



The Scottish Parliament  
Pàrlamaid na h-Alba

**PUBLIC PETITION NO.**

**PE01526**

### **Name of petitioner**

Jack Fletcher on behalf of Sexpression:UK

### **Petition title**

Making Sex and Relationship Education in Scotland Statutory for all Schools

### **Petition summary**

Calling on the Scottish Parliament to urge the Scottish Government to introduce comprehensive sex and relationship education (SRE) into the Scottish Education Curriculum and make it statutory for all schools to teach. I recommend that SRE should build upon current education guidelines and include additional criteria to keep up with technological advances. In providing non-judgemental accurate information in these areas, the children and young people of Scotland can have the skills and knowledge to make informed decisions for themselves.

### **Action taken to resolve issues of concern before submitting the petition**

I have emailed a more extensive letter with information backing up why I would like SRE to be in Scottish Education to my local constituent MSP for Aberdeen and other North East Scotland regional MSPs. I have emailed Alex Salmond, Michael Russell, Alex Neil and Michael Matheson too. My email was forwarded to Education minister Michael Russell who replied with a standard reply of what was the current provision of SRE in Scotland and did not answer any of my questions. I feel that my concerns have not been addressed at all and now feel a petition is best to show the Scottish Government that the support for SRE in Scotland is very high and that they should act upon these concerns.

### **Petition background information**

I have contacted you to raise an issue that I am concerned with: Sex and Relationship Education (SRE) in Scotland. I am a medical student who is very concerned about public health in the UK. I am a member of Sexpression:UK the only youth organisation delivering high quality comprehensive SRE in our local areas. We deliver non-judgemental information in a small group discussion format. Feedback revealed that 80-90% of our pupils 'agreed' or 'strongly agreed' that they felt better prepared to make decisions in the future regarding their sexual health and relationships.

At present, there is no statutory SRE in the Scottish Education system. I feel very strongly that this is an area that needs vast improvement and that legislation should be passed for comprehensive high quality SRE to be taught as statutory in schools at primary and secondary level, with age appropriate measures taken towards content.

This is a priority because:

- Although teenage pregnancy has fallen greatly in recent years, the rates in Scotland are still one of the highest in Europe;
- Sexual transmitted infections are still rife due to lack of contraception use;
- Homophobia is rife in schools and this is an issue that needs effective confrontation, of which education is key. Homophobia leads to self-harm, depression and reduced attainment in the individuals education capabilities, an issue that is epidemic in schools as shown by the many reports by Stonewall Scotland;
- Consent is a huge area of ambiguity and this only adds to sexual violence, rape and verbal harassment this is not treated with the concern it deserves.

The current provision is not enough to equip Scottish young people with the right information to tackle these issues. Current outcomes are for 'Learners develop an understanding of how to maintain positive relationships with a variety of people and are aware of how thoughts, feelings, attitudes, values and beliefs can influence decisions about relationships, and sexual health. They develop their understanding of the complex roles and responsibilities of being a parent or carer.' (<http://bit.ly/1iN2VEA>) This is a very broad outcome that leaves too much room for subjection and misinterpretation when teachers are implementing lessons. These are broken down to focus on the following:

- respect and caring for self and others
- respect for individual differences
- ways to express and deal with feelings and emotions
- ways to keep safe
- positive and supportive relationships

The outcomes and proposed directions for teaching are good, but Scotland should be striving for excellence in its provision of education. For this, the outcomes need to be broadened to include many more important aspects of SRE and for outcomes to be clarified so that SRE in Scotland can be more uniform and consistent, an area that is seen by the government to be lacking (<http://bit.ly/1hSPcyx>). The document referenced highlights some worrying statistics:

- one quarter (24%) had no SRE trained staff, and in 52% of schools the staff currently responsible for SRE delivery were not trained;
- less than 5% – 13/299 primary schools did not formally offer SRE when it should be 100% coverage across Scotland;
- denominational schools predominantly expressed views that contraception should not be discussed even if raised by pupils (76%), and 70.6% were unwilling to discuss STIs;
- when prompted, the children could remember other aspects of SRE, such as health promotion and anti-bullying events, but had little understanding of the role of the informal curriculum in developing positive relationships;
- case studies showed that schools initial fears about parental complaint went unrealised.

