

11 April 2024

Young People's RSE Poll 2024



Working together for quality relationships and sex education

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Executive Summary

The past twelve months have been tumultuous for Relationships and Sex Education (RSE). Just days after we launched our 2022 young people’s poll in March last year, Prime Minister Rishi Sunak announced a Government review of RSHE, triggering a national mood of hesitation and politicisation around the subject, that remains unresolved to this day.

The focus of the Government review has become not about young people’s needs, but on setting ‘age ratings’ and restrictions. This political grandstanding further detracts from the necessity of continuously updating the statutory guidance in ways that meet the needs of young people and are informed by robust evaluation of statutory RSE since its introduction in schools in 2020-21.

Asking young people about their experiences of RSE and their views on how it can be improved is a basic starting point for designing and delivering effective, engaging and inclusive curricula. Here at the Sex Education Forum, we are committed to asking young people how RSE supports them, and amplifying their voices when they share the details of what works and where the gaps exist in school lessons.

Poll methodology

Earlier this year we commissioned Censuswide* to carry out a poll of young people aged 16 and 17 years old who live in England and attend or attended school. In total, 1001 young people completed the survey. The fieldwork took place between 16 and 26 February 2024.

Of the 1002 young people participating:

- 577 identify as female, 385 as male, 14 as non-binary and 25 prefer not to say.
- 522 identify as White (English / Welsh / Scottish / Northern Irish / British), 224 as Asian, 119 as Black, 62 as Mixed Descent and 17 as Arab (these figures provide a summary of the more detailed ethnicity categories used).
- 828 identify as straight, 126 as lesbian, gay or bisexual, queer or questioning, 7 as asexual or aromantic and 40 prefer not to say.
- 64 respondents consider themselves to have a disability, 778 do not, 94 are unsure, and 65 prefer not to say.
- 291 are eligible for free school meals.

The respondents were drawn from all nine regions of England with a mix of urban, small town and rural representation.

We worked closely with young people at our Partners Sexpression:UK and Make it Mandatory to explore the purpose of the poll and current issues that would benefit from examination.

Our conversations led to a new question focused on understanding what young people see as their main source of information on key topics – such as school, friends, family, or online. We also collaborated to formulate poll questions to explore the impact of RSE on experiences of consent in relationships, and to get views on extending mandatory provision beyond Year 11.

A Poll of
1002
young people



Fieldwork took place between

16.02.2024
26.02.2024



*Censuswide abide by and employ members of the Market Research Society which is based on the ESOMAR principles.

Summary of the main findings

Solid progress in quality of RSE provision

Results from the 2024 poll show a solid improvement in young people's overall satisfaction with RSE compared to previous polls, with fifty percent rating their RSE at school as 'good' or 'very good.' This is up ten percentage points on the 2022 (SEF, 2023) poll and the highest percentage since polling began. This positive trend is mirrored across individual RSE topics; all seventeen topics listed in the poll – from puberty to healthy relationships – returned higher percentages of young people reporting 'yes' they learnt all that they needed to, compared to previous polls. Equally heartening, young people feel RSE is having an impact - with 61% of respondents agreeing that 'RSE taught me useful skills for consent in relationships'.

Disparities in representation

However, against this backdrop of progress exist worrying disparities. Only 43% of young people agree that they felt personally represented and included in the RSE that they received at school. Meanwhile, just thirty-eight percent of respondents identifying as lesbian, gay, bisexual, queer, or questioning rate their RSE as 'good' or 'very good,' compared with 52% of those identifying as straight. When asked if they felt their school had asked for their opinions about RSE, 39% agreed and 28% disagreed.

Taboo topics

Disparity is also apparent in the coverage of different topics. Nearly four in five (79%) of respondents say they learned all that they needed to about 'how babies are conceived and born', but this number falls to 56%

for 'how to get help if you are sexually abused or assaulted', 51% for gender identity, 49% for 'how to access local sexual health services' and to 34% for sexual pleasure.

Where do young people get their information?

A new question for 2024 probes what sources of information young people are relying on and exposes the extent to which social media is filling gaps. School is the main source of information for consent (47%) and healthy relationships (32%), but for learning about LGBT+ issues, young people are more likely to turn to social media (30%) ahead of school (25%), with parents being the main source of information about LGBT+ topics for just 4% of young people. With pornography a persistently neglected aspect of RSE at school, it's little wonder that 15% of young people turn to pornography itself as a main source of information about pornography, and 17% rely on social media – just 3% depend on parents or carers.

The changes that young people want to see

Young people voice their support in the poll for more robust primary school Relationships Education, with 81% agreeing that children should be taught about 'the importance of consent for things like touching another person's body' at this stage. Support is even higher from respondents identifying as female (85%), compared to those identifying as male (77%). Seventy-four percent of females say that children should be 'encouraged to question and challenge stereotypical ideas about how girls and boys should behave' as part of the

primary school curriculum, compared to 62% of males.

Young people strongly support stretching the start and finish for RSE, with 39% agreeing that their RSE would have been better 'if it had started earlier in my life'. Continuing RSE beyond Year 11 is a move endorsed by 56% of respondents, four times more than those who disagree with an extension (14%).

When asked to select from a list of possible actions from Government to help improve RSE, young people prioritise:

1. **Training for teachers as a means of improving their RSE (57%)**
2. **Flexibility for schools to cover the RSE topics that their pupils need (52%), and**
3. **Opportunities for pupils to feedback on their RSE (51%).**

Conclusion

Findings from the 2024 poll indicate that RSE is starting to embed in schools five years on from the arrival of statutory guidance, with overall quality and coverage showing improvement year-on-year. Implementation seems to finally be turning a corner after delays associated with Covid-19. However, it is clear that schools feel under confident about delivering on some areas of the curriculum that are statutory, but are particularly taboo and politicised. The problem is that these gaps leave young people vulnerable to misinformation as they seek out knowledge from online sources like social media, or have no access to advice at all.

Dear Prime Minister...

Our 2024 poll concludes with an open question inviting young people to write a message about RSE that they would like to share with the Prime Minister or Secretary of State for Education. Examples of these powerful and varied messages are scattered through the pages of this report.

Young people are fearless in calling out what needs to change, and their health and safety pay the price when RSE fails to deliver. Investing in RSE that starts early, tackles narrow gender stereotypes and basic principles of consent in primary school, and extends beyond year 11 will lead to lessons that address urgent issues in society, from violence in relationships to misogyny, anti-LGBT+ hate and poor sexual health.

