

LGBTQ+ Inclusive Relationships and Sex Education Briefing Paper

What is the problem?

Relationships and sex education (RSE) often lack LGBTQ+ inclusivity and young LGBTQ+ people's voices are often ignored.

Until 2000 in Scotland and 2003 in England, Section 28 banned the promotion of LGBTQ+ identities in schools. This has left a legacy 'of oppression, discrimination and harassment' for LGBTQ+ people.

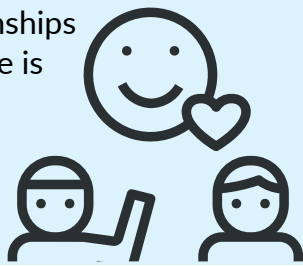
LGBTQ+ invisibility and heteronormativity lead to negative implications for young LGBTQ+ people's knowledge and skills within relationships. Young LGBTQ+ people feel that formal forms of support are not inclusive of their identities or experiences.

82%

of LGBTQ+ young people felt school RSE classes were not at all inclusive of LGBTQ+ identities and experiences, in both Scotland and England.

What does the guidance say?

- Equality and inclusion are understood through respect for diversity and legislation in both countries. Although this is a positive step, diversity discourse is neither transformative nor inclusive of LGBTQ+ lives, despite recognising their existence.
- Little focus on structural inequalities (sexism, homophobia, racism etc.) which cause violence and negative relationship and sexual experiences. Instead, homophobia is only addressed around bullying. The only mention of trans in the Scottish guidance is regarding bullying and trans is not at all mentioned outside of the LGBT acronym in England.
- In both countries' guidance, young people have a moral responsibility to 'self-regulate' and delay sexual experiences which can lead to 'victim-blaming' should something go wrong in an intimate relationship. This is emphasised by the wording of 'virtues' in English guidance.
- There is progress away from the biological 'health' focus towards a broader concept of sexual and emotional health and 'wellbeing'.
- 'Pleasure', which would support the building of positive skills for relationships amongst all young people is not currently in either guidance.



Methods

Through analysis of Scottish and English RSE guidance and a survey of 153 young LGBTQ+ people, aged 13-25, the policy contexts and experiences of school RSE were compared.

Sample

Respondents had diverse sexual identities (Lesbian/gay, Bisexual/pansexual, asexual, queer and some questioning) and gender identities (Female, male, non-binary and gender variant. 18% of Scottish and 13% of English identified as trans).

English RSE	Scottish RSE
Compulsory in all primary and secondary schools	Not compulsory in any type of school
Name changed to RSE from SRE to emphasise relationships	Relationship focus through range of different (non-sexual) relationships
Added separate section on LGBT: including the Equality Act 2010 and same-sex marriage	Updated to include same-sex marriage and the demands of LGBTI working group

Although some progress, neither guidance tackles but rather reinforces neoliberal and heteronormative (seeing heterosexuality as the norm) cultures which lead to the negative experiences of RSE for young LGBTQ+ people.

What do young people think?

1. RSE lacks LGBTQ+ inclusivity

They have negative experiences of RSE in schools. Only 16% reported RSE as useful in both Scotland and England. Even pornography was reported as more useful.

"My experience of SRE was very binary and heteronormative... there was no information on LGBTQ+ relationships." - English Young Person

Schools construct hetero- sexuality as normal. Gender and sexual identities outside of this norm were invisibilised. For trans young people, 91% felt their identities were not normalised in RSE classes. 71% of Scottish RSE classes included information about physical violence and/or abuse respondents compared to only 49% of English respondents.

In both, classes were less likely to include emotional, financial abuse and other mechanisms of coercion and control.

86% & 90%
in Scotland in England

reported no examples (positive or negative) of LGBTQ+ relationships in

Less than 10% felt discussions around domestic abuse included LGBTQ+ relationships and around a third of LGBTQ+ young people felt RSE classes gave them knowledge about accessing support for domestic abuse.

"The LGBTQ+ community was left to fend for themselves" - Scottish Young Person

2. RSE is heteronormative, biological and risk-focused

RSE emphasised biological, heterosexual sex and relationships, and risk and harm prevention through fear-based 'shock tactics'.

