

Personal and Social Education Inquiry

Key considerations for the Committee

- Not all young people in Scotland have access to inclusive and up-to-date sexual health education.
- Existing RSHP guidance may not be human rights compliant, as highlighted by the UN.
- Education is a crucial tool to address HIV-related stigma and negative attitudes.

HIV and education

The Sexual Health and Blood Borne Virus Framework 2015 – 2020 identifies the teaching of Relationships, Sexual Health and Parenthood (RSHP) education – which can be taught within PSE lessons – as a **key component in HIV prevention**. Whilst recognising equality and diversity legal obligations, it states, “*RSHP education should continue to be **provided to all young people in all schools and wherever learning takes place.***” How young people learn about HIV and wider sexual health issues is **crucial** to ensuring they have the knowledge and information to make **informed choices** about their sexual activity and the relationships they form. The UN Committee on the Rights of the Child **expressed concern at inconsistent access to sexual health education** in the UK and recommended the subject become “**mandatory**” for all schools¹. Furthermore, the UN Special Rapporteur on the Right to Education has made clear that the **right to education includes the right to sexual education**². Research by the Terrence Higgins Trust revealed **half of respondents** rated the sexual health education they received in school as either ‘**poor**’ or ‘**terrible**’³. Education is a crucial tool to tackle stigmatising attitudes and misconceptions towards HIV. The National AIDS Trust found **less than half** of the British public understand how HIV is and isn’t transmitted⁴, with the Stigma Index 2015 revealing **29% of participants** in Scotland **worry about sexual rejection**⁵.

Academic research

An international review of the impact of sexual health education in schools, including in Europe, found **increased HIV knowledge** across all programmes, with two-thirds demonstrating positive impacts on behaviour, including self-efficacy related to condom use⁶. Kirby, D et al⁷ found education programmes **increased awareness** HIV and risky sexual behaviours.

HIV Scotland research

The majority of Edinburgh and Glasgow pride attendees [indicated](#) their experience of sex education in school was poor and needed improved. Information received from **all local authorities** in Scotland regarding the teaching of RSHP in schools has revealed **inconsistencies** in how the subject is taught, resources used and how young people learn about HIV. Several local councils noted that **they were unsure** about how each school would approach RSHP and that this is a decision for head teachers and/or pastoral staff. Education has been **consistently raised** by people living with HIV as a priority in order to bridge the gap between public perceptions and reality⁸. “**We are withholding key information from young people**” – Positive Persons’ Forum participant.

¹ UN Committee on the Rights of the Child, [Concluding observations on the fifth periodic report of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland](#), 2016

² [Report of the United Nations Special Rapporteur on the right to education](#), submitted to the General Assembly in 2010

³ Terrence Higgins Trust, [Shh.. No Talking: LGBT-inclusive Sex and Relationships Education in the UK](#), 2016

⁴ Ipsos Mori and National AIDS Trust, [HIV: Public Knowledge and Attitudes in 2014](#)

⁵ Stigma Survey UK, [Scotland report](#), 2016

⁶ UNESCO, [Cost and Cost-effectiveness Analysis of School-based Sexuality Education Programmes in Six Countries](#). 2011

⁷ Family Health International, [Impact of Sex and HIV Education Programs on Sexual Behaviors of Youth in Developing and Developed Countries](#), 2005

⁸ HIV Scotland, [Positive Persons’ Manifesto](#), 2016