

Feedback from the draft relationships and sexuality education (RSE) framework consultation

(Internal report)

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Note it has not undergone a final professional proofreading and layout process.

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Summary

This report provides analysis of public feedback on a draft relationships and sexuality education (RSE) framework, developed as part of *The New Zealand Curriculum Refresh*. The feedback covered the content of the framework as well as the positioning and delivery of RSE programmes. Feedback was gathered from 11 April to 9 May 2025 using an online survey form and from email submissions sent to the Ministry of Education. The survey and draft framework were located on Tāhūrangi – The online curriculum hub.

It is intended that the findings from this feedback will contribute to shaping the final RSE content to be included in the refreshed Health and Physical Education (PE) learning area which is planned to be available for use in 2026 and required from 2027.¹

Survey responses

The online survey included two main sections. The first included fixed choice questions about how appropriate the content was for different year and age groups. Each fixed-choice question was accompanied by an open-ended question which asked whether there was any content that should be aligned differently to each year level/age group. The second section asked for overall feedback about whether the framework content will support effective RSE and whether there was specific content that should be added or removed.

Overall there were 7004 responses to the survey. The survey required respondents to pick one main role. The most common group of respondents was members of the public or parents/whānau (64%), followed by respondents in school (11%), and other educational or health organisations, agencies, or service providers (7%). The remaining responses came from student or youth (2%), others including advocacy groups (1%), and respondents who did not provide demographic information (15%).

RSE, and particularly diversity of gender and sexuality, are topical issues which tend to generate strong views in the wider community. The RSE framework consultation was widely published and promoted by a range of interest groups. The method used to seek feedback was a self-selected survey which can introduce bias as, for example, those with strongly held views are more likely to give feedback. Therefore, the findings are informative but cannot be assumed to be generalisable to the wider population.

Some of the interest groups organised large-scale response campaigns, sometimes providing set text for respondents to use. The aim of some appears to be to skew the feedback towards their perspective. As one example, the survey open-ended responses included 2714 copies of identical or nearly identical text provided by around 1000 individuals, that is, about 15% of all survey respondents. The inclusion of this volume of text has exaggerated the bias already expected from a self-selected sample.

¹ <https://www.education.govt.nz/news/consultation-open-draft-relationships-and-sexuality-education-framework>

There was also a small proportion of responses which included repeat text that came from liberal interest and advocacy groups.

Overall, this feedback appears biased towards “less or later RSE” perspectives. Without conducting some form of survey sampling it is impossible to know the overall distribution of public opinion. For the reasons outlined above caution should be exercised in taking action based solely on non-representative feedback.

Submission responses

A total of 574 additional submissions and emails received by the Ministry were read and included in the analysis of feedback. Most (535) were individual submissions primarily from members of the public and family/whānau. A few (39) came from organisations or groups (mostly other education or health stakeholders).

The submission feedback covered similar key themes and topic areas to the survey responses. Submissions did not appear to have the same repeat text bias as the survey responses although small amounts of repeat text were noted.

Some individual submitters told stories of their own or family members’ personal journeys to be accepted for who they are, and stressed the need for supportive school environment and quality RSE. Others talked about the RSE they needed, but did not get, at school to help them in their journey to accept their gender identity, sexuality, or to recognise and try to avoid sexual harassment or assault.

There were two main perspectives on the framework

Survey respondents’ and submitters’ beliefs fell mainly into two broad groups. The largest group (just over half of survey respondents) want to see less RSE content overall or content that was introduced at later ages. In the report this group is called “less or later RSE”. This group mostly comprised community members and family/whānau. Members of this group focused on a smaller range of concerns and tended to offer shorter comments. Some of the areas they commented on, such as the inclusion of “radical” content such as “gender ideology”, are not discussed in the RSE framework. The main areas this group wanted RSE to focus on “less or later” were:

- “gender ideology” and gender identities
- intimate relationships, sexuality, and safe sex
- consent education as it related to consent to sexual activity.

The main areas this group wanted RSE to focus on more were:

- the role of parents
- family values
- the best age to introduce topics (aligned with legal requirements such as the age of consent).

The second group comprised the full range of respondent types and around one-quarter of all survey respondents. Members of this group supported comprehensive RSE, and some made supportive statements about the previous RSE guidelines (Ministry of Education,

2020a, 2020b) (called the 2020 guidelines in this document). They wanted to see a wider range of RSE content that reflected students' lives, and/or for it to be introduced at an age just before or when students were experiencing this content in their lives. They also wanted to see more focus on key topics being developed over time rather than being introduced at discrete year levels.

In this report this group is called "more or earlier RSE". The main inclusions this group wanted RSE to focus on more were:

- all forms of diversity (gender identities, sexualities, family types, and cultures)
- values such as inclusion, human rights, and hauora
- consent education that becomes more nuanced over time
- relationships, sexuality, safe sex, and dealing with pornography
- content that reflects students' online lives
- puberty including menstruation (at the time some students start around age 8)
- critical thinking.

The two main groups had different concerns about the wellbeing of young people

Both main groups of respondents were concerned about the wellbeing of young people. The "less or later RSE" group were concerned about the potential impact of any or an early focus on gender diversity and "gender ideology". Although this content was not clearly covered in the framework, these respondents appeared worried that young people might be confused by a focus on diversity of genders and sexuality. They also considered a greater role in RSE was needed for parents to ensure a focus on family values and the safety of young people.

The "more or earlier RSE" group were concerned about young people's mental health and wellbeing from an inclusion perspective. They wanted RSE to reflect the diversity of gender identities, sexualities, family types, and cultural practices in Aotearoa New Zealand. They considered more focus on diversity in the RSE framework was needed to ensure young people felt safe, could see themselves within RSE learning, and were not harmed by being "othered" by RSE, their peers, or wider society.

There were different perspectives on the framework's appropriateness for different ages

In general both groups of respondents thought more work needed to be done in considering the right age group for the location of topics. However respondents from the two main groups had different perspectives on the content and topics to be included at each age. Feedback that was provided about the content within each age bracket is discussed in sections 4-8 of this report.

Taking onboard diverse perspectives

The feedback results reflect the diverging perspectives of two main groups. Many of the members of both groups had strongly held views about the actions needed following this consultation. Members of the "less or later RSE" group wanted to see:

- less content overall or content provided at later year levels
- more focus on family values

- RSE left more to the discretion of parents and families
- more communication between schools and parents.

Members of the “more or earlier RSE” group suggested:

- prioritising international and Aotearoa evidence-based practice in relation to RSE.
- ensuring the framework is designed around young people’s realities, recognising they live in a diverse world (of gender, sexuality, culture and ethnicity, and family types), are increasingly experiencing puberty at younger ages, and have extensive online lives and therefore are dealing with potential harmful content at young ages.
- listening to the voices of students and experts in the development process.
- prioritising the needs of students, especially those who have the most learning and wellbeing challenges. The student groups mentioned by respondents are those commonly identified in Aotearoa New Zealand data relating to mental health needs, that is female, Māori, Pacific, and rainbow youth (Pacheco & Melhuish, 2018; Sutcliffe et al., 2024). Disabled students and those with extra learning support needs were also mentioned by respondents as students who may experience additional discrimination and mental health challenges.

1. Introduction and methods

Introduction

This report provides an analysis of public feedback on a draft relationships and sexuality education (RSE) framework, developed as part of *The New Zealand Curriculum Refresh*.² Feedback was gathered from 11 April to 9 May 2025 using an online survey form and from email submissions sent to the Ministry of Education. The survey and draft framework were located on Tāhūrangi – The online curriculum hub.

Content within the draft framework is structured around two main headings or themes that run from Years 0–1 to Year 13. The first heading is “Healthy Relationships”, under which are two subheadings: “Relationships” and “Safety and consent”. The second heading is “My body”. The following subheadings are used under “My body” for different year level groupings:

- Years 0–3 “My body”
- Years 4–6 “My changing body”
- Years 7–8 “Pubertal change”
- Years 9–13 “Pubertal change and sexual health”.

For each year level, the draft framework specifies what is to be taught under each of these headings and subheadings. Within each year level row, content is presented as bullet points under these lead sentences: “Informed by prior learning, teach students to know that” or “Informed by prior learning, teach students to know how to”.

It is intended that the findings from this feedback will contribute to shaping the final RSE content to be included in the refreshed Health and Physical Education learning area which is planned to be gazetted in 2026 and required for use from 2027.³

The survey

The online survey included two main sections. The first included fixed choice questions about how appropriate the content was for different year level/age groups within “phase” groupings used in the New Zealand Curriculum.⁴ Each fixed-choice question was accompanied by an open-ended question which asked whether there was any content that should be aligned differently to each year level/age group bracket. The year level/age groups were:

² The development of this 2025 RSE framework was part of a Coalition government agreement. The 2025 RSE framework was intended as a consultation document. The results of this consultation will feed into the revision of the Health and PE learning area as part of the curriculum refresh. This learning area will include RSE.

³ <https://www.education.govt.nz/news/consultation-open-draft-relationships-and-sexuality-education-framework>

⁴ Updated portions of the New Zealand Curriculum are structured around five learning phases: Phase 1 (Years 0-3), Phase 2 (Years 4-6), Phase 3 (Years 7-8), Phase 4 (Years 9-10), and Phase 5 (Years 11-13).

- Years 0–3 (age 5 to 8)
- Years 4–6 (age 8 to 11)
- Years 7–8 (age 11 to 13)
- Years 9–10 (age 13 to 15)
- Years 11–13 (age 15 to 18).

An overall summary section presented fixed choice and open-ended questions about whether the framework content will support effect RSE and whether there was specific content that should be added or removed. Respondents were also asked a set of demographic questions.

Survey response rate

The survey sample was self-selected and the survey received 7004 responses overall. The number of responses varied by question. Some respondents did not complete all sections of the survey. Most fixed-choice questions received at least 6000 responses.⁵ A total of 1320 respondents did not answer any open-ended questions. Where appropriate, the graphs of fixed-choice questions in this report indicate the total number of responses (n) for each question.

For analytical purposes respondents were asked to select one best fit category to describe their role. Some commented they had multiple roles such as parent and teacher. Of the 7004 responses, most (64%) came from members of public or family/whānau (see Table 1). The next/most common group of respondents were school staff (11%), and other educational or health organisations, agencies, or service providers (7%). A few students and youth (2%) also responded. As indicated above, people from many of these categories are also likely to be family members, but in this report are identified by the role they selected. About one in eight (15%) of respondents chose not to demographically identify themselves.

Table 1 Total survey respondent demographics (n=7004)

Group	Count	%
Member of the public or family/whānau	4498	64
School (e.g., teacher, principal)	762	11
Other education or health agencies, organisations, or service providers (e.g., health or youth services)	489	7
Student/youth	162	2
Other	48	1
No demographic details provided	1045	15
Total	7004	100

⁵ The survey was set to allow only one response per device. We noted 560 repeated IP addresses in the dataset. This can occur when multiple surveys are completed from the same home, schools, workplace, or institution (such as a University). This is not unexpected for a consultation of this type. We cannot identify whether individuals completed the survey more than once using different devices.

Submissions

An additional 574 extra submissions and emails received by the Ministry of Education were read and included in the analysis of feedback. The majority (around two-thirds) were individual submissions from members of the public and family/whānau, with around a fifth from other education or health organisations (see Table 2). A few were from students and youth or individual school staff or teachers and the rest were group submissions from a range of organisations or groups including those which provide education or health support, resources, and/or advocacy,⁶ and other advocacy groups.⁷

Table 2 Total submitter demographics (n = 574)

Group	Individual submissions (count)	Group submissions (count)	%
Member of the public or whānau	364	3	64
Other education or health (e.g., health or youth services)	87	27	20
School (e.g., teacher, principal)	42	-	7
Student/youth	42	-	7
Other	-	9	2
Total	535	39	100

Group submissions were mostly from education and health stakeholders and included:

- education and curriculum facilitators, PLD providers, or subject associations
- student and youth development services
- sexual health providers or social services
- government agencies
- children’s, rainbow, or disability rights groups
- school staff organisations, education unions, or subject associations
- others such as women’s rights groups.

Most of the group submissions came from organisations who could be classified as part of the “more or earlier RSE” group described below. The student/youth submissions included some which shared personal stories stressing the need for supportive school environment and quality RSE. We reviewed all submissions to incorporate key themes into the analysis, and identified a cross-section of examples that RSE and curriculum writers may wish to read in full.

⁶ For example, relating to child and youth education, health, wellbeing, or rights; sexual health or violence prevention; or rainbow and takatāpui (LGBTQIA+) communities.

⁷ For example, for parents’ rights or women’s rights.

