

Respondent type (please select one from the following)

Child or young person	<input type="checkbox"/>	Employer/business representative	<input type="checkbox"/>
Parent/carer	<input type="checkbox"/>	Professional body/interest group	<input type="checkbox"/>
Schools governor or member of school management committee	<input type="checkbox"/>	Voluntary sector (community group, volunteer, self-help group, social or co-operative enterprise, religious, not for profit organisation)	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Mainstream school practitioner (head, teacher, teaching assistant, etc.)	<input type="checkbox"/>	Regional consortium	<input type="checkbox"/>
EOTAS provider (PRU staff, independent school staff, other provider, etc.)	<input type="checkbox"/>	Local authority	<input type="checkbox"/>
Higher education (including universities/academic institutions)	<input type="checkbox"/>	Further education	<input type="checkbox"/>
Politician (Senedd member, county councillors, MP, etc.)	<input type="checkbox"/>	Other respondent group not listed above, please specify:	<input type="checkbox"/>
Lobbyist	<input type="checkbox"/>	Prefer not to say	<input type="checkbox"/>

Question 1 – Do you agree that the explanation of the definition of RSE is clear?

Strongly disagree	<input type="checkbox"/>	Disagree	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Neither agree nor disagree	<input type="checkbox"/>	Agree	<input type="checkbox"/>	Strongly agree	<input type="checkbox"/>
--------------------------	--------------------------	-----------------	-------------------------------------	-----------------------------------	--------------------------	--------------	--------------------------	-----------------------	--------------------------

Please explain your answer:

We do not believe that RSE is defined clearly, partly because of the ill-advised renaming of this curriculum area as Relationships and Sexuality Education.

According to the definition provided in the guidance, sexuality is *‘a central aspect of being human and encompasses sexual orientation, gender identities and roles, sex, reproduction and intimacy. Sexuality is experienced and expressed through thoughts, beliefs, behaviours and relationships.’*

Although based on WHO guidelines, a strong ideological slant is evident in the emphasis given to the highly contested concept of ‘gender identities’, for which there is no agreed, consistent definition, and ‘gender roles’, which, as a feminist organisation, we consider regressive and restrictive.

As such, it does not, as Welsh Government claims, permit more inclusive and holistic

aims. Rather, it emphasises a word - sexuality - that that most people associate with adult sexual desire and applies it to children from the age of three to 16 years.

The reasons given for the change of title indicate a political and ideological foundation, which would be in breach of the Education Act 1996. It also runs contrary to the Welsh Government's own statement that the RSE curriculum must be 'objective, critical, and pluralistic as to its content and manner of teaching'.

We believe, therefore, that this area of the new Curriculum for Wales should be renamed Relationships and Sex Education.

Question 2 – Do you agree that the principles for embedding RSE are clear?

Strongly disagree	<input type="checkbox"/>	Disagree	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Neither agree nor disagree	<input type="checkbox"/>	Agree	<input type="checkbox"/>	Strongly agree	<input type="checkbox"/>
--------------------------	--------------------------	-----------------	-------------------------------------	-----------------------------------	--------------------------	--------------	--------------------------	-----------------------	--------------------------

Please explain your answer:

We have serious concerns about embedding an approach to RSE that appears unable or unwilling to make clear the differences between 'sex' and 'gender'. These words are not synonymous and squeamishness about using the word 'sex' is antithetical to good RSE.

Clarity on the definitions of the terms 'sex' and 'gender' is urgently needed; if you do not recognise sex, you cannot address sexism.

There are inherent tensions and contradictions in the way sex and gender are represented throughout the document, which raises serious concerns about how key RSE themes will be mainstreamed throughout the curriculum.

The Guidance and Code (as well as many widely available resources such as AGENDA and CRUSH) are superficially critical of sex stereotypes yet simultaneously celebrate adherence to them as evidence of an inner personal identity.

Stereotyping and restrictive gender roles are barriers to be overcome by challenging the stereotypes and showing them to be artificial. Telling children who are gender non-conforming or same sex attracted that they are 'born in the wrong body' and are actually the opposite sex only reinforces sex stereotypes and gender roles. This is regressive, sexist and homophobic.

The statement 'some people's gender identity does not match up with the sex they were assigned at birth' is presented as a fact, not as an ideological framing of the dysphoria some young people experience with their bodies. Sex is observed and recorded at birth – it is not 'assigned' and the use of this phrase is a grossly offensive misappropriation of terminology relating to the historical treatment of rare and complex differences of sexual development (DSDs).

Question 3 – Do you agree that the structure and content of the guidance clear?

