

YOUNG WOMEN LEAD 2022 - DUNDEE



Reflection and exploration
into the provision of
Relationships, Sexual Health
and Parenthood education
within Scottish Schools

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This 'Step Up Sex Ed' report, developed and published by Young Women Lead Dundee, presents an opportunity for reflection and exploration of the provision of Relationships, Sexual Health and Parenthood education within Scotland. The purpose of the report was to collate perspectives from the public on: what they believe to be the gaps within the curriculum surrounding sex education, what they feel should be taught, and what they believe was most valuable to be taught. Three key topics were selected prior to the surveys being created; Consent, LGBTQIA+, and Pleasure. Such topics were identified through workshops conducted with the YWL Dundee participants, based on their personal experiences of sex education. It is these topics that form the structure of the report. Perspectives of 99 members of the general public were obtained through a survey and it is the opinions of these individuals that form the basis of findings presented throughout the report. The gaps and potential issues identified are summarised below.

- **85%** of respondents received or currently receive sex education lessons during high school.
- **70%** believed their teachers did not have sufficient knowledge to discuss topics covered within the Scottish curriculum at the time they attended school.
- **62%** felt they did not have anyone they could speak to in confidence regarding sex within their school.
- **44%** believed the quality of the sex education they received at school to be poor.
- **40%** of respondents were not taught about consent at school.
- **37%** of respondents stated they feel pressured into certain sexual acts.
- **86%** stated they feel comfortable discussing consent with sexual partner.
- **92%** of participants who do not identify as heterosexual felt they did not receive sex education relevant to their sexual orientation.
- **94%** of respondents did not feel that the facilitator(s) delivering such education had sufficient knowledge to confidently discuss, explore and elaborate on the topics of LGBTQIA+.
- **89%** of respondents raised that they do/did not feel that their sex education within school was delivered using inclusive language.
- **85%** did not feel that a safe and non-judgemental environment was created within their school.
- **85%** of respondents did not find their sex education to be empowering.

The Step Up Sex Ed Campaign is just beginning. It is the YWL Dundee cohort's hope that this report will act as a catalyst for wider discussion and exploration into ways to address the identified gaps in the curriculum. It is clear from our findings the current curriculum does not meet the needs of pupils and does not fully prepare them for navigating the realities of sex. Our recommendations for decision-makers should inform provision of Relationships, Sexual Health and Parenthood education within Scotland

1. INTRODUCTION

The '**Step Up Sex Ed**' Report, developed and published by **Young Women Lead Dundee**, presents an opportunity for reflection and exploration of the provision of Relationships, Sexual Health and Parenthood education within **Scotland**. For the purposes of this report, and throughout our research, we used the colloquial phrasing of "sex education".

Young Women Lead (YWL) Dundee is a localised cohort of the wider YWL programme, composed of 15 women and non-binary people aged 16-30 years old. The feminist leadership programme is facilitated by YWCA Scotland who operate in different local authority areas across Scotland.

YWL Dundee started in November 2021, with the following six months spent exploring, developing and implementing our campaign: Step Up Sex Ed. The purpose of the Step Up Sex Ed campaign was to collate perspectives of the public on: what they believe to be the gaps within the curriculum surrounding sex education, what they feel should be taught, and what they believe was most valuable to be taught. Prior to YWL Dundee selecting the topic of sex education provision within Scotland, the team participated in a series of workshops to explore the issues that, as a group, we believe are affecting us within our daily lives. We agreed that our personal, lived experiences of sex education provision in school and the subsequent effects that this had on us, was the most suitable topic to address. The gaps within what is selected to teach from the current curriculum is recognised through our extensive survey engagement and is the main focus of our report.

With the publication of this report, it brings the culmination of the Young Women Lead Dundee programme. However, we hope that our findings and recommendations will be carried forward for years to come, as evidence and to support a reform of sex education provision within the Scottish school curriculum.



2. METHODOLOGY

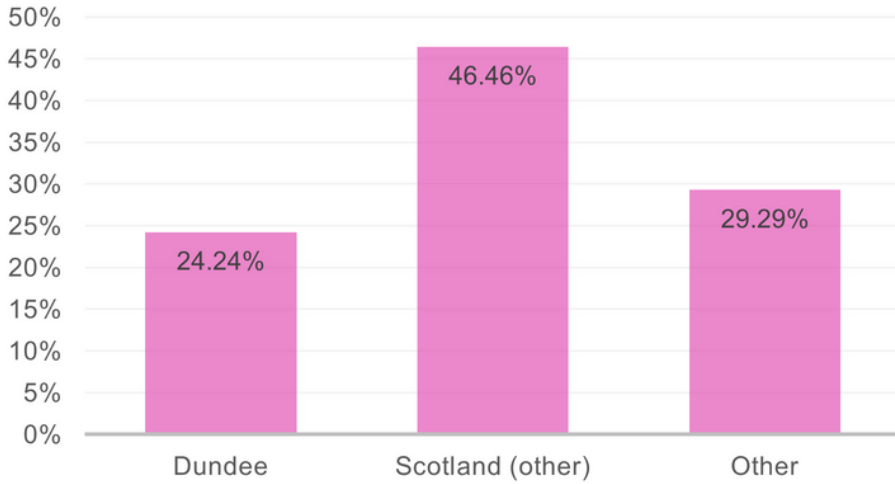
To ensure the perspectives of as many relevant parties as possible were obtained, two surveys were created: one for the general public, and one for teaching professionals. The general public survey was advertised through our social media campaign and QR stickers posted in public areas throughout Dundee. Local high schools were emailed with a link to the professional survey. The surveys were produced using Survey Monkey and consisted of a mixture of multiple-choice and free-text questions. Uptake of the surveys varied, with 143 engaging with the general and 0 engaging with the professional. Ultimately 99 members of the public fully completed the survey and it is the perspectives of these individuals that form the basis of our findings presented.

Three key topics were selected prior to the surveys being created; **Consent, LGBTQIA+, and Pleasure**. Such topics were identified through workshops conducted with the YWL Dundee participants, based on their personal experiences of sex education. It is these topics that form the structure of the following information presented.