Analysis of survey and submission data

We noted that respondents who provided comments on the draft framework fell mainly into two broad groups. The largest group (over half of survey respondents) was mostly comprised of members of the public and families/ whānau. They wanted to see less RSE content overall or content that was introduced at later ages. In the report this group is called “less or later RSE”. Overall “less or later RSE” respondents commented on a smaller range of themes. They were generally most concerned about “gender ideology” and the position of RSE in the curriculum. They tended to believe that RSE was the parents’ role or wanted a greater role for parents. These respondents sometimes appeared to be commenting about content that did not appear to be in the framework such as “gender ideology”.

The second group (around one-quarter of all survey commenters and many of the group submitters) included a more balanced mix of all types of respondents. Members of this group mostly wanted to see a wider range of RSE content that reflected the diversity of students’ lives, and/or for it to be introduced at an age just before or when students were likely to experience this content. In this report this group is called “more or earlier RSE”.

There were a smaller number of survey respondents and submission writers who were neutral about the revised guidelines, or who held mixed views about different topic areas (around one-fifth of survey responses, and very few submissions).

Across all groups, many respondents, particularly from the “less or later RSE” group repeated similar or the same content across many of the open-ended questions. Others provided detailed and nuanced responses to each question.

For each student year level/age range question, there was a great diversity of views about what content and topics could be included for this year level/age range with many respondents indicating they wanted to see less of a topic or that the topic should be included later, and others saying they wanted more of this topic, or it should be presented earlier.

Coding open-ended responses

The research team read several hundred of the open-ended survey responses and submissions as these were received and developed a coding scheme to capture key themes and ideas that were present in the feedback. Due to the volume and detail of survey responses (25,918 open-ended comments) we used generative artificial intelligence (genAI) to support our analysis of open-ended survey content. We instructed ChatGPT 4.1 to assign qualitative codes to the open survey responses using the pre-prepared coding scheme and a database of coded training examples provided by the research team (see Appendix 1). Results were reviewed and checked by the research team. NZCER maintains an OpenAI Teams subscription to ChatGPT which does not enable uploaded data to be retained or used by OpenAI for training purposes. NZCER also has an AI policy which includes information on data safety and participant confidentiality. As an additional assurance of privacy protection, all demographic and location data was removed from the dataset prior to the AI analysis –

only the codes themselves and an NZCER-designed key that allowed them to be merged back into the original dataset were uploaded.

As many of the open-ended responses included substantial amounts of text, we asked ChatGPT 4.1 to select up to five dominant codes for each response. This process enabled us to note the key themes evident for each question and for each respondent, and was likely to reduce coding error. We analysed this data to ascertain the total number of respondents from the “less or later RSE” and “more or earlier RSE” groups who mentioned each qualitative theme area at least once (see Appendix 2).

In reporting this data, we supplemented the analysis of the open-ended survey data with data from the submissions. Due to the volume of responses and the amount of detailed feedback on multiple parts of the draft framework, it is difficult to capture all the complexities of this feedback.

Reporting open-ended responses

This report provides an overview of the most common themes that emerged across the survey and submissions. To indicate the importance of the main themes from each group we have included a general idea of the proportions who mentioned each theme using terms such as “around half” or “about a quarter”. For minor themes, or sub-themes we indicated the importance of the theme through use of terms such as “some” or “a few”. We used general terms rather than percentages as offering a precise measurement of each theme creates a false sense of precision. Each theme could be expressed in many different ways, so to reduce the likelihood of coding error we restricted the coding to the five dominant themes per question for each respondent.

The general terms we used such as “around half” are derived from the total number of people who offered comments, not the total number of survey respondents, as some did not provide any comments (see Appendix 2).

Quotes have been selected by the research team to provide a general sense of the main themes expressed as well as the different perspectives on each theme (if the theme was a concern for members of both groups). Members of the “more or earlier RSE” group commented on a wider range of themes, and provided more detailed commentary in the year level/age sections in relation to the content therefore the report includes a wider range of quotes from this group.

For simplicity, we mostly use the term “respondents” when providing overall commentary about the data set. Where quotes are directly provided in the text, we have identified the category of the respondent. Members of the “less or later RSE” group mostly provided short comments and only a small proportion of this group commented on some of the themes. As a general rule when reporting we do not include comments if less than 5% of a group mentioned this theme as this can inflate the importance of the views of a few individuals. For the year level/age questions “Less or later RSE” respondents often provided general comments rather than specific feedback about content within the framework. The “more or earlier RSE” respondents often provided longer comments addressing multiple aspects of

content in the framework. To enhance readability we selected extracts from some feedback and abridged longer responses (mostly from the “more or earlier RSE” group), to cover the main theme or topic in question.

The data is biased and therefore not generalisable

RSE, and particularly diversity of gender and sexuality, are topical issues which tend to generate strong views in the wider community. The RSE framework consultation was widely published and promoted by a range of interest groups. The method used to seek feedback was a self-selected survey which can introduce bias as, for example, those with strongly held views are more likely to give feedback. Therefore, the findings are informative but cannot be assumed to be generalisable to the wider population. A survey sampling approach would be needed for generalisable results.

Bias is particularly likely for this RSE feedback as there are individuals, groups, or organisations with opposing views about the content. Some of these groups organised large-scale response campaigns, sometimes providing set text for respondents to use. The aim of some appears to be to skew the feedback towards their perspective. As one example, the survey open-ended responses included 2714 copies of identical or nearly identical text provided by around 1000 individuals, that is, about 15% of all survey respondents. The inclusion of this volume of text has exaggerated the bias already expected from a self-selected sample. This text focused on how the framework “undermines parental rights” and introduces “radical ideology” such as “gender ideology”. This text was provided through a conservative online radio platform.⁸ Most of these respondents who used this text were members of the public or parents.

The second most common shared text (repeated at least 125 times) was content that came from a more liberal perspective and covered a wide range of aspects of the framework. This feedback included a focus on the need for “up-to-date, socially and culturally appropriate definitions of gender, sex and sexuality” and “information about gender diversity” which is needed to “to better support the needs of rainbow ākonga and support other young people’s understanding and acceptance of difference” .⁹ See Appendix 3 for two examples of survey and submission text guides provided to respondents.

Overall, this feedback appears biased towards “less or later RSE” perspectives. Without conducting some form of survey sampling it is impossible to know the overall distribution of public opinion. For the reasons outlined above caution should be exercised in taking action based solely on non-representative feedback.

⁸ See <https://realitycheck.radio/gender/>

⁹ See <https://insideout.org.nz/make-an-urgent-submission-on-the-draft-relationship-and-sexuality-education-framework-today-before-submissions-close-9-may-2025-2/>

Structure of this report

The next section provides overall feedback on key themes relating to the overall framework and which ran across multiple year level/age groupings. This is followed by a summary of key points for each year level/age group, and a final summing up.

Graphs show respondents' feedback on closed questions across five demographic groups. As previously discussed, respondents were asked to choose one "best fit" role descriptor:

- Student or youth
- School
- Other education/health organisation or service provider
- Member of the public or family/whānau
- Other.

2. Key themes across the feedback

The overall framework and RSE

The majority of respondents did not consider the framework will support effective RSE. School and youth/student respondents were more positive about the content, however over 50% of respondents from the remaining three groups strongly disagreed (Figure 1).

Figure 1 Overall, the content covered in the framework will support effective RSE

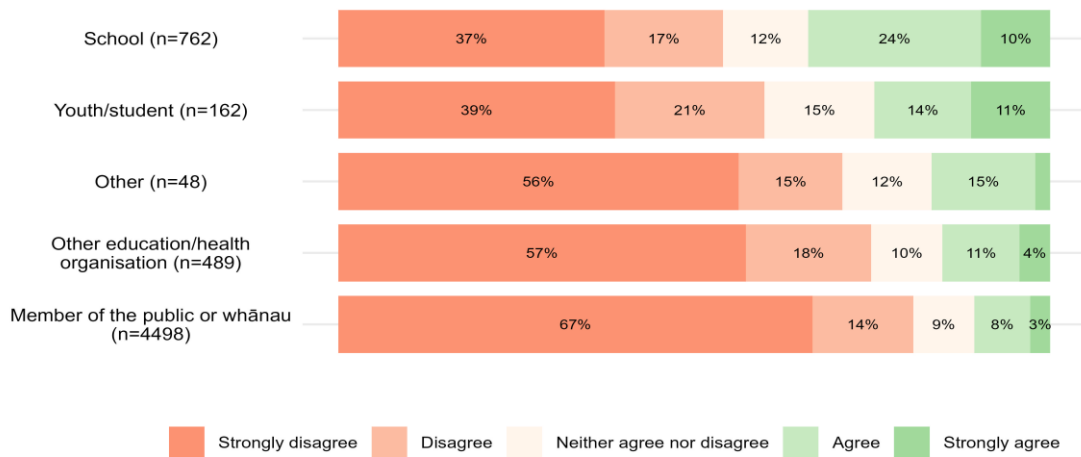


Figure 2 shows the same question presented using data from the two main respondent groups: “less or later RSE” and “more or earlier RSE”.

Figure 2 Overall, the content covered in the framework will support effective RSE by respondent perspective (n = 2797)

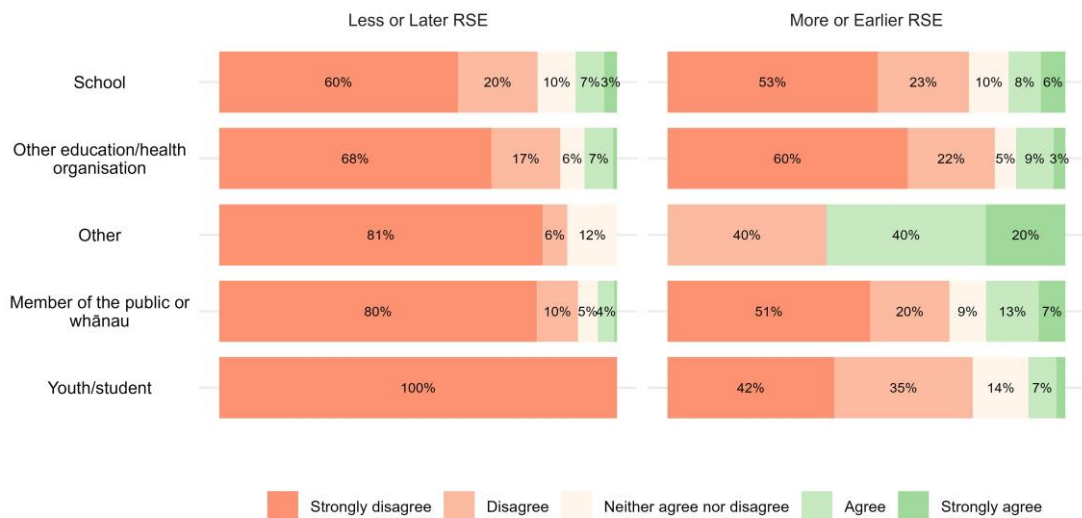


Table 3 shows the respondents to this question grouped by the two main perspectives. Not all respondents completed both the fixed-choice and open-ended aspects of the survey, and some skipped questions, which results in a reduced dataset. Some respondent groups are very small which suggests the graph needs to be read with caution, e.g., there are only 14 youth/students in the “Less or later RSE” group.

Table 3 Respondent numbers (n = 2797)

Respondent type	Less or later RSE (count)	More or earlier RSE (count)
Member of the public or whānau	1720	446
School (e.g., teacher, principal)	125	161
Other education/health organisation	98	169
Youth/student	14	43
Other	16	5
Total	1973	824

Figure 2 shows differing levels of agreement across respondents about whether the content in the framework will support effective RSE. Across all types of respondents those in the “less or later RSE” group were more likely to disagree that this was the case. Those in the “more or earlier RSE” group were more positive about the framework, however substantial proportions also disagreed.

Survey and submission comments indicate some of the reasons for the difference in responses. The “less or later RSE” group (just over half of survey respondents) wanted to see less RSE in schools overall, or content that was introduced later. They were concerned that young students would be exposed to sexual content at school and become confused through a focus on “radical ideology” such as “gender ideology”. In general they held the view that RSE was primarily the responsibility of parents or needed to be more cognisant of the role of parents.

This draft RSE framework is very inappropriate for every age level. Children/young people will be exposed to radical ideology from a very young age. Let parents decide what to teach their children regarding sexuality and stop the extreme push for gender indoctrination. Schools should have no part in this. Stick to the bare basics instead like biological facts, safety, respect and family values. (Survey; Member of the public or whānau)

Why RSE content even being taught to young children?! The content is wrong & is not consistent to healthy family values, it is the parent’s right & responsibility for RSE content at home & not at the school. The MOE does not have the right to teach such content to our children! (Survey; Member of the public or whānau)

The “more or earlier RSE” group (around one-quarter of respondents) offered a different view. They thought the framework did not accurately or adequately reflect the diverse needs of today’s children and youth. They focused on a wider range of themes and content areas than the “less or later RSE” group. In particular they wanted to see more focus on different forms of diversity (of gender, sexuality, family type, and culture) across all parts of

the framework. They also considered RSE topics needed to be better timed to fit when students were starting to experience this content. Some commented that they did not support the removal of the 2020 guidelines as they considered these better reflected the needs of young people. Others wanted to see a more strengths-based framework that focused on student capabilities.