"...probably to scare us into not having sex rather than spend time teaching us how to do it consensually and enjoyable as well as safely" - Scottish Young Person

The focus on knowledge over skills and talking about sex outside of the biological and scientific understandings of sex such as and through 'pleasure' is still stigmatised.

Despite young people preferring a redirection to positive approaches, school RSE did not enabled them to understand positive aspects of sex such as pleasure'.

While over 80% were taught about STIs, only half felt RSE equipped them to understand the concept of consent. Even less felt RSE provided them with skills to give and ask for consent.

"I definitely didn't feel equipped to deal with the nuances and the inter-personal difficulties" - English Young Person

RSE classes included information on staying safe online (90%). However, an emphasis on dangers often led to individual responsibility and victim-blaming and ignored young people's positive online experiences.

3. Young people are finding alternative sources

Due to not receiving the information they feel that they need in school, young LGBTQ+ people are finding informal education via alternative online sources and peer-to-peer learning. Young people were most likely to use informal sources of support, such as friends and the internet (both 90%), and LGBTQ+ specific organisations (40%).

New technology and social media allows young people to seek and access information about RSE and LGBTQ+ identities independently, anonymously, and without stigma.

"I didn't even know the word for my own sexual orientation until I looked it up myself online." - English Young Person

Young people using their agency is a form of resistance to societal oppression and inequalities. However, the trend towards individuals finding informal education removes responsibility from schools in educating young people of these issues.

Formal sources of support, such as school staff members (5%) and the police (6%) were least likely to be used, suggesting the need for more LGBTQ+ inclusivity and outreach.



FRIENDS

ONLINE

LGBTQ+ ORGANISATIONS

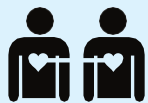
Conversations amongst friends and class mates allowed peer-led education and support.

Online media such as relationship advice and 'agony aunts' help develop sexual knowledge.

A preference for LGBTQ+ specific expertise over general youth organisations and helplines.

So, what can you do?

(or keep doing!)



1. Be a visible ally and actively include examples of intersectional LGBTQ+ relationships



2. Be more sex-positive, include 'pleasure', and the impact of social inequalities on personal relationships



3. Focus on skills as well as knowledge for safer sex and non-abusive relationships



4. Education on dangers of online and digital spaces should include positive aspects



5. Use your role to interpret policy and guidance more inclusively



6. Listen to LGBTQ+ young people's preferences



7. Put in enough time and resources and seek out training if you are unsure



8. Follow the recommendations of the LGBTI working group.



9. Share resources and information – you don't need to have all the answers!



10. Encourage and fight for more inclusive policy and guidance - use your expertise!

UK wide

[Stonewall](#) (LGBT organisation)

[Switchboard LGBT](#) (helpline support for LGBT people)

Phone: 0300 330 0630

[MindLine Trans+](#) (emotional support helpline for trans people)

Phone: 0300 330 5468

[Galop](#) (National Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Trans+ Domestic Abuse Helpline) Phone: 0800 999 5428

[Women's Aid](#) (Support for domestic abuse)

[National Domestic Abuse Helpline](#)

Phone: 0808 2000 247

[BISH UK](#) (guides to sex and relationships education)

Scotland

[LGBT Youth Scotland](#) (For LGBTI young people, 13–25 year old)

[LGBT Health and Wellbeing](#) (LGBT+ organisation)

[LGBT helpline Scotland](#) (helpline support for LGBT+ people)

Phone: 0300 123 2523

[Stonewall Scotland \(LGBT organisation\)](#)

[Rape Crisis Scotland](#) Phone: 08088 01 03 02

England

[LGBT Foundation Helpline](#) Phone: 0345 3 30 30 30

[Rape Crisis England and Wales](#)

About the Researcher

Cait Jobson is a PhD researcher in Sociology, at the University of Durham. Her masters research compared young LGBTQ+ people's experiences of RSE in Scotland and England. Her current PhD work focuses on young LGBTQ+ people seeking support for domestic violence and abuse. **Twitter:** [@caitjob](#)