Strongly disagree	<input type="checkbox"/>	Disagree	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Neither agree nor disagree	<input type="checkbox"/>	Agree	<input type="checkbox"/>	Strongly agree	<input type="checkbox"/>
--------------------------	--------------------------	-----------------	-------------------------------------	-----------------------------------	--------------------------	--------------	--------------------------	-----------------------	--------------------------

Please explain your answer:

The content is not clear. The document uses confusing vocabulary and terminology, repeatedly conflates sex and gender and includes an ideologically loaded glossary that is scientifically inaccurate and riddled with internal contradictions.

For example, 'gender identity' and 'non-binary' have no agreed legal or biological definition, while 'sex assigned at birth' is a term relating to the historical treatment of babies born with rare DSDs. It should be noted that organisations representing people with DSDs have repeatedly asked that this term is not misused by gender identity campaigners – it should therefore have no place in Government guidance.

The glossary makes specific reference to the Violence Against Women, Domestic Abuse and Sexual Violence (Wales) Act 2015, yet describes harms including domestic abuse and FGM experienced by women and girls because of their sex as 'gender-based violence'. The title of this legislation was expressly changed from 'Gender-based Violence' by Welsh Government after considerable pressure from women's organisations. This juxtaposition is confusing and absurd. Girls and women do not experience violence, abuse and harassment throughout their lives because they are feminine; but because they are female.

The influence of niche academic theory is clear, despite the stated commitment to an 'objective and pluralistic' approach, and the guidance fails to address many issues that should be of concern to schools and will be of concern to parents, for example young people's access to pornography and the impact this has on their emotional development and understanding of consent and boundaries.

Even where the draft document is clear, we are concerned that existing materials and many current external providers of RSE education will not comply with them in a way that is safe, in line with the Equality Act and genuinely inclusive.

The acronym LGBTQ+ is imprecise and should be avoided in official documents. There are two sexes, three sexual orientations, and while certain lobby groups seek continually to expand the 'trans umbrella' there is a legal definition of 'transgender' for the purposes of the Gender Recognition Act and the Equality Act 2010. There is, however, no such recognised definition of 'queer', a term, moreover, which many gay men and lesbians find deeply offensive and hurtful.

The 'other letters that can be added' are either not known – in which case why even refer to them - or deliberately not specified because it will be embarrassingly obvious that they relate to nothing more than personal preferences and self-defined social identities. To our knowledge, no-one has historically faced oppression and needed legal protection against discrimination for being 'questioning', 'asexual', 'demiromantic' or an 'ally'.

Exploring the relevance of social identities and the significance of sub-cultures may make for a stimulating and enjoyable activity for learners, but these transient labels

and youth movements have no more place in Welsh Government policies and documents than would the 'emos', 'goths', 'hippies', or 'mods' of previous generations.

Their inclusion in the glossary means that the Guidance and Code is not future-proofed, is misleading for practitioners and learners, and is potentially in breach of the Education Act 1996. The Glossary should either be extensively revised or removed.

Furthermore, while the intense focus on feelings and celebrating diversity may derive from a well-meaning attempt to redress the balance between the majority sexual orientation and historically marginalised groups, there is a risk that it unnecessarily draws attention to difference, highlighting divisions and tribalism.

It can be perceived as favouring some qualities, making some people appear more special and deserving of attention than others. Creating such an environment may paradoxically make it more likely for marginalised groups to be singled out or for children to try and label or question themselves at a stage when they are still developing and growing.

Question 4 – We propose that the content set out in the three broad stages of the guidance will become mandatory as part of the RSE code. Do you agree that they encompass what is important about RSE for all learners' ages and developmental stages?

Strongly disagree	<input type="checkbox"/>	Disagree	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Neither agree nor disagree	<input type="checkbox"/>	Agree	<input type="checkbox"/>	Strongly agree	<input type="checkbox"/>
--------------------------	--------------------------	-----------------	-------------------------------------	-----------------------------------	--------------------------	--------------	--------------------------	-----------------------	--------------------------

Please explain your answer:

Developing and expressing identity and forming relationships

We question the use of the word 'identity' here. What does 'developing an identity' mean in this context?

We believe that the document is confusing or conflating 'self-identity' - ie the emotional and social development of a child's sense of self, which is a psychologically recognised stage of childhood– with a sociologically- or politically-informed concept of identity, which suggests something created or assumed for external validation.

This again gives a strong impression that the curriculum is not really child-centred, but is promoting an ideological definition of personal identity not backed up by research in the relevant discipline.

Children and young people are individuals with unique personalities. They should be encouraged to develop as fully rounded human beings, free to explore interests and aptitudes without the constraints of sex stereotypes, and confident to express themselves. That the word 'identity' is so often coupled with the word 'gender' causes us further concern.

We believe that 'developing and expressing identity' should either change to something more reflective of children and young people growing up and developing

as individuals, or that it should be unambiguously defined as relating to early childhood emotional and social development and/or developmental psychology.