We are pleased to see content in relation to consent being taught across all ages. However, we are concerned that the proposed draft represents a significant step backward from the 2020 RSE Guidelines and may result in harm to many of the young people we support. In its current form, the draft omits essential content that would support wellbeing, safety, inclusion, and human rights. These omissions risk exacerbating stigma, discrimination, and harm, especially for young people who are Māori, Pacific, takatāpui, intersex, transgender, disabled, or otherwise marginalised. (Submission; Other education or health organisation)

It does not go far enough in so many ways. The old guidelines were better. InsideOut has produced comprehensive feedback on these guidelines, and I am in full support of their commentary. Please expand and revise the content so that more people are not 'othered' by these guidelines. Transgender is a real thing, treat it as such. (Survey; Member of the public or whānau)

General considerations

Six general themes that relate to the positioning and development of the RSE framework were evident across the feedback. These themes were:

- the content needs to be flexible and better fitted to the age and needs of learners
- the RSE framework needs to draw on evidence-based practice
- RSE must fosters and protects wellbeing
- the RSE framework needs to provide clear definitions of key terms and phrases
- RSE needs to include more support for teachers and parents
- the RSE framework should not contribute to compliance-focused teaching.

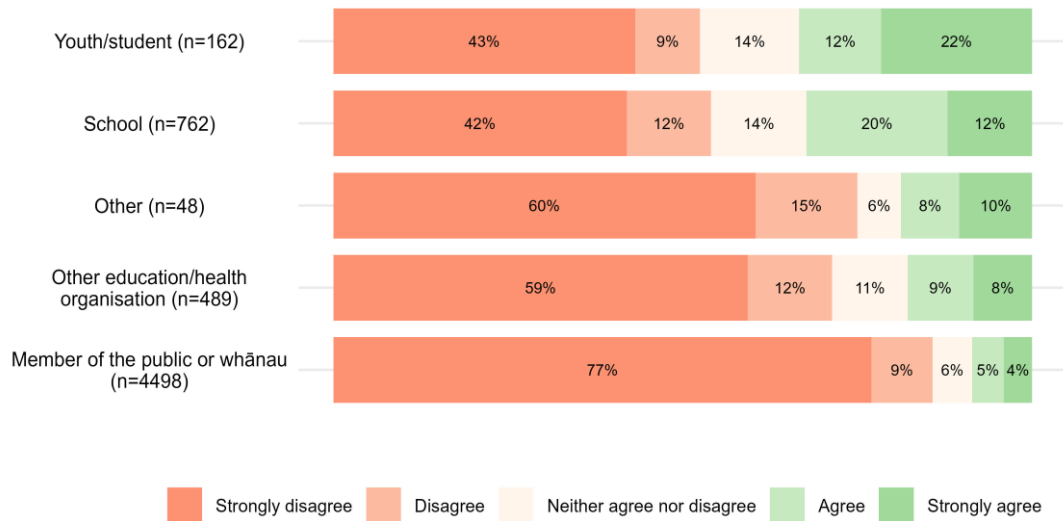
More work is needed on the fit and flexibility of content for learners

Members of both main groups of respondents indicated that more work is needed to ensure the RSE framework includes content that is a good fit for different age groups. This theme was mentioned in open-ended comments by just over half of the “less or later RSE” group and around one-third of the “more or earlier RSE” group.

Only a few respondents strongly agreed that there was no content that should be removed (4-22%) (Figure 3) or added (4-11%) (Figure 4). Continuing the patterns observed across most of the survey, student and school respondents tended to be more positive than other groups, with around a third of these groups showing some agreement that no content should be removed. Members of the public or whānau had the highest rates of strong disagreement.

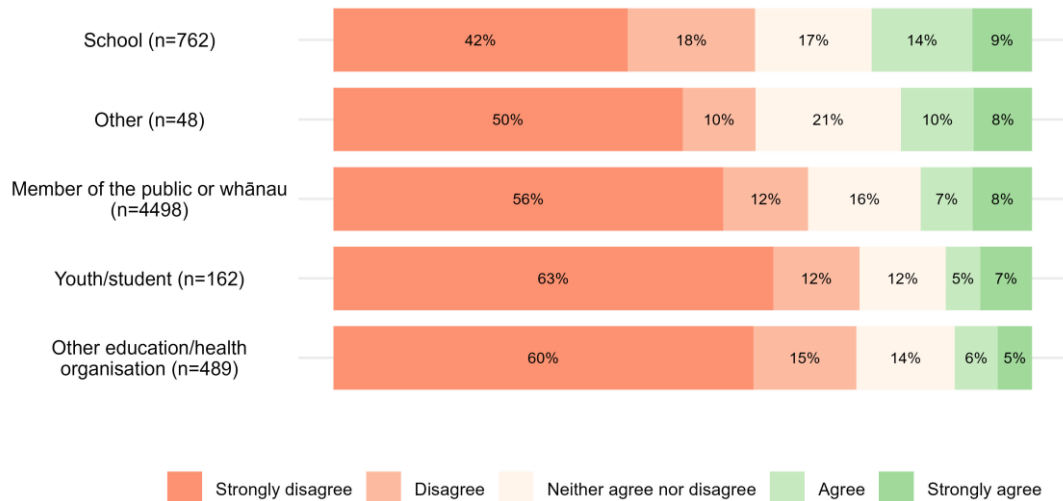
Some noted that content needed to be more nuanced and build over year levels rather than being located in one or two places. Others felt more emphasis was needed on contextualising the content to the needs of students and their whānau and community or that some content could be presented separately to girls and boys.

Figure 3 There is no content in the draft RSE framework that should be removed



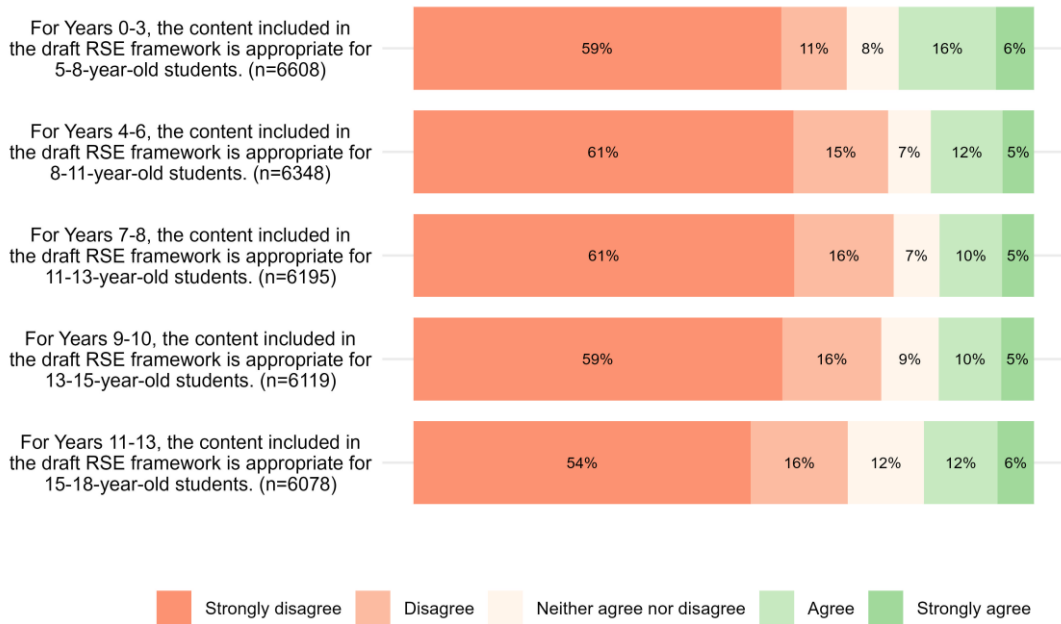
Few respondents strongly agreed that there was no additional content that should be added (5-9%) (Figure 4). In this case, youth/student respondents had the highest rate of strong disagreement.

Figure 4 There is no additional content that should be added to the draft RSE framework



More than half of respondents strongly disagreed that the content was appropriate for each age group (see Figure 5). These results are broken down to show difference across demographic groups in sections 4-8.

Figure 5 Summary of the appropriateness of the draft content by age group



Ensuring RSE draws on evidence-based practice

Around one-fifth of the “more or earlier RSE” group suggested that accuracy and fit could be enhanced by ensuring the RSE framework modelled good practice and evidence-based approaches to RSE from international and Aotearoa New Zealand sources.

[Year 9-10 content] This section of the draft is unsupported by the research and evidence-based approaches, so is unable to engage with this age group effectively. The previous 2020 guidelines were informed by mātauranga Māori and Pacific knowledges, provided by and for their communities, which formed the conceptual framework for the document. The current document’s lack of conceptual framing perpetuates the issues the draft purports to address, leading to greater pedagogical inconsistencies and failing to meet the needs of young people. The lack of attention to LGBTQIA+ students is especially concerning, given the large evidence base that demonstrates the association between prejudice, discrimination, bullying, poor mental health, unsafe educational spaces, reduced community support, poor health outcomes, alcohol and drug use, homelessness, and suicidality... Notably, recent StatsNZ reports demonstrate LGBTQIA+ populations account for a third of New Zealanders under 25. (Survey; Student/Youth)

Only a small proportion of “less or later RSE” respondents commented on the evidence base that might inform RSE.

It has been proven that this continual evil to our children is ideologically driven, factually incorrect. Why do these people ignore the research that disproves John Money's extremely dubious research. (Survey; Member of the public or whānau)

A sub-theme relating to the development of RSE content from “more or earlier RSE” respondents was the need to consult experts and communities that are most impacted by effective RSE. A few respondents noted diverse communities and young people need to have a say in the development of the framework to ensure content was appropriate to them, particularly with regards to the online space as RSE needs in this area can change rapidly.

We query what consultation has occurred with children and young people in the development of the RSE Framework, outside of the public consultation process. We refer to Article 12 of the UN Convention on the Rights of Child which upholds children’s right to have a say about matters that affect them... We advocate for children and young people to be actively included in the development of the RSE Framework and curriculum. (Submission; Social services provider)

I urge the Ministry to... Consult with cultural, LGBTQIA+ and disability advocacy groups to ensure all voices are reflected meaningfully. (Survey; Member of the public or whānau)

Only a small proportion of the feedback came from students and youth. However, there are other sources of student feedback available. A recent review of RSE (ERO, 2024) found that most students (91%) supported RSE being taught in schools. The majority (around 70%) agreed they were taught the right amount of most RSE topics, but only around half thought they were learning these topics at the right age. Students tended to want to learn about topics earlier, for example the majority (around 70%) wanted an earlier focus on friendships and bullying and personal safety (including online safety), and around one-third would like an earlier focus on different sexual identities, gender identity, and intimate relationships.

RSE needs to foster and protect wellbeing

Many respondents were motivated by a concern to ensure RSE is safe and protective of young people’s wellbeing. The two main groups expressed different perspectives on what RSE which fostered wellbeing could look like.

Respondents who wanted “less or later RSE”, or who were focused on family input and values, were more likely to comment on the potential harm that some of the RSE content might cause to young people’s mental health and wellbeing. Around two-thirds made some form of comment about “gender ideology” (this content is not a focus of the draft framework), and some of these respondents were concerned that young people might become confused by the focus on a range of genders and sexualities, distressed by being exposed to adult content, or not know how to manage a disconnect between school RSE and family values.

...it introduces confusing concepts about gender and sexual orientation at a young age it encourages sexualised content during early adolescence it promotes secrecy offering underage students confidential access to sexual health services without involving parents. (Survey; Common text included 32 times)

This framework actively splits families and confusing young children about who they are. Anxiety in children and teens is skyrocketing. This framework encourages sexuality promiscuity and sexual fetish and [is] opening the doors to making paedophilia an acceptable norm.... (Survey; Member of the public or whānau)

Around half of respondents who wanted “more or earlier RSE” also talked about wellbeing. Some noted the diminished focus on cultural and other forms of diversity in the draft framework could impact on young people’s wellbeing. Some commented that this reduced focus on diversity compared to the 2020 guidelines could result in young people not being able to see themselves in RSE, thus “othering” rainbow young people, or those from Māori or Pacific backgrounds as well as a range of other cultural groups in Aotearoa New Zealand. These respondents considered reducing the focus on diversity in RSE could impact on young people’s mental health, expose them to bullying behaviour, and other harms. Some respondents wanted to see more connections between a range of RSE topics and mental health (which is one of the topic areas in the Health and PE learning area).