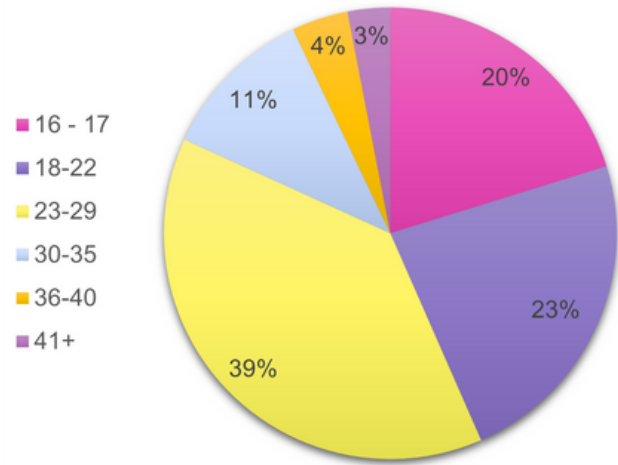


3. DEMOGRAPHICS

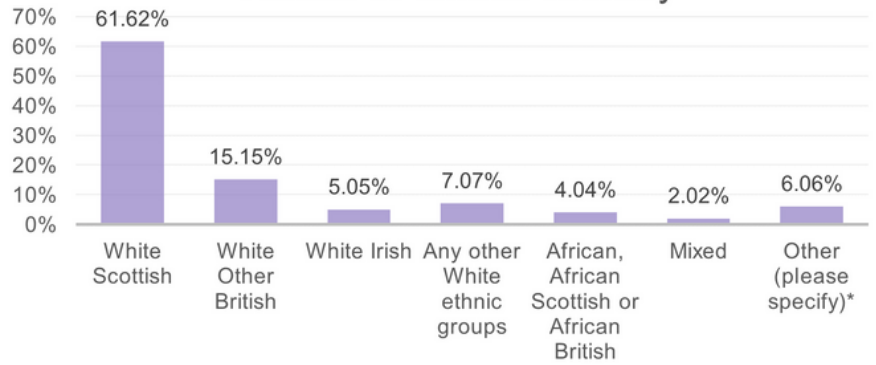
Place of High School Education



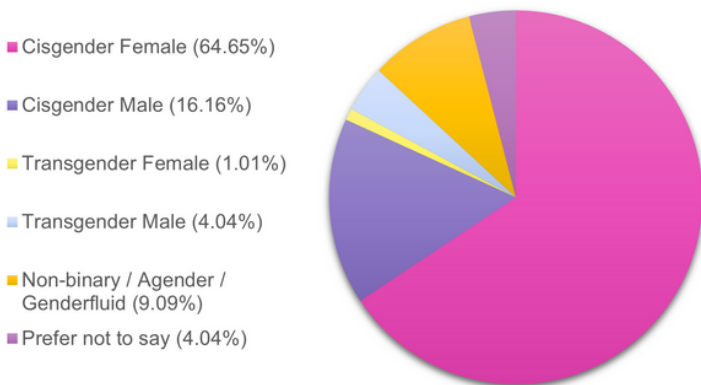
Age



Racial or Ethnic Identity

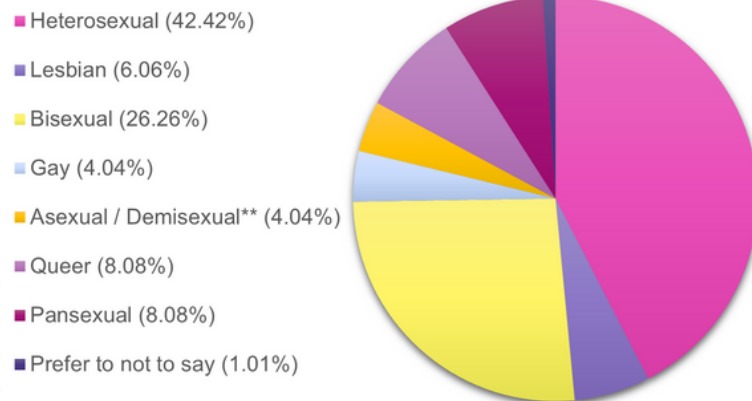


Gender

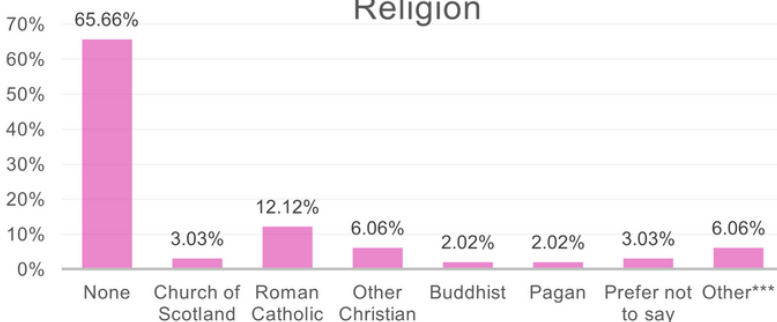


*Other includes - Pakistani, Pakistani Scottish or Pakistani British, Indian, Indian Scottish or Indian British, Chinese, Chinese Scottish or Chinese British, Black, Black Scottish or Black British, White Asian Mixed at 1.01% ea

Sexual Orientation



Religion



***Other includes Jewish, Hindu, Muslim, New Age, The Satanic Temple, and Spiritual with no specific belief at 1.01% ea

Health & Disability

The majority of respondents did not consider themselves to have a disability or long-term health condition (65.66%)

RESEARCH QUOTES

"...Being LGBTQ+ is normal and not an "other" identity to being heterosexual and cisgendered."

"None of my formal/school [sex] education was empowering but what I have taught myself is definitely empowering and has built confidence in myself."

"Everyone should be taught together it's important to understand all genders and sexualities - it can help a person be a better partner and also ensure they learn about everything."

"When I became sexually active I thought it was all about pleasing a male and acting like I was enjoying myself."

"I remember it being very pregnancy centric, how to avoid it and how it happens. Nothing about pleasure or different sexualities."

"I feel there's a lot of conversation around sex positivity at the moment which is great but not a lot of conversation around when people feel like they just don't want to have sex at all and that being okay."

4. EXPERIENCES OF SEX ED

“A lot of teachers are uncomfortable talking to children about sex. Especially male teachers with female students. We weren't prepared for the realities of sex.”

To gain a wide understanding and variety of perspectives, we asked survey participants to complete a number of questions that centred around their general experience of sex education. The key findings for this are below:

The majority of respondents (85%) currently receive or received sex education lessons during high school. Of the 15% who stated that they do or did not, two respondents explicitly stated this was due to attending a denominational school.

4.1 Gender and Sex Separation (of pupils) in Sex Education:

The majority of respondents (52%) received sex education lessons in mixed-gender classes. There were, however, varying experiences of this method. For some, they believed teaching as a collective to be positive as it resulted in all pupils being taught the same lessons, allowing individuals to be more understanding and better partners in the future. For those that spoke negatively, most highlighted embarrassment and awkwardness as the primary factor.

Of the 28% who received sex education in single-sex classes, almost all believed this was sexist, unhelpful and unnecessary. This resulted in knowledge gaps, exhibited ignorance to others' sexuality and immaturity towards 'normal' biological occurrences (especially menstruation). Participants believed this potentially puts young people at a disadvantage for navigating future experiences where they are not equipped with the necessary knowledge for themselves and their potential partners' experiences. Survey respondents also highlighted that **splitting classes into single-sex groups is 'incredible exclusive' and 'assumes genders', discriminating against transgender, non-binary and intersex students.**

Finally, 20% selected that they had been taught some sex education lessons in single sex groups. Almost all of these mentioned that classes were split by sex in primary school, however lessons were delivered collectively in secondary school. During this time, participants stated that they were primarily taught about puberty, with girls learning about periods and boys learning about male arousal. **This ultimately resulted in most believing all pupils should be taught about puberty collectively to create a shared understanding from a young age.**

4.2 Teachers' Knowledge and Ability to Teach Sex Education:

Of the total respondents, 81% stated that their sex education lessons were delivered by a teacher, and **70% believed that their teachers did not have sufficient knowledge to discuss topics covered within the Scottish curriculum at the time they attended school.** The main reason provided was participants thought their teachers did not receive enough training to deliver lessons. Some attributed this to teachers primarily specialising in other subjects such as maths and being required to deliver sex education lessons due to also being a Guidance Teacher. Another reason provided was that teachers were unable to deliver material in an engaging manner to avoid pupils being immature and distracting from the important topics covered.

