

Secondary school teacher survey of relationships and sexuality education: Key points summary

In winter 2022, over 190 secondary school teachers responded to a survey about their experiences teaching relationships and sexuality education (RSE).

While the findings indicate some positive aspects to teachers' RSE practice, many barriers and challenges exist to ensuring high quality RSE for every student, and RSE that meets the evolving learning needs of young people.

For the full report visit: <https://www.familyplanning.org.nz/media/305050/teachers-rse-survey-2022.pdf>

Key research findings from quantitative data include:

- too many young people are not getting access to the **12-15 hours of RSE** recommended by the Ministry of Education and the Education Review Office
- Teachers report covering a wide range of topics in RSE; for example, 95% of teachers reported purposefully planning for and teaching about **consent** in years 9 and years 10
- teachers reported being much **less confident integrating mātauranga Māori** and other cultural knowledge perspectives into RSE
- **time for teaching RSE was reported as a barrier** for almost 80% of teachers. Other barriers were access to professional development and whole-school approaches to RSE
- **having trained and confident teachers (49%) was the most frequently reported enabler**, followed by access to teaching and learning resources, having ākonga supporting and valuing RSE learning, and support from external providers to plan RSE
- Teachers reported **using a broad range of curriculum resources** to support RSE.



Teachers were asked several open-ended questions to find out what was “on top” for them.

Key themes from qualitative data supported the quantitative findings and include:

- **lack of time** – to undertake professional learning and development, to plan with colleagues, and to teach students - was cited as a major barrier to RSE; many teachers stated that a **lack of status** for the subject, and lack of support from senior leadership, was a challenge.
- Teacher knowledge, confidence and being trained to teach the subject was signalled as critical to teaching RSE. Comments acknowledged that **RSE can be a challenging subject to teach**.
- Many teachers commented that the **majority of senior students do not have meaningful RSE** because they do not take health as an NCEA subject; teachers expressed a desire to incorporate RSE at the senior levels and noted it may be more relevant to senior students.
- Some respondents noted the **complexities of RSE within a religious school** context.
- A number of teachers discussed **challenges related to community consultation**, and some cited potential or real concerns about parent and community opposition to aspects of RSE.
- The role and use of external providers in RSE was discussed, with **mixed views from teachers about the value of external providers teaching** aspects of RSE; the majority of teachers were teaching this material and wanting to do so.

“The quality of RSE you get at my own school varies enormously depending on the teacher in front of the kid. I can’t even fathom how diverse the range of quality varies from school to school, area to area.”

“It comes down to how much the school values RSE, who is leading it, the resources and development around how they are used. How much time schools allow teachers to cover this information.”

“I believe our school has excellent RSE education at Y9 and Y10. But the lack of anything beyond this is sad, as students need to be 'ready' and often aren't at Y10.”

“I’m super passionate and well-read around RSE, my colleagues not so much. They don’t necessarily feel comfortable in this space which creates a barrier for our students.”

Quotes from survey respondents



What's next?

New Zealand has a world leading health and physical education curriculum, and clear guidance from the Ministry of Education as to how to enact a responsive, quality RSE programme. Given that previous research has shown inadequacies of RSE in Aotearoa, it is unsettling to find through this survey that significant challenges remain.

Media interest in RSE in 2022 has commented on the need to mandate topics such as consent and has featured the voices of young people who say there is not enough education in this space. While this survey shows that almost all teachers report teaching a wide range of topics, including consent, there is clearly a disconnect and young people believe RSE is not meeting their needs. The deficiencies in RSE identified in this survey support young people's call for better RSE, including in senior years of secondary school. RSE relates to, and must respond to, changing social and cultural norms and influences. Some teachers express nervousness around negative responses from their community to aspects of RSE. Parents and communities have a role supporting teachers to meet the needs of their young people.

In Aotearoa, there is a requirement and a responsibility under Te Tiriti o Waitangi to ensure equitable learning outcomes for Māori. This report shows teachers are not confident incorporating mātauranga Māori and other cultural perspectives into RSE.

There are a number of changes in the pipeline for the education sector which could present opportunities to strengthen RSE including an upcoming curriculum refresh, NCEA changes, and the introduction of the new National Education Learning Priorities (NELP). This survey, and recommendations, are therefore timely. A range of stakeholders are involved in the delivery of RSE. These recommendations are intended for a broad audience to consider.

"Our students really enjoy RSE. They get involved in discussions and are keen to learn the content. That also helps a lot with delivery, if the kids are keen it makes the teacher more passionate."

"Having 2 hours of health (a week) at year 9 and 10 has made such a difference. We now have the time to explore the areas the students take us with in-depth discussions."

"Every Health lesson (including RSE), ākonga walk away buzzing that their kete has been filled with a little bit more knowledge, tools & skills to help them navigate the world and their relationships; that's only once every two weeks, imagine how our ākonga and communities could flourish if they had high quality RSE three times a week :)."

Quotes from survey respondents

Some the key recommendations are presented below. To read the full survey, including a complete list of the recommendations, visit [here](#).

Some key recommendations: curriculum, teaching and learning

- School leaders to use needs assessment and evaluation frameworks to ascertain RSE teachers' professional learning and development (PLD) needs, and provide PLD to address these needs, and determine the impact of the PLD on teaching.
- Initial teacher educators to work together across tertiary institutions to develop a community of practice and share ideas for effective practice in preparing teachers to teach RSE, in order to enhance teacher confidence and capability to teach RSE after graduating.
- Resource developers and external providers to work with teachers in secondary schools to support and enhance their RSE knowledge, confidence, and practice, rather than directly deliver RSE to ākongā.
- Teachers to seek and act on student voice when planning RSE programmes of learning.

Some key recommendations: leadership and environment

- School leaders to allocate sufficient time for health education so that RSE has a commitment of at least 12-15 hours of face-to-face teaching time in years 9 and 10.
- School leaders to create space in the senior secondary level timetable for non-NCEA learning in RSE which is taught by trained health education teachers, again in line with the 12-15 hours per year level recommendation.
- The school board to meaningfully include RSE in strategic planning, curriculum reporting by the principal, and the two-yearly community consultation.
- School leaders and teachers to clarify and strengthen their understanding of the realistic and measurable learning outcomes of RSE and what schools can be and are accountable for through a whole school approach.

Some key recommendations: community connections

- School leaders to provide culturally responsive opportunities for parents and whānau to meaningfully contribute to local RSE curriculum design.
- Better support for school boards to undertake the two-yearly community consultation, including understanding of legal requirements and recommended processes, and support for schools if consultation yields dissenting views within the school community.
- Ministry of Education to consider mechanisms for promoting and raising the profile of RSE in schools and among school communities.
- Parents and whānau to take an active interest in RSE, both inside and outside of the two-yearly community consultation.