies by using a Research Extraction Sheet (RES). The information recorded was used to synthesise and summarise the evidence related to the research questions. We utilised a dynamic and iterative approach when implementing the REA. Search terms and inclusion criteria were discussed with relevant stakeholders, and additional papers were added through snowballing and recommendations by the Expert Group.

Research questions

Based on the tight timescale of this project, and to ensure that available resources were used efficiently to answer the key research questions, we set out research questions that were targeted in both the search and review of literature. Additionally, we retrieved and discussed any evidence related to the secondary research questions of each chapter that was found in the literature, but those questions did not define our search strategy. The REA sought to provide evidence on the following areas:

Chapter 1. Pedagogy, and the whole school context

This should include evidence around:

- best practice around curriculum planning and design;
- the importance of whole-school approaches compared to single interventions;
- best practice to create a safe space for students;
- best practice in teaching for inclusion, including the impact of making teaching relevant to all groups, including pupils of minority racial backgrounds, LGBTQ+ pupils, pupils with SEND;
- best practice for incorporating reflective practice, psycho-social education, and skills practice into relationships education lessons;
- best practice around using external resources;
- the impact of parental attitudes;

- best practice around adapting relationships education for pupils with learning differences and with SEND.

Secondary research questions

The impact of involving pupils in curriculum design.

Best practice around teaching topics which feel awkward or uncomfortable.

Chapter 2. Boundaries, consent, and privacy

This should include evidence around:

- best practice in teaching and discussing sexual consent and communication;
- understanding the interaction between power imbalance and consent;
- understanding vulnerability, including SEND;
- effective interventions from teachers to challenge stereotypes, misogyny, racism or other forms of prejudiced assumptions which might increase the likelihood of consent-violations;
- how to make consent education relevant for all pupils, including minority racial backgrounds, LGBT, different faiths and pupils with SEND.

Secondary research questions

Age and stage appropriate introduction of topics related to consent, such as bodily autonomy and privacy, human rights, sexual consent and authentic consent.

Understanding the historical and social content around consent, including the impact of misogyny and racism.

Chapter 3. Sexual violence and harassment

This should include evidence around:

- What are the most effective teaching techniques to ensure that young people are clear about what is and is not acceptable behaviour and why;
- What is the most effective way to teach about intersectionality and sexual harassment or violence;

- What is the most effective way to teach about the impact of pornography on sexual behaviour and sexual expectations?

Secondary research questions

The evidence available around pupils' relevant life experience to inform recommendations about the age at which different topics are introduced – including when pupils are likely to experience unwanted sexual attention, requests to send nudes and unsolicited sexual imagery.

Chapter 4. Domestic violence and non-peer abuse

This should summarise:

- What we know about the life experiences of young people in order to inform an age and stage appropriate curriculum, including experiences of:
 - FGM,
 - Grooming and sexual exploitation,
 - Forced marriage,
 - Honour based violence,
 - Coercion;
- What we know about effective interventions to support young people who have experienced or witnessed domestic abuse.

The research questions to inform the **appropriate age and stage to introduce some of the topics** can be challenging to be captured by a systematic REA. Keywords related to 'age', 'course', or 'stage' would provide large quantities of non-relevant results that would make the screening process unmanageable. For this reason, we did not include them as primary research questions, but specifically sought evidence and well-informed pieces of grey literature to retrieve best practice on this matter.

Inclusion and exclusion criteria

We used inclusion and exclusion criteria to decide if the materials identified from our search were suitable for answering the core research questions of this project. The criteria that were used to move from a long list of materials towards a short reading list of studies included in our technical review are listed in Table 1 below.

