



Response to Draft Guidance on the Conduct of Relationships, Sexual Health and Parenthood Education in Scottish schools

Scottish Youth Parliament

Background to SYP

Our vision is of a stronger, more inclusive Scotland that empowers young people by truly involving them in the decision-making process.

The Scottish Youth Parliament (SYP) is democratically elected to represent Scotland's young people. We listen to young people, recognise the issues that are most important to them, and ensure that their voices are heard.

In working towards our aims, we support the following values:

Democracy - All of our plans and activities are youth-led, and we are accountable to young people aged 14-25. Our democratic structure, and the scale of direct participation across Scotland, gives us strength and sets us apart from other organisations.

Inclusion - We are committed to being truly inclusive. The Scottish Youth Parliament believes that all young people have a right to a voice, it doesn't matter who we are or where we come from. We celebrate our diversity.

Political independence - We are independent from political parties. Only by working with all legitimate political parties can we make progress on the policies that are important to young people.

Passion - We believe that drive and energy are key to successful campaigning. We are passionate about the key issues and believe that young people are part of the solution, not the problem.



Executive Summary

- The Scottish Youth Parliament (SYP) welcomes this guidance update in light of the Marriage and Civil Partnership (Scotland) Bill.
- Whilst the Scottish Youth Parliament have not consulted with young people on this guidance directly, this submission is based on a series of consultations with young people about sex education in PSE and other elements of the Marriage and Civil Partnership (Scotland) Bill.
- The Scottish Youth Parliament urges vigilance in updating guidance on sex education in schools to ensure that young peoples' rights are not undermined and that discussion of same sex marriage is not banned or restricted in schools, given that it is likely that same sex marriage will soon be enshrined in Scottish law.
- The Scottish Youth Parliament supports an appropriate amendment being made to guidance on teaching the value of stable relationships in sex education, to ensure that guidance can be used by all schools.
- The Scottish Youth Parliament agrees that the current right of parents and carers to withdraw children from lessons on sexual health or religion, where they are concerned that what is being taught may conflict with their religious or cultural views and where there is consent of the child, should be maintained.
- The Scottish Youth Parliament believes that young people should be able to take part in lessons if they disagree with their parents' view that they should be withdrawn. This is particularly important for young people in the senior phase of school.
- The Scottish Youth Parliament believes that if pupils are withdrawn from lessons, their right to alternative sexual health education in keeping with their parents' religious or cultural views should be maintained and guaranteed.
- The Scottish Youth Parliament believes that, from primary level, schools should provide up-to-date and effective personal, social and sexual education, tailored to pupils' specific needs and lifestyles.
- The Scottish Youth Parliament believes same sex marriage should be taught in primary and secondary schools as part of lessons on the value of stable relationships and the rights of individuals in Scotland.



- The Scottish Youth Parliament believes that same sex marriage should not be taught as a 'controversial' political or moral issue.
- The Scottish Youth Parliament believes there should be increased LGBT education and information in all schools to reduce stigma and homophobic bullying.
- The Scottish Youth Parliament believes that teachers should not be allowed to teach that same sex relationships are harmful, or that they should be free to teach pupils that same sex marriage is wrong if they personally disagree with it. Participants were unanimous in their view that it was the job of teachers to teach issues in an objective manner.
- Whilst the Scottish Youth Parliament appreciates that this guidance relates to the conduct of teachers, rather than the content of sex education, which is the ultimately the responsibility of Local Authorities through the Curriculum for Excellence, our consultation with young people suggests that both the standard and consistency of sex education is inadequate. If we accept that good quality sex education is something that all young people should have access to through education, and they have a right to this education, then the Government should intervene to ensure robust and consistent content and conduct across all schools in Scotland.
- The Scottish Youth Parliament believes the Government should take this opportunity to consider both content and conduct together.
- The Scottish Youth Parliament is happy to work with the Government to carry out more detailed and structured consultation with young people in this area going forward.



Scottish Youth Parliament: Policy and Sex Education

Key Scottish Youth Parliament policy is sourced from our “Change the Picture” Youth Manifesto. Every five years, SYP conducts a mass consultation exercise on an extensive range of policy statements with the young people of Scotland. The last consultation exercise for our 2010 Manifesto, “Change the Picture” received nearly 43,000 responses. The statements, selected and endorsed by young people, form the basis of SYP policy for the following five years until the next manifesto process. Therefore, the policies contained within the manifesto are an accurate and fair representation of the views of the young people of Scotland.

Three specific policy statements from our present manifesto have direct relevance to the Government’s proposed Sex Education Guidance. They include:

“From primary level, schools should provide up-to-date and effective personal, social and sexual education, tailored to pupils’ specific needs and lifestyles.” (83% Agree)

“All laws regarding homosexual relationships, whether male or female, should be equal to those of heterosexual relationships” (74% Agree)

“There should be increased LGBT education and information in all schools to reduce stigma and homophobic bullying.”

The Scottish Youth Parliament also consulted with young people on two other occasions which have direct relevance to this guidance: firstly; during the course of responding to the consultation on the Marriage and Civil Partnership (Scotland) Bill; and secondly, during the course of a consultation exercise on the experiences of young people of Personal and Social Education. These exercises combined a series of online surveys and focus groups.

Both consultation exercises have revealed a number of important insights that SYP believe the Government should take into account.

