

Young people's RSE poll 2018



Introduction

The Sex Education Forum, in partnership with the National Education Union (NEU) commissioned Censuswide to carry out a poll of 1000 young people aged 16 and 17 years old.

In total 1001 young people participated in the survey, including 393 males, 595 females, 5 preferred not to say and 8 other. Participants were either 16 years old (505 individuals) or 17 years old (496 individuals).

Just over a quarter (26%) indicated that they are eligible for free school meals. 7% of respondents stated that they have a disability and 9% that they have a special educational need.

The survey ran between 23 October 2018 and 2 November 2018 and covered all 9 geographical regions in the UK.

Part 1: Rate your RSE

Q1. How would you rate the quality of the relationships and sex education you received at school as a whole?

Table 1 – data from Q1

		Male	Female	16 years old	17 years old
	1001	393	595	505	496
Very good	131	65	66	68	63
	13.10%	16.50%	11.10%	13.50%	12.70%
Good	321	133	186	168	153
	32.10%	33.80%	31.30%	33.30%	30.80%
OK	385	142	236	187	198

	38.50%	36.10%	39.70%	37.00%	39.90%
Bad	116	35	81	55	61
	11.60%	8.90%	13.60%	10.90%	12.30%
Very bad	48	18	26	27	21
	4.80%	4.60%	4.40%	5.30%	4.20%

- **45% of respondents rate the quality of their RSE as 'good' or 'very good'**
- **17% of all respondents rate the quality of their RSE as 'bad' or 'very bad'**

Male respondents more likely to rate their RSE as 'good' or 'very good' than females: 1 in 6 (17%) male respondents would rate the quality of the relationships and sex education they received at school as 'very good'. This is compared to around 1 in 10 (11%) of female respondents.

16 year olds a little more likely to rate their RSE as 'good' or 'very good' than 17 year olds

Part 2: What topics were covered? What was missed?

Respondents were asked about a range of topic areas. For each topic the question was:

At school, did you learn everything you needed to about the following:

And the response choices were 'yes', 'no' or 'I didn't learn about this at all'.

Did you learn all that you needed to about this and whether or not they had learnt 'all that they needed to' about them, and if indeed they had learnt anything about the subject at all.

FGM and pleasure were the two topics young people were least likely to have learnt anything about. Cyberbullying and bullying are the two topics that were most likely to have been covered

Topics **not learnt about** at school at all:

- 33% had not learnt about FGM
- 30% had not learnt about pleasure
- 27% had not learnt about pornography
- 23% had not learnt how to recognise when someone is being groomed for sexual exploitation
- 23% had not learnt how to tell if a relationship is healthy

- 22% had not learnt about Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Trans gender (LGBT+) issues
- 20% had not learnt how to tell if a relationship is abusive
- 18% had not learnt about how to get help if you were sexually abused or assaulted
- 16% had not learnt about fertility
- 15% had not learnt how to access local sexual health services
- 13% had not learnt about gender equality
- 12% had not learnt about HIV
- 12% had not learnt about pregnancy options (including abortion)
- 11% had not learnt about giving and getting sexual consent
- 10% had not learnt the medically correct names for genitalia
- 6% had not learnt about STIs at all
- 3% had not learnt about condoms and contraception
- 4% had not learnt about puberty at all
- 3% had not learnt about bullying at all
- 2% had not learnt about cyberbullying at all

Respondents were also asked whether or not what they had learnt was adequate. The topics that had been covered most adequately were cyberbullying, bullying, condoms and contraception, STIs, and puberty:

Respondents answered 'yes' this topic was covered adequately at school:

- 90% had learnt everything they needed to about cyberbullying
- 88% had learnt everything they needed to about bullying
- 83% had learnt everything they needed to about condoms and contraception
- 82% had learnt everything they needed to about STIs
- 80% had learnt everything they needed to about puberty

However, only 53% of respondents had learnt everything they needed to about how to access local sexual health services.

Topics to do with healthy / abusive relationships received more mixed responses, with respondents answering 'yes' they learnt all they needed to about at school as follows

- 73% had learnt everything they needed to about 'giving and getting sexual consent'
- 55% had learnt everything they needed to about how to tell if a relationship is abusive
- 52% had learnt everything they needed to about 'how to recognise when someone is being groomed for sexual exploitation'
- 49% How to tell if a relationship is healthy

The topics where respondents were least likely to say they had learnt all they needed to at school were:

- 43% had learnt everything they needed to about pornography
- 37% had learnt everything they needed to about FGM
- 37% had learnt everything they needed to about sexual pleasure

There were considerable differences between how female and male respondents assessed if they had learnt all they needed to about the various topics.

Table 2: Respondents answering 'yes' they learnt all they needed to about the topic

	Males	Females	All
Bullying	90%	91%	90%
STIs	84%	81%	82%
Pornography	51%	37%	43%
Sexual pleasure	49%	29%	37%

"We weren't taught about what sex is so how would we know if we were assaulted or raped. When taught about puberty I didn't know I'd bleed or what sexual arousal was which took years to learn."

"They never told me about gay sex and relationships which is kinda an issue because I'm a lesbian"

Part 3: How could RSE be improved?

Respondents were given a range of options about how their RSE could have been improved, including the option to say that their RSE could not have been improved.

Table 3: How could your relationships and sex education have been improved? (Tick all that apply)

	%	N=
More topics being covered	56.00%	561
More time dedicated to lessons in the subject	51.70%	518
Having a more sex-positive' approach that stresses the positive side of sex and relationships	39.00%	390
The subject being treated more seriously	34.20%	342
Teaching methods used that make it less awkward	32.70%	327
More real-life examples	32.60%	326
Lessons starting at an earlier age	28.60%	286
Smaller groups	28.40%	284
Teaching styles that make the subject fun and enjoyable to learn about	24.10%	241
If pupils had been consulted about what was taught	16.30%	163
More personalised for my needs	13.00%	130
Parents and carers being involved more with what we were learning at school	12.60%	126

Lessons starting at a later age	9.50%	95
I don't think my relationships and sex education could have been improved	8.70%	87
Other, please specify	3.10%	31

Comments from participants about other ways the subject could be improved;

"Instead of approaching the topic by scaring kids into not having sex, educate us properly. And help us learn about healthy relationships"

"more open-minded teachers. we were not taught anything about LGBTQ+ issues, sex ed etc"

"not separating genders to discuss problems (periods, testicular cancer, etc). Also teaching us about periods"

"Being taught about pregnancy and how to raise a child when you want one instead of just about contraception!"

"If I actually had lessons on the topic"

Participants were also asked what had been good about the RSE they received. This was an open question. Here is a selection of comments.

"My teacher was extremely confident and easy to talk to. There was no questions that surprised her"

"learnt all key terms"

"Learnt that sex isn't a bad thing and that women can enjoy it too"

"Looked at plastic models of the human body part and looked at how a condom looked like"

"Learning about puberty at a much younger age was good especially do those hitting puberty when they were younger."

"It was very open and honest when it came to answering questions"

"It was a very good experience cause I learnt new things"

"It did not hold back on the subject, there was not information hidden."

"In sex education i thought it was very good that they taught us how to use contraception and apply a condom safely".

“gave real life examples”

“Class discussing together and learning as a whole”

“Certain teachers made the subjects fun and enjoyable whereas some just made it awkward”

Acknowledgments

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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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