

Sex Education Forum

Five Year

Strategy

2026-2030



Who we are

Sex Education Forum was founded in 1987. From day one, our defining strength has been to bring organisations and people together around our shared goal of ensuring high-quality, inclusive relationships and sex education (RSE) for all children and young people. Nearly four decades later, our convening power is formidable, with our 75 Partner organisations and members forming a vibrant community who share our values and principles for RSE.

We campaigned for decades for legislative change to mandate RSE provision in all schools in England. With this goal achieved, we became an independent charity in 2021 and shifted our attention to monitoring the implementation of statutory provisions and addressing the gaps.

We know that the quality of RSE depends on listening closely and regularly to young people's needs and experiences and ensuring that educators – whether they are teachers, parents, carers or other trusted adults- are competent to meet those needs. We involve young people through our annual poll, consultation and co-production activities and our youth partnerships programme. Our support for educators is provided through our portfolio of high-quality training and by sharing reliable, evidence-based information about effective RSE.

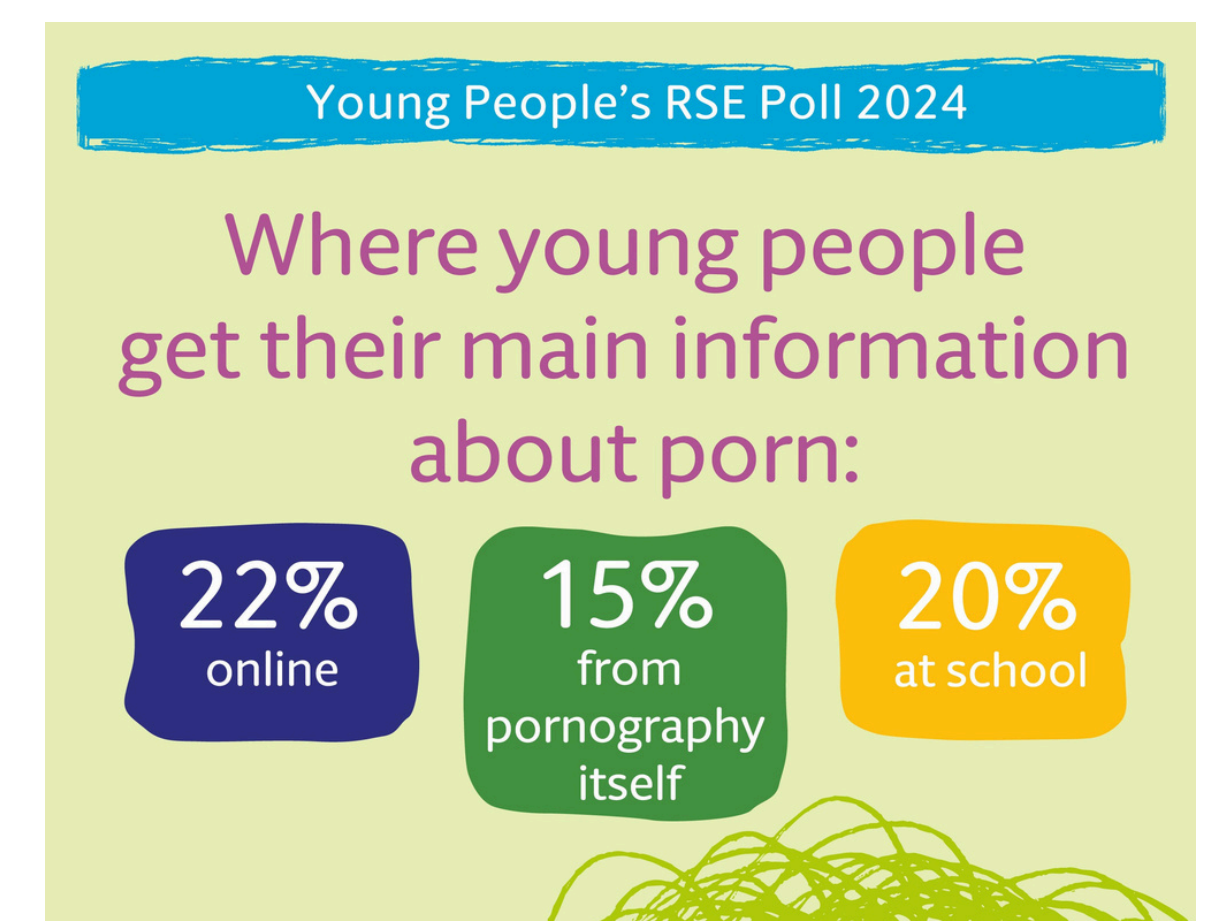
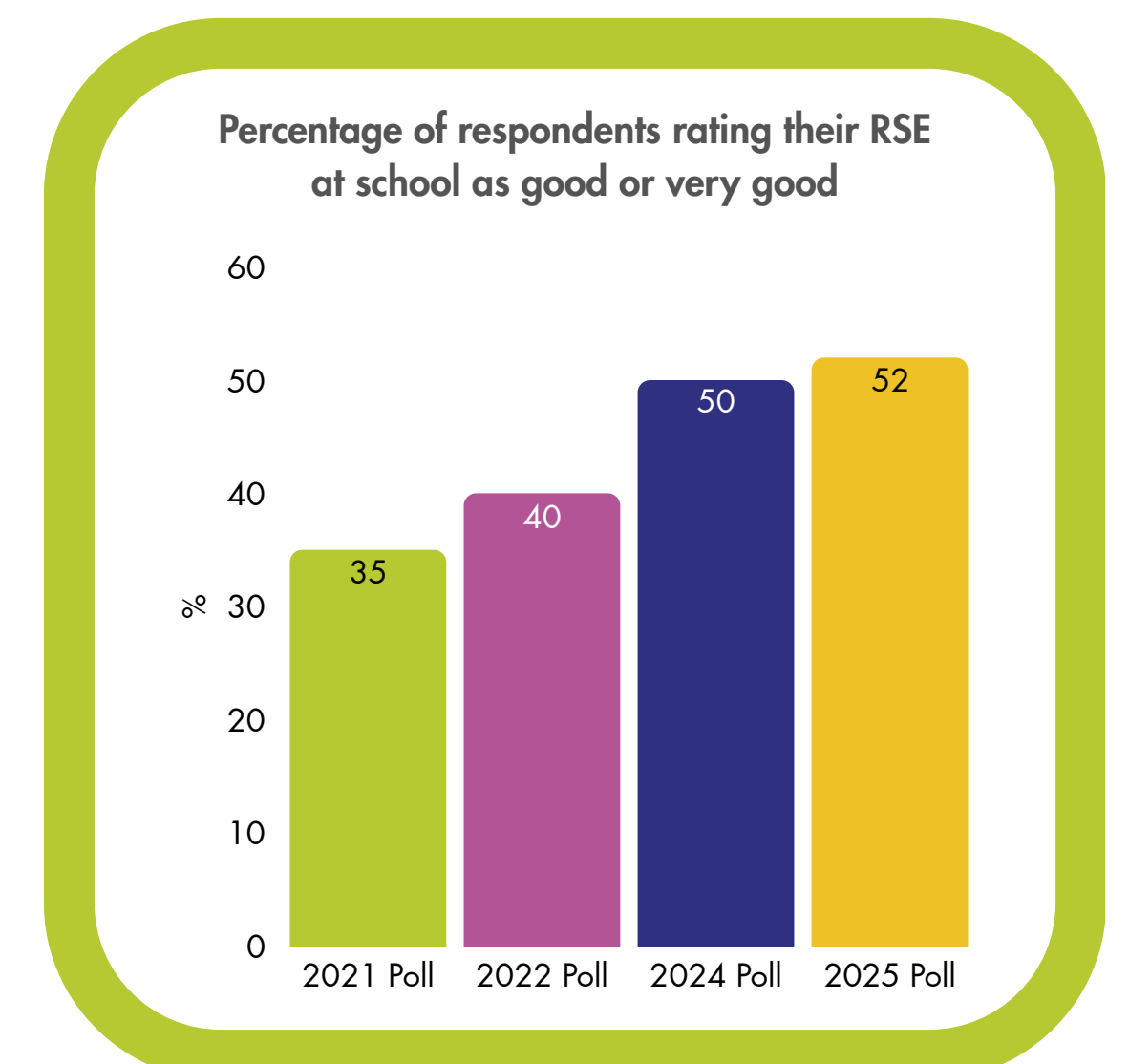
Staff support for #CareDay2026



