

# Statutory RSE: Are teachers in England prepared?



## Introduction

Legislation passed in the Children and Social Work Act 2017 introduces Relationships and Sex Education (RSE) as a statutory requirement in secondary schools and Relationships Education in primary schools. This applies to all schools in England, with schools that are ready being encouraged to follow new guidance and regulations from September 2019 and all schools to do so by September 2020.

Primary schools are being encouraged by the Department for Education to provide sex education as well as Relationships Education. In this report we refer to RSE throughout, rather than separate components.

The quality of RSE provided in schools in England has been a concern for many years, and numerous surveys and reports have highlighted the importance of training for the staff delivering RSE. See for example Ofsted's report 'PSHE in schools: Not yet good enough' (2013). Ofsted has also commented on models of delivery, for example describing off-timetable /drop-down days as a weak model to rely on.

The Sex Education Forum ran an online survey for 4 weeks, from 3 – 31 October 2018. We asked people currently involved in the teaching of RSE to describe aspects of how they are delivering the subject, and if the training they have accessed is meeting their needs. Ultimately the aim was to create a picture of current provision and need, in order to establish how prepared schools are to deliver high quality RSE to all pupils.

A total of 350 people took part in the survey, but those working outside of England have been removed from the survey data for the analysis contained in this report. This leaves 240 responses. Because not all respondents completed every question the total number of respondents to each question is included in this report.

People identifying as female accounted for 82% of responses, with 17% identifying as male and 1% as trans or neutral. 78% of respondents identify as heterosexual, 14% as gay, lesbian, bisexual, queer or pansexual, 2% as asexual and 6% preferred not to say. 7% of respondents are living with a disability.

46% of respondents deliver RSE in a secondary school, 35% in a primary school, 5% in a sixth form college and 14% work in more than one school. Some data and commentary is included in this report which compares secondary school and primary school respondents.

The survey was open to all professionals teaching RSE. The majority of respondents were teachers. School nurses, sexual health professionals and non-teaching school staff were amongst those also represented. The survey was disseminated via a range of email newsletters and social media.

## Findings

### Part 1. Overall quality of RSE

48% of respondents rate the RSE in their school as high quality or very high quality. Only 12% of respondents rate the RSE in their school as low quality or very low quality. Four in 10 respondents chose to rate their RSE as neither high nor low quality. When comparing secondary schools and primary schools, secondary schools had the higher ratings for quality (55% high quality or very high quality for secondary compared with 40% for primary).

Table 1

<b>How would you rate the quality of the RSE that is delivered in your school currently?</b>			Primary		Secondary	
Very high quality	8.37%	18	2.47%	2	9.17%	10
High quality	39.53%	85	37.04%	30	45.87%	50
Neither high nor low quality	39.53%	85	45.68%	37	34.86%	38
Low quality	8.37%	18	7.41%	6	8.26%	9
Very low quality	4.19%	9	7.41%	6	1.83%	2
	Answered	215		81		109
	Skipped	25		4		5

→ **Close to half of respondents rate the RSE in their school as high quality or very high quality (48%)**

→ **A further 40% rate their schools' RSE as neither high nor low quality**

→ 12% of respondents rate the RSE in their school as low or very low quality

## Part 2. How RSE is delivered

It is encouraging to see that many schools are using timetabled lessons as the model for delivering RSE, and that RSE appears to be teacher-led in most schools.

For most (61%) of the teachers and educators responding, RSE occupies less than 5% of their job. Teaching RSE occupies 100% of a job role for only 1.4% of respondents. Only 16% of respondents spend more than a fifth of their time teaching RSE.

These findings suggest that there are currently few people whose main job it is to teach RSE – a subject that will soon be statutory in all schools.

Table 2

<b>What proportion of your job is spent teaching RSE?</b>		
Less than 5% (for example occasional ad hoc lessons)	60.75%	130
5-20% (e.g. 1 day of your working week)	22.90%	49
21-40%	5.61%	12
41-60%	5.14%	11
61-80%	1.40%	3
81-100%	2.80%	6
100%	1.40%	3
	Answered	214
	Skipped	26

Table 3

<b>Who delivers RSE in your school? (please tick all that apply)</b>		
teachers	89.95%	197
school nurses	21.00%	46
non-teaching school staff	14.61%	32
sexual health professionals	18.72%	41
external visitors - charity sector	20.55%	45
external visitors - private sector	15.53%	34
Other (please specify)	4.11%	9
	Answered	219
	Skipped	21

