



Church of Ireland
Board of Education (Northern Ireland)

**The Church of Ireland Board of Education (NI)
response to DENI public consultation
on Relationships and Sexuality Education.**

1. The content of teaching and learning resources for Learning for Life and Work developed by CCEA should be factual and contain age-appropriate, comprehensive and scientifically accurate education on sexual and reproductive health and rights, covering prevention of early pregnancy and access to abortion and these resources should not advocate, or oppose, a particular view on the moral and ethical considerations of abortion or contraception.

Agree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Disagree
	X	

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS (OPTIONAL) The space below is for you to add any additional comments should you wish to provide more detail in respect of the Statement above.

The Church of Ireland Board of Education (NI) is content that teaching resources for Learning for Life and Work developed by CCEA concerning the two new areas of RSE legislated for, by the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland in July 2023 should be factual, age-appropriate, comprehensive and scientifically accurate.

We believe, however, that it is naïve to suggest that any topic under the auspices of RSE could be presented in a neutral way that is without involving ethical considerations, as there is no ‘neutral’ understanding of human identity or worldview. Schools with a Christian ethos should therefore have the freedom to teach RSE in line with their ethos. We recognise that CCEA-created resources will be making value judgments on what facts and what science is presented, alongside what is understood by ‘age-appropriate, comprehensive and scientifically accurate’. In addition, what is deemed scientifically accurate today may not be seen as such in a year’s time, and any policy should take this into account. Therefore, these resources should be open to scrutiny and should ensure that they acknowledge differences in worldview positions e.g. the Christian belief in the sanctity of life from conception.

Lessons should be developed in such a way as to encourage critical thinking, enabling pupils to consider a range of ethical and moral viewpoints, including a religious view

Chair: Archbishop John McDowell
Secretary: Dr Peter Hamill

Church of Ireland
Floor 2, 18-22 Hill Street
Belfast, BT1 2LA
028 90828860
edunorth@rcbcoi.org



Church of Ireland
Board of Education (Northern Ireland)

which reflects the ethos of the school. There should be balance in the ethical and religious viewpoints articulated. Class discussions should be respectful, balanced and open spaces where all pupils feel valued and safe to express their personal viewpoint and opinions, without fear of consequences, and teachers should not be forced to teach things with which they ethically and morally disagree.

In line with current government policies around sexual health and health promotion, resources developed by CCEA around prevention of early pregnancy should continue to promote the delaying of first sex. The resources should not presume that young people are, or will be, sexually active and should affirm that saying no to sexual activity is a possible and positive choice. Indeed the Board would advocate that CCEA should also present the reason or reasons why someone would wait until marriage to engage in sexual activity.

There has been much public discourse around the Department’s consultation including an ‘opt-out’. This should be available to teachers who do not wish to engage with the material on prevention of early pregnancy and access to abortion services. As such, we would implore the Department to find a way to meet the Secretary of State’s demands which equips teachers adequately to have the skills to discuss general health provision but does not force them to direct pupils towards abortion services.

2. Parents/carers should be informed about the specific nature and content of the age-appropriate, comprehensive and scientifically accurate education on sexual and reproductive health and rights, covering prevention of early pregnancy and access to abortion.

Agree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Disagree
X		

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS (OPTIONAL) The space below is for you to add any additional comments should you wish to provide more detail in respect of the Statement above.

The Church of Ireland Board of Education (NI) strongly believe that RSE teaching begins in the home and is the responsibility of the parents/carers who have the right to have their children educated in accordance with their wishes.

External providers should provide schools with lesson plans and outcomes prior to the lesson being taught. Parents should know who is delivering topics and if it is an external



Church of Ireland
Board of Education (Northern Ireland)

provider, the content should be available to parents and pupils prior to the lesson. Schools should also ensure a teacher known to pupils is always present and that the ethos of the school is consistently upheld.

As external providers may cover prevention of early pregnancy and access to abortion as part of a wider programme of delivery, provision needs to be made for how schools manage delivery of content if the right of withdrawal only applies to a particular part of the programme.

3. The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child includes at Articles 1-3 and 12 the rights of the child to ‘express their views, feelings and wishes in all matters affecting them, and to have their views considered and taken seriously’ and at Article 5 ‘the rights and responsibilities of parents and carers to provide guidance and direction to their child as they grow up so that they fully enjoy their rights. This must be done in a way that recognises the child’s increasing capacity to make their own choices.’ The Department’s guidance, when developed, should consider in such instances how schools balance the rights of both children and parents/carers in implementing the regulations.

Agree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Disagree
X		

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS (OPTIONAL) The space below is for you to add any additional comments should you wish to provide more detail in respect of the Statement above.

The Church of Ireland Board of Education (NI) agree that Article 3 of the UNCRC, ‘the best interests of the child must be the guiding principle’, we agree it is in the best interests of the child to receive high quality RSE; it is important children and young people are taught how they might engage in healthy, respectful relationships of all types, not only with their peers but also with adults and those who are younger than them. For example, it is important that students understand matters like ‘consent’ in order to keep themselves safe and also to ensure that they are treating others well.

This Board believes that there should be a balancing of the rights of children/young people with the rights of the parents/carers; this should not lead to a situation where adults are not informed about what is being taught and have no legal right to withdraw their child on matters of conscience. It is for this reason the Department’s guidance should consider such instances and guide the school in the sensitive handling and

Chair: Archbishop John McDowell
Secretary: Dr Peter Hamill

Church of Ireland
Floor 2, 18-22 Hill Street
Belfast, BT1 2LA
028 90828860
edunorth@rcbcoi.org



Church of Ireland
Board of Education (Northern Ireland)

approach to parental requests for an opt-out on these issues. As stated already RSE teaching begins in the home and so it is vitally important that parents/carers are supported and offered training to have healthy conversations in the home.

The Board have a concern that there could be a situation when parents' choice to have their children removed or present is not adhered to and the child makes a choice that the parents/carers are unaware of, a clear process must be provided for how this is to be managed.

4. Pupils and parents/carers should have access to an overview of their school's RSE policy and planned RSE programme.

Agree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Disagree
X		

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS (OPTIONAL) The space below is for you to add any additional comments should you wish to provide more detail in respect of the Statement above.

Like all policies, RSE policies should be developed under the leadership of governors, in collaboration with parents or carers and pupils, as well as teachers and other educational and health professionals. Included in this policy will be the aims and objectives of RSE and how teaching will support the school's ethos and reflect the moral and religious principles held by parents/carers and school management authorities.

As is current practice, a school's RSE policy should be made publicly available on the school's website.

The planned RSE programme should also be made available to pupils and parents/carers.

Support should always be available for pupils for whom these topics 'trigger' a safeguarding/child protection or trauma memory. It should not be assumed that this is covered under existing policies.

What provision is being made for mental health support counselling? Where abortion is being covered, are all other viable options also discussed? Do both boys and girls have



Church of Ireland
Board of Education (Northern Ireland)

the support available to them should these classroom discussions cause a trauma memory?

Dr Peter Hamill

Secretary

Chair: Archbishop John McDowell
Secretary: Dr Peter Hamill

Church of Ireland
Floor 2, 18-22 Hill Street
Belfast, BT1 2LA
028 90828860
edunorth@rcbcoi.org