Some of our achievements

Since becoming an independent charity in 2021, we have:

- Advocated for better RSE by providing the only annual poll of young people's views and experiences of RSE, which is relied on to monitor the quality of RSE nationally. It has been quoted hundreds of times in the media, research, policy-papers and in Parliament and supports the entire sector to evidence the need for improvement.
- Championed the provision of high-quality SEND specialist RSE support, recognising the particular needs and vulnerabilities of young people with SEND, and provided training directly to educators in over 200 special schools and SEND settings.
- Designed, piloted and evaluated a trail-blazing RSE training for foster carers and begun a full-scale roll-out of the new programme: 'Caring Conversations', which will benefit hundreds of looked after children.
- Established our youth partnerships programme, funded by the National Lottery Community Fund, and formed an impactful partnership with youth-led grassroots campaign organisation Make it Mandatory who are campaigning for RSE to extend up to the age of 18.
- Shared research evidence about RSE in easy-to-use formats and contributed to academic knowledge about 'what works' in RSE by serving as an intervention partner for two school-based trials: Positive Choices and Think Again.



“I think the biggest change was the idea of being able to talk about difficult subjects with my young person... and having the confidence in myself, having the tools to be able to do that with confidence.”

- Feedback from Foster carer following participation in our Caring Conversations programme

The context

The world is increasingly complex for children and young people to navigate as they grow up. The digital landscape is changing rapidly, with increases in social media and AI. Technology is a source of both opportunity and challenge for human relationships, sexual wellbeing and health. Concerns include the polarised and misogynistic messaging of commercially driven algorithms, exposure to sexually violent content, and the difficulty in differentiating health facts from misinformation. The benefits available through internet connectivity are realised partly through having the relevant skills and knowledge that foster agency.

Children and young people's physical and mental health is suffering:

- With increases in violence against women and girls, increases in race and religiously motivated hate crime and unacceptable levels of hate crimes targeting sexual orientation, gender identity and disability ([Home Office statistics, 2025](#)).
- Two in five teens in relationships have experienced emotional or physical relationship abuse ([Youth Endowment Fund, 2025](#)).
- 15-24 year olds are the most likely to be diagnosed with the most common types of sexually transmitted infection ([UK Health Security Agency, 2025](#) and [Women and Equalities Committee Report, 2024](#)).
- Rates of teenage conception have risen for the first time in 14 years ([Local Government Association, 2025](#)).
- Health inequalities negatively impact marginalised groups, such as Looked after Children ([RCPCH, 2021](#)).

The role of RSE

RSE is not a silver bullet, but it is an essential tool in providing a foundation of reliable information, attitudes and skills for healthy relationships and healthy bodies and the critical thinking to challenge misinformation. These are skills that last a lifetime. Research evidence overwhelmingly finds that there are health benefits in providing a RSE curriculum, and points to the need for RSE to begin early in a child's education if it is to be preventative of harm. The Istanbul Convention, ratified by 39 parties of the Council of Europe, includes Article 14 - preventing violence against women through formal and informal education. The protective nature of RSE is grasped well in recent Government policy including the violence against women and girls strategy: 'Freedom from Violence and Abuse', and the updated Government RSHE guidance (2025).



RSE Challenges

However, public and political understanding about RSE is inconsistent, and narratives around RSE provision are prone to misinformation. Ahead of the 2024 General Election there was a fresh surge of ‘backlash’ against RSE and it remains a topical issue among political actors and the media. Consequently, the space for dialogue with policy-makers, parents, carers and the wider public is key to building a better understanding about what RSE really is and why it’s so crucial as a preventative and protective tool that helps equip young people to deal with challenges and live healthy, happy lives.