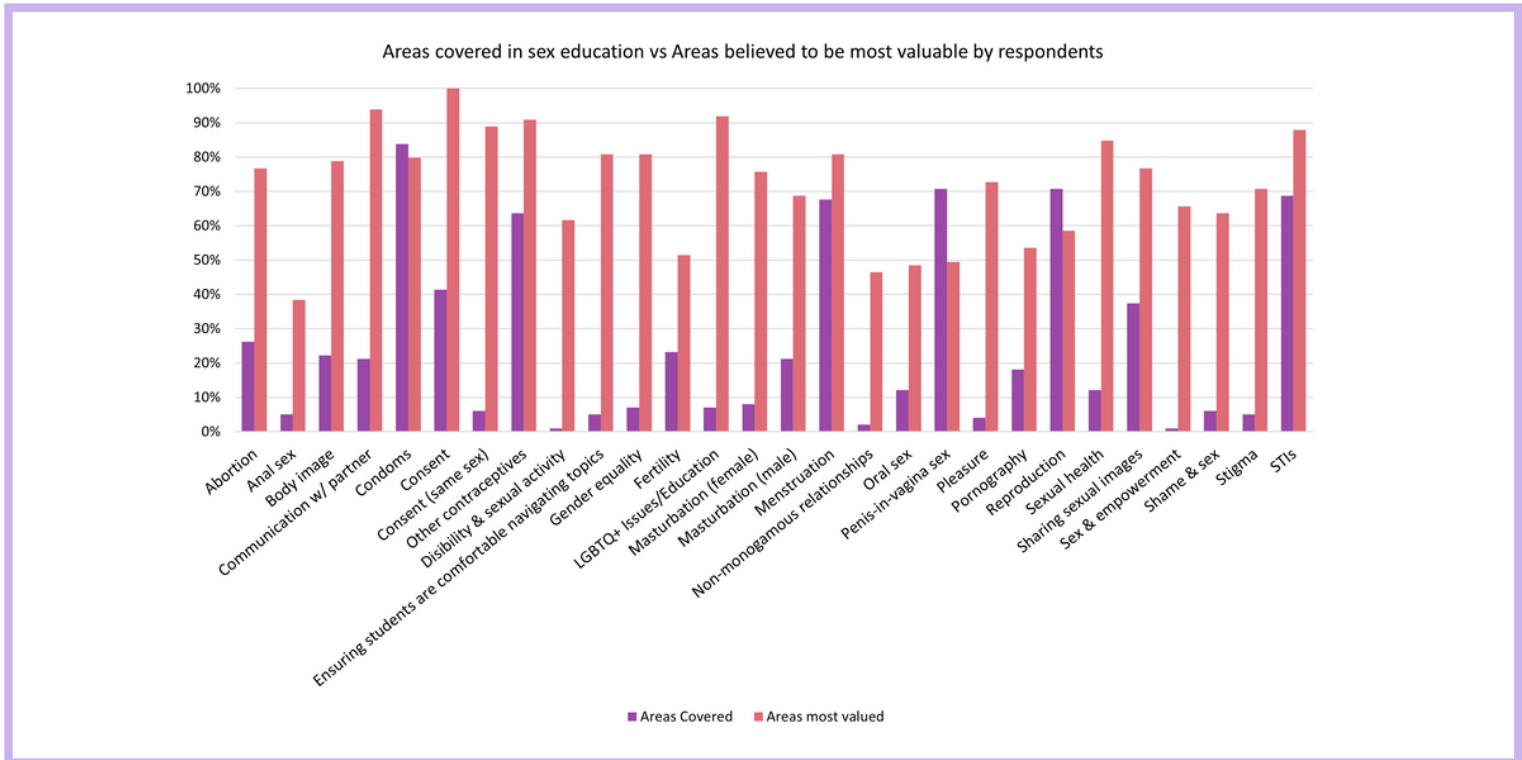
Most respondents believed that teachers were sufficient in covering puberty, sexual health and cis-heteronormative sexual intercourse, however mentioned that some lacked knowledge and/or ability to teach on same-sex relationships. Ultimately they thought this left them unprepared for the realities of navigating relationships and sex when the time arrived. One participant did state that the high-quality sex education they received was attributable to their teachers transparency when answering questions. This teacher would admit when they did not know the answer and research on their pupils behalf.

4.3 What is Taught vs What Individuals Wish was Taught in Schools:

Respondents were asked what is currently or was taught within schools and what participants believe should be taught in schools. Participants were predominantly taught about: condoms (84%), penis-in-vagina sex (71%), reproduction (71%), STIs (69%) and menstruation (68%). **There was a stark contrast in aspects that pupils were not really taught in school and what participants believed should be taught.**

Of the areas most valued by the participants to be taught in school, 100% believed consent should be taught. Whilst only 41% received lessons on consent during their time at school. Other areas that were highly valued by participants were: communication with partner (94%), LGBTQ+ education (92%), other contraceptives (91%), STIs (88%), same-sex consent (89%) and sexual health (85%).

From the table below, the results suggest that an adjustment to the current curriculum or what is selected to be taught from the curriculum needs to occur. It would be valuable if topics outwith those that are deemed necessary or core should be selected by pupils to ensure their needs are being met.



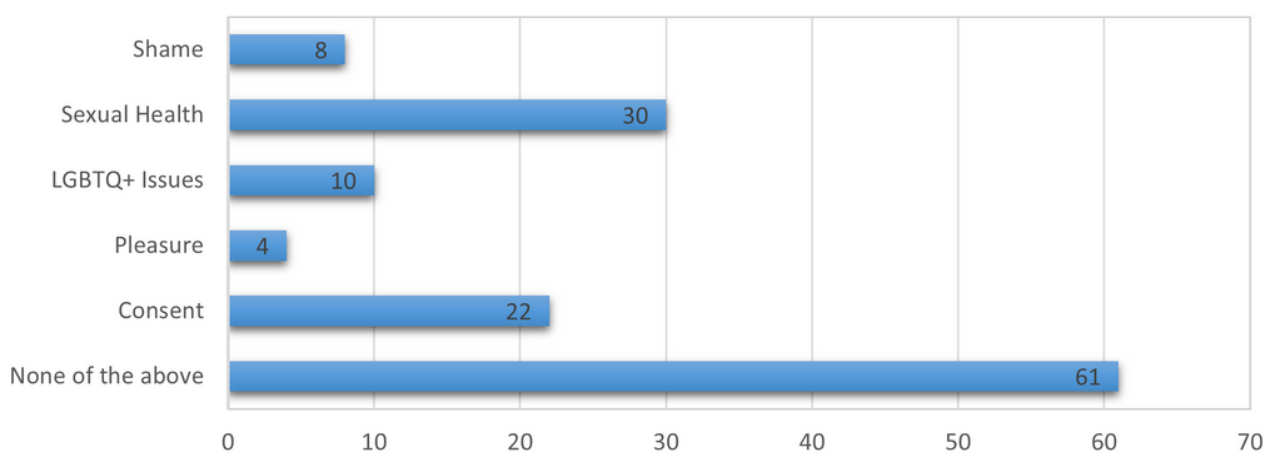
4.4 Ability to Seek Advice and Support from Teachers in Confidence:

The majority of respondents (62%) felt they did not have anyone they could speak to in confidence regarding any aspect of sex within their school. One respondent commented that, *“a feeling of shame was reinforced upon us (for all aspects of sex education)”*. Others highlighted that technically they did have an appointed guidance teacher and it would likely be their responsibility to be a point of contact for pupils to seek support and advice from regarding sex. However, not all participants felt comfortable approaching their guidance teacher. Reasons for this were due to the teacher being older or of a different gender to them. Some participants also highlighted that their school (and some individual teachers) did not create the right environment that pupils felt able to approach teachers to discuss personal matters.

The key, take-home messages that respondents learned in school surrounded puberty, reproduction, and the use of contraception. Although essential, the emphasis on these topics at the expense of other key messages outlined within this report, resulted in students (past and present) feeling most confident discussing sexual health issues (30%) with their teachers and facilitators, over others.

Despite some teachers being willing to provide support and advice on aspects of sex, especially guidance staff, it is clear from responses that schools need to make it explicitly clear that this is an option for pupils. This would hopefully result in young people feeling more comfortable and confident to approach staff to seek advice in confidence. It should also be noted that due to pupils not always feeling comfortable approaching their appointed guidance teacher, **all teachers should be provided with a basic level of training to navigate potential questions on topics within sex education.** Due to pupils often having more contact with subject teachers it is likely they will form a closer bond and feel more comfortable approaching them as opposed to guidance teachers who are often seen on a less frequent basis. This is not to discount the role of guidance staff, but to instead ensure the needs of young people are met. Ideally the staff member a pupil has chosen to confide in would help facilitate a meeting being organised with an appropriate member of the guidance team if more advice or support is required for the pupils questions and concerns.