While I support the intent to develop a consistent, age-appropriate, evidence-based curriculum, the current draft is deeply flawed Most urgently, the draft framework erases the existence of gender-diverse, trans, and intersex young people. There is no reference to gender diversity, and only one fleeting acknowledgment of intersex experiences, which doesn’t appear until mid-adolescence. These omissions violate basic human rights and undermine our collective responsibility to ensure all students feel seen, safe, and valued in our education system. A truly inclusive framework must reflect the diversity of Aotearoa. This includes the lived experiences of trans, non-binary, takatāpui, fa’afāfine, fakaleitī, and other gender-diverse communities, who are an intrinsic part of our cultural and whānau structures. It is inappropriate and culturally insensitive to impose a narrow, monocultural, binary view of gender and sexuality in a country where indigenous and Pasifika understandings of identity are more expansive and inclusive. (Survey; Member of the public or whānau)

Provide clear definitions for key terms and phrases

Terms and their definitions surfaced as a theme across different topic areas, particularly highlighting divergent points of view about definitions of sex and gender. Some of the respondents from the “less or later RSE” group held the belief that there were only two genders and the guidelines should reflect this binary view. Some objected to the term ‘intersex’.¹⁰

¹⁰ These respondents wanted the term to be replaced with ‘differences in sex development/disorders of sexual development’ (DSD).

My view is there are only two genders – male and female. What individuals think of themselves is a personal choice and hence such perspectives should not be included. (Survey, Health promotion/student services provider)

[Remove content about] so called...choosing your gender, and sexual preferences! There are ONLY 2 GENDERS and sex is between a male and a female in the confines of Marriage. (Survey; Member of the public or whānau)

The “more or earlier RSE” group called for evidenced-based socio-cultural definitions which do not portray gender as binary and instead reflect national and international research, people’s lived experiences, and the diversity of views on gender in society.

The proposed definitions of sex and sexuality are inadequate and do not reflect what the best international and national research evidence indicates. As a researcher in the field of sex characteristics I am extremely concerned that the proposed definition is archaic reflecting a view that sex is a binary. This ignores the lived and actual experiences of members of the intersex community. It is a definition that does not stand up to any degree of scrutiny. Further the definition of sexuality needs to be expanded to include diverse sexualities other than the primary four listed. And finally, a definition of gender must be added to the curriculum. this definition needs to be based on evidence and cultural expertise - especially Mātauranga Māori that demonstrates the existence of Takatāpui people. It is clear that consultation for this curriculum was narrow and did not include experts on RSE both nationally and internationally. (Survey; Researcher/RSE educator)

A wide range of other terms or phrases which respondents suggested could benefit from accurate definitions or descriptions were also mentioned such as ‘consent’, ‘inclusive’, ‘cultural views’, ‘trusted adults’, ‘bullying’, ‘healthy sexual activity’, and ‘respecting others’ interests and preferences’.

For the most part this is fine but the framework needs more specification around definitions. ‘Cultural views’ – like what? Is te ao Māori and the te reo terms of diversity used at all? Kids need to feel represented and seen in their education and not as if they’re some freak who doesn’t fit in. Make it accurate to the terms and vernacular and current diversity being used today (Survey; Student/Youth)

What does respecting others’ interests and preferences mean? Who are these other people? What are their interests and preferences? This is another vague statement that can be used to push an agenda that many parents may not want their children taught. Please be specific and document this so parents know what is meant by this statement. (Survey; School staff)

Some respondents noted that parents should be included as ‘trusted adults’.

‘Trusted Adults’ is a red flag to me. Where are parents in this discussion? I am aware that for some children, parents are an issue for them, but involving ‘trusted adults’ is an area that needs to be treated with massive respect to family. (Survey; Member of the public or whānau)

There were also different perspectives on the best age or order to introduce concepts and terms. For example some respondents from the “less or later RSE” group thought accurate terminology for body parts was not needed or could be introduced later, while some from the “more or earlier RSE” group talked about the importance of using accurate terminology

so young people know how to talk about their body and for their safety. These points are discussed in sections 4 and 5.

Offer more support for teachers and parents

A few respondents (around one-tenth of each group) talked about the need for support and PLD for teachers using the framework, particularly in the older years/ages. Some suggested resources and specialist health groups that schools could access for support.

***Recommendations:** Maintain the inclusion of sexual health, consent, and decision-making in Years 9-10, but ensure schools are supported with high-quality, culturally responsive teaching resources. Ensure access to PLD for teachers to confidently manage conversations around contraception, sexuality, and complex social scenarios. Encourage integration with health services (e.g. school nurses or community providers) to support access to accurate, confidential information. (Survey; School staff)*

The majority (around four-fifths) of “less or later RSE” respondents were concerned about the role of parents in regard to RSE. One common theme was that the RSE framework “undermines parental rights” (this statement was part of the Reality Check radio text and therefore was included in hundreds of responses to each open-ended question). Some respondents also provided suggestions for engaging with parents in terms of RSE content which included sharing examples of the content with parents prior to RSE classes, workshops for parents, and including parent representatives in RSE classes.

***Need for support for parents and caregivers:** It is essential that RSE is communicated with parents and ideal that this communication would involve not just telling parents what is included in the guidelines but running short courses for parents in which they can learn some of the skills-based content, especially around consent. This would be useful at all ages so that parents are reinforcing learnings within the home and would reduce misinformation in communities that can lead to resistance to RSE materials. (Submission; Other education or health)*

Ensure the RSE framework is not perceived as compliance-focused

Some respondents from the “more or earlier RSE” group were concerned that the framework was presented in a step-by-step manner and might lead to compliance-focused teaching. They wanted to see a framework that enables teachers to balance evidence-based and developmentally focused learning with a flexible approach that meets students’ longer-term as well as just-in-time needs. Some referred to the 2020 guidelines as good practice in this regard.

Some of the foundational concepts are appropriate, such as understanding feelings, boundaries, and friendships, but the new structure feels rigid and risks encouraging checklist-style delivery. This undermines deeper learning and adaptability to individual and community contexts. The prior guidance was more holistic, evidence-based, and better supported teacher confidence. (Survey; Other education or health)

...this draft framework is prescriptive, depersonalised, and contributes to a silencing of marginalised voices, particularly rainbow communities... It's important to recognise that RSE, as both a topic and a developmental journey, is not linear or structured in the way that core subjects like literacy and maths are. The attempt to apply a rigid, checklist-style model misunderstands the nature of effective wellbeing education. Teachers who prefer (or are required) to follow plans strictly may miss critical opportunities to address prevalent or urgent topics relevant to their ākonga. While there are still some positive elements, the gaps and omissions are significant.... (Survey; Other education or health)

Key themes relating to topics and content

This section discusses key themes in respondents' overall reactions to the content of the draft framework. Some of these themes are discussed further in the year level/age level sections where they tended to be most commented on.

Analysis of feedback about RSE content people thought should be added, removed, or aligned differently to learners' ages demonstrated several areas where perspectives diverged, as well as areas where there were common themes. In many areas where some people wanted content removed or pushed into later years, other people wanted more content added, and for learning to be introduced earlier. Some of the "less or later RSE" respondents appeared to be commenting about content that was not in the framework.

We identified at least seven themes in the feedback. These themes tended to recur across year level responses as well as in the "overall feedback" questions:

- polarised views on aspects of diversity (of gender, sexuality, and family types, but not culture)
- more emphasis on values
- support for consent education but diverging views about the content
- more focus on puberty education that is just-in-time
- more focus on building and maintaining friendships and dealing with conflict
- polarised views on intimate relationships, sexuality, and safe sex
- more focus on students' online behaviours (e.g., thinking critically about pornography).

Polarised views on aspects of diversity

Many respondents in the "more or earlier RSE" group said the draft guidelines needed to better reflect diversity, including diversity of cultures, sexualities, gender identities, family structures, and abilities. Fewer of the "less or later RSE" respondents commented on these four aspects of diversity.

Diversity of culture

Over one-third of respondents from the “more or earlier RSE” group felt the “erasure” or exclusion of a diversity of cultures dishonoured Te Tiriti o Waitangi. They felt it was important to include te ao Māori perspectives, and the perspectives of the many diverse cultures in Aotearoa New Zealand so that all students could see themselves in RSE.

It is disappointing to see limited inclusion of te reo Māori and te ao Māori concepts in the draft. This omission not only undermines Te Tiriti o Waitangi obligations but also disconnects the framework from current practices in many schools that already integrate Māori models of health and wellbeing. Concepts such as Te Whare Tapa Whā, Ko au/Ko aku hoa/Ko tāku ao, and Te Huia offer rich, culturally grounded frameworks for understanding relationships and sexuality. Their absence is a missed opportunity for meaningful bicultural practice, particularly for learning at years 0-3. (Survey; Other)

The current draft deliberately erases crucial content, such as references to trans and non-binary identities, te ao Māori, and the diverse experiences of Pasifika and Asian cultures. This content should be reinstated, as it is vital for fostering inclusivity and respect in our education system. Rather than removing content, the focus should be on ensuring that all students, regardless of gender, identity, or culture, feel seen, heard, and supported. (Survey; Member of the public or whānau)

While most of the “less or later RSE” group did not comment on cultural diversity, a few felt that excluding diverse perspectives (cultural and otherwise) from the RSE framework allows individual families the opportunity to teach it to their children rather than schools.

Primary school children should be allowed to develop without the introduction of concepts that may conflict with diverse family beliefs. By removing specific mentions of trans and non-binary identities, as well as other cultural references, the updated guidelines respect the responsibility of parents to address these matters in a way that aligns with their values. (Submission; Parent)

Diversity of gender

Gender diversity was a common topic of discussion for many of the respondents. Around one-quarter of the “less or later RSE” group commented on gender diversity. One theme was a belief it was only appropriate to teach two genders, ‘male’ and ‘female’ and expressed concern about “gender ideology” being taught at school. Some felt it was more appropriate for parents to teach their children about gender.

There should be no different perspectives on gender. You are confusing these young people. Help them by confirming there are only two genders in this world... (Survey; Other)

There are some topics, particularly concerning gender identity, where I believe the school's approach might be presenting certain ideas as facts when they are actually points of view or what some call 'gender ideology.' It's my responsibility and desire as their parent to help them understand these subjects in a way that I believe is balanced and healthy. When the school takes a strong stance on these personal and sensitive issues, I feel like it's stepping into my role, and I want to ensure we as parents are the main source of learning for my children on these matters. (Survey; Parent)

“More or earlier RSE” respondents felt there needed to be more diverse range of genders included in the framework. This was the most common theme mentioned by around two-thirds of these respondents. Many commented that culturally specific genders needed to be included such as irawhiti, takatāpui, fa’afafine, fakaleiti, akava’ine, vakasalewalewa, or sister girls and brother boys. Some connected the lack of diversity in the framework in relation to this topic to potential mental health issues among children and teenagers if they could not “see themselves” reflected in RSE, and urged for more teaching in this area.

Without intentionally adding back in the removed groups (gender diverse, culturally) this draft framework will disempower minority students compared to the framework it is replacing... It will take away the mana from takatāpui students particularly irawhiti. It will confuse those older students who have had inclusive education to date, and fuel those students (and their parents) who wish to engage in scaremongering, bullying, and hate towards the rainbow community. Whilst there are lovely aspects in this framework, it cannot be accepted with all it has removed. (Survey; Member of the public or whānau)

Removing references to gender diversity, non-binary identities, and non-heterosexual relationships does not make those students disappear, it makes their experience invisible. These are often our most vulnerable young people. Exclusion from the curriculum increases the risk of marginalisation, mental health struggles, and sadly, suicide. These are very real and pressing concerns, far more so than the exaggerated fears around irreversible medical interventions in young people. (Survey; Teacher)

Diversity of sexuality

Members of the “more or earlier RSE” group believed there needed to be a more varied discussion on sexuality. This was a key theme mentioned by over half of this group. They wanted to see more diversity of language such as terms common in the rainbow community like queer. They also wanted to see a fuller range of sexualities referenced such as pansexual, polysexual, and aromantic. It was suggested the writers could consult with members of the rainbow community and RSE experts in this area.

The RSE Framework should enable an inclusive curriculum, representative of diverse expressions of gender and sexuality that exist among young people in Aotearoa. We highlight concerns expressed by groups such as InsideOUT Kōaro (2025) and Sexual Wellbeing Aotearoa (2025) that the proposed framework is not inclusive of rainbow communities or Māori, Pacific and other cultural or non-binary understandings of gender and sexuality. Research indicates that young people experience a range of feelings, both positive and negative, in relation to puberty, emphasizing the importance of education about this topic being safe and inclusive (Marks et. al, 2023). (Submission; Health organisation)

Around one-fifth of the “less or later RSE” commented on diversity of sexualities. They felt there needed to be less or no teaching of diverse sexualities and sexuality education in schools, with most concerned that the topic could encourage sexual activity in younger age groups. They felt this topic should be covered at home in order that it reflected home values.