Findings from our annual RSE poll provide evidence of progress in the quality of provision since RSE became statutory in schools. Yet too many young people still lack the honest information they need to navigate safe relationships and protect their sexual health. Only 52% of young people rate their relationships and sex education (RSE) at school as ‘good’ or ‘very good’ (SEF, 2025), and only 43% of students feel personally represented and included in their RSE (SEF, 2024).

The role of trusted adults

Despite increased access to information online, young people tell us that they want non-judgemental RSE from trusted adults throughout their formative years including from school, health professionals, parents and carers. It is our mission to help provide this.

What young people told us

“I appreciated that my dad respected boundaries and let me lead sensitive discussions”

“My school made us do interactive activities during our PSHE class so the whole class is involved and everybody learns.”

“[My] Carer provided emotional support when I felt discomfort or anxiety with aspects of RSE and provided me the time, space and listening.”

Young people’s RSE poll SEF, 2025

Why now ?

We have been operating as an independent charity for five years, establishing sound governance and systems and firm foundations for financial sustainability. We are incredibly proud of our small but mighty team of six staff who work remotely, and our dynamic board of trustees.

During this period, our strategic focus has centred on supporting the implementation of statutory RSE, but we've also explored young people's needs for RSE outside of school and beyond the age of 16.

The first ever iteration of statutory RSHE guidance (2019) is now in transition to updated guidance, with implementation beginning in September 2026. The government has launched its VAWG strategy, which makes commitments to a credible, healthy relationships education offer for students by 2029.

We have reached a pivotal point as an organisation and in the policy landscape, where we can learn from half a decade of experience with statutory RSE and explore opportunities to accelerate improvement and to address gaps.

What our partners say:

"RSE itself is about communication, so it makes sense that this is a central pillar"

"The poll is absolutely excellent and doesn't exist without Sex Education Forum. It's incredible data. It's so useful when we're articulating the need."



What we did

To develop our new strategy, we carried out a 'PESTLE' analysis with staff and trustees. This tool helps with looking ahead at what is changing in the external environment that is relevant to RSE. Next, our Partners were invited to share their perspectives on what they thought the key challenges will be for RSE in the next few years, and what they see Sex Education Forum contributing that is different to other organisations.

Focus groups and interviews enabled a deeper exploration of these questions, and were carried out with key stakeholders, with the aim of involving a diverse range of types of organisations, including national voluntary and community sector organisations, local authorities, and RSE specialist organisations of varying sizes.

Twenty-eight organisations participated in our consultation activities, and helped us generate a wealth of insights and ideas. Key patterns emerged, highlighting Sex Education Forum's considerable strength and reach as convenor of the RSE sector and a trusted source of information and insights from young people. The importance of our annual young people's RSE poll came through loud and clear.

Stakeholders share our worries about the challenges to children and young people's health and wellbeing, but feel positive about what we have achieved through civil society action and the ongoing opportunity through statutory RSE. There is overwhelming support for us to continue campaigning for RSE to extend to age 18. People said that Sex Education Forum could go further to communicate the work we do and reach a wider audience with our evidence-based understanding of RSE.

Finally, we tested our draft strategy with staff and partners and made some tweaks. The language of our new strategy has already become embedded in our work, and in many ways, it feels like the strategy has been up and running for a while now, and there is much to do!

Thank you to everyone who has contributed their time and insights so generously.

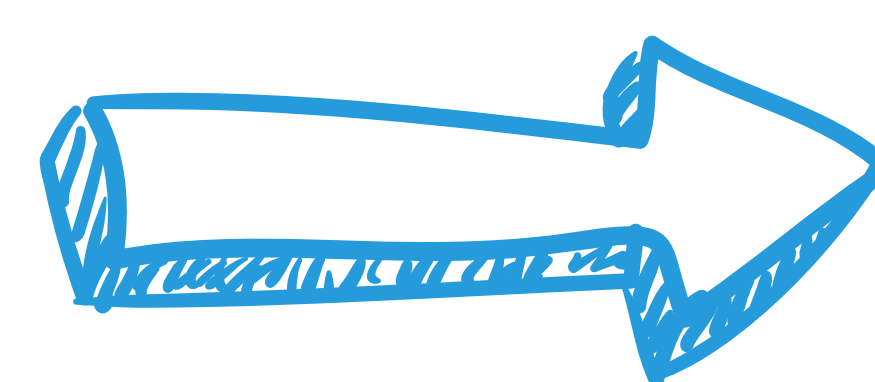


Introducing our new strategy

Our vision is that relationships and sexual wellbeing are an understood, accepted and valued part of life that enhances health and human thriving.