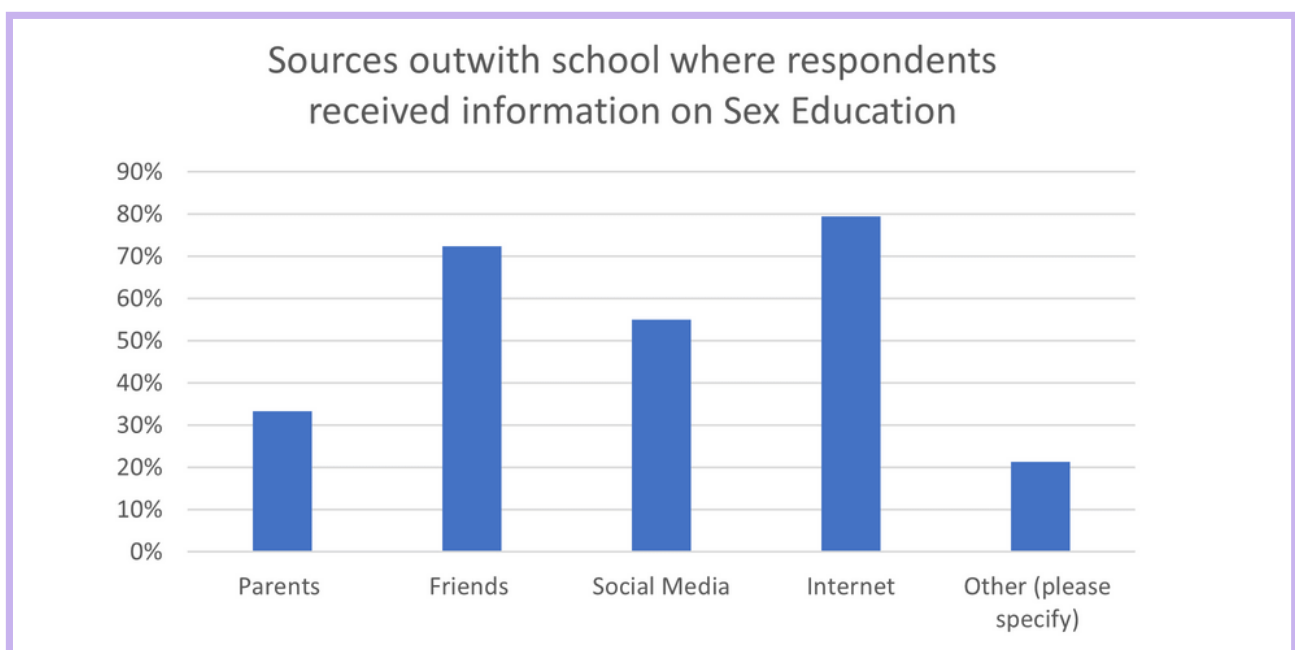
There was someone to speak to in confidence about the following aspects of sex at school



4.5 External and Alternative Source of Information:

79% of respondents gained further information through the internet and 72% from conversations with friends. Of those that expanded on their answers, some stated that through the use of the internet they were exposed to a lot of sexual content from a young age. For some this included accessing pornographic websites, resulting in them being exposed to and learning about sex in an unhealthy way. Whereas others mention that the internet became an invaluable source following formal sex education at school, allowing them to research and learn topics that were not covered in school. However, it was only at a later age was the internet used in a healthy manner. For those who expanded on their answer of 'friends' as an alternative source, some stated that discussions were often generated following rumours that would be passed around school. If an individual did not understand the content of the rumour, they would turn to their peers for information. Through this way unhealthy messages surrounding sex can be learnt in younger individuals. However, as individuals grow older, friends can often be an invaluable source of information through discussing experiences and/or concerns.

With many school pupils now having almost instant access to the internet through their phones and at risk of learning about sex through unhealthy sources, it is suggested that schools should consider compiling a list of healthy resources for pupils. This would ensure pupils are accessing safe resources and have the ability to access further information outside the classroom if certain topics were not covered in depth. It would also provide the opportunity to answer questions pupils had but were potentially too nervous to ask whilst in the classroom in front of their peers.

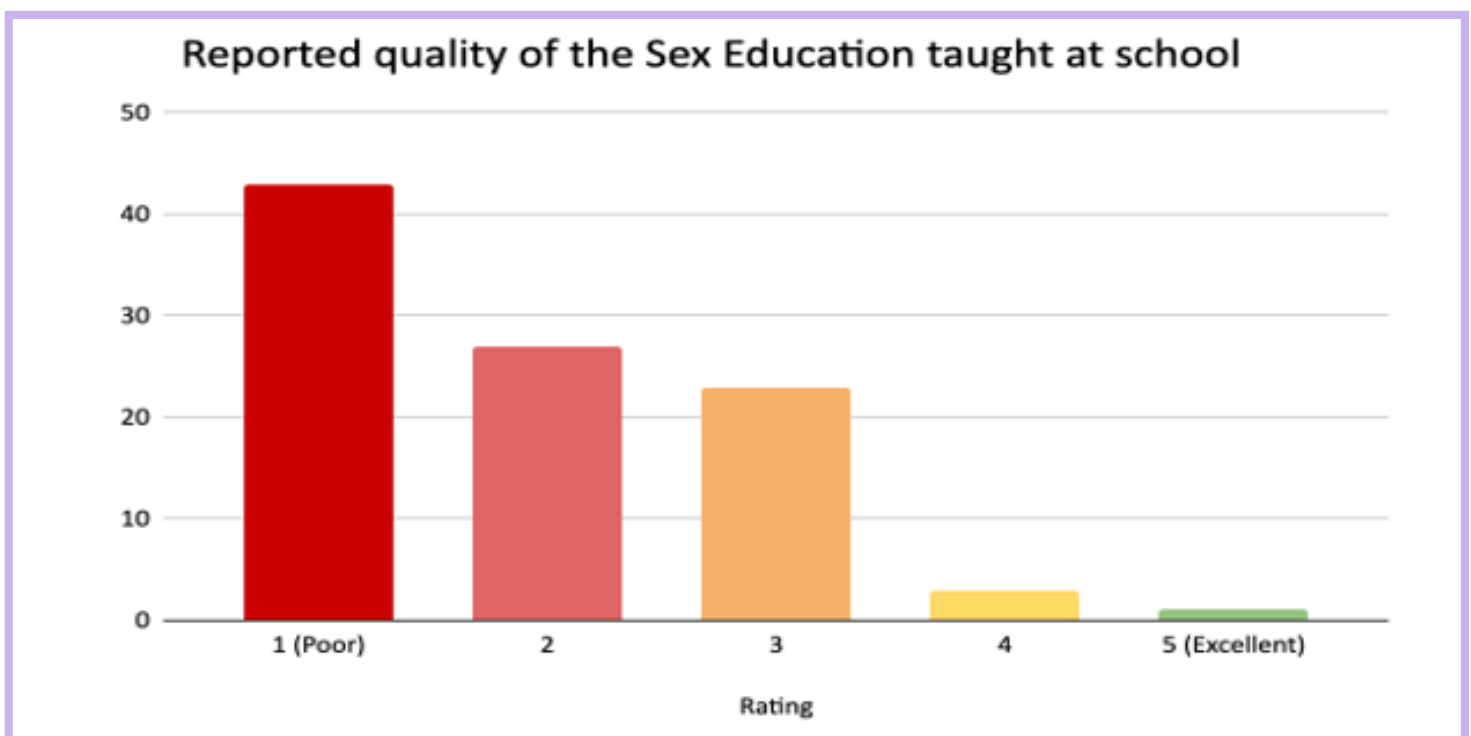


4.6 Rating of Sex Education Taught in Schools:

44% believed the quality of sex education in schools to be 'poor', with the average rating only being 1.89.