This framework present all family structures, alternative sexualities, as equal in their usefulness and results. This is patently false. While we may allow freedom for people to make

personal choices it is not correct science to teach children of this age that all sexualities, family structures and choices are of equal utility. That is just social engineering, usually by people who are bitter about their own bad choices. Gender ideology is not scientifically sound for adults, let alone for children. (Survey; Parent)

What Should Be Removed from the RSE Curriculum... Sexualized Content Across All Year Levels Introduces sexual topics prematurely and normalizes early sexual behaviour. Disconnects sexual activity from commitment, morality, and long-term responsibility. Erodes innocence and fosters emotional harm during critical developmental stages. (Survey; Education or Health organisation)

Diversity of families

Around one-third of respondents from the “more or earlier RSE” group were concerned about the exclusion of diverse family structures in the framework.

More information needs to be given about different family structures that include gender diverse and rainbow families with same sex parents for example. Visibility and understanding is key to create acceptance of diversity and reduce bullying of children from rainbow families. (Survey; Other)

Some referred to elements in the 2020 Guidelines they wished to see reinstated in the RSE Framework.

The 2020 guidelines acknowledged the diversity of families and the importance of young children learning that there are a range of family structures including two parent families, single parent families, families with two mums or dads, and parents who identify as LGBTQI+, Takataapui or another gender identity. (Survey; Teacher)

Less than one-tenth of the “less or later RSE” group commented on diverse family structures. A few felt learning about differing family structures should be left to the parents to discuss.

Different family structures (e.g. cultural and religious variations) it is not for schools to engage in religious or cultural studies; this is taught in the home not by some radical teacher. Remove completely. (Survey; Other)

Thinking about the needs of neurodiverse and disabled students

Groups such as disabled or neurodiverse students were also mentioned in a few responses which called for greater inclusion and awareness of diversity. Some submissions made the point that consent education for and about disabled people was key as the members of this group have been shown to experience challenges accessing RSE and also are likely to experience higher rates of rates of sexual assault and abuse than others.

[We] are concerned that there is barely any mention of disabled people or disability within the Draft RSE Curriculum Framework apart from an indirect reference instructing teachers ‘to act in ways that are inclusive of everyone, regardless of differences, such as gender, ethnicity, or different abilities....’ It is important that this is addressed explicitly, as despite the 2020 curriculum being the most comprehensive document produced on the subject for

many years, it was still not very accessible to disabled learners, even though simple tweaks to how it is delivered can make this happen... Other New Zealand research has found that people with learning/intellectual disabilities also experience significant barriers to receiving education around sexuality and relationships due to, for example, a lack of resources available in accessible formats including Easy Read [We] note the proposals contained in this review to make the teaching of sexual consent mandatory for all students as part of the curriculum. We believe this to be vital as disabled people report experiencing higher rates of sexual assault and abuse than on-disabled people. While the mandating of consent education is a welcome first step, we ask that this element of the proposed curriculum be strengthened. (Submission; Other)

Provide adapted resources for learners with ID and neurodiversity, including visuals and beneficial language that can be understood. Ensure curriculum design accounts for sensory, social, and communication needs. Embed trauma-informed approaches in the delivery of content. (Survey; Other education or health organisation)

Focusing on diversity could help diminish bullying behaviour

Around one-fifth of “more or earlier RSE” respondents wanted more focus on bullying behaviour, and some noted a lack of focus on diversity is likely to enable this behaviour. They commented that children who are gender diverse experience high levels of bullying and stigmatisation, which can contribute to higher levels of mental health concerns for these young people.

Our young rainbow people have a right to know that they are normal, and to be represented and included “this is not negotiable” it’s a human rights issue! Furthermore, education about the diverse realities of sex, gender and sexuality encourage acceptance, and understanding and help prevent bullying, violence and suicide. Research tells us erasure sets a dangerous precedent for our community, and in Aotearoa we are proud to be one of the few countries with a stronghold of protection wrapped around our trans whānau. Furthermore, there is a strong cultural and racial bias to what has been drafted. (Survey; Member of the public or whānau)

Others considered there was a need to teach students to recognise and challenge a range of behaviours that can manifest as bullying such as homophobia and transphobia.

[Years 4-6]... There should be anti-bullying messages specifically targeting homophobia and transphobia. At this age the boys in my school were already using slurs such as ‘faggot’ or ‘shemale’ and used ‘gay’ as a pejorative. The earlier this is caught, the less this can happen... (Survey; Demographics not supplied)

Only a small number of “less or later RSE” respondents mentioned bullying behaviour.

I think schools can and should be at [Years 0-3]... be talking about making friends and what to do if you are bullied and letting the children know that they can talk to their teacher if they are uncomfortable about anything - but keeping it simple and innocent as it should be at this age. (Survey; Member of the public or whānau)

More emphasis on values

The importance of values was a key theme mentioned by around half of the respondents from each of the two main groups. Those from the “less or later RSE” group wanted more focus on family values and roles.

RSE should be about teaching kids body safety, respect, and the basics like biology, family values, and the key role parents play. Right now, the framework ...steps on parental rights and brings in extreme ideas that just don't belong in the classroom. Some of the content around sex, gender, and identity is seriously inappropriate for young kids. Gender ideology shouldn't be part of the curriculum (Survey; Member of the public or whānau)

Respondents from the “more or earlier RSE” group wanted students to consider a wider set of values (beyond individual and family) that reflected what they saw as Aotearoa New Zealand and societal views, or that were aligned with a human rights perspective.

'Values-based' must include shared public values, not just individual moral beliefs. A public education system must serve the rights, safety, and wellbeing of all students not just those whose families hold dominant cultural or religious views. Values like inclusion, bodily autonomy, safety, and respect are not niche; they are part of our human rights obligations. The previous RSE guidance struck a much more appropriate balance by embedding values in hauora, equity, and diversity. (Survey; Member of the public or whānau)

Diverging views around consent education

In general, most respondents appeared to be in support of some form of consent and safety education across all age groups. Around half of respondents from the two main survey groups commented about consent, and many group submissions also addressed this area.

... we welcome a compulsory framework being developed in response to the damning Education Review Office (ERO) report 'Let's Talk About It' but we want it to fit Aotearoa New Zealand in 2025 and beyond. ERO reported that 82% of students didn't learn and would like to have learned about consent. (Survey; Other education or health)

Once again there were differing views about what could be covered and at what age. One theme from the “less or later RSE” group was a tendency to view consent education as primarily being about consent to sexual activity. Therefore they considered consent education was not appropriate for younger age groups as they would not understand it and therefore it could be potentially harmful. They felt it was important that children started learning what an unsafe situation looks like and how to say ‘no’ to a range of situations, progressing to a more complex understanding of consent in relation to sexual behaviour as they grow older. A number thought consent to sexual activity should not be covered until students were at the legal age of consent.

While consent is important, discussions of consent in romantic or sexual scenarios (e.g., Years 8-13, Pages 6, 10-12) are too mature and risk desensitising students to adult themes. Consent education should focus on general boundaries (e.g., saying no to unwanted touch) and be age appropriate. (Survey; Member of the public or whānau)

...It's difficult to determine the 'consent' content as there's not enough detail about what this will actually entail for one to make an informed comment or assessment. Is there any confirmation that discussions on consent will NOT include reference to sexual behaviour? My concern is that children of this age group [Years 0-3] do not have the emotional intelligence to understand consent as a concept or even what is safe or unsafe in a situation that an adult would consider potentially dangerous. And regardless of how well such concepts are delivered, for children in this age group introducing them before the required maturity level could easily backfire to inadvertently make children much more vulnerable to grooming and generally being at risk to sexual abuse from adults and other children alike. (Survey; Member of the public or whānau)

Those from the “more or earlier RSE” group tended to define consent more broadly, as being about agreeing or not to a range of behaviours. Many respondents in this group considered that the RSE framework should go further and include more about the nuances of consent, including in situations that are coercive or involve power dynamics or peer pressure.

Include content that reinforces learning about consent, i.e. understanding how coercion, power, and fear contribute – a ‘yes’ from someone who is drugged is not consent. (Survey; Health promotion/student services provider)

Consent education must go beyond basic concepts. Students should be supported to understand that consent can be given or withdrawn at any time, and that saying yes to one behaviour does not imply permission for others. This is critical in developing emotionally safe and respectful relationships. (Survey; Health promotion/student services provider)

Some respondents considered knowledge about consent was particularly important for students who belonged to marginalised groups that are more likely to experience sexual abuse and assaults. Groups mentioned included the rainbow and disability communities.

Consent also requires an understanding of the power dynamics at play in any situation, so proper consent education that is aimed at keeping children safe must also include education about what it means to have power, privilege, authority, and the consequences of these. At all levels, the relationships, bodies, genders, sexes, and sexualities of disabled students should also be acknowledged, included, valued, and engaged with ethically. (Survey; Member of the public or whānau)

The differences in views between survey respondents in their view of the breadth of consent education indicate a need to define the term “consent” more clearly and include more detail about what learning about consent might look like at each age group (see sections 4-8).

Puberty education at the right times

A range of respondents commented on puberty and a wide variety of views were expressed. This topic was raised more often by members of the “more or earlier RSE” group (around one-third). Less than one-fifth of “less or later RSE” respondents commented on this area. Some of the main themes and differences in perspectives are summarised below.

Puberty

A clear theme for the “more or earlier RSE” group was that puberty education needs to start earlier to be aligned with the time children in each class might be starting puberty. Some commented that getting the timing right could be difficult as young people reached puberty at different times, as do different genders. One solution could be to cover puberty in more depth over a number of years. This group also wanted to see more diversity of experience in puberty content.

...the age range for starting this education, at year 10, is later in life than when children will be starting to go through puberty, and there will be several year where the children will be experiencing puberty and noticing differences in the development of different children in their classes. Therefore I think that in year 7 or 8 children should be taught about how puberty can look different for different people, and how some people start puberty at different ages to other people. This is also important for children experiencing precocious puberty (early puberty), letting them know that there isn't something wrong with them just because they started puberty earlier than other kids. (Survey; Other)

Any introduction to puberty should include discussions about diversity in sex characteristics and gender, in line with international guidance. Introduction to puberty should include teaching to recognise that puberty may be particularly challenging for some children, particularly those who are gender-non-conforming, transgender and/or intersex.... We note important-yet-sensitive topics such as wet dreams and erections are not mentioned till Year 7, yet many people experience these things from a much younger age. Again, a lack of information about these things can leave children feeling confused, or experiencing shame. (Survey; Teacher)

Respondents in the “less or later RSE” group wanted a simplified approach to puberty which focused on biological and body changes and was delivered later when they considered children would be more able to understand it. Many commented that this content should avoid “gender ideology” and wanted to see more of a role or connection with parents when this content was a focus at school.

The teaching should also emphasize that children's mothers and fathers are their first port of call if they need more support or guidance and that they should always go to them when they feel unsure about anything. (Survey; Member of the public or whānau)

I oppose any sex education (whether voluntary or not) before puberty. Until a child reaches puberty, he or she cannot properly understand the significance of the subject matter involved. (Survey; Member of the public or whānau)

More comprehensive menstruation education

The need for more comprehensive menstruation education was raised by around one-quarter of “more or earlier RSE” respondents. Only a few “less or later RSE” respondents mentioned menstruation. This was one topic for which there did not appear to be a large group indicating there should be less focus on this topic. Two main suggestions were offered primarily from the “more or earlier RSE” group. One was that the timing of menstruation education needs to start earlier to be aligned with the time children in their class might be starting puberty (e.g., at around age 8 or 9). The second was that there needed to be more

coverage of the range of menstruation experiences including difficulties and variations like endometriosis. Some respondents were concerned that students needed accurate information so they were prepared when they started menstruating, and did not feel frightened or embarrassed by their experiences.

Menstruation stigma and poverty should be discussed earlier in the curriculum, as by Year 10, the damage and shame surrounding either will already be in full swing. Throughout the entire curriculum, there is a lack of education surrounding menstrual differences like endometriosis and amenorrhoea. (Survey; Member of the public or whānau)

Up-to-date health data tells us that over 6% of young people will be menstruating by the end of Year 6, and 20% by the end of Year 7. Some children have not been taught about menstruation and are terrified when it begins. This is an avoidable harm. Health difficulties, such as endometriosis, are not introduced until later in the piece, but these must be introduced alongside other foundational discussions relating to ab/normal menstruation. We know heaps of young people struggle with endometriosis and pain from their very first cycle. They need to understand their options, and how to advocate for themselves with whānau and medical professionals. (Survey; Other education or health)

Differing views on relationships, sexuality, and safe sex

Focus early on friendships and feelings

In general, a range of respondents supported the focus on children learning about respectful relationships and the skills they needed to manage their friendships and recognise healthy and unhealthy friendships and relationships. Friendships were mentioned by around one-tenth of the “more or earlier RSE” respondents around one-twentieth of the “less or later RSE” group. The most common themes were that the RSE Framework needed more focus on learning about building and maintaining friendships and how relationships contribute to wellbeing. Some respondents wanted more focus on helping young children better understand the complexities in friendships, their own emotions, as well as how to manage conflicts and difficulties in relationships. Respondents across both groups wanted a focus on recognising and dealing with peer pressure.

