



Our Reference:

15 October 2020

Dear

Thank you for your e-mail of 25 September to the Deputy First Minister and Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills, John Swinney MSP, regarding the Relationship, Sexual Health and Pregnancy Syllabus and attached letter with questions relating to the content of the online teaching resource. I am replying as I am responsible for relationships, sexual health and parenthood (RSHP) education policy in the Scottish curriculum.

Before I answer your specific questions on the online resource, it may help if I set out the overarching policy context. The Scottish Government is committed to ensuring all children and young people receive high quality RSHP education, which is an integral part of the health and wellbeing area of the curriculum. Curriculum for Excellence (CfE) is the national approach to learning and teaching for young people aged 3 to 18 in Scotland and is underpinned by the values of wisdom, justice, compassion and integrity. The curriculum is not statutory and the resource is intended to support teachers, head teachers and other professional educational practitioners to meet the experiences and outcomes of CfE. We are specific about the need for children and young people to gain knowledge appropriate to their age and stage of education. RSHP education is intended to help children and young people build positive relationships as they grow older and should present facts in an objective, balanced and sensitive manner within the framework of curricular values and an awareness of the law on sexual behaviour. Teachers therefore have the flexibility to include content on whatever subjects they feel appropriate to deliver meaningful RSHP lessons.

The online resource ([www.rshp.scot](http://www.rshp.scot)) was developed by a collaborative partnership of health boards and local authorities. It provides teachers with a valuable resource to support children and young people's learning and understanding in RSHP education. Teachers and schools are best placed to

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decide how they deliver education in the most age-appropriate way. The RSHP resource provides teachers with factual information about sexual and reproductive health, in a non-judgemental manner, to enable children and young people to make informed decisions about their lives.

In the development of the RSHP resource, it was ensured learning outcomes remained age appropriate in all CfE levels. The RSHP resource was developed to help improve the delivery of the existing curriculum. All of the resources now available as part of the RSHP resource have been quality assured and peer reviewed by a partnership of educators, health professionals and third sector organisations. The RSHP resource was also informed by extensive feedback over the 2018/19 academic year. Draft content was posted online during 2018 and educators, parents and carers were encouraged to comment and use the drafts. Content was developed to ensure it remained credible with young people and provided them with a meaningful learning experience, for example it has been proven warning young people of the dangers of porn or showing them graphics of sexually transmitted infections, were not credible and did not provide a meaningful learning experience. This then allowed for a process of review and refinement until the final content was agreed and the resource was published in September 2019. As well as an open process that allowed anyone to contribute, a number of schools were recruited as pilot settings. During this period the resource was informed by over 1,000 primary and secondary teachers and piloted in 38 schools across the country. Following publication, the managing partners are committed to an ongoing process of review and improvement to ensure the resource continues to be engaging and relevant.

While the content of the resource is primarily about relationships, it also covers sexual health and wellbeing, and explores parenthood. Throughout the material provided in the RSHP resource are key messages about kindness and empathy in relationships, and the importance of love, respect and consent, whether that be in friendships or in adult relationships.

The Scottish Government also asks teachers to work closely with parents and carers in the delivery of RSHP education, by discussing proposed lessons and resources with them in advance, as they may do with all other curricular areas. If, however, parents or carers feel the content is not appropriate, they can discuss the withdrawal of their child from all or part of a planned programme of lessons. In the case of a secondary school-aged child, their wishes must also be taken into account. If a child is withdrawn, arrangements should be made for them to have alternative positive educational provision. In addition, no school, or individual teacher, is under a duty to support, promote or endorse one type of relationship over another.

You included a range of questions in your letter and these are noted and responded to below.

**1. Learning intentions in the section my body states “Children learn the correct names for parts of their body, including male and female genitalia, and their functions.” The video how to be a girl states that girls can have a penis. Do you think this will cause confusion for children at ages 8 to 10?**

It is not clear which video you refer to. Resources for the second level are age and stage appropriate.

**2. Sexual rights are presented as fact in the relationship, sexual health and pregnancy materials. Is the Scottish Government planning to include sexual rights within the framework**

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## **of children's rights and how will any conflict between these rights and parental rights and responsibilities be managed?**

The Scottish Government has introduced a Bill to Parliament which is concerned with incorporation of the UNCRC into Scots law. There is no conflict between this and the sexual rights described in the RSHP resource materials. The RSHP resource emphasises the importance of ongoing communication with parents and carers about RSHP education facilitated in Scottish schools.