SRE helps students to learn about the emotional, social and physical aspects of growing up as well as relationships, human sexuality and sexual health. In providing non-judgemental accurate information in these areas, the children and young people of Scotland can have the skills and knowledge to make informed decisions for themselves. The Family Planning Association also believe that it is 'vitaly important to educate people about sex and relationships, to ensure that they have all the information and advice they need to explore, develop and express their own sexuality safely.'

Parents are a key component to providing comprehensive SRE but many parents find this area hard to discuss with their children and I feel it is the responsibility of the Scottish Government to provide this information as it does for many subject areas vital for the health and wellbeing of young people.

I hope you consider my thoughts and proposal that would align Scotland with current

International Planned Parenthood Federation (IPPF) framework for SRE (<http://ow.ly/rStQ5>). Scotland can join many other countries in Europe that already have SRE in place in their education: Denmark, France, Germany, Greece, Netherland, Norway, Poland and Sweden; to name a few.

### Unique web address

<http://www.scottish.parliament.uk/GettingInvolved/Petitions/MakeSREstatutoryInScotland>

### Related information for petition

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My proposition is as follows- that a bill for statutory comprehensive sex and relationship education be introduced to Scottish Parliament. I recommend that SRE should build upon current education guidelines and include in addition the following:

- Online safety
- Routes and modes of STI infection, with symptom recognition
- Consent
- Law surrounding sexual behaviour
- Sexuality (to include lesbian, gay, bisexual information and issues)
- Gender (to include transgender information)
- Healthy relationships and what is lawfully abuse
- Abortion (as a form of treatment, not contraception)
- Body image
- Pregnancy
- Challenging stigma and stereotypes
- Ensure that children and young people are clearly informed where they can get confidential advice and support

### Do you wish your petition to be hosted on the Parliament's website to collect signatures online?

YES

### How many signatures have you collected so far?

1

### Closing date for collecting signatures online

27 / 06 / 2014

### Comments to stimulate online discussion

I am a member of Sexpression:UK the only youth organisation delivering high quality comprehensive SRE in our local areas. We deliver non-judgemental information in a small group discussion format. Feedback revealed that 80-90% of our pupils 'agreed' or 'strongly agreed' that they felt better prepared to make decisions in the future regarding

their sexual health and relationships. Education is key to empowering the children and young people of Scotland to making healthier choices in their lives. Scotland should be following other European nations in providing statutory SRE, with guidance documents such as by the Sex Education Forum, Brook and PSHE Association are great in explaining the importance of comprehensive SRE

([http://www.brook.org.uk/images/brook/professionals/documents/page\\_content/SRE/SRE\\_Supj](http://www.brook.org.uk/images/brook/professionals/documents/page_content/SRE/SRE_Supj))

Without schools providing reliable information many young people will turn to other resources on the internet which can have incorrect information. They also turn to friends for information and this can perpetuate myths of sexual health and relationship ideals, but also add to peer pressure issues such as 'sexting'. SRE does not make people more promiscuous, but actually have less partners and more likely to use contraception in their first sexual encounter, which is also at an older age than those that do not receive SRE. We are denying children the right to comprehensive education that is needed for all the relationships they encounter in their lives. As a result of more widespread education, Scotland should also see a reduction in sexual harassment cases and in the burden of sexual health issues on the NHS. Parents need to be involved in SRE too and a basis of knowledge gained from school is crucial to making sure no child is left without knowing information crucial to their personal and inter-personal development. With the passing of the Equal Marriage Bill, we should be teaching about LGBT issues and creating a more inclusive society.

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