How about teaching children to love and accept themselves for who they are? Not to try to be like anyone else just to fit in. How to avoid peer pressure. Why is so much of this based around sexuality? There are so many more life skills that children can be taught. (Survey; Member of the public or whānau)

There needs to be a stronger focus on wellbeing in social aspect, and schools should have a stronger focus on friendship and collaboration. Teachers are constantly having to deal with problems after issues arise, rather than front footing it by pre-loading. With the time required to teach literacy/maths, we are unable to prioritise this. This has a massive knock-on effect as students are navigating how to be a good friend, a skill which they can only really develop at school... it is incredibly vital for wellbeing for learners as otherwise they are unable to focus on their learning, and there are massive lines for organisations for mental support. (Survey; School staff)

There needs to be a lot more on actual relationships. How to resolve conflict? How to maintain friendship? How to Go the distance? How to stay committed? How to get over difficult situations, how to get through hard times in life. (Survey; Member of the public or whānau)

Some respondents (mostly from the “more or earlier RSE” group) thought that young people needed to start to learn at earlier ages how to identify healthy and unhealthy relationships and behaviours such as coercion, manipulation, and control.

I’m concerned the framework misses early opportunities to help children recognise uncomfortable dynamics in friendships and family relationships; like being pressured, excluded, or repeatedly ignored. These early behaviours are where patterns of coercion begin, and children can learn to trust their instincts when something doesn’t feel right. Teaching about boundaries, feelings, and asking for help is important; but without naming why someone might feel unsafe or unsure, the lessons risk being too vague. We need to empower young children not just to be kind, but to understand when someone’s behaviour is controlling, hurtful, or persistent, and what to do about it. (Survey; Member of the public or whānau)

Views differed on intimate relationships, sexuality, and safe sex

Education relating to intimate relationships, sexuality, and safe sex was an area which polarised respondents. Around one-third of both groups commented on this area and there were a number of sub-themes covered which are summarised below and addressed in the year level/age group sections.

Respondents who aligned with the “less or later RSE” group mentioned a range of changes they would like to see including:

- less focus on sexuality and safe sex and more on abstinence education
- less focus on potential sexual content (e.g., visuals and “graphic sexual content”)
- the need to stress the age of consent (16), and only focusing on sexuality and safe sex (and use of drugs like alcohol) when students are legally allowed to engage in these behaviours.

Respondents mentioned a range of content and topics they did not want included in RSE (regardless of whether they were in the framework), including masturbation, pornography, consent lessons, puberty blockers, chest binders, and different facets of possible sex education. Some considered that sexuality education was best offered at home or wanted more connection between school and home when these topics were being taught.

Remove all sexual content for minors until 15 & a half years of age then only include precautions, std symptoms/treatment/reproduction and biological reality... Remove radical groups from making the sex ed program and the radical resources they provide. (Survey; Member of the public or whānau)

Respondents who aligned with the “more or earlier RSE” group wanted an earlier focus on many topics so they were timed when students might be experience them in their lives.

... the draft: Delays essential learning around consent, sexual violence laws, and identity to an age when young people may already be navigating these issues in real life. Fails to mention HIV, heteronormativity, and STIs in adequate detail. (Survey; member of the public or whānau)

The topics they wanted to see more of, or an earlier focus included:

- sexual attraction including crushes
- affirming a wide range of sexualities and genders (so students understand that whoever they are or who they like; their feelings are normal)
- learning to navigate intimate relationships
- the impact of alcohol and drugs on consent
- safe sex and up-to-date information on contraception and strategies to prevent pregnancy
- risks such as STDs (including comments on the lack of inclusion of content relating to HIV).

A number wanted more focus on pornography (which does not appear to be mentioned in the framework). They considered an early and comprehensive focus on thinking critically about pornography was needed given its prevalence online, and due to research showing that young children access it online and are using it as a source of RSE. They were also concerned about growing evidence of the damage online pornography could do to young people.

In general, these suggestions from the “more or earlier RSE” group align with a harm minimisation approach to RSE, which acknowledges the current reality of the world that young people live in and aims to proactively prepare them with the knowledge, skills, and critical thinking capabilities they need to manage their health and wellbeing. Harm minimisation approaches avoid non-evidenced based RSE practices such as using “fear tactics” or “just say no” approaches such as promoting sexual abstinence until marriage.

Include more on sexual abuse and violence, assault, and harassment

In relation to sexuality and consent and safety education, some respondents considered the RSE framework needed more focus on assisting young people to keep themselves safe through learning to recognise, avoid, address or seek help in relation to sexual violence, abuse, harassment, coercion, and power imbalances. These respondents were mostly aligned with the “more or earlier RSE” group and submissions from sexual health providers. This theme is covered mostly in the Years 11-13 section.

Research shows high rates of physical and sexual violence experienced by youth aged 12-18, most often perpetrated by male peers, boyfriends, or acquaintances. However, students are exposed to the conditions which embed, condone, justify, and perpetuate this relational violence much earlier. Therefore, our recommendations are as follows: 1. Embed a gendered analysis of violence into the RSE Guidelines: Teaching about violence and consent must explicitly acknowledge and address the gendered patterns and drivers of abuse. Schools are not neutral spaces. Instead, they are gendered environments where cultural norms minimise, ignore, or even enable unhealthy relationships and the violence experienced by students.

Harassment and abuse often occur in full view of peers and adults, reinforcing a culture where relational violence is normalised. (Survey; Other education or health provider)

School-based RSE should help young people to identify inappropriate behaviour in relationships; build their skills and capacity to have healthy relationships and reduce perpetration of partner and sexual violence. As well as learning knowledge, attitudes and skills to develop respectful, healthy relationships, RSE should also support the development of positive peer group social norms, as young people are most likely to seek help from one another around mental health and experiences of harm. The bystander approach or teaching young people to safely intervene in situations which may lead to harm, or where social attitudes which promote violence, discrimination or exclusion are being expressed, is effective in developing these positive peer group norms. (Survey; Sexual harm survivors service)

Abuse often comes from family and trusted adults

A range of submissions and survey responses presented personal stories of harm and noted they could have benefited from RSE that helped them recognise abusive behaviours. A second theme in these submissions, and some survey responses, was the need for more focus on educating young people that abuse most commonly comes from known adults **and** youth such as peers, siblings and other family members, and people who could be described as “trusted adults” (e.g., sports coaches or members of organised religions) and not strangers. In general, this was one reason some respondents noted there needed to be a clearer definition of “trusted adults” and more understanding of when someone was not acting like a “trusted adult” or youth.

...Our children must know what abuse and manipulation is, even at the age of 5... I also understand the new guidelines remove much of the discussion of power imbalance in discussing what consent looks like. Identifying power imbalance, as in abuse by teachers and pastors, is an important topic to discuss with children, right to late adolescence. It is fundamental in understanding when they are being groomed and manipulated... .. To revert to a prudish morality from 50 years ago, as when I was young, in the name of simplistic 'common sense', shows how divorced the advocates of the RSE refresh are from our very real world. Pre-arming our youngest citizens with high-quality knowledge is their best protection.. (Submission; Member of the public or whānau)

Include more on laws and legal behaviours

Some respondents from both main groups wanted more focus on laws and rights. Around one-fifth of respondents from the “less or later RSE” group commented on this area. They would like to see more focus on the age of consent, and laws relating to harmful digital communications and sexual offenses, as part of safety education.

Introduction to laws on sexual violence are not mentioned until ages 13-14, however many people of this age are often already exploring intimate relationships and can sometimes be in abusive dynamics with adults. Knowledge of these laws could help keep them safe. Likewise, the laws clearly articulate what is right and wrong in intimate relationships, discussions around these laws and consent can help young people identify and choose safer, respectful, consensual behaviours. (Survey; Member of the public or whānau)

Consent education needs to recognise that sexual relations are illegal for under 16s. ... Yes, some children are engaging in early sexual behaviour for a variety of reasons. The answer, though, is not teaching children to manage all this, but to teach teachers to manage it and set an expectation that they will create a positive classroom culture and report red flags to appropriate authorities. (Survey; Member of the public or whānau)

A small number of “more or earlier RSE” respondents commented on this theme. They tended to want a focus on laws from an ethics and relational perspective, that is, that laws protect young people and uphold their rights. These respondents were concerned that there might be too much emphasis on legal requirements. They wanted more opportunities for young people to develop empathy for others and understandings about a range of behaviours that might cause harm to others.

I support that students should learn about healthy online behaviour, positive communication, sexual orientations, and consent. I believe that these students should learn not only about the legality of consent, but also about the ethics of consent. (Survey; School staff)

Include content relating to students’ online behaviours

Around one-third of “more or earlier RSE” respondents considered the framework needed to be more cognisant of students’ online lives and support young people to learn how to identify and reduce the potential harms they might face in this space including its potential impact on mental health. “Less or later RSE” respondents were less concerned about online behaviours.

Thinking critically about digital citizenship, safety, and online harm

Providing RSE that helps young people safely navigate online spaces was important to some respondents who were aware that students were increasingly getting their information about sex and sexuality from online sources. Some respondents talked about the need for RSE to support students to think critically about digital and online content, and to understand the harms these could cause. Digital safety topics included:

- thinking critically about online pornography (addressed above)
- the nuances of consent in an online environment
- thinking critically about online portrayals of body image and body shaming
- thinking critically about sexting and social media pressure
- thinking critically about the role of social media influencers
- how online spaces could be places where students experience grooming or harassment
- how to report harm.

A few also mentioned online gaming environments. Some wanted a more explicit connection to be made between online environments and harm to mental health (a related topic in the Health and PE learning area).

By ages 11-13, students are often already exposed, directly or indirectly, to complex topics such as pornography, coercion, grooming, and sexting. The "sending nudes" culture...can begin as early as 9-10 years old. Therefore, discussions on these topics must begin no later than Year 5, with Years 7-8 building on this foundation through honest, age-appropriate education that empowers students with the knowledge and tools to navigate these realities safely... practical strategies for responding to unsafe digital interactions, and discussions around legal implications (e.g. harmful digital communications, age of consent, and content classification laws) should be gradually introduced with developmentally appropriate framing. (Survey; Health promotion/student services provider)

Parents are often not up to date with what young people are facing. In a digital age, many parents do not understand how early and frequently young people encounter online pornography, body image pressures, and digital harassment. Without accurate, proactive education in schools, children turn to TikTok, YouTube, or peers to learn about sex and relationships – often absorbing harmful and misleading messages. Avoiding topics like pornography or consent doesn't protect children; it abandons them... (Survey; Member of the public or whānau)

...RSE needs to focus on embedding ideas about "ethical digital citizenship and critical thinking" this is a module that can expand and develop over age groups. Navigating the topic this way "as opposed to "online safety", a vague term that speaks again to a risk-centred lens would equip students with the fundamental understanding of how to approach and conduct themselves online that they can then apply to new and changing contexts as and when they develop. (Survey; Other education or health provider)

Only a small proportion of "less or later RSE" respondents commented on online behaviours. These comments tended to focus on restricting or monitoring access to devices.

As a general rule I think it is the role of parents at [Years 0-3] to be talking to their children about what is safe and unsafe. Children at this age are so innocent and we should be protecting that - maybe the more appropriate thing is to teach parents how to create safe environments for their children and to protect them from online content which is not appropriate for their age (Survey; Member of the public or whānau)

Digital devices move to 6-7. A child aged 5-6 should have no unsupervised time browsing so content would go over their heads. (Survey; Member of the public or whānau)

3. The fit of content to age group

The following sections present respondents' views on the appropriateness of the draft framework content for each target year level/age group. For each year level/age there was considerable diversity of views about which content or topics could be included. The tables in each section show that some themes were mentioned across all year level/age groups and others were a focus for a particular year level/age group. As one example, online behaviours was mentioned the most at Years 7-8.

For each year level/age group we present:

- a graph showing the responses to a fixed choice question about whether the content included in the draft RSE framework was considered appropriate for this age group by a range of respondent groups.
- a table of the main themes and topics mentioned by 20% or more of the two main respondent groups in the open-ended question about which content should be aligned differently to the age of the learner.
- a short summary of particularly areas of interest at this year level/age group.