### **3. A 2019 analysis of 135 peer-reviewed studies on the effects of pornography found that it encouraged, “regressive attitudes towards women”, “sexual aggression” and “social maladjustment. Do you think that the “WTF is Porn?” video which states porn is fun and lists the different types of porn available online is an adequate resource for use within the relationship and sexual health and pregnancy materials?**

The RSHP resource materials take a clear perspective on what pornography is and the harm it does. The particular piece of content you refer to is a part of one of two lessons at Senior Phase, which is aimed at young people in S4, S5 or S6, where young people (because RSHP is often delivered later in the year) are likely to be 16 or older. We know a significant number will be viewing pornography. A lot of time was taken to consider the tone - how to engage young people without shame, embarrassment or closing down any consideration to the challenge to be posed before learning even started. This first part of the two sessions uses a series of fast-paced elements, the risk is always that what appears to be ‘jokey’ means the important messages are lost. While some of the WTF? content is initially throw-away unsophisticated ‘humour’, it is also fair to say there are some strong and serious messages in there that do speak to what follows in this lesson and in the next. The six minute film is not to be viewed on its own but in the context it is placed in two 50 minutes classes. While an adult viewer might watch this in isolation and feel that too much of it condones something, the intention is to educate ‘against’. It is suggest the balance across the two lessons is to engage, challenge and inform and this is achieved.

### **4. Why is the additional more explicit materials for ASN students hidden from parents and carers? Do you think that concealing this information may raise safeguarding issues?**

These images are not hidden or concealed. Some learners with additional support needs or learning disabilities benefit from images that are more explicit than those used in the main body of material in the resource. This is because some learners do not comprehend the meaning of an image if it is nuanced or in any way ambiguous. The images in this section could be used to replace images in the main resource if this is what meets the needs of the individual or group. Or they can be used to construct a particular approach to a topic or theme, again guided by learner needs.

These images have been curated to support work with learners in specific circumstances. Any educator who may use these images, are required to make decisions about what is appropriate for their learners, and build an approach which is supported by the setting and ongoing engagement with parents and carers. Where an educator is clear they have a need for these images, they can request access to them. This can be also be done at the request of or in conjunction with parents and carers.

### **5. Within the various descriptions of family relationships there is no mention of foster**

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## **families or cared for children. Why where these groups omitted?**

The resource presents families as diverse. There are a range of additional book suggestions offered to support learning which again are representative of different families.

## **6. A recent BMJ study titled” Anal heterosex among young people and implications for health promotion” found “Anal heterosex often appeared to be painful, risky and coercive particularly for women. The concept of Anal sex in introduced at the third level (age 11+) of the relationship, sexual health and pregnancy curriculum without any context discussion of health and fertility risks or lack of mutual pleasure. Do you find this is a responsible way to introduce the idea of anal sex?**

Sexual intercourse is described factually at Third/Fourth level <https://rshp.scot/third-fourth-level/#sexualintercourse> it is important to name anal sex as a practice because the law defines sexual intercourse as including this act. From this level, all sex is described in the context of consent and pleasure. There are additional lessons on both these topics. If you look at learning in the Senior Phase, this learning activity is very clear in terms of anal sex <https://rshp.scot/senior-phase/#OralAnal> and connects to important discussion of consent and risks.

## **7. There are numerous factual inaccuracies and missing information within the relationship, sexual health and pregnancy materials, such as including the anus as part of the reproductive system and excluding the cervix as part of the female reproductive system. Given these inaccuracies, do you think the materials are fit for purpose and will there be any attempt to update the materials?**

The partnership which oversees development of the resource will consider amending the labelling to remove the reference to the anus and include labelling for the cervix in the diagram.

## **8. The section of the relationship, pregnancy and sexual health syllabus that includes discussion of prostitution does not mention the significant link between prostitution and drug use. Which agencies were advising on this section of the syllabus and why wasn't this element included?**

The learning activity in prostitution/paying for sex is comprehensive and clear in its identification of prostitution as exploitation and gender based violence. Additional materials are identified if young people would like to spend more time on these issues. This content, as with all content, was open to public consultation for a full year in the development phase.

Officials leading on the Equally Safe strategy were also engaged with as part of the development process.