Our mission is to make high-quality relationships and sex education a reality so that children and young people grow up understanding themselves and other people and are able to exercise their rights and responsibilities.

Read on to find out how we will deliver our strategy through four pillars, underpinned by youth voice.



Introducing our new strategy

To deliver our ambition and address the gaps and quality of RSE over the next 5 years, we will focus on four mutually reinforcing pillars, underpinned by youth voice.

Convening: We will convene the sector, bringing together a wide range of partners, including youth-led organisations, so that we can share our collective understanding of the challenges and solutions.

Communicating: We will work towards the whole community having a greater understanding of what RSE really is and the role that everyone can play in protective education for children.

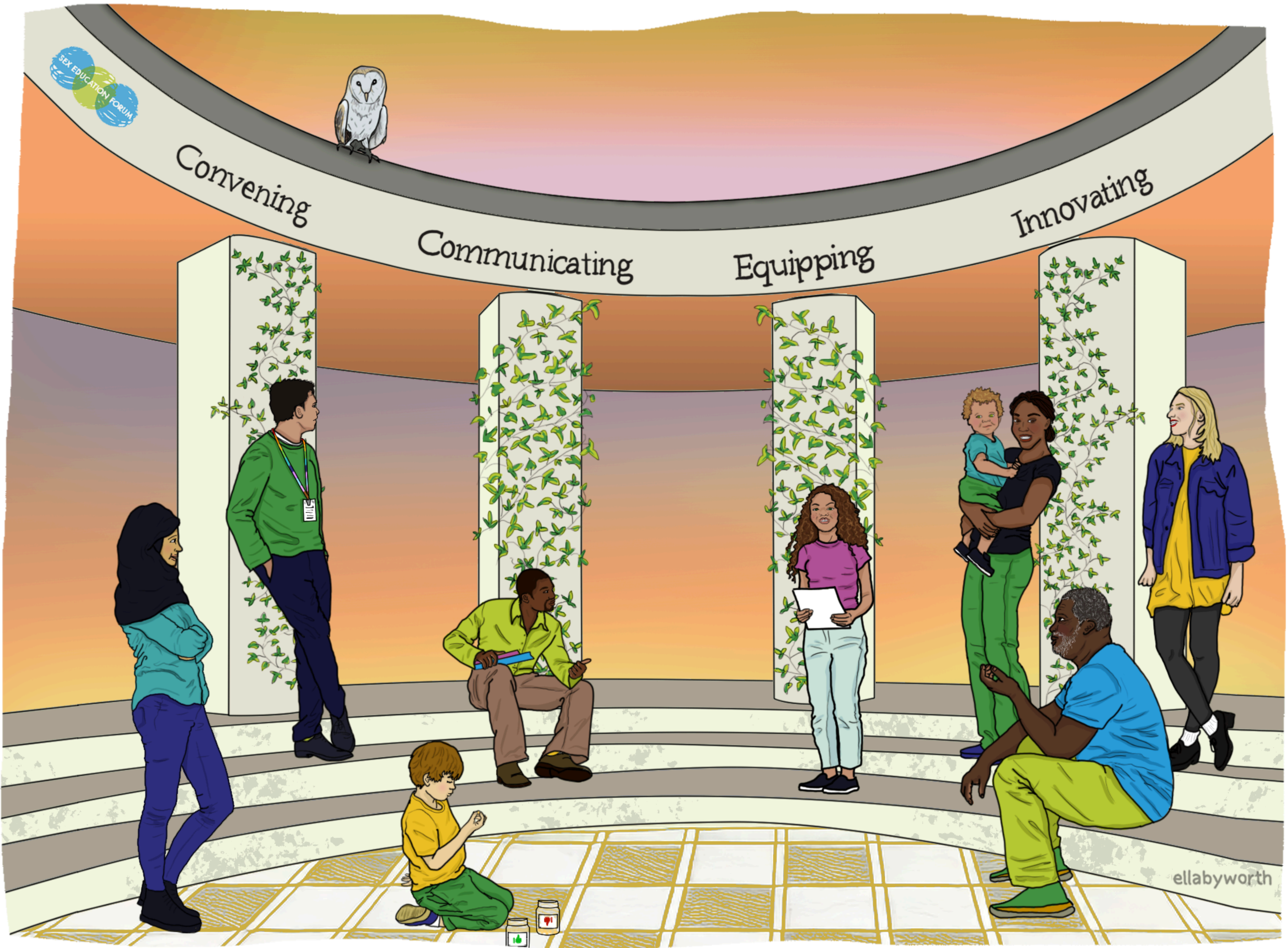
Equipping: We will strive to ensure educators and trusted adults are better equipped to teach relationships and sex education effectively and to address health inequalities.

Innovating: We will respond to the changing health and well-being needs of children and young people.

Young People are at the heart of Sex Education Forum's work, we feel it is important that their voices remains central to our focus.

We do this through our annual RSE poll, which is an impactful national barometer for RSE quality, and through our youth partnerships, which give young people access to mentoring, networks and funding to pursue their RSE goals.

The four pillars of our strategy



1. Convening

We want the quality and consistency of RSE that children and young people receive to improve and for RSE to extend beyond school.

We will achieve this by convening the sector, bringing together a wide range of partners, including youth-led organisations, so that we can share our collective understanding of the challenges and solutions.

We will lead policy influencing activities to develop legislation and guidance and for example, to call for RSHE training budgets and mandatory RSE post-16.

How we will deliver this:

1. We will play a lead role in national policy influencing activities to ensure RSHE guidance and legislation is the best it can be, working to ensure that future updates to the Government RSHE guidance for schools are informed by evidence and young people's experiences and needs.
2. We will broaden our policy focus beyond school provision, by providing support to Make it Mandatory's campaign for mandatory RSE in further education so that the RSE needs of young people aged 16-18 are better met.
3. We will provide an inclusive forum that brings key statutory and voluntary and community sector organisations together so that a diverse range of RSE specialists and strategic stakeholders, including smaller and larger expert organisations, can inform policy developments collaboratively.
4. We will form new partnerships with youth-led organisations so that we can collaborate to influence policy and practice, empowering young people to achieve their goals for better RSE.
5. We will provide the national benchmark for monitoring the quality and consistency of RSE by commissioning a young people's RSE Poll, co-designed with young people and communicating the findings to policy-makers, government and the public.
6. We will maintain our strong bi-lateral relationships with policy stakeholders including Government and Ofsted, so that we continue to inform decision-makers with our knowledge of evidence and practice, thus contributing to systems change that enables high quality RSE.

2. Communicating

We want the whole community to have a greater understanding of what RSE really is and the role that everyone can play in protective education for children.

We will achieve this by explaining the realities and research about RSE in accessible ways and removing barriers for young people to make their voices heard.

How we will deliver this:

1. We will advance public understanding about the role of RSE in helping young people to thrive and be healthy, including by publicising findings from our young people's RSE poll.
2. We will develop a new workstream on strategic communications to address public understanding about RSE and its role in the prevention of violence and promotion of good health.
3. We will increase the accessibility and reach of our messages about policy, research and practice by integrating 'Easy read' and other accessible formats into our materials.
4. We will provide clear messages about key features of good quality RSE practice to a wider range of educators, youth professionals and trusted adults.
5. We will amplify young people's views, needs and experiences relating to RSE by platforming young people at our events, with increased opportunities for marginalised young people to communicate throughout our activities.
6. We will actively communicate about our full range of projects and activities so that what we do to 'equip', 'innovate' and 'convene' is better understood by a wider audience.

3. Equipping

We want educators and trusted adults to be better equipped to teach relationships and sex education (RSE) effectively and to help address health inequalities.