Overall student and school respondents were most likely to agree the content was appropriate for each year level/age group, and members of the public and whānau were the least likely.

Members of the "less or later RSE" group tended to comment on the same themes across age groups therefore we have summarised these themes in the previous section. Members of the "more or earlier RSE" group commented on a wider range of themes and were more likely to include commentary that referred to a particular year level/age group. Therefore more quotes from these respondents are included in the year level/age group sections.

Many respondents talked about the areas that were most important to them, which did not necessarily answer the question about what content that could be aligned differently. Some respondents used the same text for every year group question. Given the diversity of views and the bias in the data, it is challenging to draw any clear conclusions about the best location for age-appropriate content from this feedback alone.

4. Years 0–3 (age 5–8)

Figure 6 shows the extent to which the different respondent groups agreed the draft content was appropriate for Years 0-3. Respondents were evenly split about whether the content was appropriate. School and youth/student respondents were more positive. The majority of other respondent groups disagreed that the content was appropriate for this year level/age group. Members of the public or whānau and 'Other' respondents showed the most disagreement. This pattern remained similar across all the other questions about year level appropriateness. Respondents provided different reasons for their level of disagreement.

Figure 6 For Years 0–3, the draft content is appropriate for 5–8 year-olds

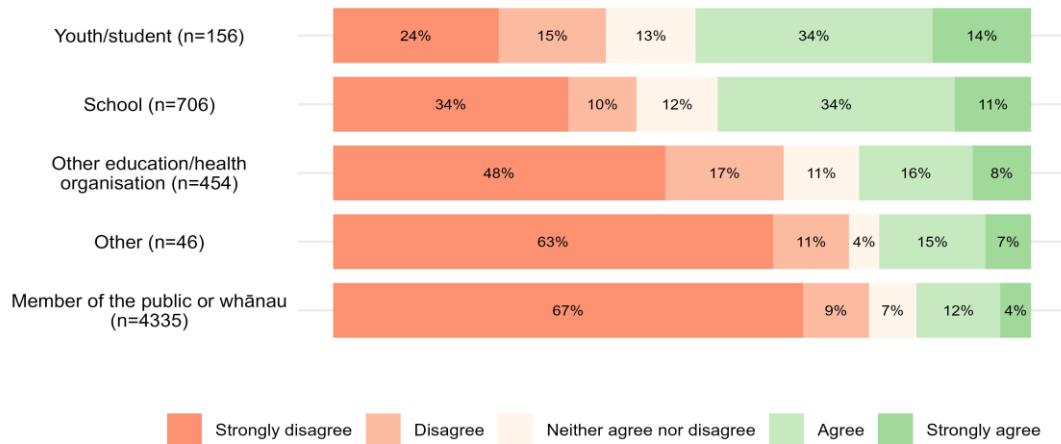


Table 4 shows the most often mentioned themes and content respondents mentioned in an open-ended question about aligning content differently for Years 0–3.

Table 4 Respondent views about content that should be aligned differently for Years 0–3

Theme or content area (mentioned by 20% or more of each group)	Less or later RSE group	More or earlier RSE group
Concern about the best age for content	X	X
Consent and safety education	X	X
Values	X	X
Parents' role	X*	
Diversity of gender identities		X*
Diversity of family types		X
Diversity of cultures		X
Diversity of sexuality		X
Wellbeing: Diversity and wellbeing		X
Wellbeing: Impact of gender ideology	X	

*Indicates the most frequently mentioned area

Content that should be aligned differently (Years 0-3)

Perspectives from the “less or later RSE” respondents

“Less or later RSE” respondents tended to express concern about any “sexuality” education being included at these year levels. Some expressed this feedback as a general view without making specific reference to the proposed content at these year levels.

Specific content under “My Body” these respondents tended to object to including teaching students to know:

- “that body parts (including genitals) have anatomically correct terms”
- “to know how to ask questions and talk to trusted adults if they have worries, or are curious, about their bodies”.

As discussed earlier in the report, respondents in this group also tended to react to the term “consent” (used in a strand subheading as well as appearing in teaching guidance from years 2 and above), expressing concerns based on their interpretation that this term was about sexual behaviour. These respondents tended to state that RSE teaching would draw attention to things that children didn’t need to know or weren’t ready for, that it would disrupt children’s innocence, and/or that it should be exclusively the responsibility of parents to address. Some respondents expressed fears that these teaching points in RSE could lead to “grooming” or “sexualisation” of children.

Naming genitals and discussing body differences risks sexualising young children and introducing concepts they are not developmentally ready to process. This should be reserved for parents to address in a family context, emphasising modesty and privacy. (Survey; Member of the public or whānau)

In the first three years of school, children need to be taught the basics of their bodies (names of parts) and to tell the teacher if someone's being nasty. They absolutely should not "ask questions and talk to trusted adults if they have worries, or are curious, about their bodies." They should only be encouraged to speak to their parents/primary caregiver (i.e. at home) about their bodies. Anything else gives the impression that it is fine for adults in positions of authority to talk to them about their bodies, creating a pathway for grooming. (Survey; Member of the public)

Children will always ask questions about anything. Should they do so parents should answer simply to the age of the child. NO-ONE else needs to take responsibility for this. (Survey; Member of the public)

I don't think adding this discussion [that body parts (including genitals) have anatomically correct terms] to a group of 5-6 years old kids is appropriate. Adding this to the group to talk about it, will start to sexualize kids. (Survey; Member of the public)

The content about “safe and unsafe secrets” was of concern to respondents in the “less or later RSE” group, who tended to say that children of this age should not be encouraged to keep secrets of any kind. The “safe and unsafe secrets” phrasing was also of concern to respondents in the “more or earlier RSE” group (see below).

Perspectives from “more or earlier RSE” respondents

“More or earlier RSE” respondents tended to be very supportive of teaching students anatomically correct terms for body parts including genitals, and about concepts of consent. Respondents in this group also discussed a wider range of themes including having more emphasis on body diversities, and revisiting knowledge about bodies each year.

I strongly believe this age group needs to be equipped with more detailed, inclusive, and thorough basic understandings of the diversity of bodies, including for example the normal variations that can exist in sex characteristics (i.e. intersex bodies). I am very concerned that an acknowledgement of cultural perspectives on bodies is not present until age 11! (Survey; Education or health organisation)

I think that body parts should be revised in year 2 or 3 or both, children forget things. Even adults have poor knowledge of female genitals. Consent should be explicitly covered in year 3, this is vital and should be reinforced. (Survey; Member of the public)

Respondents in this group also supported the inclusion of learning about consent and boundaries, suggesting that very young children were capable of learning and understanding these ideas.

Consent should be taught earlier. Also different family structures and genders. Kids know about this at ECE and have no trouble understanding it. (Survey; Whānau)

Like respondents in the “less or later RSE” respondent group, respondents in the “more or earlier RSE” group had similar issues with “safe and unsafe secrets”. Respondents suggested it was more useful for children to learn about “safe, unsafe, and unwanted” touch and what to do if they felt uncomfortable.

A clear mention + teaching of "unsafe touch" should also be introduced. Safety around body parts should be explicitly taught. (Survey; Whānau)

When we lived overseas our 5-8 year children learned about safe touches, unsafe touches, and unwanted touches. safe touches - these are touches that keep you safe and are good for your body - pats on the back, hugs, doctor exam. Unsafe touches - these are not good for the body and hurt your body or your feelings (pinching, hitting, kicking, touching private parts of your body). Unwanted touches - these may be safe touches yet the child doesn't want to be touched in that way by that person at that moment in time. It's ok to say "no" to unwanted touches. As parents we were asked to help our children practice saying "no" in a strong but polite voice. (Survey; Whānau)

Some “more or earlier RSE” respondents wanted more focus on addressing bullying behaviours at this age. A few noted this focus could be included throughout all ages, and cover evidence-based strategies such as how to be an active bystander or upstander.

[Years 0-3] The content outlined for years 0-3 is appropriate and in fact many of the topics discussed up to year 4 are appropriate for this age group as well. Particularly I would highlight bullying and inappropriate touching/sexual abuse as topics that should be highlighted for all ages, in an appropriate manner. (Survey; Other education or health) (Survey; Education or health organisation)

In contrast some of the members of the “less or later RSE” group felt Year 3 might be too early for young people to safely learn how to stand up for themselves and their peers.

Many respondents, including teachers, discussed the importance of including all forms of diversity including to be inclusive of all learners and their families.

Any discussion of family should include same sex parents in order to be inclusive. (Survey; school response)

Some educators identified content within the Years 0-3 phase as useful for working with other students, including at older ages.

Please note that this content is appropriate for many of our learners with learning support needs, particularly those with ORS H and VH, regardless of their chronological age. (Survey; school response)

5. Years 4–6 (age 8–11)

Figure 7 shows the extent to which the different respondent groups agreed the draft content was appropriate for Years 4-6. Like the Years 0-3 data, school and youth/students showed more agreement than the other respondents, the majority of whom strongly disagreed that the content was appropriate for this year level/age group.

Figure 7 For Years 4–6, the draft content is appropriate for 8–11 year-olds

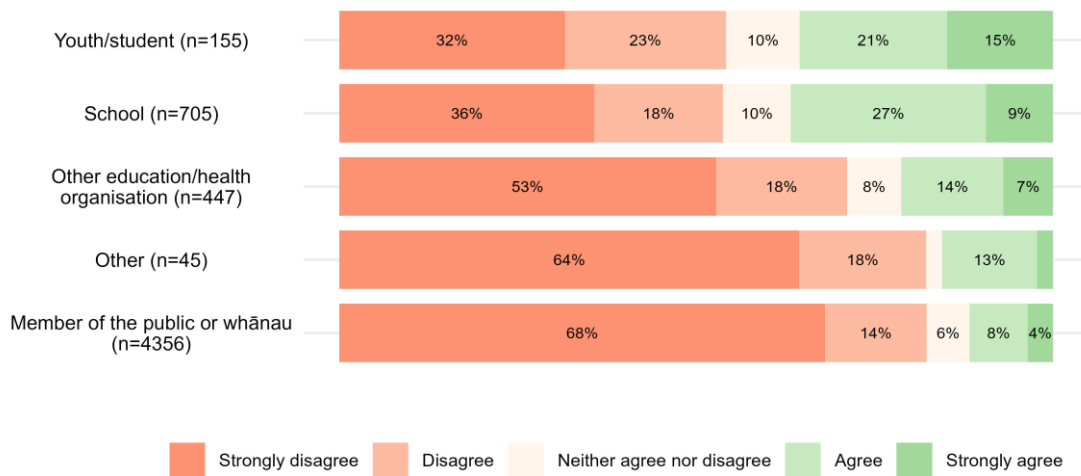


Table 5 shows the most often mentioned themes and content respondents mentioned in an open-ended question about aligning content differently for Years 4-6. Puberty and menstruation are especially commented on at these year levels.

Table 5 Respondent views about content that should be aligned differently for Years 4–6

Theme or content area (mentioned by 20% or more of each group)	Less or later RSE group	More or earlier RSE group
Concern about the best age for content	X	X
Consent and safety education	X	X
Values	X	X
Parents' role	X*	
Diversity of gender identities	X	X*
Diversity of family types		X
Diversity of sexuality		X
Diversity of cultures		X
Puberty (new theme for this age group)		X
Menstruation (new theme for this age group)		X
Wellbeing: Diversity and wellbeing		X
Wellbeing: Impact of gender ideology	X	

*Indicates the most frequently mentioned theme

Content that should be aligned differently (Years 4-6)

Perspectives from the “less or later RSE” respondents

Many respondents in the “less or later RSE” group tended to express objections to, or query the meaning of, the terms “inclusive/inclusion” and “preferences”, as well as the word “gender” and “gender stereotypes”, expressing a belief that these terms are “harmful ideology” that “radical groups” will use to “push their radical views onto OUR children”. This feedback was often expressed alongside this group’s belief that there are only two genders and/or that the word “sex” should be used instead of gender. As with the feedback at Years 0-3, respondents in the less-or-later group again voiced concerns about “consent” being taught in Years 4-6.

Inclusion has the potential to introduce rainbow education which natural parents (sic) are against. (Survey; Member of the public)

If the terms "supporting inclusion", and "respecting others interests and preferences" refer to sexuality and gender, children in this age group are too young and are vulnerable to external pressure and hence insecurity about themselves. They are too young. (Survey; Member of the public)

Remove the words gender from here. this will only seek to confuse children and support the harmful gender ideology that is damaging our children. (Survey; Member of the public)

Year 4: Remove: "Identify and respond to gender stereotypes"... There are TWO SEXES. Not genders...Remove the word CONSENT. Rather teach Year 4 children how to say YES or NO strongly and confidently when faced with various GOOD or BAD situations. (Survey; Whānau)

Eight- to eleven-year-olds should not be expected to 'support inclusion' when it may not align with their family values. (Survey; Member of the public)

Perspectives from the “more or earlier RSE” respondents

Respondents in the “more or earlier RSE” group tended to say the content at Years 4-6 needed to be more inclusive, as well as introducing ideas and content earlier that were currently only introduced from Year 7 and above, to be more aligned with what learners were experiencing.