Table 1: Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

Theme	Inclusion Criteria	Exclusion Criteria
Population characteristics or context	Pupils under 18. Specific subsets of the population under 18 (e.g., students with SEND, racial minorities, LGBTQ+ pupils).	Non educational institutions (e.g., prison-based sex education). Pupils over 18. (e.g., university students or other adults within educational institutions).
Country	England, rest of the UK, comparable countries (USA, Australia, New Zealand, Canada, EU and EEA countries).	Non-comparable countries in Africa, Asia and South America.
Methods	Qualitative studies, including focus groups, interviews and questionnaires to practitioners, students, parents, policymakers or any other stakeholder. Descriptive and observational studies on educational practices or programmes. Quantitative analysis and evaluation of relevant programmes and interventions. Evidence reviews and meta-analyses.	Quantitative research on causal effects, but not describing the intervention or educational practice itself. Theoretical discussions or proposals without case studies.
Impacts and outcomes	Any impact related to individual or organisational behavioural changes, views or sexual practice within schools - including abuses, sex or intimate relationships.	Impacts linked to medical outcomes related to sexual relationships (e.g., changes on views on pregnancy or medical advice) Studies on single-sex education will also be considered out of scope for this project.

Theme	Inclusion Criteria	Exclusion Criteria
Date of research	Published between 2012-2022.	Published earlier than 2012.
Language	English.	Any other language.
Type of studies	Peer-reviewed journal articles, non-peer-reviewed academic outputs, government-commissioned research, publications by research organisations, evidence by providers of interventions/support, government publications.	Newspaper articles and editorials/opinion pieces, magazine articles. Theses and dissertations. Books or other work of equivalent length.

Information sources

We mainly used this protocol to retrieve evidence from academic literature. For this purpose, we focused on databases of published and unpublished academic literature. Namely, ABI/Inform, JSTOR, Science Direct, SAGE, SSRN, IDEAS, Project Muse, SpringerLink and Google Scholar.

In addition to our systematic search and approach to the literature, we retained flexibility to include studies obtained through backward snowballing (i.e., considering the literature cited on the references of a start set paper) and forward snowballing (i.e., tracking the literature that cites a paper that is reviewed). This was applied in cases when we identified significant gaps in the design of methods or its implications in order to ensure a comprehensive understanding of existing techniques of interest.

We also retained some flexibility to add a few papers proposed by experts in the stakeholder engagement stage when specific gaps were identified.

Search strategy

We designed the search strategy to ensure it is targeted at thoroughly answering the key research questions. Table 2 illustrates the keywords used to identify relevant sources of evidence.

This protocol was set to obtain the most relevant pieces of literature to address the primary research questions. Based on the time schedule and the scope of the review, we

built the search strategy through targeting keywords present in the title (main field) and the abstract (chapter and research question level).

During the scoping review, we tested different combinations of words to arrive at the following set of keywords. These keywords were based on a desk-based review of related studies – for example, Hilton, G. (2021), Pugliese et al. (2019) and Sell et al. (2021). Search terms were combined into search strings using Boolean operators (AND/OR/NOT) and other database-specific search operators. Using these strings, we arrived at a long list of studies, which we screened to see if they meet the inclusion criteria.

Table 2: Search Keywords

KEYWORD 1 Main subject	sex education, sexual education, relationships education, sexuality education
KEYWORD 2 Chapter level	school, “whole-school”, pedagogy, teach*, consent, privacy, violence, harassment, domestic, abuse, practice
KEYWORD 3 Research question	curriculum, pupils, parents, resources, gender, power, behaviour/behavior, pornography, expectations, experience, coercion, FGM, groom*, marriage, LGBT, SEND, disab*, racial, “emotional literacy”, “psycho-social”, “safe space”, “honour-based violence”, “parental attitudes”

Different combinations of search terms and keyword fields were selected to identify relevant evidence. Those used were the ones that returned a substantial, but manageable, number of relevant results.

Study records

Data management

To ensure the search process is comprehensive and transparent, we used a Research Activity Sheet (RAS) to record all searched terms, accessed sources, the date of the search and the number of search results.

We recorded and maintained a list of the retrieved references in a specialist software package called Zotero. Zotero is a free, open-source reference management tool that stores citation information (e.g., author, title and publication fields) and has the ability to organise, tag and perform advanced searches.

Selection process and data collection

We began the process by screening the titles of initial search results and removing any duplicate studies to compile a long list of relevant research papers and reports. Our interdisciplinary team screened the abstracts to decide which studies to include in the short list. The screening process to select shortlisted papers was carried out according to the inclusion and exclusion criteria listed in Table 1. An independent researcher checked a random sample of decisions to verify agreement with the screening process.

