

# Briefing: Extending Relationships and Sex Education to 18

There is growing support for extending Relationships and Sex Education (RSE) to young people up to the age of 18, with 105,000 signatories backing this change via a petition started by Faustine Petron, founder of Make it Mandatory.

- An amendment to the Children's Wellbeing and Schools Bill could change legislation so that RSE is provided for all young people up to the age of 18 attending further education institutions.
- The [amendment](#) has been tabled by Baroness Lister, with Baroness Morgan, Bishop of Gloucester and Lord Hampton supporting.
- The Bill began progressing through the Lords Committee Stage on 20 May, and is expected to be read on one of the [Committee days in June](#).

## Summary of key points

- **Extending Relationships and Sex Education (RSE) to young people in post-16 education would contribute to the prevention of violence against women and girls (VAWG) and the Government target to halve VAWG in a decade.** 72% of girls under 18 reported experiencing some form of emotional partner abuse and 31% of girls and 16% of boys reported experiencing some form of sexual partner violence ([The Children's Society, 2020](#)).
- **Further education is a gap in RSE legislation:** RSE is mandatory up to the end of secondary education, but not in further education. Universities have been mandated by the Office of Students ([condition E6](#)) to have policies on harassment and sexual misconduct including a requirement to inform students about these topics, but further education is a gap that needs closing.
- **An amendment to extend RSE to young people aged 16-18 could swiftly be secured through the Children's Wellbeing and Schools Bill.** The next stage of the Bill is Reading in the House of Lords. If successful, the finer detail of the legislation could be set out in updated statutory RSHE guidance.
- **Health and wellbeing benefits at a key transition point:** Securing mandatory RSE up to 18 would ensure consistency across 16-18 education settings; will protect young people with essential knowledge for their wellbeing and safety, reduce risks of abuse, poor sexual health, and online harm; and will better prepare them for independent adult lives.

**We call on Peers to support an amendment to the Children's Wellbeing and Schools Bill during the Lords Committee stage expected to be read in June 2025.**

Campaign partners Make it Mandatory, Sex Education Forum, Brook and EVAW can support with briefing. Please reach out to your contact at these organisations to discuss further.

## Briefing paper in full

This briefing paper explains the gap in existing legislation, provides statistics on the health and wellbeing of young people aged 16-18 and sets out the support for extending the mandate on RSE up to age 18 to close the current gap.

## Campaign support

Make it Mandatory's campaign is supported by the Sex Education Forum, Brook and EVAW Coalition and is endorsed by more than 50 organisations across safeguarding, health and education.

"We, the undersigned, support an amendment to the Children's Wellbeing and Schools Bill to extend relationships and sex education (RSE) provision up to the age of 18 in further education institutions"

Advance	National Association of Headteachers (NAHT)
Amnesty International UK	National Association for Managers of Student Services (NAMSS)
Association of Young People's Health (AYPH)	National Education Union
Beyond Equality	National Union of Students
Bold Voices	NSPCC
Brook	Oxfordshire Youth
Cambridgeshire PSHE Service	Period Positive
Centre for Mental Health	Plan International UK
Chameleon PDE	PSHE Association
Childnet International	SafeLives
Children and Young People's Mental HealthCoalition	School of Sexuality Education
Coram Life Education	Sex Education Forum
Diversity Role Models	Sexpression: UK
Drs for Choice	Sixth Form Colleges Association
End Violence Against Women Coalition	Spectra CIC
Everyone's Invited	Split Banana Education CIC
Family Planning Association	Tender
Fumble	Terrence Higgins Trust
Girlguiding UK	The Alice Ruggles Trust
Gloucestershire Healthy Living and Learning (GHLL)	The Eve Appeal
HFL Education	The Faculty of Sexual and Reproductive Healthcare
Humanists UK	The Schools Consent Project
It Happens Education	Training Works
Jigsaw Education Group	University and College Union (UCU)
Let Me Know	White Ribbon UK
Life Lessons Education Ltd	Women's aid
Life Support Productions	Women and Girls Network
Make it Mandatory	Working Chance
Middle Eastern Women and Society Organisation (MEWSO)	

# The case for extending RSE

## **1. Existing legislation and guidance – how 16-18 falls through the gap**

The Children and Social Work Act 2017 introduced mandatory RSHE for all schools in England. This applies to primary and secondary schools, including those with Sixth Forms, but not to further education colleges.