Only one survey participant rated their experience as 'excellent'. This individual was educated within Scotland, but outwith Dundee, and attended school less than 12 years ago. The area they attended high school was particularly impacted by a high prevalence of teenage pregnancy, STD transmission and early school-leavers. Instead of the school ignoring these factors impacting their pupils, they instead adopted a 'no shame approach' to sex education. This in turn encouraged open group discussions in class, with questions encouraged. If pupils did not feel able to raise their hand and ask, an anonymous question box was provided to avoid pupils feeling embarrassed. Questions within the box were discussed at the end of each lesson. Pupils also had access to information regarding sexual health clinics, contraception, pregnancy assistance and abortion. They were also able pick up condoms and dental dams for example, at the nurses office or at the end of the sex education classes.

This example provided demonstrates the importance of high schools being reactive to societal trends or changes within their local and tailoring lessons to meet the needs of pupils potentially impacted by these factors.



Lessons should also be tailored to what the pupils wish to learn for them to be best equipped with knowledge to navigate relationships and intimacy.

As a group we are aware that the curriculum has been reviewed and has improved over time. However, with the majority of respondents being aged 16-29 and recently having been through the education system, the results would suggest that there is still room for major improvement overall.

“We were taught in a very black and white way that didn’t acknowledge how gender inequality can influence attitudes towards sex”

5. CONSENT

“Consent for me is the most important part of sex. It is so much more than just saying yes, if you have to convince someone to have sex, use protection...you're breaking their consent”

A key theme identified by the YWL Dundee Team was the importance of consent in any relationship (sexual or not). Although the basics of consent were covered in sex education classes, there was not enough discussion on its importance, and that consent doesn't relate to sexual intercourse alone. Survey respondents shared their experiences with consent and how it was taught within their school.

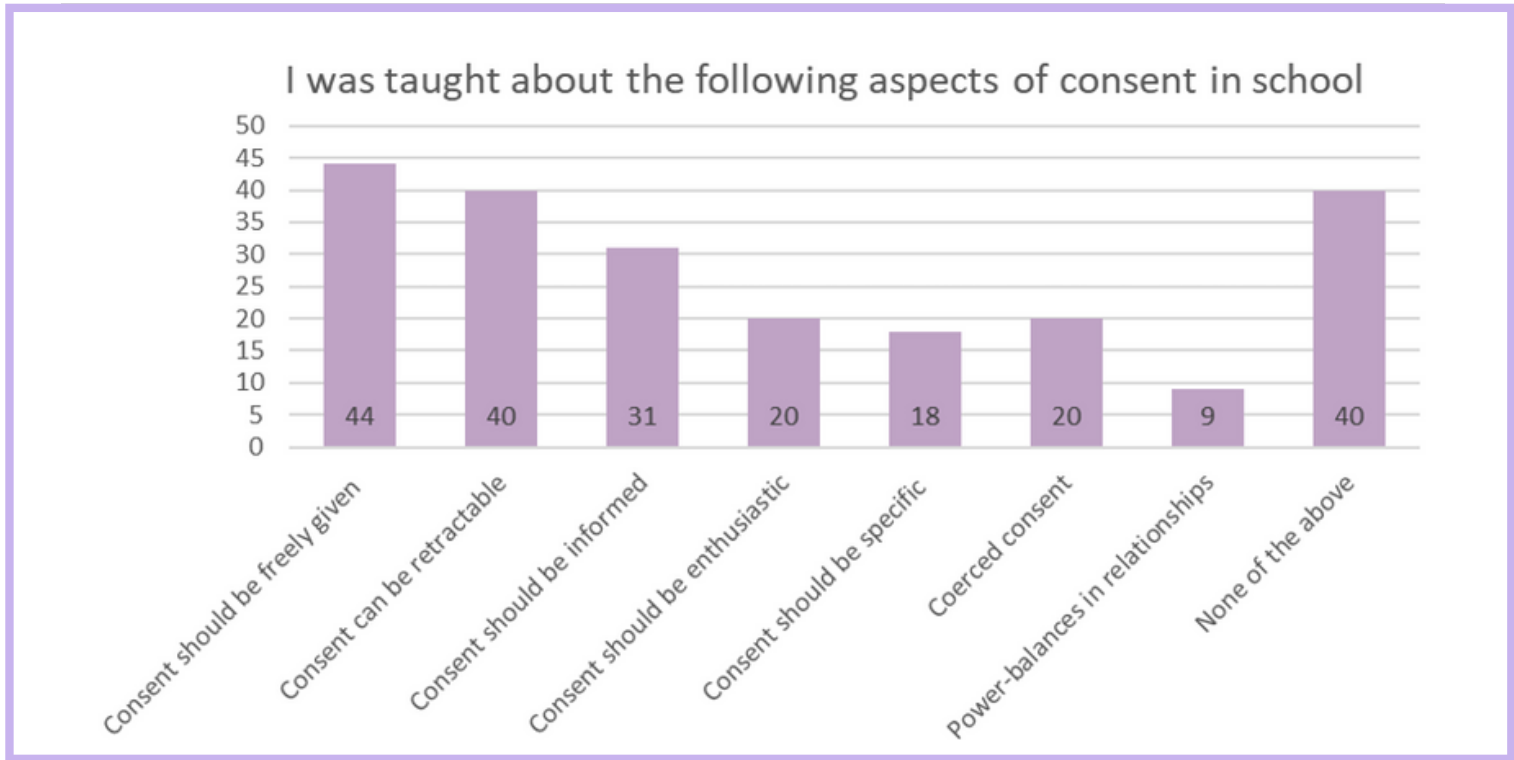
5.1 Definition of Consent

Despite consent being reported by respondents as a topic covered frequently within their education, definitions interpreted by respondents varied. However, the same message appeared clear from the majority: **“No means no”, “consent can be revoked at any time... being pressured into consenting is not real consent”, and “consent to one thing does not mean consent to everything”.**

Some respondents also commented that the discussion of 'consent' as a topic within sex education needs to cover all forms of consent, and not limited to those who are partaking in the conventional cis-heterosexual, sexual relationships. One respondent commented on the notion of **“coerced consent, and what you do about it if you find yourself in that situation”**, and the meaning of consent being **“taught within non-sexual contexts too”.**

The legalities of consent also featured as a highly covered topic within schools too, such as the age of consent, prioritised over actually covering the practicalities of consent, for instance, the physical and verbal cues that are and are not, definitively, consent.

Overall, individuals' definition of consent was found to be heavily influenced by what aspects of consent they were, or are currently, taught at school. Explanations and examples were given for each item of consent. The notion of **“Consent should be freely given”** came out as the highest taught aspect within schools, with the concept of **“power-balances in relationships”** being taught the least. Unfortunately, **40% of respondents stated that none of the listed aspects of consent were taught in their school**, almost the same number as those who were taught that consent should be freely given. The table below outlines the results of our survey:



5.2 Society and Social Media

Society and the media (social media, tv/film, porn) can play a role in how individuals perceive and interpret sexual acts. We asked survey respondents whether they felt inclined to partake in any sexual acts through pressure felt from society or media. Respondents also shared if they felt pressured to avoid certain sexual activities as a result of societal or media influence, through negative or stigmatic depictions of them, or whether certain acts were seen as *"taboo"*.

Results show that the majority of respondents do not feel pressure to avoid or partake in certain sexual acts, however, 37% of respondents do feel pressured to partake in certain acts.

