

## **Joint Position Paper on Reform of Relationships and Sexuality Education (RSE) February 2019**

This paper briefly outlines the core common policies of the RSE NGO Working Group 2018-19<sup>1</sup>. As a group, we welcome very strongly the review of Relationships and Sexuality Education in Ireland currently being undertaken by the NCCA and commend their engagement with the NGO sector in seeking out much-needed changes to the way RSE is taught in Ireland. Living as we are through a profound moment of social change in our national history, we believe this review offers an unprecedented opportunity to modernise how we meet the needs of our young people, how we promote inclusion of formerly-hidden identities within our educational system, and how we ensure better sexual and emotional health outcomes in the next generation of Irish citizens.

While this document seeks simply to summarise our commonly-held positions, each of the below points are dealt with in more depth and placed in their proper context within the individual submissions made by each contributing organisation directly to the NCCA. We encourage all interested parties to read these full submissions for a more complete picture.

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### **Key Recommendations**

#### **1. Holistic RSE**

We believe that a holistic and comprehensive approach to sexual health and wellbeing is key. Social and emotional learning should be recognised as core competencies within the RSE curriculum, with a particular focus on self-awareness and distinguishing between healthy and unhealthy relationships from as young an age as possible.

#### **2. Role of Educators**

All students must have access to reliable, informed and up-to-date sexual health education, regardless of school ethos, facilitated by a teacher, wellbeing officer, or appropriate external educator. Comprehensive and accredited trainings should be put in place, for all educators, to provide a positive impact on the consistency and quality of rolling out the programme to ensure they can direct students to the right sources of information and to provide a healthy and holistic atmosphere for discussion.

#### **3. Consent**

Consent is of foundational importance to all healthy relationships, not just sexual ones. Principles of understanding, respecting and communication in negotiating consent should be strengthened as a core and consistent part of RSE, beginning at the very start of a child's education and carrying all the way through to adulthood.

#### **4. Contraception and STIs**

RSE should provide a practical knowledge around the use of a wide range of contraceptives, with a due regard for the needs of all forms of consensual sexual relationships, including education and signposting to appropriate services. RSE should include non-stigmatising and up-to-date information about the effective treatment of HIV and other Sexually Transmitted Infections.

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<sup>1</sup> The membership of the Working Group includes the following organisations endorsing this document: SpunOut.ie, BeLonG To, ShoutOut, NYCI, USI, HIV Ireland, Foróige, IFPA, Bananas Sex Ed, the Teen Parents Support Programme and ISSU.

## 5. Sexuality Online

Online sexuality is a large part of many modern relationships, and RSE must prepare students to safely navigate the realities of dating apps, sexting, and social media. The RSE curriculum must also reflect the impact of pornography in a stigma-free, evidence-based way.

## 6. LGBTI+ Integration

It is essential that RSE provides for the needs of all students regardless of sexual orientation or gender identity. LGBTI+ inclusion must run through RSE to demonstrate visibility, value and inclusion. The curriculum should promote healthy LGBTI+ relationships, reflect on societal gender roles, and educate on trans and intersex identities.

## 7. Continual Review

We believe the RSE curriculum should be regularly reviewed to ensure an ongoing commitment in keeping the curriculum current, engaging and up to date to meet the needs of modern Irish young people.

## 8. The Voice of the Young Person

We believe that the voices, opinions and experiences of young people themselves must be central to the construction and review of the RSE curriculum, and that active engagement with students and their representative organisations will always be key.



Supporting Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual & Trans Young People in Ireland

