

PRESS RELEASE

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Relationships and Sexuality Education (RSE) should be standardised in schools, say MLAs

- A new survey commissioned by Informing Choices NI highlights that only 17% of MLAs believe RSE in schools is ‘satisfactory’.
- 78% agree that there should be a standardised curriculum, regardless of a school’s ethos.
- 62% agree that children and young people should be taught about different family types, such as single parent or same sex families.
- 60% agree that information on the availability of contraception and access to abortion should be included in all post-primary schools.

“Our survey results send a clear message to the Secretary of State that there is overwhelming political support to reform the teaching of RSE in Northern Ireland.”

Ruairi Rowan, Director of Advocacy and Policy for ICNI

Informing Choices NI (ICNI) has today (1 September 2022) published the results of a new survey which shows overwhelming support amongst MLAs to reform the teaching of Relationships and Sexuality Education (RSE) in Northern Ireland. Only 17% believe the current provision is satisfactory.

78% agree that there should be a standardised curriculum used in all schools, regardless of their ethos, and 70% supported the introduction of a new Sexual Health Strategy which includes the implementation of consistent and inclusive RSE.

62% agree that children and young people should be taught about different family types, such as single parent, blended or same sex families, while 33% disagree.

60% agree that information regarding the availability of contraception and access to abortion should be included within RSE in all post-primary schools. Only 31% oppose this.

RSE is a mandatory part of the curriculum in Northern Ireland; however, each school is responsible for developing their own policy, which is reflective of their ethos. Therefore, the topics discussed and the standard of fact-based information and support pupils receive varies between schools.

The Secretary of State for Northern Ireland has a legal duty to ensure that adolescents have access to age-appropriate, comprehensive and scientifically accurate education on sexual and reproductive health and rights, including prevention of early pregnancy and access to abortion. He recently indicated that he was prepared to intervene to reform RSE, if the Department of Education failed to act.

Ruairi Rowan, Director of Advocacy and Policy for ICNI, said:

“For too long our children and young people have been failed by the inadequate provision of RSE. This often leaves them unaware of their reproductive choices, unprepared when forming relationships and unlikely to experience inclusive education that is reflective of all family types.

“Our survey results send a clear message to the Secretary of State that there is overwhelming political support to reform the teaching of RSE in Northern Ireland. We urge him to intervene to ensure that the law is implemented and that our children and young people are provided with the comprehensive and scientifically accurate information and support they need to make informed choices regarding their sexual and reproductive health.”

ENDS

Survey information

Savanta ComRes, a London-based polling and research company, and Stratagem, who are part of the Connect Group, one of the UK’s largest independent public affairs consultancies, jointly run the MLA Research Panel.

Savanta ComRes sought the views of MLAs using an online survey. The research was in the field between 17 June and 29 July 2022 during which time 30 MLAs completed the questionnaire anonymously.

Data undergoes a weighting process to ensure that the responses are representative of the composition of the Northern Ireland Assembly. Due to the weighting applied, percentages may not always add up to 100.

All work is undertaken in accordance with British Polling Council rules and is conducted strictly in keeping with the Market Research Society Code of Conduct.