5.3 Relationships and Consent

86% of respondents felt comfortable discussing consent and boundaries with current, previous and potential sexual partner(s). Many highlighted that discussions around consent were central to sustain and foster a healthy relationship, with one respondent stating, ***“It always needs to be discussed before partaking in a sexual act, it’s a red flag if it’s not 100% between parties.”*** A number of individuals did share, however, that they felt this confidence around conversations on boundaries and consent with partners was only developed during their adult life, and that they did not feel confident when they were teenagers, ***“As an adult, yes. Absolutely not when I was an adolescent due to the terrible sex ed I come from”.***

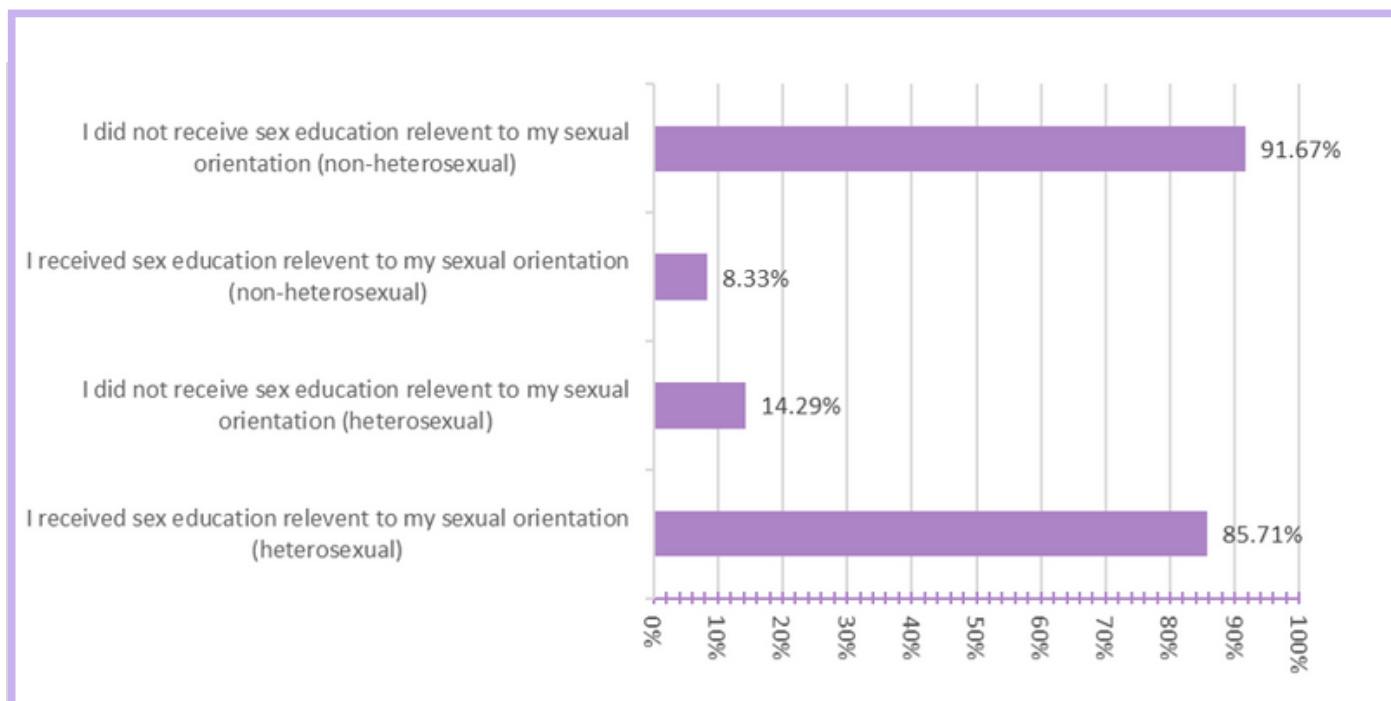
“Someone needs to consent to have any form of intimacy. At 37 I don't think this was clearly communicated when I was young.”

6. LGBTQIA+

"[Sex education provision on LGBTQIA+] was so bad that its taken me over a decade to accept I'm bisexual"

A theme that was shared amongst a majority of the Step Up Sex Ed team was that of LGBTQIA+ representation. It is our experience that sex education does not use inclusive language, and only mentions lesbian and gay sexual orientations. It was our experience that the other aspects of the LGBTQIA+ were not covered, with many members of the cohort learning about some queer identities for the first time in our monthly sessions (e.g. demisexuality, agender). Respondents were asked about their experiences within sex education, with a focus on the discussion of LGBTQIA+ issues. It was interesting to see the responses from those who are LGBTQIA+ vs those who are cis-hetero.

6.1 Sex Education in Relation to Sexual Orientation



86% of respondents who identify as heterosexual felt that they received sex education relevant to their sexual orientation.

92% (44) of those who do not identify as heterosexual felt they did not receive sex education relevant to their sexual orientation, the other 8% (4) of respondents identified as bisexual.

These figures exclude those who stated that they did not receive any sex education at school.

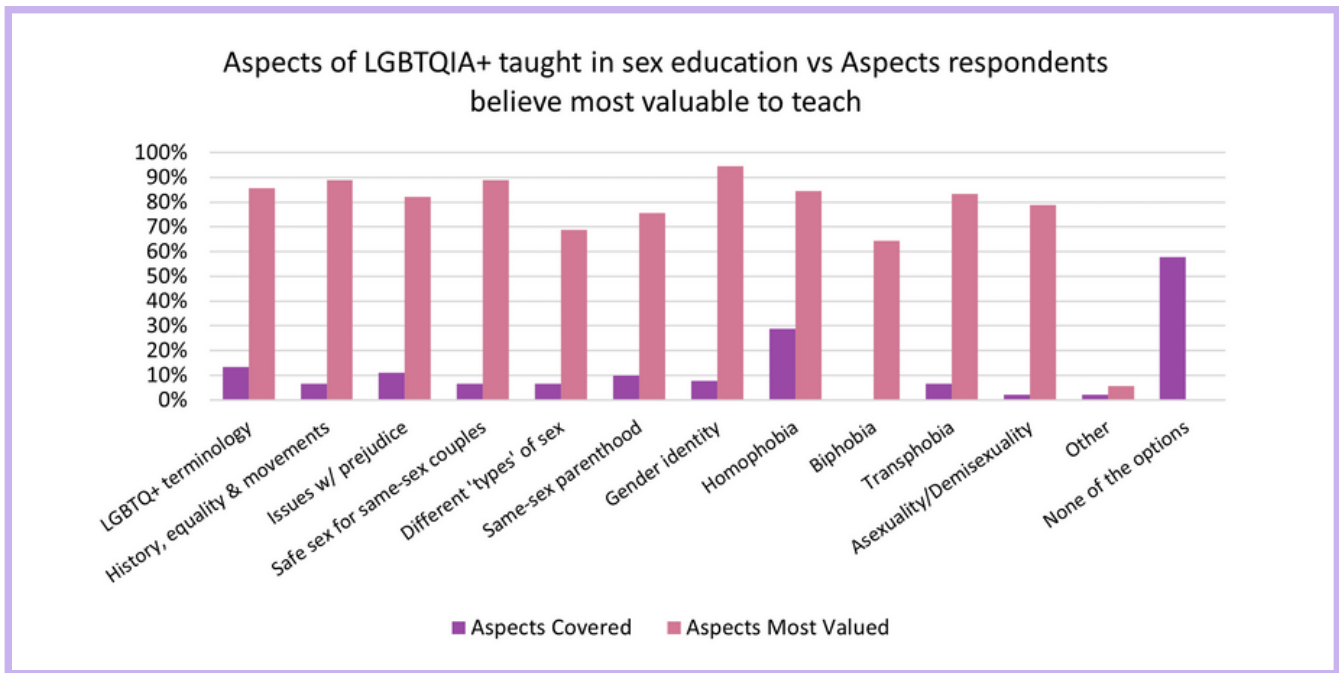
6.2 Normalisation of LGBTQIA+ Sex Education in Schools

Only 7 respondents (8%) felt that LGBTQIA+ relationships were or currently are normalised in the sex education received in school. These percentages are comparable to the responses when only including those a part of the LGBTQIA+ community.