The following sentence gives serious cause for concern:

Gradually learners should be supported to understand how aspects of identity and individuality, including LGBTQ+ diversity, sex, gender and sexuality, develop and change over time.

Sex is not an aspect of identity and in no way does it 'change over time'. It needs to be made very clear, especially to young children, that it is not possible to change sex. Whether someone is gay, lesbian, bisexual or heterosexual is not an aspect of identity, it is a natural sexual orientation. Young people's understanding of their sexual orientation develops as they grow up, but sexual orientation itself does not 'change over time'.

A shift of focus from factual information (including on sexual orientation) to prioritising identity and sexuality in RSE is in danger of creating a culture that blurs boundaries, compromises safeguarding and may lead to poor self-esteem and wellbeing as well as unhealthy relationships.

Understanding sexual health and well-being

We broadly support the content and approach of this strand, with the caveat that effective teaching and learning about sexual health and well-being depends entirely on clear language regarding sex.

There is no place for the woolly, contested term 'gender' in discussing how male and female bodies work with regard to sexual and reproductive health.

Fostering safety and respect, being valued and supported.

The 'Everyone's Invited' project brought into stark relief how sexual abuse and harassment has become normalised in schools, the vast majority perpetrated by boys against girls.

The routine misogyny and sexism that girls have to deal with and the attitudes that are encouraged and reinforced among boys by a prevailing porn culture means that we are not starting from the same place when addressing this strand. The challenges and approaches needed are very different for boys and girls and the Guidance and Code must recognise that.

The rights of girls to set and maintain personal boundaries for their privacy, dignity and safety must be emphasised. They do not have to 'be kind' and acquiesce when those boundaries are threatened, whether that is physically, emotionally or sexually.

Connected with this, we believe the Guidance or Code should consider the impact of pornography and prostitution from the critical viewpoint of them being manifestations of violence against women.

How can young lesbians find positive role models when popular culture views it as no more than a porn category: performative 'lesbianism' for male audiences? How can young straight girls go out into the world of dating when they and their male peers are shown a version of sexuality in which women are battered, choked, and abused?

How can boys grow up to respect women as equals when they know that it is possible to pay for sex from women who might be trafficked, struggling with addictions, or living with the threat of violence from pimps? How can they understand consent when they have immediate online access to the most violent and degrading pornography?

Question 5 – Do you agree that the RSE code section of the guidance is clear and appropriate?

Strongly disagree	<input type="checkbox"/>	Disagree	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Neither agree nor disagree	<input type="checkbox"/>	Agree	<input type="checkbox"/>	Strongly agree	<input type="checkbox"/>
--------------------------	--------------------------	-----------------	-------------------------------------	-----------------------------------	--------------------------	--------------	--------------------------	-----------------------	--------------------------

Please explain your answer:

We refer you to our comments regarding the Guidance section.

We also point out the contradiction between stating in the draft Guidance (p9) 'In all schools and settings, teaching should reflect the law (including the Equality Act 2010) as it applies to relationships', together with repeated references to all the other legislation which schools and other settings need to have regard to, and the inclusion in the draft Statutory Code of a glossary of terms which either have no basis in law, science or medicine, or where the definitions provided are not legally correct or do not reflect the scientifically accurate definitions that learners will encounter in other curriculum areas.

Question 6 – Do you agree that the mandatory elements of the guidance (the RSE code) are the right ones? Is anything missing that should be included?

Strongly disagree	<input type="checkbox"/>	Disagree	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Neither agree nor disagree	<input type="checkbox"/>	Agree	<input type="checkbox"/>	Strongly agree	<input type="checkbox"/>
--------------------------	--------------------------	-----------------	-------------------------------------	-----------------------------------	--------------------------	--------------	--------------------------	-----------------------	--------------------------

Please explain your answer:

We refer you to our response to Question 4.

Question 7 – Do you agree that the guidance offers relevant information to support practitioners when designing their school curriculum for RSE?

Strongly disagree	<input type="checkbox"/>	Disagree	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Neither agree nor disagree	<input type="checkbox"/>	Agree	<input type="checkbox"/>	Strongly agree	<input type="checkbox"/>
--------------------------	--------------------------	-----------------	-------------------------------------	-----------------------------------	--------------------------	--------------	--------------------------	-----------------------	--------------------------

Please explain your answer:

There is a lack of specific information for schools on what partner organisations or resources should or should not cover in delivery. If something is compulsory, it's reasonable that children and parents know what's being taught, that it will be accurate and objective, not ideologically loaded.

The guidance rightly highlights the legal requirement for RSE to be 'objective, critical and pluralistic' in its content and manner of teaching and that schools are required to comply with the relevant requirements of the Equality Act 2010.

Despite this, existing materials and resources endorsed by Welsh Government or produced by current 'partner organisations' do not meet that standard.