Current Provision of Sex Education as a part of PSE

The consultation exercise with young people on the quality of PSE revealed the following results:

- 63% of young people said that “Not enough is taught about the importance of consent in sex and relationships.”
- 74 % of young people said that “Not enough is taught about discrimination against minority groups (e.g. young people who are disabled, LGBT or who belong to an ethnic minority)
- 50 respondents added additional comments about problems with PSE in their schools. Recurring issues included: sex education felt to be irrelevant or patronizing; issues with teachers appearing to be poorly prepared, not interested in teaching PSE or embarrassed about discussing particular topics; a lack of information about same-sex relationships and sexual health.
- 87% of people said that “Trained experts brought in to discuss issues such as sexual health and relationships in an informal and less awkward atmosphere” would make a “Big difference” or “some difference.”

Same Sex Marriage and Education

The below section, taken from the Scottish Youth Parliament’s consultation response to the Marriage and Civil Partnership (Scotland) Bill, highlights the position of the Scottish Youth Parliament on education and same sex marriage after consultation with young people.

In relation to the right of parents to withdraw their children from lessons, the consultation revealed the following results:

| “Do you think young people should have the right to..?” | | | | |
|---|------------------|-----------|-----------------|--------------|
| | <i>Yes</i> | <i>No</i> | <i>Not sure</i> | <i>Total</i> |
| Withdraw from these classes for the same reasons, even if their parents have no problem with it | 41% (49) | 43% (51) | 16% (19) | 119 |
| Be asked their views and have them taken into account where their parents have asked for them to be withdrawn from a lesson | 81% (96) | 13% (16) | 6% (7) | 119 |
| Alternative sexual health or religious lessons that are in keeping with their parents’ views if they are withdrawn from regular lessons | 53% (63) | 30% (35) | 17% (20) | 118 |
| Take part in the lessons if they don’t agree with their parents’ view that they should be withdrawn, if they are in the senior phase (S4 onwards) | 88% (105) | 7% (8) | 5% (6) | 119 |

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|---|-----------------|----------|----------|-----|
| Take part in the lessons if they don't agree with their parents' view that they should be withdrawn at any age. | 71% (85) | 19% (22) | 10% (12) | 119 |
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- A number of respondents added additional comments which included: some who felt that parents should not be allowed to withdraw pupils from lessons; others who felt that pupils should be given the opportunity to make an informed choice about their participation; some who were concerned at pupils “missing out” on important elements of PSE, such as the importance of consent and safe sex; and a small number of suggestions that the lessons should teach basic facts *“followed by different perspectives, and let the pupils discuss what they think about the various views presented and perhaps write (or optionally present) their views.*
- The majority of participants in the focus groups in schools and youth groups felt that the child should be given the option to opt out of same-sex marriage talks in schools rather than their parents.
- Whilst undecided as a whole on whether pupils should have the same rights that their parents have to withdraw themselves from lessons that conflict with their religious or cultural beliefs, a majority of young people agree that they should have the right to alternative lessons to ensure that they receive appropriate sex and relationships education and don't miss out entirely, in line with the provisions outlined in the existing guidance.
- Most significant however, is the overwhelming support for young peoples' views to also be taken into account when parents or carers object to the content of the lesson, and for them to have a right to take part in the lesson if they do not agree with parents' or carers' views.
- In relation to how same sex marriage should be taught in schools, the responses of young people included the following:

| “Do you think same-sex marriage should be taught about in schools..?” | | | | |
|--|------------------|-----------------|-----------------|--------------|
| | Yes | No | Not sure | Total |
| As part of teaching the value of stable relationships and marriage in sex education lessons | 90% (107) | 6% (7) | 4% (5) | 119 |
| As a controversial moral issue in PSE or RE, like abortion | 32% (38) | 62% (74) | 6% (7) | 119 |
| In high schools, as part of lessons on what rights people have in Scotland | 94% (111) | 3% (3) | 3% (4) | 118 |
| As a controversial political issue in Modern Studies, like whether prisoners should be allowed to vote | 40% (48) | 51% (61) | 8% (10) | 119 |
| In primary schools as part of appropriate sex education lessons | 73% (86) | 20% (23) | 8% (9) | 118 |
| In primary schools, as part of lessons | 82% (98) | 12% (14) | 6% (7) | 119 |

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|---|---------|------------------|--------|-----|
| on what rights people have in Scotland | | | | |
| It shouldn't be taught about as it's not relevant to learning about sex, morality or politics | 9% (10) | 86% (102) | 5% (6) | 118 |
| It shouldn't be taught about because I don't think same-sex marriage is right | 3% (4) | 91% (107) | 6% (7) | 118 |

- There was concern amongst the groups at suggestions that teachers would, or should, be allowed to teach that same sex relationships were harmful, or that they should be free to teach pupils that same sex marriage was wrong if they personally disagreed with it.
- Participants were unanimous in their view that it was the job of teachers to teach issues in an objective manner. One participant in one of the school groups felt that *“teachers must teach their pupils, it is part of the law and as an educator you have a responsibility to ensure that future generations are brought up to be tolerant members of society. Those teachers who are denying these pupils information are actively doing harm to those LGBT pupils by denying they exist.”*

Conclusion

The Scottish Youth Parliament broadly welcomes this guidance; however we feel that it should be strengthened to protect the rights of young people to participate in sex education even if their parents wish to withdraw them from classes.

In addition, our consultation with young people demonstrates inconsistency in both the quality and content of sex education across schools in Scotland. According to our youth manifesto, 83% of young people agree that there should be up-to-date and effective sex education from primary level tailored to their needs and lifestyles.

Whilst the Scottish Youth Parliament appreciates that this guidance relates specifically to the conduct of teachers and educators, our consultation with young people reveals the need for Government intervention to ensure good quality and consistent sex education for all young people across Scotland.