Young people are simply asking for decent education, reliable information and a little support to navigate a complex world. To deliver this well in schools requires investment in training for teachers and designing guidance with suitable flexibility and responsiveness to young people's needs.

It is high time that Ministers in Government have courage and answer to the young people they are duty-bound to serve.

Lucy Emmerson

**Chief Executive,
Sex Education Forum**

11 April 2024

“Young people are fearless in calling out what needs to change, and their health and safety pay the price when RSE fails to deliver.”

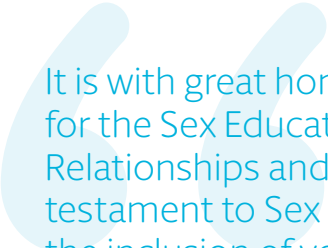




Foreword



Make it Mandatory



It is with great honour and enthusiasm that I write this foreword for the Sex Education Forum on their pivotal report regarding Relationships and Sex Education (RSE). This report stands as a testament to Sex Education Forum's commitment to prioritise the inclusion of young people's voices in the vital conversations surrounding RSE.

Against the troubling backdrop of recent national discussions marred by homophobia, transphobia, and political fear-mongering, the emergence of this report is a breath of fresh air. It boldly articulates what young people unequivocally demand and deserve: inclusive RSE that commences earlier and extends beyond Year 11.

As a young campaigner who spearheaded the first campaign calling for the extension of RSE in England until the age of 18, rather than the current and premature limit of 16, I have personally witnessed how many conversations around RSE

consistently overlook the desires and concerns of young people. I founded the [Make it Mandatory](#) campaign alongside my friends after experiencing poor RSE at school and my lived experience of an abusive relationship as a teenager. The 95,000 signatures on [our petition](#) and support from parents, young people and politicians alike have highlighted the urgent need to reconsider how we use RSE as a method of prevention in the fight to tackle violence against women and girls. For instance, the poll data reported in this report from the Sex Education Forum sheds light on the impact of school lessons, revealing that 61% of respondents acknowledged that RSE equipped them with valuable skills for navigating consent in relationships. This finding is particularly significant given the release of a concerning report by the Crown Prosecution Service (CPS) and Equally Ours in January of this year. The [CPS report](#) unveiled alarming

responses from 18-24 year-olds, with only 53% correctly identifying an attack as rape if the victim does not fight back. Moreover, while 87% of those aged 65 and above recognised that being in a relationship or marriage does not imply consent, only 42% of 18-24 year-olds shared the same understanding.

These statistics are deeply troubling and underscore the imperative of effective RSE that goes beyond 16 years old, something the [Parliamentary Women and Equalities Committee](#) also formally urged the government to implement, last year. Sex Education Forum's report highlights how RSE amongst many other things, has empowered young people to understand consent in relationships, showcasing the transformative and vital role RSE plays in ensuring the safety and well-being of young individuals when implemented correctly.

RSE must be part of lifelong learning, not something that is unfairly capped at 16 years old and left to a postcode lottery that sees thousands of young people missing out on RSE during Key Stage Five (KS5). When the government's data shows that a higher percentage of people aged 16 to 19 years were victims of domestic abuse in the last year than those aged 45 to 54 years and 60 years and over (ONS, 2023) we must interrogate why RSE is not extended to young people up until they are 18 so that they can continue to benefit from learning about healthy relationships, sexually transmitted infections, pornography and much more. These are all things I wish I had had the opportunity to learn about at school as it would have supported me in navigating my teenage years and adult life tremendously. High-quality, comprehensive RSE that finishes later is what this generation wants and deserves, with four times more respondents in this report by Sex Education Forum agreeing (56%) than disagreeing (14%) that RSE lessons beyond Year 11 would be beneficial to their personal development and well-being.

In conclusion, the insights and findings presented in the Sex Education Forum report leave no room for doubt: young people know best when it comes to their education, and they are the true experts on their experiences and needs. Their voices, desires, and concerns must be at the forefront of any discussions surrounding RSE. As we navigate the path forward, let us remember that the future of our society lies in the hands of our youth. We owe it to them to provide the tools and knowledge necessary to navigate the complexities of life such as relationships and sexuality with confidence and resilience. Anything less is a disservice to our collective future.

By centring young people's perspectives and listening to their voices, we can foster an RSE curriculum that truly serves their interests and promotes their well-being. The time to trust in the expertise of young people is now.

Faustine Petron
Founder, Make it Mandatory
April 2024





Foreword

Sexpression

In today's rapidly evolving world, where access to information is more abundant than ever, navigating the landscape of relationships, sexuality, and personal development has never been as complex nor as different from generations which preceded it.

Young People's Poll 2024 offers invaluable insights into the attitudes and experiences of today's youth, shedding light on emerging trends and underscoring the need for inclusive and effective relationships and sex education (RSE).

Sexpression is acutely aware of issues impacting young people through our members across 16 university branches and near-peer RSE delivery in schools and wider community. We collaborated closely with the Sex Education Forum to help design essential aspects for evaluation in the 2024 Young People's Poll. After consulting with a

range of young voices within Sexpression, we highlighted the importance of joy in RSE and identifying the sources young people turn to for answers about RSE. **Sexpression:UK** has a longstanding commitment to amplifying youth voices and we're delighted to support the Young People's Poll which is an incredible representation of the views of young people.

One key trend highlighted by the poll is the overwhelming support for extending RSE beyond year 11 which reflects a growing recognition among young individuals that ongoing education in areas such as consent, healthy relationships,

and sexual pleasure is essential for personal development and wellbeing. What this illuminates, is that young people view RSE as a vital tool for equipping them with the skills necessary to navigate the complexities of adult life.

Furthermore, the poll reveals a notable emphasis by young people on the importance of the discussion of pleasure within RSE. This reflects a broader societal shift which recognises that whilst sex ought to be safe, legal, and consensual, it is also something to be enjoyed by the parties involved. By acknowledging and addressing the significance of pleasure with RSE, educators have an opportunity to empower young individuals to cultivate positive attitudes towards their own bodies and sexual experiences.

We also see that education institutions are quoted as primary sources of information on topics such as consent and puberty. However, alongside schools, social media and parental guidance still play integral roles in shaping young people's perceptions and understanding of RSE. There are a wide range of sources of information when it comes to pornography, with schools being the main source for some, but many gain information via social media or even directly from pornography itself. This demonstrates the diverse landscape of information sources and the varied paths through which young people are exposed to information about sensitive topics. In essence, the poll highlights the need for the education system to account for the gaps filled in by online disinformation, social media, and pornography.