Resources such as AGENDA, CRUSH and others used by organisations offering to support schools with the delivery of RSE actively promote a specific ideological approach that encompasses misrepresentation of the protections and exemptions of the Equality Act.

It is difficult for schools to navigate the plethora of resources to determine which are safe, accurate and meet the requirements of the guidance and code. Before resources are used in Welsh schools and other settings there should be a clear, rigorous process of review and assessment to ensure that they are legally and scientifically accurate as well as consistent with being a 'positive and protective' part of the new curriculum.

As an absolute minimum, Welsh Government needs to include an explicit statement in the guidance regarding what materials are not acceptable, so teachers can be confident to reject unsuitable resources produced by ostensibly credible organisations.

Below is a suggested statement, adapted from the Department of Education Guidance for England, that we believe would provide the necessary reassurance for teaching professionals. We trust that the origin of this text will not prevent it being given objective consideration. This is a subject that goes beyond party political or national governmental lines.

'Topics involving gender and biological sex can be complex and sensitive matters to navigate. You should not reinforce harmful stereotypes, for instance by suggesting that children might be a different sex (or gender) based on their personality and interests or the clothes they prefer to wear. Resources used in teaching must always be age-appropriate and evidence based and accurate language should be used. Terms such as 'assigned at birth' are not accurate and are confusing to learners. Beliefs in concepts such as 'gender identity', which some people find helpful in describing their feelings, should not be taught as if they were fact. Materials which suggest that non-conformity to gender stereotypes should be seen as synonymous with having a different 'gender identity' should not be used and you should not work with external agencies or organisations that produce such material. While teachers should not suggest to a child that their non-compliance with gender stereotypes means that either their personality or their body is wrong and in need of changing, teachers should always seek to treat individual students with sympathy and support.'

Question 8 – We would like to know your views on the effects that the RSE draft statutory guidance would have on the Welsh language, specifically on:

- i) opportunities for people to use Welsh
- ii) treating the Welsh language no less favourably than the English language.

What effects do you think there would be? How could positive effects be increased, or negative effects be mitigated?

Supporting comments

Question 9 – Please also explain how you believe the proposed RSE draft statutory guidance could be formulated or changed so as to have:

- i) positive effects or increased positive effects on opportunities for people to use the Welsh language and on treating the Welsh language no less favourably than the English language
- ii) no adverse effects on opportunities for people to use the Welsh language and on treating the Welsh language no less favourably than the English language.

Supporting comments

Question 10 – We have asked a number of specific questions. If you have any related issues which we have not specifically addressed, please use this space to report them.

We believe that every child should have access to high quality, fully inclusive, safe, age appropriate RSE. This Consultation Document, however, does not meet the standard expected of Statutory Guidance.

It is Merched Cymru’s view that this Guidance needs to be extensively revised and rewritten so that schools and other settings know how to design and deliver an appropriate, effective Relationship and Sex Education curriculum that is safe and accurate and in line with learning in other curriculum areas such as biology.

Such a curriculum should cover the following five points:

1. High quality, age appropriate, scientifically accurate information for all children and young people to enable them to fulfil their potential, and live and love safely and healthily whatever their background or protected characteristics.

2. An end to the conflation of the terms sex and gender, the appropriation of inaccurate terminology, and to the confusion of objective facts with the subjective beliefs some people find helpful when coping with their everyday lives and making sense of their feelings.
3. Provision to address the impact of biological sex, sexism and stereotyping on boys and girls, along with a focus on addressing the additional barriers, harassment, discrimination and risk of harm experienced by girls and young women because they are female.
4. Clear guidance for schools and youth groups - as already provided by the DfE in England - to enable them to judge what is and isn't appropriate for inclusion in the lessons to deliver the RSE curriculum.
5. A central list of approved resources and organisations which comply with the Guidance and Code. This should be held at either a Wales-wide or local authority level to ensure that materials, lesson plans, partner organisations and trainers have been vetted and DBS checked in line with safeguarding best practice.

Welsh Government also needs to consider the implications of the recent Forstater Judgment for the Guidance and Code in relation to the right of teachers and other staff who believe that biological sex in human beings is real, binary, immutable and very relevant to the teaching of RSE. In UK law sex is binary and, despite the claims of some activists, the science is also very clear on this.

Finally, we ask the Welsh Government to ensure that it puts children's and young people's right to receive honest, objective, accurate education regarding sex and relationships ahead of placating lobby groups who push a particular ideological agenda that would deny women and girls their hard-won sex-based protections.

Education will never be completely free of politics and there will always be arguments about the merits of different approaches; we should keep in mind the words of CP Scott that 'comment is free, but facts are sacred'.

Responses to consultations are likely to be made public, on the internet or in a report. If you would prefer your response to remain anonymous, please tick here: