

INTRODUCTION

- 1. The Welsh Local Government Association (WLGA) represents the 22 local authorities in Wales. The three national park authorities and the three fire and rescue authorities are associate members.
- 2. It seeks to provide representation to local authorities within an emerging policy framework that satisfies priorities of our members and delivers a broad range of services that add value to Welsh Local Government and the communities they serve.
- 3. The Welsh Local Government Association and Association of Directors of Education in Wales (ADEW) welcome this opportunity to respond to the consultation on Relationships and Sexuality Education (RSE) Statutory Guidance and Code.
- 4. The following response is structured around the specific questions set out in the response form.

CONSULTATION RESPONSE

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

Strongly	Disagree	Neither	Agree	✓	Strongly	
disagree		agree nor			agree	
		disagree				

- 5. The WLGA and ADEW agree that overall, the definition of RSE is clear. There is a strong emphasis on the importance of RSE in supporting learners to develop healthy and positive relationships. The emphasis on relationships education is welcome and supports the four purposes and broader aims of Curriculum for Wales in developing well rounded citizens, as well as the Whole School and Whole System approach to mental health and emotional well-being.
- 6. There are a couple of points in this section which colleagues would like further clarification on. Firstly, it would be helpful if providers were given more guidance on teaching RSE in the context of the Rights protected by the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC). Footnote number 4 states there is more information on this aspect of the UNCRC in the glossary but this reference is missing.
- 7. Secondly, in the definition section on page 7, the guidance refers to how "learners can develop an understanding of how people's faith, belief, human rights and cultures are related to all aspects of RSE". There is a risk this could be misinterpreted by some

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providers without further clarification. It could be useful to re-emphasise the importance of teaching pluralistic views where RSE content may crossover with the teaching of values and ethics in the curriculum.

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

Strongly	Disagree	Neither	Agree	✓	Strongly	
disagree		agree nor			agree	
		disagree				

- 8. The WLGA and ADEW agree that overall, the principles for embedding RSE are clear. The guidance clearly emphasises the whole-school approach needed with all practitioners contributing to fully embed the school's RSE priorities. The emphasis on developing a continuous process aiming to improve overall learner well-being is also a strength.
- 9. It is essential that practitioners receive high quality professional learning that enables them to successfully implement the interdisciplinary, whole-school approach to RSE provision. This is particularly important in ensuring the pluralistic requirement is met. Practitioners who are responsible for developing their school or setting's RSE policy will need time and support to effectively plan their provision.
- 10. There is some concern within local authorities over the timescales needed to effectively train practitioners and the time needed to design a curriculum that effectively integrates the RSE guidance ready for implementation by September 2022. This is a particular concern given the increased workload resulting from the Covid19 pandemic.
- 11. ADEW colleagues report that there needs to be a greater emphasis on the importance of communication and engagement with parents and the wider community when considering the principles of effective RSE delivery. The guidance could include suggestions of useful networks or agencies that could support in the development and successful implementation of RSE policies such as youth workers, school nurses and other RSE experts who work closely with schools and settings.
- 12. ADEW colleagues are reporting that the changes to the rights of parents to withdraw are causing challenges for schools and local authorities, any additional support or guidance to help resolve these challenges would be useful.

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

Strongly	Disagree	Neither	Agree	✓	Strongly	
disagree		agree nor			agree	
		disagree				

- 13. There is overall agreement that the structure and content of the guidance is clear. The underpinning values and supporting legislation are clearly signposted. The reference to the Equality Act 2010 is particularly helpful in promoting and safeguarding pupil rights. The WLGA and ADEW welcome the move towards enabling pupils to understand that there are a range of different examples of healthy stable relationships. This will help increase inclusivity and ensure equal value is placed on a range of different types of healthy stable relationships.
- 14. The wording of the guidance in relation to Voluntary Aided schools needs clarification so that this is not misinterpreted.
- 15. As mentioned in earlier responses a significant amount of time and resource will need to be dedicated to building the specialist expertise required to effectively design and implement high quality RSE provision. There is a concern about capacity within the sector given the short time frames and time lost due to pandemic recovery work.

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	Neither	Agree	✓	Strongly	
disagree		agree nor			agree	
		disagree				

- 16. The WLGA and ADEW agree that the three broad stages encompass what is important about RSE. The guidance does allow some flexibility for professionals to adapt and differentiate according to the developmental needs of the learner which is welcomed.
- 17. ADEW colleagues felt that the broad stages were appropriate to the learners' ages however practitioners would benefit from more detailed guidance to increase consistency of provision between schools. Providing more detailed guidance and exemplar materials would help guard against the judgements of individual practitioners and ensure consistency of approach.

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

Strongly	Disagree	Neither	Agree	✓	Strongly	
disagree		agree nor			agree	
		disagree				

- 18. There is broad agreement that the RSE code section is clear and appropriate. Some local authorities would however recommend the guidance is developed further to avoid any misrepresentations in this sensitive aspect of the curriculum. Prototype schemes of learning or learning journey examples, as provided in the Religion, Values and Ethics guidance, could help support practitioners in developing a better understanding of the progression of each strand.
- 19. It has been recommended that "Valuing safe, healthy and equitable friendships and relationships in a range of contexts" and "consent" should be included for earlier age groups, not just secondary ages.
- 20. There was strong agreement that several of the other statements were in the appropriate age bracket and ADEW colleagues welcomed this useful guidance on the teaching focus within each strand.