Additional feedback shows that 94% of respondents did not feel that the facilitator(s) delivering such education had sufficient knowledge to discuss, explore and elaborate on the topics of LGBTQIA+ confidently. This is an increase of 24% from the 70% of respondents who felt this way regarding facilitator(s) delivering sex education as a whole. Therefore, it is clear that more training is required of these facilitators, especially regarding LGBTQIA+ sex education.

6.3 LGBTQIA+ in the Curriculum

We were keen to gain insight into the aspects taught regarding LGBTQIA+ issues within the sex education curriculum, and what is seen to be most valuable to teach to young people. The graph below presents a visual representation of our key findings comparing the two. One respondent (educated in Scotland but outwith Dundee within in the past 10 years) highlighted that they received no education surrounding LGBTQIA+ sex/issues, other than being told that *“if we were gay, we’ll get HIV”*.



As we can see each respondent thinks all LGBTQIA+ issues are valuable to teach. Other aspects respondents were taught was the existence of gay people, but no in depth teaching or learning opportunities were provided.

Other aspects that respondents believed were valuable to teach included the normalisation of LGBTQIA+ identities - that they are not "other" identities and heterosexual and cisgender identities should not be the default- respondents stated that they wanted LGBTQIA+ terminology within the heterosexual and cisgender default of their current sex education programme.

It is clear that respondents feel teaching about gender identities is most valuable to young people.

Homophobia was the most taught aspect of LGBTQIA+ sexual education, which while seen as valuable was not in the top three most valuable aspects of LGBTQIA+ to teach - respondents are more interested in the history and equality side of LGBTQIA+ and safe-sex for same-sex couples. Respondents also view transphobia as just as valuable to learn as homophobia - but this is not the reality of their sex education.

6.4 Teachers' Knowledge and Ability to Teach LGBTQIA+ Issues

89% (79) of respondents raised that they do/did not feel that their sex education within school was delivered using inclusive language. Further to this, 90 (78%) would not feel comfortable asking about LGBTQIA+ sex or other issues affecting the LGBTQIA+ community with those facilitating their sex ed class.

90% of non heterosexual respondents do/did not feel that their sex education within school was delivered using inclusive language. 88% did not feel comfortable asking about LGBTQIA+ sex/issues to their sex education class facilitator.

Additionally, of the 13 people who provided their gender identity and are not cisgender, 92% felt like their sex education was delivered using non-inclusive language. 100% would not feel comfortable asking about LGBTQIA+ issues to the person who was facilitating their sex ed class, with one non-cis respondent opting out of answering these questions.

Common comments for this reluctance included fear of being "outed", fear of homophobic responses, and not thinking the teacher would have the training or resources to answer/handle the question.

"It should be covered with every young person even if they do not feel they are a part of the community, help with stigma and having everyone fully informed on LGBT issues...and LGBT sex".

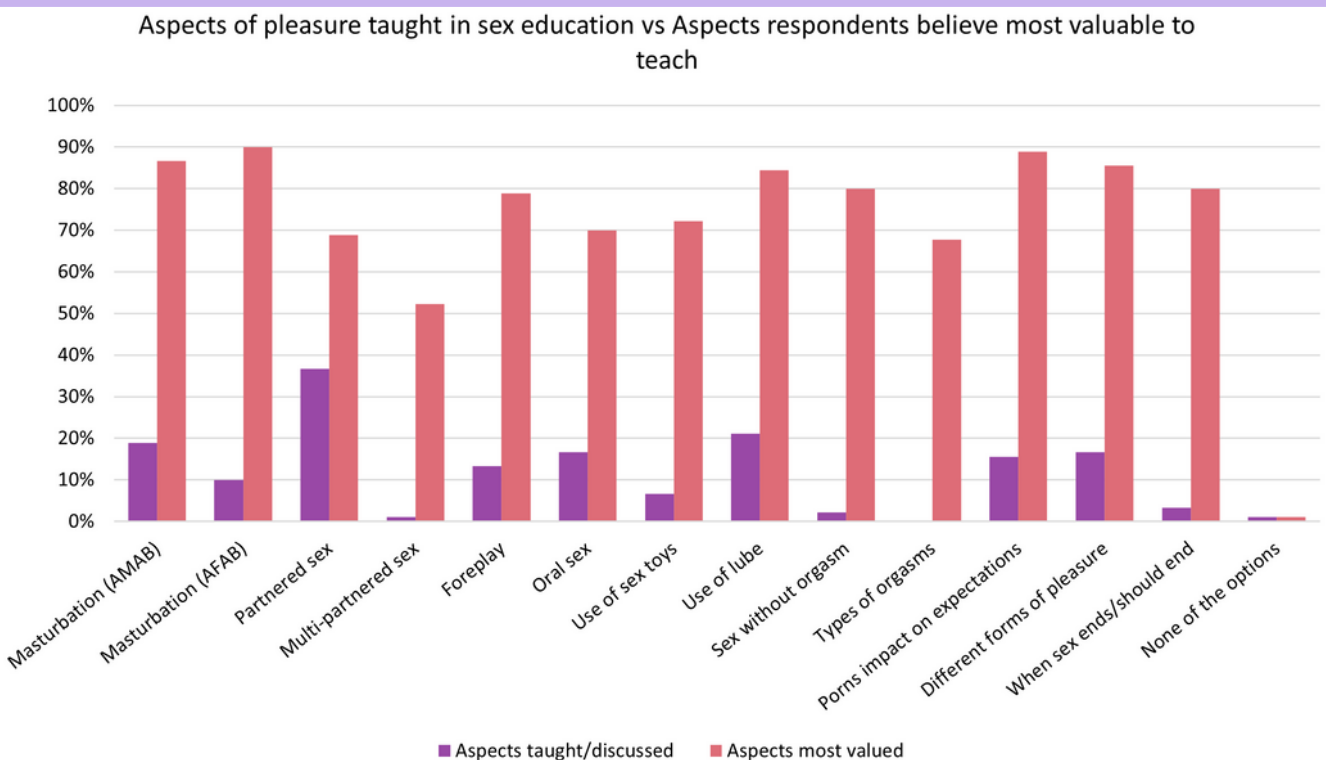
7. PLEASURE

“Masturbation: I feel like it is very normalised for men but not for women”

A theme that was shared amongst all within the Step Up Sex Ed team when exploring our own experiences of sex and sex education, was that of ‘taught’ pleasure, and understanding the concept of pleasure. It is our experience that pleasure was not taught extensively within schools, and where it was, it was centred around cis-hetero male pleasure. We also asked survey respondents to share their experiences of pleasure within the context of sex education.

7.1 Pleasure in the Curriculum

After asking survey respondents what their experiences were of pleasure being taught in sex education, we drew a comparison with what they deemed necessary to be taught in these settings.



Overall, the key messages that individuals took from the concepts of pleasure being taught within sex education was varied. The majority of respondents shared that it was, and still is, rarely discussed within a school setting as a positive thing, or something that should be sought. Many shared that their own experience and development of understanding pleasure was through personal exploration, such as internet searches.

The role of, and the 'meaning of sex', was also heavily reported as being focussed on teaching that it was about *"making babies"* and *"scientific"*, focussing on reproduction and procreation for the majority.

On the other hand, a small number of respondents stated that the key messaging they took away from sex education regarding pleasure was that pleasure can be felt for all partaking in sex, ***"pleasure should be the goal to achieve for all parties during intercourse"***, and that, ***"...Your own pleasure is more important than feeling like you're a tool for your partners' pleasure."***

Additionally, some also felt that the messaging around pleasure was non-inclusive with regards to the different experiences of what 'pleasure' is, or what sexual experiences can mean for different individuals, ***"[We were told] that everyone feels pleasure during sex and if you didn't there was something wrong with you."*** Overall, this messaging can be deemed potentially influential and impactful on individuals' self-esteem, self-worth and their own understanding and relationship with all aspects of sex.