Table 4

<b>How many teachers deliver RSE in your school?</b>			Primary		Secondary	
I am the only RSE teacher in the school	6.05%	13	0%	0	8.26%	9
We have a team of teachers who teach RSE	33.49%	72	15.85%	13	52.29%	57
All teachers teach RSE in the school	26.98%	58	57.32%	47	6.42%	7
Form teachers teach RSE	17.21%	37	15.85%	13	24.77%	27
RSE is delivered entirely by non-teachers in the school	3.72%	8	2.44%	2	0.92%	1
Other (please specify)	12.56%	27	8.5% <sup>4</sup>	7	7.34%	8
	Answered	215		82		109
	Skipped	25		3		5

In a small proportion (4%) of schools RSE is delivered entirely by non-teachers. The most common model is to have a team of teachers who teach RSE. Where all teachers teach RSE in the school it is usually a primary school – this was the model for 60% of primary school respondents. It is more common to find that a team of teachers teach RSE (33%) or that all teachers teach RSE in the school (27%).

Table 5

<b>When is RSE delivered in your school?</b>		
RSE is taught through 'drop-down' off-timetable days only	12.56%	27
RSE is taught through timetabled lessons only	34.88%	75
RSE is taught through a combination of timetabled lessons and drop-down days	30.70%	66
RSE is taught in Form/Tutor Time	7.91%	17
Other (please specify)	13.95%	30
	Answered	215
	Skipped	25

It is encouraging to see that in two-thirds of schools (66%) the model for delivering RSE involves timetabled lessons, sometimes combined with drop-down days. 12.5% of schools are relying on 'drop-down' off-timetable days as their only model for delivering RSE.

- 1 in 8 schools delivering RSE through 'drop-down' days only
- Two-thirds of schools have timetabled lessons for RSE
- Only 16% of respondents spend more than a fifth of their working time teaching RSE

### Part 3. Training to deliver RSE

The survey included some questions which asked specifically about the training respondents had received to teach RSE.

Only 6% of teachers had learnt about RSE as part of initial teacher training. 29% of all respondents have never received any training on RSE.

*“Didn’t do anything specific on RSE [in initial teaching training] so feel I have picked it up from within the school I’m now in... muddling through” (Comment from survey respondent)*

Table 6

<b>I feel that I have had adequate training to deliver RSE</b>		
Strongly Agree	13.93%	28
Agree	26.87%	54
Not sure	21.39%	43
Disagree	27.36%	55
Strongly Disagree	10.45%	21
	Answered	201
	Skipped	39

The **adequacy** of training that teachers had received on RSE was mixed – with similar numbers agreeing and disagreeing that their prior training was adequate. The responses add up to 38% either disagreeing or strongly disagreeing that their training was adequate and 41% either agreeing or strongly agreeing that they had adequate training. To put it another way, the chances of a teacher of RSE having or not having adequate training in the subject are roughly equal.

Table 7

<b>Did you learn about RSE as part of initial teacher training?</b>		
Yes	5.97%	12
No	82.09%	165
I did not do initial teacher training	13.43%	27
	Answered	201
	Skipped	39

Only 6% of respondents had learnt about RSE as part of initial teacher training. Excluding the 27 respondents who did not do initial teacher training (ITT), the percentage of those who did ITT but learnt nothing about RSE as part of it is 93%.

Table 8

<b>When did you last have any RSE training?</b>		
Less than 2 years ago	37.31%	75
2-5 years ago	22.39%	45
6-10 years ago	7.96%	16
More than 10 years ago	4.48%	9
I have never had any RSE training	29.35%	59
	Answered	201
	Skipped	39

We asked how recently respondents had participated in RSE training. The results show that a startling 29% have never had any RSE training.

Table 9

<b>If you attended RSE training within the last 2 years, who was your most recent training provided by?</b>		
School	13.66%	22
Local Authority	19.88%	32
Health Provider (NHS or otherwise)	10.56%	17
Voluntary Sector	8.70%	14
Private Provider	15.53%	25
I have not had RSE training within the last 2 years	40.99%	66
	Answered	161
	Skipped	79

There is a mixed economy of training provision, but 41 of respondents had not attended any RSE training within the last 2 years.

- **29% of respondents have never had any RSE training**
- **Only 6% of respondents had learnt about RSE as part of initial teacher training**
- **Less than half say their training to deliver RSE is adequate**

## Part 4. Confidence with inclusion, equalities and topics

Respondents were asked about their confidence to teach about a selection of topics that are part of the proposed content listed in the draft new Government guidance on RSE. We also asked about underpinning issues that run throughout the teaching of RSE, specifically confidence to meet the needs of pupils with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND), to foster gender equality and to be LGBT inclusive.