As we navigate the complexities of providing effective RSE, it is essential to recognise and respond to these emerging trends. By staying attuned to the evolving needs and preferences of young people, educators and policymakers can ensure that RSE remains relevant, inclusive, and impactful.

Vidyut Chattopadhyay
Externals and Press Director,
Sexpression: UK
April 2024



Part 1: Overall satisfaction with RSE at school

Question 1: How would you rate the quality of the relationships and sex education you received at school as a whole?

Table 1. 2024 data for question 1, together with comparative data from Sex Education Forum’s previous polls, 2022 (SEF, 2023)*, 2021 (SEF, 2022)* and 2019 (SEF, 2019)* polls.

Rating given for RSE	2024 Poll	2022* Poll	2021* Poll	2019* Poll
Number of respondents	1001	1002	1002	1000
Good or very good	50.05%	40.42%	35.33%	41.10%
Very good	15.18%	11.18%	10.48%	11.30%
Good	34.87%	29.24%	24.85%	29.80%
OK	38.76%	41.82%	42.11%	41.80%
Bad	8.09%	12.38%	16.47%	13.20%
Very bad	3.10%	5.39%	5.09%	3.90%
Very bad or bad	11.19%	17.76%	21.56%	17.10%

50%
of respondents rate the quality of their school RSE as ‘good’ or ‘very good’

11%
of respondents rate the quality of their school RSE as ‘bad’ or ‘very bad’

Table 2. Data from question 1 – 2024 poll only.

Rating given for RSE	All	Gender			Sexual Orientation			Disability	
	All	Boys	Girls	Non-binary	Lesbian, gay, bisexual, queer, questioning	Straight	Asexual/ aromantic	Disability	No disability
Number of respondents	1001	385	577	14	126	828	7	64	778
Good or very good	50.05%	51.69%	49.91%	35.71%	38.10%	52.17%	28.57%	43.75%	52.06%
Very good	15.18%	18.96%	12.82%	14.29%	8.73%	16.30%	0.00%	17.19%	15.17%
Good	34.87%	32.73%	37.09%	21.43%	29.37%	35.87%	28.57%	26.56%	36.89%
OK	38.76%	35.06%	40.55%	42.86%	43.65%	37.80%	57.14%	43.75%	36.76%
Bad	8.09%	8.57%	7.97%	14.29%	11.90%	7.61%	14.29%	4.69%	8.61%
Very bad	3.10%	4.68%	1.56%	7.14%	6.35%	2.42%	0.00%	7.81%	2.57%
Very bad or bad	11.19%	13.25%	9.53%	21.43%	18.25%	10.02%	14.29%	12.50%	11.18%

Summary

- **50%** of respondents rate the quality of their school RSE as ‘good’ or ‘very good’ – **up 10 percentage points** on the ratings from the previous Poll (data collected December 2022, published March 2023).
- **11%** of respondents rate the quality of their school RSE as ‘bad’ or ‘very bad’ – down seven percentage points on the ratings from the previous Poll.
- **38%** of respondents identifying as lesbian, gay, bisexual, queer, or questioning rated their RSE as ‘good’ or ‘very good’ compared with **52%** of those identifying as straight.
- **18%** of respondents identifying as lesbian, gay, bisexual, queer, or questioning rated their RSE as ‘bad’ or ‘very bad’ compared with **10%** of those identifying as straight.
- **44%** of respondents who consider themselves to be disabled rated their RSE as ‘good’ or ‘very good’, compared with **52%** for those who would not consider themselves disabled.

By ethnicity, 46% of White British (English / Welsh / Scottish / Northern Irish), 47% of Asian Pakistani, and 61% of Black African respondents rated their RSE overall as ‘good’ or ‘very good’. These ethnicity groups had 50 or more respondents. Other ethnicity groups had less than 50 respondents, meaning that sample sizes are not robust.

The number of respondents identifying as non-binary (14) and aromantic/asexual (7) are shown in the table but provide too small a sample size to give robust comment on this data.

What message, if anything, would you like to share with the Prime Minister and Education Minister (Secretary of State for Education) about RSE?

Dear Prime Minister...

“Tell people that LGBT people exist and teach kids properly so they feel the school system is working with them instead of against them please. ”

*Sample information

The four polls referred to in the table were conducted by Censuswide, on behalf of Sex Education Forum, with samples and date ranges as follows:

- **2024 Poll (SEF, 2024)**: Sample of 1001 young people aged 16 and 17 in England (who attend/ed school), research conducted 16.02.2024 and 26.02.2024.

- **2022 Poll (SEF, 2023)**: Sample of 1002 young people aged 16 and 17 in England (who attend/ed school), research conducted 02.12.2022 - 13.12.2022.

- **2021 Poll (SEF, 2022)**: Sample of 1002 young people aged 16 and 17 in England (who attend/ed school), research conducted 29.10.2021 - 12.11.2021.

- **2019 Poll (SEF, 2019)**: Sample of 1000 young people aged 16 and 17 in England (who attend/ed school), research conducted 28.10.2019 - 06.11.2019.

*Full details of previous polls available from www.sexeducationforum.org.uk/evidence

38%
of respondents
identifying as
lesbian, gay,
bisexual, queer, or
questioning rated
their RSE as ‘good’
or ‘very good’

44%
of respondents
who consider
themselves to be
disabled rated
their RSE as ‘good’
or ‘very good’

Part 2: Views on timing and topics

Question 4. To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements?

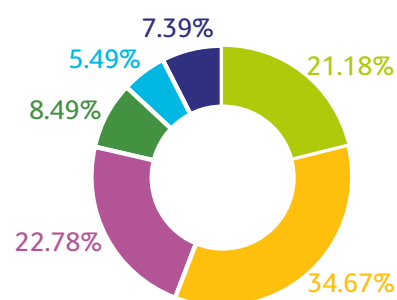
Table 3. Data from question 4.