## **9. The statement in the slides labelled ‘Pornography what’s the problem?’ states People who watch porn just have to hit the “reset” button and stop using porn completely for a few months. What evidence supports this statement?**

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The source of this statement is referenced and it sits within a very clear set of messages about the harm of pornography. The particular statement offers a strategy that young people who self-identify as having a problem can consider. As with all content it is delivered by skilled educators who are seeking to engage young people in reflection and learning.

**10. The comments under the video “WTF is porn?” have many references to the presenter’s personal videos which display pornographic images. Do you find this to be adequate in terms of safeguarding?**

Guidance for use of videos throughout the resource states at the outset that educators review all materials and think for, and plan how to begin and end video material during a lesson. This will minimise the possibility for comments on the videos to be unintentionally viewed in a school situation.

**11. The video “WTF is porn?” states porn is not real. This is misleading as it often depicts real people who often suffer real abuse. The average life expectancy for a performer in pornography is 37. Do you think this information should be included within the syllabus?**

It is a helpful educational strategy to pose the question/debate about real sex vs porn sex – it is a strategy. It is not saying the people or harm are not real. The learning intention is for older young people in secondary school to “*explain pornography presents behaviours that can be violent or degrading, and these behaviours are not appropriate in real life relationships*”. Much of the learning puts pornography in a negative light and certainly does not promote it. Learning on pornography is intended to enable young people to be critical about the media they are viewing as young people believe watching pornography made people less respectful of the opposite sex.

**12. The video “WTF is porn?” makes the following two statements: “You’re technically not allowed to watch porn until you are at least 18 years old” “In the UK it’s not actually illegal to watch porn at any age, but it is adult entertainment.” Do you think this supports the learning criteria “I understand the law on pornography.”?**

The law on pornography is wider and is covered further in the resource.

**13. According to anti-trafficking non-profit, [Rescue:Freedom](#), in 9 countries, 49% of sexually exploited women said that pornography was made of them while they were being sold for sex. Why is there no mention of people trafficking and sexual abuse in any of the RSHP materials related to porn?**

There is a section at third/fourth level on abuse and relationships. There are strong and consistent messages throughout the resource on gender based violence.

**14. Given that numerous commentators in the video “Money and Power: Commercial Sexual Exploitation in Scotland” state that prostitution is not a choice and is exploitative shouldn’t this be clearly stated in the slides?**

The PowerPoint slides are supportive, they do not contain all key messages, the message in the film

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is clear.

**15. There are no statistics around the number of violent sexual assaults or deaths of individuals involved in prostitution in the UK. Should these statistics be included?**

Statistics should not be included in the learning activity as they will not remain current. The partnership which oversees development of the resource will instead seek to amend the supporting material by including a link or suggestion to find the more recent statistics .

**16. The menstruation section uses the term “people with a female body”, yet women and girls is used in other sections of the material particularly when describing bodies. Do you agree that clear and consistent terms are vital when discussing sexual health and that women and girls is that appropriate term when addressing menstruation?**

The RSHP resource is consistent in language where material has been produced. Occasionally, for example in an animation, different terms may be used.

**17. The menstruation slides do not provide a clear explanation of why periods happen although further information is contained in videos. Do you think that slides should contain an explanation of menstruation so that all children, particularly girls, can have clarity around the subject?**

The PowerPoint slides are supportive, they do not contain all key messages, the messages in the film are clear/supportive.

**18. Within the My Body sections there are images regarding female anatomy that have the female in a submissive position which are not replicated for the male anatomy (fig 1). Can you tell me why these images were included and why no additional images are provided for males?**

The view was that this image provided a clearer view of the anatomy being described. It would be a mistake to describe this as submissive.

**19. The syllabus includes discussion around assisted conception methods such as artificial insemination and IVF at the first level. Do you think knowledge of assisted conception methods is essential for children learning the initial facts of conception?**

Yes. There will be children in these lessons who have been conceived using such means, they have a right to see their experiences represented.

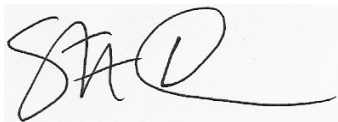
**20. The material on the subject of human sexuality is confusing and lacks clarity. It defines sexuality as being “about what we feel, what we do and is something that exists within ourselves”. Do you think these slides and activity plan enhances children’s understanding of relationships, sexual health and pregnancy?**

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Yes.

I hope you find this letter helpful.

Yours sincerely



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**IAW : Support and Wellbeing Unit**

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