



Briefing for the Public Petitions Committee

Petition Number: [PE01526](#)

Main Petitioner: Jack Fletcher on behalf of 'sexpression UK'

Subject: Sex and relationships education in schools

Calls on the Parliament to urge the Scottish Government to introduce comprehensive sex and relationships education (SRE) into the Scottish Education Curriculum and make it statutory for all schools to teach.

Background

The petition requests that the Scottish Government create a statutory duty for schools to provide sex and relationships education.

There is almost no statutory curriculum in Scotland. The exceptions are that Gaelic must be taught in Gaelic speaking areas (Education (Scotland) Act 1980 (c44)(s1(5)(a) iii) and religious instruction will normally be expected to be provided (Education (Scotland) Act 1980 s8(i)).

Rather than being set out in statute, the school curriculum is established through guidance issued by Education Scotland. In addition, guidance on sex education was issued by the then Scottish Executive as circular 2/2001. This guidance is currently being updated.

The Scottish Government note that responsibility for sex and relationship education lies primarily with local authorities. In response to a recent health and sport committee inquiry (see below) they stated that:

Whilst Education Circular 2/2001 provides a broad framework of effective relationships, sexual health and parenthood education, it is recognised that it is up to local authorities and head teachers to decide what is provided in their schools and what training is provided to support their staff. The inspection process currently evaluates relationships, sexual health and parenthood education as part of the overall health and wellbeing curriculum.

Development of current guidance

In 1999, the Scottish Executive's announcement that they would repeal s2A of the Local Government Act 1986 (Prohibition on promoting homosexuality by teaching or by publishing material) led to the establishment, in October 1999,

of a working group on sex education in Scottish schools. It published its report - the [McCabe Report](#), the following year. This led to the development of the current guidance which is contained in [Circular 2/2001](#) 'Standards in Scotland's Schools, etc. Act 2000: conduct of sex education in Scottish schools.' At the same time, the then Scottish Executive published:

- [Sex Education in Scottish Schools: A summary of national advice](#), [Effective Consultation for Parents and Carers](#) and
- [A guide for parents and carers](#)

In 2005, [Respect and Responsibility](#) re-iterated the 2/2001 guidance, and emphasised the need to consult parents and pupils:

parents and carers should be given the opportunity in advance to view key teaching materials and to ask questions about any aspect of a sex-education programme. Schools should also give pupils an opportunity to identify and express their own needs.

Curriculum for Excellence

Relationships education is part of '[Health and Wellbeing](#)'. The overall outcome is that:

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.

The guidance provides different outcomes that are appropriate for each stage of learning. This guidance covers learning from pre-school to S3. Education Scotland also [publish examples of good practice](#) in teaching relationships and sexual health.

Research

NHS Health Scotland [published a review](#) of sex and relationship activities and resources in primary school in Scotland in 2010. This found:

- some evidence of fears about perceived opposition from pressure groups, which often resulted in a cautious approach
- The extent of the guidance offered by local authorities varied, with some detailing what should be taught (and when, and how) as well as providing teaching resources. Others offered less prescriptive guidelines, while some simply referred schools to national guidelines, leaving the responsibility for curriculum planning to each school

A larger scale [review of secondary schools](#) was published in 2008. This found that while there were relatively few schools who reported that sex and relationship education programmes were wholly an off-the-shelf package, schools named a wide variety of external/collaborating programmes.

Scottish Government Action

[New draft guidance](#) on sex and relationships education was consulted on in autumn 2013. In response to a parliamentary question on [25th June 2014](#), Cabinet Secretary Michael Russell said that the final version would be published “later this year” (S4O-03405).

Other recent Scottish Government action was referred to in their response to the Health and Sport Committee’s inquiry into teenage pregnancy (see below) and included a review of resources and supporting sharing best practice. The response also noted that:

The Scottish Government is keen to increase training available for the relationships, sexual health and parenthood education area of the curriculum in order to improve the confidence of teachers - some of whom have not had much training before taking on this subject area.

In [evidence to the Health and Sport Committee in May 2014](#), Colin Spivey, a Scottish Government official, described how the revised guidance would be used to re-emphasise that part of the curriculum:

We believe that the revised code will be the jumping-off point for a re-launch of that facet of the curriculum. In particular, a package of the materials that are currently available will be launched at the same time as the revised code. Education Scotland will pull those materials together in a coherent package, which will be launched jointly with the revised code. In addition, Education Scotland is considering holding an event at the start of the next school year to focus on the issue.

In a related area, a short life working group on child sexual exploitation was established in January 2013. One of its [recommendations](#), published in December 2013, was that “Consideration should be given to the list of resources associated with the guidance on the conduct of relationships, sexual health and parenthood education in schools and how these might further highlight CSE.” The working group is currently developing an action plan on child sexual exploitation.

Scottish Parliament Action

Recent PQs have asked about progress in the review of circular 2/2001 (25th June 2014) and whether the Scottish Government will review sex and relationships education (S4W-17306, Kezia Dugdale).

Health and Sport Committee

The Health and Sport Committee held an [inquiry into teenage pregnancy](#) last year and its report included some observations and recommendations about sex and relationships education in schools.

The Committee received submissions referring to patchiness, inconsistency and too much being left to the discretion of individual schools. For example, NHS Forth Valley Sexual Health Strategy Group argued that “more accountability for schools to report on what is being delivered in SRE would

be useful as there is inconsistency in the quality and content of programmes in schools despite training and curriculum development support being available”.

The Committee made a number of recommendations on relationships and sex education, including calling for a review of current provision in schools. However, the [Scottish Government responded](#) that such a review was not necessary given the relatively recent review in 2008 (secondary schools) and 2010 (primary schools).

Public Petitions Committee

The Public Petitions Committee undertook an inquiry into child sexual exploitation (CSE), publishing a [report in January 2014](#). This included recommendations that school education include: internet safety, sexual bullying and gender stereotypes. It also recommended a ‘mapping exercise’ of current good practice and “...a national education programme on CSE, with support materials to be delivered in all schools and for higher and further education courses in social work and social care to cover all aspects of disability and child protection.”

In [response](#), the Scottish Government referred to Curriculum for Excellence and the work of the expert group referred to above.

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16th July 2014

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