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	Neither	Agree	✓	Strongly	
disagree		agree nor			agree	
		disagree				

- 21. The WLGA and ADEW broadly agree that the mandatory elements of the guidance are appropriate with some local authorities requesting additional mandatory elements to be included. ADEW would like to recommend stronger wording is used in the sections on "Content appropriate to learner development" to re-emphasise the mandatory nature of guidance within these tables.
- 22. It is felt that a greater emphasis on gender identity and sexuality, at the developmentally appropriate point, should be built into the guidance to address how this is often misinterpreted in the media. One example could be the inclusion of 'LGBTQ+' in brackets

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as an example of how practitioners may develop "an understanding of what characterises the nature of different families and range of relationships".

- 23. It has been suggested that a statement on teaching young people facts about contraception should also be included in the age-appropriate column of the table on taught content. Sharing factual information about contraception has an important role to play in the prevention of sexually transmitted infections and preventing unwanted pregnancies. There is a risk that some governing bodies or schools will avoid teaching this content if it is not explicitly noted in the statutory guidance.
- 24. The wording could be improved within the ages 3-7 statement "The use of accurate terminology for all body parts". ADEW colleagues have suggested exchanging "accurate" for "scientific" and suggest that "all body parts" needs revising for this age group. As this is an area which some parents find controversial, this section of the code needs to be particularly clear. It was also suggested that the ages 11-16 statement "Knowledge and understanding that there can be both intended and unintended outcomes of having sexual experiences including offline and online..." would be better if it were rephrased to include the term 'relationships' as well as sexual experiences.

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

Strongly	Disagree	Neither	✓	Agree	Strongly	
disagree		agree nor			agree	
		disagree				

- 25. Several local authorities reported that the information provided was useful but that they would value a more detailed framework to accompany this code to better support practitioners when designing their school curriculum for RSE. ADEW colleagues felt that exemplar schemes of learning and examples of good practice would be useful additions to this guidance.
- 26. The consultation document identifies that good practice will include the use of specialist services and expertise, local authorities and schools alike would therefore value recommendations from Welsh Government indicating which organisations are best placed to offer this support.
- 27. Local authorities are keen to stress the need for robust professional learning opportunities to increase teaching expertise in this area.

28. As well as this initial guidance, some practitioners will need ongoing support and monitoring to help them gain confidence in their delivery of RSE and to be reassured that their delivery is safe and developmentally appropriate.

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?

- 29. All local authorities agree that the RSE draft statutory guidance does not significantly influence the opportunities for people to use Welsh nor does it have any direct effect on treating the Welsh language less favourably than the English language. However, local authorities have raised some concerns over the possible lack of resources which may cause a barrier, for example there are more books which implicitly and explicitly explore relationships and sexuality in English.
- 30. All local authorities emphasised the importance of ensuring that all guidance, resources, specialist support and advice is available bilingually and that providing resources with standardised terms in Welsh will aid discussions through the medium of Welsh. Careful attention will need to be given to the use of the correct terminology in both languages.

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

- 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.
- 31. As mentioned above, ensuring that high quality resources and all professional learning opportunities are provided in Welsh or English will ensure there are positive effects and no adverse effects on opportunities for people to use Welsh. Effectively publicising and marketing these resources or events could encourage English-medium schools to engage with some of the Welsh language content, which could in turn increase the opportunities for schools to use Welsh.

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.

- 32. The WLGA and ADEW would like to suggest that a few additional terms are added to the glossary and are explained in greater detail within the guidance. It is recommended that a comprehensive and appropriate definition of "consent" is included in the glossary. In addition to the definition of "Violence against women domestic abuse and sexual violence", this document should also reflect that men too, can be victims of domestic abuse. This is particularly important in ensuring we move away from stereotypes and promote inclusivity.
- 33. One of the key themes identified in most responses is the need for this guidance to be accessible to the wider school community, specifically governing bodies, parents and carers. The WLGA and ADEW would like to recommend that Governing Bodies are added to the 'audience' section of this guidance. Governing bodies have a key role in monitoring and determining the effectiveness of a school's RSE policy. School governors will therefore also require training on this aspect of the curriculum to support an effective whole-school approach to RSE delivery. Providing evidence of good practice, where developmentally appropriate RSE has made a difference, will help ensure the wider school community support the successful implementation of this new policy.
- 34. As with all aspects of Curriculum for Wales, schools should continue to be encouraged to collaborate with other schools and partner organisations in the development of RSE provision. Exemplar material or a model RSE policy which schools can personalise would be an additional help to schools in building their understanding of the requirements.
- 35. Local authorities would also benefit from guidance on how to address some of the challenges and concerns raised by parents and some religious groups relating to RSE delivery. Local authorities are keen to understand the process or support available to Headteachers who deal with challenges such as parents persistently keeping their children from school when RSE provision is planned.
- 36. Local authorities would also welcome clarification on who is expected to provide the specialist advice and support mentioned in the guidance. Will there be a national programme of training for staff to develop this expertise? It would also be useful to have a list of endorsed and trusted agencies that schools can signpost pupils to, where appropriate.

CONCLUSION

37. The WLGA and ADEW support this change in policy and welcome the renewed emphasis on the importance of learning about healthy stable relationships. This guidance should help ensure that the rights of all children and young people are upheld and that they have the opportunity to develop their knowledge and skills in this vital area. Both the WLGA and ADEW fully support the new curriculum for Wales and are committed to working with schools and partners to successfully implement these changes.

For further information please contact:

Sharon Davies, Head of Education sharon.davies@wlga.gov.uk

Welsh Local Government Association Local Government House Drake Walk Cardiff CF10 4LG

Tel: 029 2046 8600

We welcome correspondence in Welsh and English and will respond to correspondence in the same language. Use of either language will not lead to a delay.