Tables 10 and 11: Topics that respondents were asked about, and confidence to teach them

<b>How confident do you feel to deliver teaching on the following subjects?</b>
1. Key facts about puberty including physical and emotional changes
2. The differences between appropriate and inappropriate or unsafe physical and other contact
3. The vocabulary and confidence to report concerns or abuse
4. About different types of bullying (including cyberbullying), the impact of bullying, responsibilities of bystanders to report bullying and how and where to get help.
5. What constitutes sexual harassment and sexual violence and why these are always unacceptable
6. The facts about reproductive health, including fertility and the potential impact of lifestyle on fertility for men and women
7. The facts about the full range of contraceptive choices and options available
8. That there are choices in relation to pregnancy (with medically and legally accurate, impartial information on all options, including keeping the baby, adoption, abortion and where to get further help).
9. How the different STIs, including HIV/AIDs, are transmitted, how risk can be reduced through safer sex (including through condom use) and the importance of and facts about testing
10. About sexually explicit material online and the damage it may do
11. How students can get further advice, including how and where to access confidential sexual and reproductive health advice and treatment

Topic	Extremely Confident		Quite Confident		Moderately Confident		Slightly Confident		Not at all Confident		Total	Weighted average
	%	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%	Count		
1	46.60%	96	38.35%	79	10.19%	21	3.88%	8	0.97%	2	206	1.74
2	38.35%	79	46.60%	96	9.71%	20	2.91%	6	2.43%	5	206	1.84
3	43.69%	90	37.38%	77	12.62%	26	4.37%	9	1.94%	4	206	1.83
4	48.78%	100	39.02%	80	10.73%	22	1.46%	3	0.00%	0	205	1.65
5	37.44%	76	40.89%	83	13.79%	28	5.42%	11	2.46%	5	203	1.95
6	32.51%	66	35.47%	72	20.20%	41	6.90%	14	4.93%	10	203	2.16
7	34.16%	69	31.19%	63	15.84%	32	9.90%	20	8.91%	18	202	2.28
8	24.63%	50	32.51%	66	21.18%	43	10.84%	22	10.84%	22	203	2.51
9	31.53%	64	30.05%	61	16.75%	34	10.84%	22	10.84%	22	203	2.39
10	23.15%	47	35.96%	73	21.67%	44	10.84%	22	8.37%	17	203	2.45
11	29.90%	61	30.88%	63	18.63%	38	11.27%	23	9.31%	19	204	2.39
											Answered	206
											Skipped	34

The topics that respondents felt least confident about are contraception, pregnancy options, STIs including HIV, safer sex, accessing sexual health services and also teaching about sexually explicit material online. The topics that teachers were most confident about were bullying and puberty. This pattern was broadly repeated across primary and secondary school respondents.

Table 12

<b>How confident are you to take an approach throughout RSE which:</b>												
	Extremely Confident		Quite Confident		Moderately Confident		Slightly Confident		Not at all Confident		Total	Weighted Average
	%	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%	Count		
Is LGBT inclusive	20.39%	42	33.98%	70	24.27%	50	11.17%	23	10.19%	21	206	2.57
Fosters gender equality	33.50%	69	35.92%	74	22.33%	46	3.88%	8	4.37%	9	206	2.1
Meets the needs of children with SEND	16.10%	33	33.66%	69	30.24%	62	11.71%	24	8.29%	17	205	2.62
											Answered	206
											Skipped	34



Table 13

<b>What information or guidance would help you to teach RSE more effectively?</b>							
	Very helpful		Quite helpful		Not helpful		Total
How to choose and use reliable resources to use when delivering RSE teaching	70.20%	139	25.25%	50	4.55%	9	198
Case studies describing how other schools have approached RSE	59.39%	117	30.46%	60	10.15%	20	198
Guidance on how and when to use external visitors to deliver RSE teaching at your school	57.36%	113	32.99%	65	9.64%	19	198
Practical advice on how to deliver RSE to students with SEND	76.26%	151	22.22%	44	1.52%	3	198
Guidance on involving students in developing your RSE curriculum	57.87%	114	35.53%	70	6.60%	13	198
Guidance on how to involve parents when developing your RSE curriculum	64.47%	127	31.47%	62	4.06%	8	197
Other (please specify)							13
					Answered		198
					Skipped		42

Respondents flagged up that they would like help to provide RSE that meets the needs of pupils with SEND with 99% stating they would value further advice in this area. LGBT inclusive RSE and how to involve parents with developing the RSE curriculum were also flagged as areas that educators want support with.

Respondents working in primary schools were more likely to describe themselves as lacking confidence in providing LGBT inclusive RSE (30% described themselves as 'slightly confident' or 'not at all confident' in this area, compared with 17% of respondents working in secondary schools).