	Relationships and sex education lessons beyond year 11 would be beneficial to my personal development and well-being	My relationships and sex education would have been better if it had started earlier in my life	Relationships and sex education taught me useful skills for consent in relationships	Relationships and sex education at secondary school should include learning that sex should be enjoyable
Agree (net)	55.84%	38.76%	61.24%	59.84%
Strongly agree	21.18%	13.49%	22.58%	29.57%
Somewhat agree	34.67%	25.27%	38.66%	30.27%
Neither agree nor disagree	22.78%	29.27%	20.28%	22.78%
Somewhat disagree	8.49%	12.69%	7.49%	5.69%
Strongly disagree	5.49%	9.79%	2.90%	4.00%
N/A	7.39%	9.49%	8.09%	7.69%
Disagree (net)	13.99%	22.48%	10.39%	9.69%

Summary

- Four times more respondents agreed (56%) than disagreed (14%) that RSE lessons **beyond year 11** would be beneficial to their personal development and well-being.
- Respondents were six times more likely to agree (61%) than disagree (10%) that RSE taught them useful **skills for consent in relationships**.
- Six times more respondents agreed (60%) that RSE at secondary school should include **learning that sex should be enjoyable** than disagreed (10%).
- 39% of respondents agreed that **'my RSE would have been better if it had started earlier in my life'**, with 13% strongly agreeing.

Relationships and sex education lessons beyond year 11 would be beneficial to my personal development and well-being



Dear Prime Minister...

“If I had learned about it earlier maybe some mistakes would not have happened.”

Stretching the time-line for RSE

The quotes displayed are answers to the question 4a:

“Why would your relationships and sex education have been better if it started earlier in your life?”

“I would have been able to ask questions and not Google things.”

“I would have felt more prepared and less sheltered - I had to find out from peers.”

“Could help to reduce ideas of rape culture if it was started to be taught at a young age.”

“I just think I should’ve known a lot of things that I didn’t sooner to prepare me better.”

“Some stuff I had to learn on my own because I knew about it before sex education was taught and nowadays younger children are becoming more aware so they should know sooner.”



“As I would have a better understanding about relationships, often people start relationships when entering secondary school.”

“I think that RSE discussion should start earlier in life. As teens, a lot of the boys already had a set view on consent, and tended to disregard it. It really made interacting with the topic difficult as this was the first glimpse into the topic for some.”

“Because I would have understood it better before it started happening to me (puberty and unwanted sexual attention).”

“Would have allowed for greater understanding of the world around me and how to navigate it better, provide protection from unwanted sexual behaviour that otherwise may not know was not okay and allowed me to be more comfortable when older as less stigma.”

“Would be more knowledgeable of positive relationships and where to go if I felt unsafe in a situation.”

Part 3: Young people’s involvement and inclusion in RSE

Question 4: This year, the Government is updating the guidance (instructions) they give to schools about relationships and sex education. To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements?

Table 4: Data from Question 4 continued (1).

	My school asked me for my opinions about relationships and sex education	I felt personally represented and included in the relationships and sex education that I received at school	I had enough opportunities to ask questions, and get answers to them, in relationships and sex education at school
Agree (net)	38.56%	43.26%	55.64%
Strongly agree	12.29%	14.49%	23.78%
Somewhat agree	26.27%	28.77%	31.87%
Neither agree nor disagree	24.78%	30.37%	21.88%
Somewhat disagree	13.79%	9.89%	10.79%
Strongly disagree	14.59%	7.49%	4.90%
N/A	8.29%	8.99%	6.79%
Disagree (net)	28.37%	17.38%	15.68%

Summary

- 28% of respondents disagreed that ‘my school asked me for my opinions about RSE’ compared with 39% who agreed.
- 43% of respondents agreed that they felt personally represented in the RSE that they received at school, with 17% disagreeing.
- More than half (56%) of respondents agreed that they had enough opportunities to ask questions, and get answers to them, in RSE at school, with 16% disagreeing.

43%
of respondents
agreed that they
felt personally
represented in
the RSE that they
received at school,
with
17%
disagreeing

Dear Prime Minister...

“Find a way to make it that students feel more comfortable to ask those important questions that need answering.”

Part 4: Parent and carer involvement in RSE

Question 4: To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements?

Table 5: Data from Question 4 continued (2).

	I wish my parents / carers had been better informed about the Relationships and Sex Education I got at school	I wish my mum (or another female carer) had been more involved in my Relationships and Sex Education when growing up		I wish my dad (or another male carer) had been more involved in my Relationships and Sex Education when growing up			
	All	All	Male	Female	All	Male	Female
Agree (net)	40.46%	33.47%	32.21%	34.84%	27.67%	34.81%	23.05%
Strongly agree	16.88%	15.28%	14.55%	16.12%	10.99%	13.25%	9.53%
Somewhat agree	23.58%	18.18%	17.66%	18.72%	16.68%	21.56%	13.52%
Neither agree nor disagree	30.77%	29.97%	27.79%	32.06%	27.07%	27.01%	27.90%
Somewhat disagree	11.79%	13.29%	13.25%	13.52%	13.69%	13.25%	13.69%
Strongly disagree	9.49%	14.59%	18.70%	12.13%	21.38%	15.84%	25.48%
N/A	7.49%	8.69%	8.05%	7.45%	10.19%	9.09%	9.88%
Disagree (net)	21.28%	27.87%	31.95%	25.65%	35.06%	29.09%	39.17%

Summary

- Respondents were almost twice as likely to agree (**40%**) with the statement ‘I wish my parents / carers had been better informed about the RSE I got at school’ than to disagree (**21%**).
- Opinions were **divided between agreeing or disagreeing** that they wished for greater involvement in RSE when growing up from either their mum / or another female carer or dad / or another male carer.
- Respondents were 5 percentage points more likely to agree that they wished their mum or another female carer had been more involved (**33%**) than their dad or another male carer (**28%**), however there are noticeable variations between male and female respondents, with over a third of boys (**35%**) agreeing that they wish their dad (or another male carer) had been more involved, compared to **23%** of girls.

40%
of respondents
agreed
“I wish my parents/
carers had been
better informed
about the RSE I got
at school”

Dear Prime Minister...

“ Help parents who are unsure on how to speak to their children on these topics. ”

Part 5: Topics covered and missed

For question 2, respondents were asked about 17 different topic areas.

Question 2: At school, did you learn everything you feel you needed to about the following:

The response choices were 'yes', 'some but not enough', and 'I didn't learn about this at all'. The option to tick 'prefer not to say' was also available.

Chart 1: Data from question 2*

*The topics are listed in rank order, with the topic that respondents identified as having learnt most about at the top of the list.

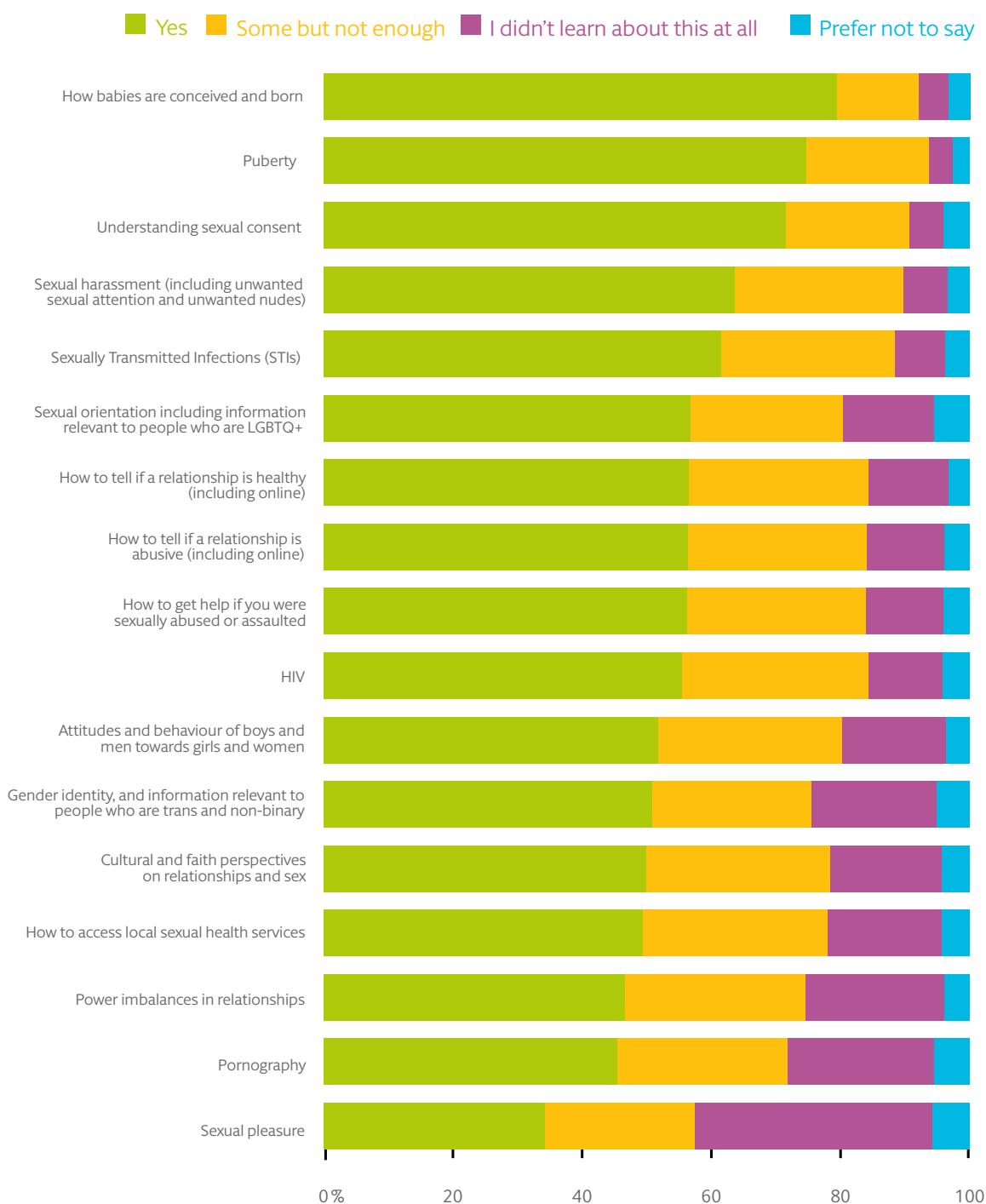
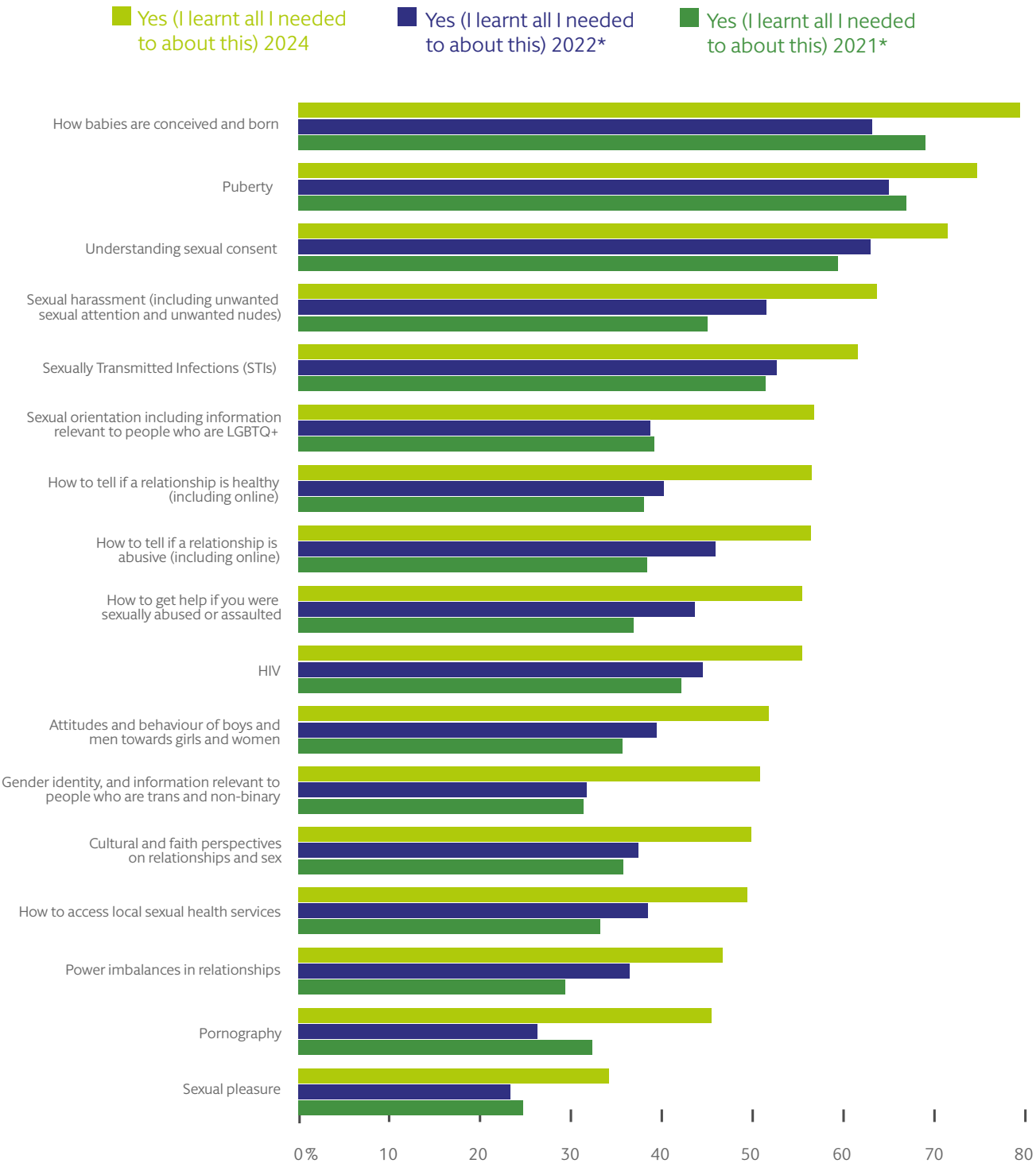


Chart 2: Data from question 2: percentage who answered: 'yes I learnt all I needed to about this', compared with data from previous polls.

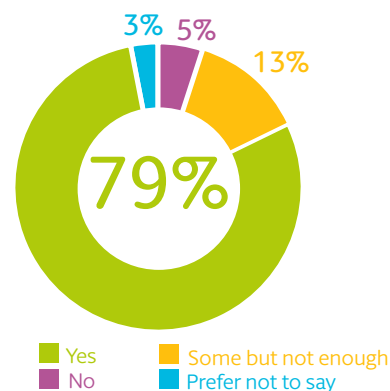


*For 2022 and 2021 poll samples and sources see part 1, page 10

Summary

The topics most fully covered

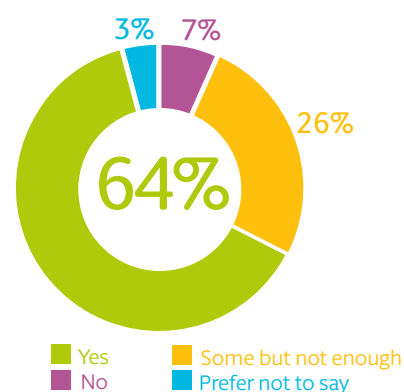
- 79% ticked 'yes, I learnt everything I needed to' about 'how babies are conceived and born'
- 75% learnt all they needed to about **puberty**
- 71% learnt all they needed to about 'understanding sexual consent'
- 64% learnt all they needed to about **sexual harassment**



ticked 'yes, I learnt everything I needed to' about 'how babies are conceived and born'

The gaps in RSE topic coverage

- 60% of respondents learnt nothing at all or not enough** about **sexual pleasure** at school
- Over 1 in 5 respondents (23%) learnt nothing at all about **pornography** at school, with a combined 49% learning nothing at all or not enough** about pornography
- 49% of respondents learnt nothing at all or not enough** about **power imbalances in relationships**
- 38% learnt nothing at all or not enough** about **sexual orientation**, and 44% learnt nothing at all or not enough about **gender identity**
- 46% learnt nothing at all or not enough** about how to access **local sexual health services**
- 40% learnt nothing at all or not enough** about **HIV**
- 35% learnt nothing at all or not enough** about **sexually transmitted infections**

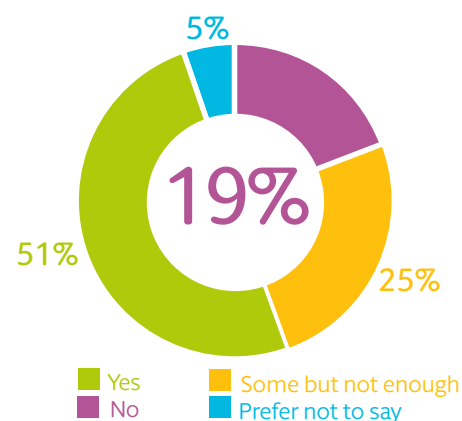


learnt all they needed to about sexual harassment

Improvements in topic coverage compared to previous years

Coverage of all topics included in the 2024 survey has improved since the previous poll data (collected December 2022), for example 12% of respondents learnt nothing at all about 'how to tell if a relationship is healthy' compared to 24% in the previous poll – a reduction of 12 percentage points.

**'Some but not enough' and 'I didn't learn about this at all' answers combined. See also Table 11 in Appendix.



learnt nothing at all about Gender identity, and information relevant to people who are trans and non-binary

The time to listen is now

The quotes displayed are answers to the question:

“Why would your relationships and sex education have been better if it started earlier in your life?”

“There should always be a focus on the risk of STDs but try to approach the topic in a way that doesn't scare children but in a way to warn and provide support. Make sure to remember that it is also supposed to be enjoyable.”

“Our bodies are our own, and we deserve to know what is happening to them. I was taught about periods, but nothing about discharge, I thought I was abnormal or kept wetting myself; we need to be told about these things so we know they are natural.”

“...all secondary aged and older children need to know where to access safe and free contraception, I at 16 still do not know where in my area to find it, I don't know where my nearest sexual health clinic is and I'm too scared to ask anyone who might know.”

“Give more of an emphasis on the teachings of pleasure and the importance of consent.”

“We need to be told more about LGBT sexuality I am a lesbian and growing up I never knew you could have sexual diseases from same sex until the age of 15 when I started myself.”



Dear Prime Minister...

The quotes displayed are answers to the question:

“What message, if anything, would you like to share with the Prime Minister and Education Minister (Secretary of State for Education) about RSE?”

“Not enough is being covered within lessons. Children often find the information from other untrustworthy sources such as pornography or their friends.”

“Children are never too young to learn about relationships and gender and shouldn't be optional as it can create stigmas around natural parts of life.”

“More teaching hours required to cover all topics.”

“Educate children on the LGBTQ community and same sex relationships there will be someone in each class that it'll be relevant to and children need to learn to be more accepting. Queer people have and always will exist and children need to be taught.”

“Children should be educated on relationships of every kind.”

“Teach kids about contraception and where to use it and how to get it, teach kids about timing of sexual actions and how it is not always the best idea to rush into sex in a relationship.”



Part 6: Main sources of information about key RSE topics

Question 6: When growing up, what, if anything, was your main source of information about these topics?

Table 6: Data from question 6.

	Puberty	Consent	Pornography	Healthy relationships	Unhealthy relationships	Sexual health	LGBT+ (sexual orientation and gender identity)
Web-sites (not including porn)	3.70%	2.90%	4.80%	2.80%	2.90%	5.39%	3.70%
Pornography	2.50%	2.70%	15.48%	1.60%	4.20%	2.90%	2.60%
Social media	8.49%	11.49%	17.48%	15.18%	17.78%	12.39%	30.07%
TV or other media (e.g. radio, podcasts)	4.90%	4.90%	4.20%	7.09%	7.29%	4.30%	8.19%
Books or leaflets	3.60%	2.30%	2.90%	3.10%	2.80%	3.40%	2.00%
Parents or carers	15.08%	10.69%	3.40%	12.09%	8.99%	6.29%	4.40%
Family members (not parents or carers)	4.00%	4.00%	1.90%	4.90%	3.40%	2.40%	2.40%
Friends and other children / young people	3.80%	4.20%	7.69%	4.70%	4.00%	3.60%	6.09%
Romantic or sexual partner (boyfriend or girlfriend)	1.20%	1.20%	0.70%	3.80%	3.10%	1.20%	1.20%
School	44.16%	46.65%	20.38%	32.47%	34.27%	45.35%	25.07%
Health professional	0.80%	1.00%	1.00%	1.80%	1.70%	3.00%	0.40%
Youth or community group or faith leader	0.80%	0.60%	1.00%	1.00%	0.30%	0.50%	1.00%
Other	1.60%	1.90%	1.90%	1.50%	1.20%	1.60%	2.10%
Nothing was my main source for this	5.39%	5.49%	17.18%	7.99%	8.09%	7.69%	10.79%

Summary

- **School** ranks highest as the **main source of information** across all topics included in the survey, for example **47%** of respondents placed school as the main source of information about consent followed by social media (**11%**) and parents or carers (**11%**).
- After school, **parents and carers** and **social media** are the next most common main sources of information about puberty, consent, healthy and unhealthy relationships when growing up.
- The main sources of information about pornography stand out from the other topics in the survey; with school being the main source for **20%**, followed by social media (**17%**), nothing (**17%**) and pornography itself (**15%**).

Dear Prime Minister...

“ Not enough is being covered within lessons. Children often find the information from other untrustworthy sources such as pornography or their friends. ”

47%
of respondents placed *school* as the main source of information about consent followed by *Social Media*
11%
and *parents or carers*
11%

30%
of respondents placed *Social Media*



as the main source of information about LGBT+ (sexual orientation and gender identity)

Part 7: Primary school

Question 5: To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following as part of Relationships Education at primary school?

Table 7. Data from question 5.

	Children should be taught about the importance of consent for things like touching another person's body	Children should be warned about the harms of pornography	Children should be encouraged to question and challenge stereotypical ideas about how girls and boys should behave	Children should learn what trans and non-binary mean	Children should see examples of same-sex relationships included in stories, scenarios and discussion
Agree (net)	81.42%	72.93%	69.33%	52.65%	55.64%
Strongly agree	60.74%	48.35%	41.76%	26.47%	28.87%
Somewhat agree	20.68%	24.58%	27.57%	26.17%	26.77%
Neither agree nor disagree	12.49%	16.48%	21.68%	24.58%	24.28%
Somewhat disagree	3.50%	6.19%	5.09%	8.89%	8.19%
Strongly disagree	2.60%	4.40%	3.90%	13.89%	11.89%
Disagree (net)	6.09%	10.59%	8.99%	22.78%	20.08%

Summary

- More than half of respondents agreed with the five areas they were questioned about being taught as part of Relationships education at primary school.
- 81% of respondents agree that children should be taught about the importance of consent for things like touching another person's body (as part of Relationships education at primary school), with 61% strongly agreeing and just 6% opposed.
- 73% of respondents agree that children should be warned about the harms of pornography (as part of Relationships education at primary school), with 48% strongly agreeing.
- 69% of respondents agree that children should be encouraged to question and challenge stereotypical ideas about how girls and boys should behave.
- Over half of respondents (53%) agree that children should learn what trans and non-binary mean as part of Relationships education at primary school.
- Over half (56%) of respondents agree that children should see examples of same-sex relationships included in stories, scenarios and discussion as part of Relationships education at primary school.

53%
of respondents agree that children should learn what *trans* and *non-binary* mean as part of primary Relationships Education

Table 8: Data from Question 5 for male and female respondents.

	Children should be taught about the importance of consent for things like touching another person's body		Children should be warned about the harms of pornography		Children should be encouraged to question and challenge stereotypical ideas about how girls and boys should behave		Children should learn what trans and non-binary mean		Children should see examples of same-sex relationships included in stories, scenarios and discussion	
	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female
Agree (net)	77.40%	85.10%	73.51%	73.14%	62.08%	74.18%	47.27%	55.29%	52.21%	56.85%
Neither agree nor disagree	15.06%	10.05%	15.58%	16.64%	24.94%	19.58%	24.68%	24.96%	23.38%	25.30%
Disagree (net)	7.53%	4.85%	10.91%	10.23%	12.99%	6.24%	28.05%	19.76%	24.42%	17.85%

Summary

There are some notable differences between male and female opinions on what should be taught as part of primary school Relationships education. For example:

- Nearly three-quarters (**74%**) of female respondents feel that Relationships education at primary school should encourage children to question and challenge stereotypical ideas about how girls and boys should behave, compared to just **62%** of male respondents
- 85%** of female respondents say children should be taught the importance of consent as part of primary Relationships education, compared to **77%** of male respondents

85%
of female
respondents say
children should
be taught the
importance of
consent
as part of
primary
Relationships
Education

Part 8: Actions to improve RSE

Question 7: This year, the Government is updating the guidance (instructions) that they give to schools about relationships and sex education. From the actions listed below, please tick up to five that you think would be most helpful to improve relationships and sex education.

Table 9: Data from question 7.