Young people must be in full time education until they are 18, and 608,000 students age 16-18 study in either FE or sixth form college in England ([AoC](#)).

Mandatory RSHE is benefiting young people - with nearly half of students (47%) feeling well prepared for sex and relationships in higher education ([HEPI, 2025](#)), compared with just 27% who felt well prepared in 2021. Just over a quarter (28%) do not feel well prepared.

Statutory safeguarding guidance '[Keeping Children Safe in Education](#)' applies to schools and further education colleges, and emphasises the importance of preventative education. Schools follow the [statutory RSHE guidance](#) to deliver this but there is no equivalent guidance for colleges. Updated RSHE guidance can provide a flexible framework for RSHE for 16-18 education, building on the sequential approach recommended by Ofsted.

The tutorial system in colleges is well positioned to deliver age-relevant lessons on healthy relationships and sexual health and has scope on wider PSHE education topics. Some FE and sixth form colleges voluntarily provide RSHE. However, this provision is inconsistent, not monitored and there is scant training for college tutors.

The Office for Students is making it [a condition of registration for universities](#) to set out how they intend to prevent and address sexual violence, reflecting the high prevalence of sexual violence amongst students. Ensuring all young people can access RSHE in the years **before** they reach universities is an essential part of an effective prevention strategy.

Under the [Convention on the Rights of a Child](#), a child is any person under the age of 18. Under the Istanbul Convention (of which the UK government is a signatory), signatories commit to teaching about equality (between men and women) in formal curricula and at all levels of education (Article 14, Education). Currently England is not providing a continuous approach throughout all years of a child's education.

## **2. The health and wellbeing of young people aged 16-18**

The incidents of domestic abuse and poor sexual health are very high amongst 16-18 year olds and this is when many start intimate and sexual relationships for the first time.

- Young people in the age group 15 to 24 years are the most likely to be diagnosed with the most common types of STI ([WEC Report, 2024](#)). The average age of first sexual intercourse is 16 years old ([Natsal-3](#))

- [ONS statistics](#) show that the proportion of people who were victims of domestic abuse in the past year (year ending March 2023) were higher for the 16-19 age group (at 8%) than any other age group.
- 79% of young people have accessed violent pornography by the age of 18 ([Office of the Children's Commissioner](#), 2023)
- Social media was the joint highest influence on student mental health (82%) equal to home circumstances ([AoC 2024](#)). Other influences include drugs and alcohol misuse (62%) and gender identity (62%). Gaps in students' core social skills, difficulties with managing relationships, and increase in social anxiety are noted by colleges.
- 16-18 is a crucial period in education for young people with SEND who face significantly higher risks of sexual exploitation and poor sexual health outcomes ([Alma Economics, 2024](#)).

### **3. Support for extending RSE to 16-18 year olds**

The Women and Equalities Select Committee recommends that RSHE be extended. Witnesses to their [inquiry into sexually transmitted infections](#) (2024) support the extension including Professor Sir Chris Whitty, Chief Medical Officer for England, Dame Rachel de Souza, Children's Commissioner for England, and Dr Claire Dewsnap, President of BASSH.

56% of young people aged 16-17 support RSE beyond Year 11 ([SEF, 2024](#)) and 58% want wider PSHE to be mandatory up to 18 ([HEPI, 2025](#)).

105,000 people have signed a petition, started in 2022 by Make it Mandatory, calling for the extension of statutory RSE to Key Stage 5 ([Change.org](#)) and the call is backed by 50 organisations across safeguarding, health and education.

Faustine Petron, founder of Make it Mandatory explains: "I am a university student and young survivor of domestic abuse. As an older teenager, I would have benefited from being provided with RSE after year 11 and an adequate education surrounding the early warning signs of domestic abuse, the different forms abuse can take, and places to get help."

### **4. Amendment to the Children's Wellbeing and Schools Bill**

With the Government's pledge to halve violence against women and girls within a decade, the Children's Wellbeing and Schools Bill presents the ideal opportunity to close the gap in prevention education and ensure that children learn about healthy relationships and sexual health until they reach adulthood.