An open text box was supplied to specify 'Other' forms of information and guidance. Comments included:

- *Guidance on discussing LGBT+ issues*
- *Funded training by specialists and directives to Headteachers to create dedicated PSHE teams*
- *Lesson plans on all the areas for all secondary age range*

- *Where to access free or affordable resources e.g. condoms for contraception- could not get from local GP, chemist and no worries closed down*
- *Bringing in outside agencies would not be useful, with dwindling finances it is easier for staff to teach, and we should all have an understanding to benefit our children.*

**→ 99% would find it helpful to have some guidance as to how to meet the needs of children with SEND**

**→ 7 out of 10 respondents would find it very helpful to have guidance on ‘How to choose and use reliable resources to use when delivering RSE teaching’**

## Part 5. Working with parents

Respondents were asked to rate how well they thought their school works in partnership with parents when delivering RSE.

Table 14

<b>How well do you think your school works in partnership with parents when delivering RSE?</b>			Primary		Secondary	
Extremely Well	9.86%	21	13.75%	11	9.17%	10
Quite Well	37.56%	80	46.25%	37	45.87%	50
Neither well nor badly	32.86%	70	30.00%	24	34.86%	38
Quite badly	15.96%	34	6.25%	5	8.26%	9
Very badly	3.76%	8	3.75%	3	1.83%	2
	Answered	213		80		109
	Skipped	27		5		5

Respondents were most likely to describe their school as working ‘quite well’ (37.5%) in partnership with parents, but 20% felt they were doing quite or very badly with this. Primary schools were more likely to describe their school as working well with parents: 60% chose ‘extremely well’ or ‘quite well’ compared with 36% in secondary. There was support for further guidance on how to involve parents when developing their RSE curriculum (see Table 13).

**→ 10% of schools working ‘extremely well’ in partnership with parents on RSE**

**→ 37.6% of schools working ‘quite well’ in partnership with parents on RSE**

- **20% of schools doing 'badly' in relation to parental partnership on RSE**
- **Primary school respondents more likely than secondary to rate parental partnership well**
- **96% would find it helpful to have some guidance on how to involve parents when developing their RSE curriculum**

## **Discussion and conclusions**

This is a self-selected sample so may have a particular bias, however, the data we have collected serves as a snap-shot of the current situation in relation to RSE provision in England from the perspective of those delivering it. It creates a picture where:

- **Nearly half (48%) of respondents rate the RSE in their school as high quality or very high quality**
- **10% of respondents' schools working extremely well in partnership with parents**
- **29% of respondents have had no training in RSE**

It is encouraging to see that many schools are providing high quality RSE already, and useful to know the scale of change needed to ensure that all schools are providing high quality or very high quality RSE. We should expect to see the quality of RSE improve as a result of the implementation of statutory RSE, so it will be important to track change over time. It will also be useful to compare the rating given by teachers and school staff with the rating given by young people so see how closely the two are aligned.

The dominant model for RSE delivery amongst the schools / respondents surveyed is timetabled RSE, sometimes in combination with off-timetable sessions. We would hope to see reliance on a drop-down day only model disappear completely as statutory RSE is implemented.

The statutory guidance places considerable emphasis on working with parents, and evidence shows that RSE is more effective when home is involved, so this is also a feature of RSE that needs to be monitored.

There is a substantial gap in training for RSE at both the initial teacher training stage and continuing professional development. Our survey has identified some topic areas where teachers and educators would like further support – particularly in relation to sexual and reproductive health and teaching

about explicit online material. There is also strong support for further information and guidance addressing cross-cutting issues particularly SEND and LGBT inclusion, and also choosing and using resources.

The survey found that a very small proportion of teachers and educators have a role that is dedicated to RSE. There seems to be limited scope for teachers and educators to specialize in RSE and personal, social, health and economic (PSHE) education. Specialism will be important to ensure that there are staff competent to lead the subject in a school. There is also a need for all school staff to be adequately briefed on RSE. This is vital if the delivery model involves all teachers in the school to deliver RSE, and also for a whole-school-approach that goes beyond classroom learning. The staffing of RSE should be reviewed again in future.

There is currently no financial investment from Government for support and training for schools on RSE and we hope that this survey will help to shape a national strategy with ring-fenced investment.

## References

Department for Education (2018) [Relationships Education, Relationships and Sex Education \(RSE\) and Health Education](#); Draft for consultation, July 2018.

Ofsted (2013) [PSHE in schools: Not yet good enough](#).

Sex Education Forum (2015) [SRE – the evidence](#). NCB.

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The Sex Education Forum is the leading voice on RSE in England and is a national collaboration of organisations and individuals committed to improving sex and relationships education for children and young people. The Sex Education Forum is hosted at the National Children's Bureau.

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