To achieve this, we will promote a more strategic approach to RSE training by leading a national dialogue on standards with policy-makers and education leaders.

Through our RSE training programmes for school, youth, social care and health professionals, as well as foster carers, we aim to help create a generation of more professionalised, skilled and confident educators. Our approach focuses on reducing health inequalities by prioritising the trusted adults who support marginalised young people.

How we will deliver this:

1. We will develop and build sector-wide support for a national strategy on RSE teacher training – as part of wider PSHE education – with primary, secondary and further education within its scope. The strategy will form part of communications with Government and Parliamentarians to make the case for long-term Government investment in professionalising the teaching of RSE.
2. We will deepen the collective understanding of ‘what works’ to improve RSE in schools, colleges and other youth settings by responding to young people’s views about how RSE can be improved, using evidence-informed approaches, and calling for investment in training that is efficient and effective.
3. We will involve a range of stakeholders in the production of a set of educator competencies for RSE that is relevant to teachers, wider youth professionals, and voluntary and statutory organisations, and we will establish the competencies as a national reference point for RSE standards in school and beyond.
4. We will increase the number of educators (within and beyond school) who are trained, competent and supported to provide RSE to marginalised children and young people, thus reducing health inequalities. A trauma-informed approach and our SEND specialist know-how will be threaded throughout our practice.
5. We will expand our networks to better meet the professional development needs of student teachers and younger educators involved in RSE, creating earlier opportunities to step into RSE-related careers and establish professional networks with peers.

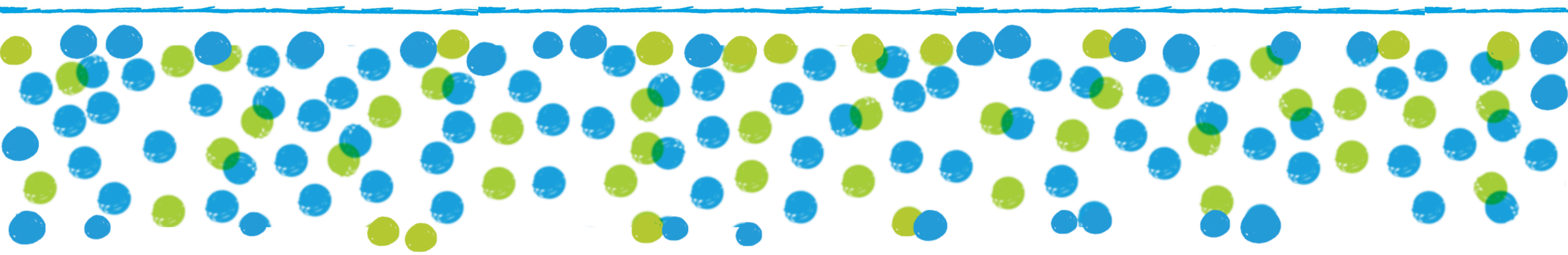
4. Innovating

We recognise that new approaches are sometimes needed to meet children and young people's evolving and intersectional health and wellbeing needs.

We want to have greater impact in meeting these needs by collaborating to design and test innovative responses to gaps in RSE provision, in partnership with leading researchers and in connection with the RSE sector internationally.

How we will deliver this:

1. We will partner in the co-creation, testing and scaling of innovative pilot projects which promote health and wellbeing and tackle gender-based violence and teenage relationship abuse, working closely with academics and ensuring that new approaches are grounded in practice and informed by the current needs and experiences of young people.
2. We will develop, in partnership with boys and young men, a more nuanced understanding of their needs in relation to RSE and engage with educators and trusted adults to communicate and progress this.
3. We will forge new partnerships with researchers, for example to address religious and cultural gaps in RSE and other topics identified by young people.
4. We will advocate for meaningful parental involvement in RSE and the benefits of school and home working in partnership. We will further our understanding of how to support parental involvement through research studies, and by disseminating learning with our Partners and the audiences we communicate with.
5. We will identify opportunities for collaboration – with stakeholders in England and internationally – ensuring we are drawing on, contributing to and disseminating international practice and research.



**Join our RSE community and
be part of bringing our
strategy to life.**