An amendment could add a clause to the Children and Social Work Act 2017 (chapters 34 and 35) to include further education providers in addition to primary and secondary schools.

**We call on Peers to support an amendment to the Children's Wellbeing and Schools Bill during the Lords Reading in May.**

# Appendix 1: Proposed amendment wording

"To move the following Clause –

## **"Duty to provide relationships and sex education and PSHE to persons who have not attained the age of 18 at further education institutions**

1. The Children and Social Work Act 2017 is amended as follows.
2. In section 34 (Education relating to relationships and sex) –
  1. at the end of subsection (1)(b) insert –

"and,  
(c) relationships and sex education to be provided to persons who have not attained the age of eighteen and who are receiving education at post-16 education institutions in England";

1. in subsection (2)(a), after "schools" insert "and further education institutions";
  2. in subsection (2)(b), after "schools" insert "and further education institutions";
  3. in subsection (2)(b), after "schools" insert "and further education institutions".
3. In section 35 (Other personal, social, health and economic education) –
    1. at the end of subsection (1)(b) insert –

"and,  
(c) to persons who have not attained the age of eighteen and who are receiving education at post-16 education institutions in England";

1. in subsection (2)(a), after "schools" insert "and further education institutions";
2. in subsection (2)(b), after "schools" insert "and further education institutions";
3. in subsection (2)(b), after "schools" insert "and further education institutions".

Explanatory note: This new clause would extend the existing provision of relationships and sex education and PSHE under the Children and Social Work Act 2017 to people under the age of 18 who are receiving education at post-16 education institutions in England.

## About the campaign partners

**Make It Mandatory** is a multi-award-winning, grassroots, and youth-led campaign with over 105,000 signatures. Founded by young survivor of teenage domestic abuse, Faustine Petron, the campaign calls on the Government to extend RSE to 18.

**Brook** is the UK sexual health charity, providing clinical sexual healthcare, and delivering and supporting high quality RSE in England and Wales.

**End Violence Against Women Coalition (EVAW)** is a membership organisation representing over 160 specialist violence against women and girls (VAWG) services, researchers, survivors and NGOs working to end VAWG in all its forms.

**Sex Education Forum** is a charity that brings together over 70 Partner organisations to make sure the RSE young people get is right for them and is the best it can be.

## Support for extending RSE to 18

**namss** National Association for  
Managers of Student Services

**nus**  
national union of **students**

 Sixth Form Colleges  
Association

 **NAHT**  
THE SCHOOL LEADERS' UNION

 national  
education  
union

**UCU**  
University and College Union



 SEX EDUCATION FORUM  
working together for quality  
relationships and sex education

**END  
VIOLENCE  
AGAINST  
WOMEN**

 **brook**

**PSHE** | ASSOCIATION 

**women's aid**  
until women & children are safe

  
**Girlguiding**

**NSPCC**

THE Alice  
Ruggles  
Trust  
PUTTING AN END TO STALKING

 **Childnet**

**CENTRE FOR  
MENTAL  
HEALTH**

 **PLAN**  
INTERNATIONAL  
For children and  
equality for girls

  
**SEXPRESS:UK**

**WHITE RIBBON**  
-ORG.UK-

 **SafeLives**  
Ending  
domestic  
abuse

**AMNESTY**  
INTERNATIONAL 

 **FSRH** The Faculty of Sexual &  
Reproductive Healthcare



Children & Young People's  
Mental Health Coalition

B EQUALITY Y O N D



WORKING CHANCE  
Unlocking women's potential



Humanists UK



Family Planning  
Association



Life Support  
productions



Chameleon PDE  
PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT EDUCATION IN A CHANGING WORLD

Jigsaw<sup>®</sup>  
Education Group

the eve  
appeal  
the gynaecological cancers charity

MEWSO  
Middle Eastern Women & Society Organisation

FU  
MB  
LE

Terrence  
HIGGINS  
TRUST

WOMEN & GIRLS  
NETWORK



coram  
Life Education

SCARF

It happens  
education  
Let's talk about it...



tender

School of  
Sexuality  
Education

schools  
consent  
project



Diversity  
Role Models



CAMBRIDGESHIRE  
PSHE  
SERVICE

oxfordshire  
youth

HFL Education

Gloucestershire  
Healthy  
Living and Learning

Life  
Lessons



advance