"The whole idea of sex/sexual pleasure - it's got an awkward feeling around, something that almost feels wrong or dirty... even when I know it's not"

8. SHAME AND EMPOWERMENT

“Sex was branded as bad and shameful”

During the analysis of our survey data, the clear themes of shame, empowerment and the influence sex education can have on these became apparent. It is our feeling that notions of shame associated with sex, should be transformed into a sense of empowerment when discussing, partaking and experiencing all aspects of sex.

8.1 School environment and delivery of sex education

The majority of respondents (85%) did not feel that a safe and non-judgemental environment was created within their school. For those respondents, most highlighted that their education was purely based on heterosexual relationships and how to avoid pregnancy. One responded commented that, *“there was a lot of homophobia, jokes about rape, misogynistic comments during lessons and teachers didn’t do anything”*. Another respondent commented that their classes were, *“Very clinical, fact driven classes”*.

8.2 Shame within sex education

Half of the respondents stated they felt some sort of shame associated with sex. A clear theme within these answers was that this shame was centralised around the topic of AFAB masturbation. One respondent stated that *“I was told it was a sin to masturbate”*, whilst another stated, *“Masturbation... I was never told it was a normal, OK thing”*.

Additional themes that arose were that of shame around body image, desire for sex and certain aspects of sex, and the age at which they did/didn’t become sexually active.

40% of respondents stated they had no feelings of shame associated with sex and 10% were uncertain. Elaborated response on this varied, but key messages were that respondents felt *“sexually liberated”*, and that, *“sex is sex... most people do it, some people don’t, and that’s okay - as long as everything is consensual.”*

Many felt their experiences of sex education left them *“fearing having sex”*, and that the main messaging centred on *“preventative measures”* to sexual experiences.

8.3 Empowerment within sex education

Alongside this notion of shame that many felt within their sex education, respondents were also asked about whether they felt their experience of sex education had left them feeling empowered. 85% stated "No" to this, with 5% stating yes, and 10% sharing they were "Unsure".

One respondent shared that, ***"None of my formal/school education was empowering but what I have taught myself is definitely empowering and has built confidence in myself."*** Although this is a positive outcome, positivity and empowerment should stem from sex education provided within schools, rather than young people having to seek this information for themselves from external sources.

On the other hand, another respondent felt that their sex education enabled them to take ownership of their own safety when it comes to sex and they found this empowering, as a result of the increased focus on contraception and recognition of STI risks.

Overall, with the majority of respondents sharing the view that their sex education was not empowering, many of the stated reasons for this are linked to gender, identity and non-recognition of female pleasure. This is showcased through the following quotes taken from our survey data:

"We were taught in a very black and white way that didn't acknowledge how gender inequality can influence attitudes towards sex."

"There was never anything about how sex can be empowering and taking charge of yourself and your identity is empowering..."

"My sex education made me fear having sex, it did not teach me that women can enjoy sex. I was taught that 'at least' your first time would be painful and to expect blood/pain during sex. It seemed focus on male pleasure."

"I used to feel shame about masturbation and asking for what you want during sex... I think it comes naturally with age and maturity, but having friends I could speak openly with has helped a lot."

9. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The Step Up Sex Ed Campaign is just beginning. It is the YWL Dundee cohort's hope that this report will act as a catalyst for wider discussion and exploration into ways to address the identified gaps in the curriculum. It is clear from our findings the current curriculum does not meet the needs of pupils and does not fully prepare them for navigating the realities of sex. As such, we make the following recommendations to decision-makers in relation to the provision of Relationships, Sexual Health and Parenthood education within Scotland:

- 1. *Sex Education resource pack developed and provided to young people.*** School pupils should be provided the opportunity to access age-appropriate, healthy resources on sexual health and education, both within and outside their education establishment. These resources should be signposted within the establishment and throughout their sex education, regardless of whether there is a trained professional delivering sex education within said establishment.
- 2. *Addressing the individual needs of pupils within the classroom.*** Children and young people will benefit from the curriculum being tailored to their needs, with recognition that individual's require different methods to communicating and teaching. Lessons should adopt an intersectional approach and pupils should be consulted on which topics they wish to learn out outside of the core topics deemed necessary (sexual health/reproduction). Incorporation of this into the planning and development of sex education resources and the delivery of teaching is crucial.
- 3. *All pupils should be taught the same information.*** A universal approach should also be adopted when developing and delivering sex education; all students should be taught all areas of sex education, regardless of sex and gender.
- 4. *Consistent and more frequent sex education lessons.*** All students should be taught sex education within a setting that is explicitly recognisable as their sex education subject, classroom(s), and teacher(s), as to avoid duplication of efforts, missed areas of education or disadvantaged individuals in their knowledge as a result of them not being signed up to a specific subject. Sex education lessons should also be more frequent, especially in later years of high school rather than deemed as a block of lessons within a wider subject.
- 5. *Lessons to reflect wider societal trends and norms.*** An effective approach to be developed for investigating and exploring what themes young people and children want and need to be taught within their sex education. Changes and modifications to the curriculum should reflect and be reactive to wider societal trends, norms and developments emerging.
- 6. *Inclusion of social media and internet influences.*** Online sexual content needs to be discussed in class. This is the first exposure of sexual content many students have. The reality of sex vs pornographic content, sharing 'nudes', pressure to perform certain acts, and sex-positive non-school resources should be explored.

7. **Teaching the practicalities of consent.** Consent needs to be discussed in classrooms from a young age for non-sexual situations. Consent education needs to go beyond the legality of what consent is - discussion around coerced consent, non-verbal cues that may indicate a change of consent, and how power-balances in relationships affect consensual agreement.

8. **Sex education should be inclusive.** An inclusive approach for both sexual and gender identities needs to be the norm for sex education. Gender neutral terms, education on transgender issues and transphobia, and an inclusion of same-sex sex education needs to be implemented throughout the sex education curriculum rather than taught as their own modules.

9. **Integration of how sex can be pleasurable for all, and not something to be feared.** Discussion of pleasure, including self-pleasure is important. Students need to be able to know what is normal or irregular when having sex to be able to navigate a healthy sex life. The majority of sex happens for pleasurable reasons, yet sex education focusses on scientific and reproductive reasons. A focus is needed on how sex can and should be pleasurable - not on the negatives that may happen or pain that might occur.

10. **Sex education should be empowering.** A recognition of the concepts of shame and empowerment within sex education and the role they can play on an individuals' perception of themselves and their partners when embarking upon sexual acts must be incorporated into the curriculum. This can occur through open discussion, detailed and researched resources and relevant examples.

For the above recommendations to become a reality, sex education teachers and educators need to have specific training and qualifications to be able to teach their subject confidently. Consultations with trainee teachers, young people, and professionals who see young people in relation to sexual health, needs to be carried out routinely to seek their opinions on what aspects of sex education need to be improved as our societal landscape changes. More funding needs to be allocated to allow these changes to happen. The Education Secretary needs to implement a resource pack which is readily available, easily accessible, and easy-to-understand, to all school age students in Scotland (with relevant resources to each age range). A government official, trained in sex education teaching, should be charged with overseeing this resource and as a point-of-call to contact by school-aged children.

It is our hope that this report is used to guide the development of sex education, can be used to empower other young people to advocate for changes within their school settings and to raise awareness about the discrepancies in sex education provision.

***“Sex Education needs to change.
Everyone needs to learn Sex Ed that
helps them navigate their future sexual
experiences.”***



To find out more about the Step Up Sex Ed Campaign:

Instagram: @step.up.sex.ed

Twitter: @StepUpSexEd

Website: stepupsexed.wixsite.com/stepupsexed

We would like to thank all of our respondents for taking the time to complete our survey and providing us with invaluable information.

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