Overall ranking		All	Male (385 respondents)	Female (577 respondents)
			<i>1137 options ticked</i>	<i>1960 options ticked</i>
1	Provide training for teachers so they can develop more confidence with RSE	56.84%	49.61%	61.87%
2	Flexibility for schools to cover RSE topics at the age that their students need	52.45%	50.65%	53.55%
3	Schools to ask students for feedback on their RSE lessons and use their suggestions to improve them	50.95%	45.19%	54.94%
4	Rules so that schools can only teach RSE topics to their students at set ages	42.46%	41.04%	44.71%
5	Give information to parents about RSE, including written in different languages	40.76%	36.10%	43.85%
6	Show parents all of the RSE lesson materials that schools use	36.56%	35.32%	38.30%
7	Help parents get more involved in providing RSE at home	31.97%	28.05%	35.18%
8	None of these	8.49%	9.35%	7.28%

Summary

- Respondents gave highest priority to the action ‘Provide training for teachers so they can develop more confidence with RSE’, with 57% selecting this option.
- ‘Flexibility for schools to cover RSE topics at the age that their students need’ was ranked second, with 52% of respondents selecting this action.
- In third position was ‘Schools to ask students for feedback on their RSE lessons and use their suggestions to improve them’, selected by 51% of respondents.
- On average, female respondents selected more actions each (from the up to five they could choose) as being **helpful to improve RSE** than male respondents, and there is higher support from female respondents for all options listed than male respondents.

57%
of respondents
agreed to the action
of *Teacher training*
to help teachers
be more confident
with RSE.

Dear Prime Minister...part 2

The quotes displayed are answers to the question:

“What message, if anything, would you like to share with the Prime Minister and Education Minister (Secretary of State for Education) about RSE?”

“We cannot be afraid of teaching children RSE because it is much easier for them to be knowledgeable and safe than for them to not know and possibly get themselves into trouble or danger.”

“Needs to be improved, more inclusivity, more education and better student, teacher and parent engagement.”

“Thank you for giving teachers the opportunity to teach us this.”

“We need more of it and in small doses once we reach a certain age in primary school because so many girls grow up unrepresented and uneducated when it comes to sex and relationships and don't know how to keep themselves safe and end up taken pregnant.”

“This is an incredibly important part of children's development and morality, this could also help issues with sexual violence against individuals.”

Appendix 1

Question 2: At school, did you learn everything you feel you needed to about the following?

Table 10: Data for the 17 topics referenced in Chart 1 (Question 2)

Topic	Yes (I learnt all I needed to about this)	Some but not enough	I didn't learn about this at all	Prefer not to say
How babies are conceived and born	79.42%	12.69%	4.60%	3.30%
Puberty	74.63%	19.08%	3.60%	2.70%
Understanding sexual consent	71.43%	19.18%	5.29%	4.10%
Sexual harassment (including unwanted sexual attention and unwanted nudes)	63.64%	26.07%	6.79%	3.50%
Sexually transmitted infections	61.54%	26.77%	7.79%	3.90%
Sexual orientation including information relevant to people who are LGBTQ+	56.74%	23.58%	14.09%	5.59%
How to tell if a relationship is healthy (including online)	56.44%	27.87%	12.29%	3.40%
How to tell if a relationship is abusive (including online)	56.34%	27.67%	11.99%	4.00%
How to get help if you are sexually abused or assaulted	56.24%	27.17%	12.59%	4.00%
HIV	55.44%	28.77%	11.59%	4.20%
Attitudes and behaviour of boys and men towards girls and women	51.75%	28.47%	15.98%	3.80%
Gender identity, and information relevant to people who are trans and non-binary	50.75%	24.68%	19.38%	5.19%
Cultural and faith perspectives on relationships and sex	49.85%	28.57%	17.18%	4.40%
How to access local sexual health services	49.35%	28.57%	17.78%	4.30%
Power imbalances in relationships	46.65%	27.87%	21.48%	4.00%
Pornography	45.45%	26.27%	22.68%	5.59%
Sexual pleasure	34.17%	23.28%	36.66%	5.89%

Dear Prime Minister...

“ It [RSE] is just as important as any subject. Nailing it at an *early age* in children could help minimise the problems we face in society. ”

Table 11: Data for the 17 topics referenced in Chart 1 (Question 2) displaying percentage of respondents saying they ‘didn’t learn about this at all or ‘some but not enough’ (combined) about a topic for all, male and female respondents.

Topic	All	Male	Female
Sexual pleasure	59.94%	49.09%	67.24%
Power imbalances in relationships	49.35%	43.12%	53.90%
Pornography	48.95%	44.68%	51.99%
How to access local sexual health services	46.35%	45.71%	47.14%
Cultural and faith perspectives on relationships and sex	45.75%	43.64%	47.31%
Attitudes and behaviour of boys and men towards girls and women	44.46%	36.36%	49.57%
Gender identity, and information relevant to people who are trans and non-binary	44.06%	38.96%	46.45%
HIV	40.36%	37.66%	41.59%
How to tell if a relationship is healthy (including online)	40.16%	37.40%	41.42%
How to get help if you are sexually abused or assaulted	39.76%	32.73%	43.85%
How to tell if a relationship is abusive, (including online)	39.66%	35.84%	40.90%
Sexual orientation including information relevant to people who are LGBTQ+	37.66%	34.81%	38.47%
Sexually transmitted infections	34.57%	32.47%	35.53%
Sexual harassment (including unwanted sexual attention and unwanted nudes)	32.87%	29.09%	34.32%
Understanding sexual consent	24.48%	24.16%	23.92%
Puberty	22.68%	24.68%	21.14%
How babies are conceived and born	17.28%	19.22%	16.29%

Dear Prime Minister...

“ Teach about the harms of porn. ”

“ Need to teach boys and girls the same things. ”

About Us

The Sex Education Forum is the voice of Relationships and Sex Education (RSE) in England. As a national charity, we promote and protect the physical and mental health of children and young people by improving their access to RSE. We do this by:

- Bringing together our partners and wider stakeholders to share best practice and research and monitor the provision of RSE in England.
- Working alongside policy makers and engaging with Parliamentarians to raise the profile of RSE and ensure effective delivery.
- Supporting educators with high quality training, resources and a membership scheme, so they can be competent and confident providers of RSE, in partnership with parents, carers, children and young people.
- Gathering and utilising the international evidence for effective RSE to inform policy and practice and advance understanding of the benefits of RSE.

Working together is central to everything we do. Partners of the Sex Education are organisations or individuals with a strategic interest or specialist expertise in RSE and are in agreement with our shared values and principles for evidence-based RSE.

We believe that RSE should be relevant and meet the needs of children and young people, and actively involve them as participants, advocates and evaluators in developing good quality provision. We are particularly concerned to address the needs of children and young people most at risk of missing out on RSE and of poor sexual health and relationships outcomes. Comprehensive and inclusive RSE provides scope to explore and address numerous equity and diversity issues. Sex Education Forum has consulted with young people frequently throughout our 37-year history.

To find out more and join our RSE community visit:
www.sexeducationforum.org.uk