The screening process resulted in a final reading list of papers to include in the review, which was read in full and included 80 papers.

Data Extraction

To capture the key findings of each study included in the short list, we used a Research Extraction Sheet (RES) that included the following details for each study:

- Title
- Author(s)
- Type of publication
- Publication date
- Source
- Country/Region of focus
- Abstract/Executive summary
- Methodology (e.g., focus groups, interviews, survey, observational data)
- Population of interest (e.g., all pupils, LGBTQ+ pupils, pupils with SEND, pupils from minorities, parents, teachers)
- Relevant chapter
- Relevant research question – primary
- Relevant research question(s) – additional
- Summary of findings
- Limitations
- Quality score

The information was recorded in MS Excel.

Assessing the quality and relevance of studies

To assess the quality of the studies included in the short list, we used the criteria listed in Table 3 below. The quality assessment of the evidence was based on (i) credibility, (ii)

methodology, and (iii) relevance of the study. For each category, we assigned a score from 1-3 (where 1 is the lowest score and 3 is the highest). We excluded studies with the minimum score across the three categories (i.e., 1 out of 3 in each category).

Table 3: Quality assessment

Category	Description	Score
Credibility	<p>Is the study coherent? Can findings be trusted? Does the author consider study limitations or alternative interpretations of the analysis? Has the study been peer-reviewed?</p> <p>1 = Study has not been peer-reviewed, with conclusions drawn from limited data or theoretical discussion. Lack of transparency around data and no discussion of data quality. Study focuses on an ongoing intervention with no discussion around assumptions made.</p> <p>2 = Study is unpublished or study is informally published as a working paper/research report by a reliable source. Limited discussion around sources, information and data quality, or alternative interpretations of research findings. Study focuses on an ongoing intervention with adequate discussion around assumptions made.</p> <p>3 = Study is published in a peer-reviewed academic journal. Study discusses information quality, sampling decisions and other aspects of the methodology. Study focuses on a completed initiative.</p>	1-3
Methodology	<p>How robust is the evidence to contribute to our review?</p> <p>1 = Methodology is weak and relies on uninformed opinions or unreliable data.</p> <p>2 = Methodology of analysis is adequate and relates to a robust case study, experimented intervention or evaluated teaching practices.</p> <p>3 = The study is a literature review, meta-analysis or discussion of more than one completed intervention.</p>	1 - 3

Category	Description	Score
Relevance	<p>Does the study help to answer the research question?</p> <p>1 = The research question or hypothesis is not directly related to the proposed research questions. Alternatively, the external validity of the study is not guaranteed, and/or the country is not comparable.</p> <p>2 = Study addresses an intervention from an EU or EEA country. The research question or hypothesis is only somewhat related to the proposed research questions.</p> <p>3 = Study addresses an intervention for a comparable English-speaking country (USA, Canada, Australia and New Zealand), or within the UK. The research question or hypothesis is directly related to the proposed research questions.</p>	1-3
Overall judgment	Considering the above categories, what is the overall judgment?	3-9

This quality score aimed at ensuring a comprehensive understanding of best practice, approaches and discussion on the topics, maximising the relevance of the papers included in the review while decreasing the number of studies to a manageable amount.

Given the tight time scales of this project, we prioritised the literature by sifting papers when there was a large evidence base for some specific research questions. Instead, for research questions and chapters where the evidence was scarce, we read any article retrieved from our search strategy satisfying the minimum criterion (i.e., a minimum score of 2 in each category).

The majority of academic literature was of relevance to Chapter 1. Therefore, the selection criteria applied to screen papers for Chapter 1 were stricter than those applied to Chapters 2, 3 and 4. Particularly for Chapter 1, we only read papers for which the relevance and credibility were both scored as 2 or above, and their methodology as 3 (which effectively restricted the review to literature reviews and REAs). For the rest of the chapters, we read all papers with a rating of 2 or above in all criteria.

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