...it does not go far enough to reflect the realities that many 8-11-year-olds are already experiencing. At this age, students are asking serious questions about bodies, relationships, identity, and fairness and they need honest, inclusive, and age-appropriate answers. (Survey; Education or health organisation)

Many respondents in the “more or earlier RSE” group expressed mixed views about the phrasing under “My Body-My changing body” at Year 6 that “most people have either a female or male body and their anatomy...”. Some objected to this phrasing, while others were happy that it said “most” rather than “all”, recognising that there were other

experiences. These respondents wanted to see more inclusion of diverse body and gender experiences reflected in discussions about puberty changes.

I am glad to see that students will be taught that "MOST people have either a female or male body..." - I think by year 6 students can have more explanation of the idea of intersex, and be introduced to gender identity, as a further explanation of what 'most' means in this context. (Survey; School staff)

Normalise different bodies, accept, include and celebrate others... Remove from year 6 "most people have either a female or male body" avoid using absolutes in all areas of the RSE curriculum, instead using "people" or "some people have... and others have.." Explicitly include intersex when talking about bodies from years 4. (Survey; Whānau)

A strong theme amongst the "more or earlier RSE" group was the need to address puberty changes earlier, as some learners were already experiencing these changes.

More detail from year 4 about pubertal change including menstruation, discharge, spontaneous erections, thoughts and feelings, breast development, body hair. (Survey; Education and health organisation)

Menstruation is happening earlier and missed in this age group. Previous RSE guidelines included specific detail necessary for this age group. (Survey; School staff)

Respondents in the "more or earlier RSE" group also discussed aspects of relationships and sexuality education they felt were important to begin discussing with students in this phase.

Consent and navigating relationships is important for children to learn. This is a perfect age for consent discussions. (Survey; Whānau)

Thanks to social media kids are exposed to both the good and bad of human sexuality and the complicated health issues and relationships that come with it. Teach them early, teach them empathy and teach them consent - we can build the next generation of kids that grow up to have healthy relationships. (Survey; Member of the public)

Children at this age are already beginning to have romantic desires and deserve to have it explained to them what it means if they are feeling those towards the same gender, or they have no interest in romance (asexual/aromantic). They also deserve to understand what it might mean if they or someone they know is transgender, non-binary, or questioning their gender identity/presentation. I think this may somewhat be covered by the "gender stereotypes" topic in Year 4, however I would like to see this clearly defined as including gender identities as well. (Survey; Whānau)

6. Years 7–8 (age 11–13)

Figure 8 shows the extent to which respondents from different groups agreed the draft content was appropriate for Years 7-8. This graph showed a similar pattern to the previous graphs with school and youth/student respondents showing less disagreement than the other groups about the fit of the content.

Figure 8 For Years 7–8, the draft content is appropriate for 11–13 year-olds

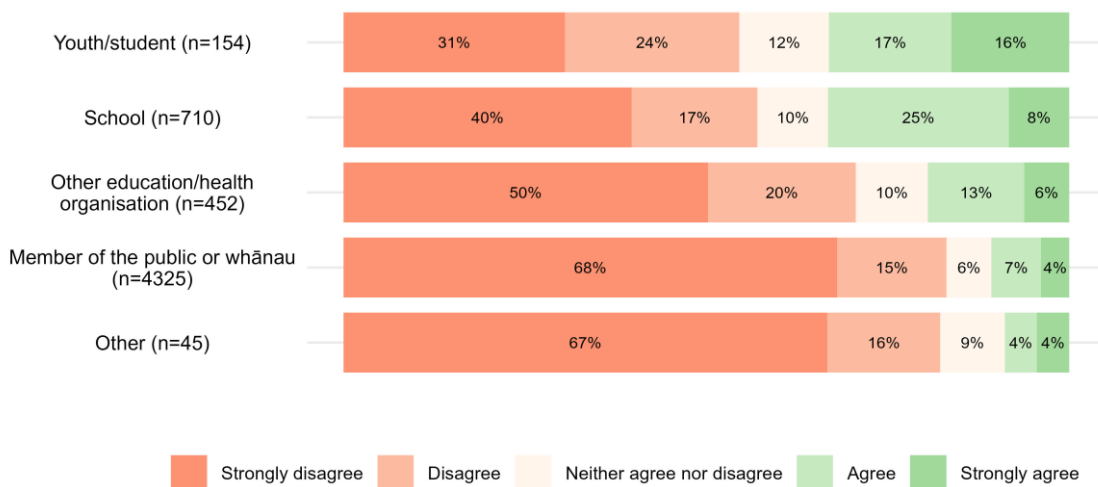


Table 6 shows the most often mentioned themes and content respondents mentioned in an open-ended question about aligning content differently for Years 7–8. Online behaviours are a focus for these year level/age groups.

Table 6 Respondent views about content that should be aligned differently for Years 7–8

Theme or content area (mentioned by 20% or more of each group)	Less or later RSE group	More or earlier RSE group
Concern about the best age for content	X	
Consent and safety education	X	X
Values	X	X
Parents' role	X*	
Diversity of gender identities		X*
Diversity of sexuality		X
Diversity of cultures		X
Online behaviours (new theme at this age group)		X
Wellbeing: Diversity and wellbeing		X
Wellbeing: Impact of gender ideology	X	

*Indicates the most frequently mentioned theme

Content that should be aligned differently (Years 7-8)

Particular themes of interest at this age group are covered below. In general some of the “more or earlier RSE” group thought that some or most of the Year 9-10 content could be taught at Year 7-8. The “less or later RSE” group wanted less content relating to gender, sexuality, and sex for this age group.

Pubertal change

As mentioned earlier, those from the “less or later RSE” group were concerned about concepts being introduced too early or wanted a more biological approach to puberty.

Year 8 (age 12-13): Why are we teaching “Sexual attraction and orientation / Healthy sexual activity” to underage children? They are too young to dive deep on that and I won't teach that to my 12-13 years old children. Rather I would build on the brief puberty knowledge they are learnt in age 10-11, and dive deep on puberty i.e. biological side of it, ex. hormones that causes all these, what are these hormones, how these hormones work; learn about what happened to our brain when undergo puberty etc., so that they know more and better about themselves, in which they will know how to self-regulate while going through the roller coaster of emotions during puberty. Good stuff: Year 8 (age 12-13): “New Zealand law sets a legal age of consent for sexual conduct.” (Comment: this should be reinforced at all levels) (Survey; Member of the public or whānau)

Topics of conception and sexual attraction seem too early. Some topics around menstruation (in particular when these may indicate issues that further support such as medical advice is appropriate) are too early if to be taught to all students. Could be very relevant to female students. Some of these general statements seem to imply delivered to all? We would want an assurance that we can deliver this through the lens of our special character as a state integrated school. This means that for us “safe sexual activity” is that which is consensual within the context of a marriage. (Survey; School staff)

At this age, some of the “more or earlier RSE” group considered a more holistic discussion of pubertal change was needed that went beyond physical descriptions of body changes and functions and which avoided gender stereotypes. These two quotes from school staff highlight this perspective.

There definitely needs to be more about holistic changes related to puberty as this only seems to cover physical changes/experiences. The stuff on conception is at the right year level, but the language is reductive (to the point where it could refer to any almost any species of mammal) and totally devoid of holistic human experience. We also need to start to see the beginnings of positive messaging around body as these changes happen, acknowledging the challenging feelings young people can have around their bodies and how they can reframe these to be positive rather than negative or scary. (Survey; School staff)

The draft does not adequately meet the needs of students in Years 7–8. Some statements related to puberty are problematic and inaccurate. For instance, the Year 7 description of menstruation. The menstrual cycle involves physical, mental, social, and emotional changes for them and/or their peers, with specific roles played by each part of the female reproductive

system (ovaries, fallopian tubes, uterus, cervix, and vagina) recognises multiple dimensions of change. Whereas the corresponding statement about male puberty during pubertal change, the male reproductive system (testes, sperm ducts, urethra, and penis) develops and performs specific functions and responses such as erections and wet dreams (nocturnal emissions) is limited to the physical. This imbalance reinforces outdated gender stereotypes and binary thinking... The explanation of reproduction... also presents a narrow and reductive view. It reinforces sexist assumptions by implying that women's bodies exist solely for reproduction and men's for delivering sperm. This framing excludes the role of assisted reproductive technologies and diverse family-building pathways, and does not reflect contemporary understandings of reproductive health. (Survey; Teacher)

Educator respondents noted that parents were not always comfortable with these topics and therefore school needed to be a safe space for discussion about puberty and change.

Many Year 7 and 8 students are quite worldly, they are exposed to all sorts of misinformation that they get independently of their school and family. There needs to be accurate information and frank discussion about gender diversity and identity, sexual orientation, the harms caused by shame and bullying, critical thinking around pornography, the importance of having a positive body image and the right to make choices, the laws relating to sexual activity and where to find help. This is a lot, there are many students who may not be thinking about this stuff much BUT there needs to be guidance for teachers and schools for creating safe spaces for discussion..., support for parents/caregivers who are navigating this with their kids. As an experienced high school teacher and Family Planning educator I know that plenty of kids are exposed to the language around all this as well as unfiltered on-line content and extreme views. (Survey; Teacher)

Divided views on introducing attraction, sexuality, and sex

One aspect of the Year 7-8 content for which there were different perspectives and beliefs was in relation to Healthy relationships – Year 8: “Sexual attraction and orientation” and “Healthy sexual activity”.

Some “more or earlier RSE” respondents noted that at this age students would be having crushes, and some would be experimenting with sexual activity, and therefore they needed to be prepared. These respondents wanted more focus on navigating intimate relationships, recognising healthy and unhealthy relationship behaviours, and considering consent to sexual activity as well as other behaviours.

I think the learning needs to be what "appropriate" sexual behaviour for that age is - i.e., they are going to experiment but with an emphasis on making sure there's CONSENT and continuous consent for example, pausing and saying, "are you OK with this?" ...It would be good to learn about age-appropriate relationships i.e. if you are 13, your 16 year old boy/girlfriend could get in legal trouble. That it's not normal to be pursued by someone more than 1-2 years older than them - this is a REAL problem at the teenage stage, especially for young girls without good parental relationships at home and it is KNOWN that older teenage boys and MEN seek these young girls/ women out and know which ones are easy to victimize. (Survey; Other education or health)

These respondents felt a focus on diversity of genders and sexualities was particularly important so students can understand they and their peers may have a variety of experiences and do not feel shamed for being different from their peers.

I believe that this part of the framework "some people are sexually attracted to people of the opposite sex (heterosexual or straight), the same sex (homosexual, although preferred terms usually include lesbian or gay), or both sexes (bisexual). Some people may not experience sexual attraction towards another person (asexual)." has some strengths. I support that it includes diverse sexualities including bisexual and asexual. However, I believe it erases trans and nonbinary identities and should include these. Here, again, intersex, non-binary, and transgender experiences are erased: "describe and apply strategies to manage both the physical and emotional aspects of the hormonal changes that happen during puberty, which are different for males and females." These experiences being minority does not mean they should not be included in teaching and learning...I think the statement 'healthy sexual activity' as a topic of learning for Year 8 students needs clarification. (Survey; School staff)

This group also held the belief that sexuality education at this age needed to counter the fact that many young people would be learning about sex from watching pornography.

[For Years 7-8] Agree in general, however pornography/explicit online content should in my view be introduced as a concept in year 8. The evidence is clear that if a boy (in particular) has a smart phone then many of them will have viewed pornography by age 12 and they need to be provided with a framework in which to process this and how to get help. The deeply misogynistic and often violent content in pornography that depicts girls and women as sexual objects and glorifies causing them harm and pain during sex has to be talked about in RSE. It is damaging and warping boys and young men's view of consent and what a sexual relationship should be.... (Survey; Student or whānau)

[For Years 7-8] I agree that ALL of this content should be taught... By this age, young people should be learning about pornography. Many young people has accessed watched or been exposed or pornography by this age... (e.g., Zen et al., Meehan et al., Arnett et al.) (Survey; member of the public or whānau)

Members of the "less or later RSE" group held the opposite view as they held the belief that a focus on sexual activity at this age would encourage young people to engage in sex too young or expose them to harms they were not mature enough to deal with.

[Year 7-8 content] These are minors at intermediate, of whom the vast majority will not be sexually active at all, making most of the content irrelevant and potentially harmful. Understanding reproduction from a general perspective could be helpful but most students at this age will find detailed content traumatic and disturbing. Year 9 or 10 is a more suitable age for a medical approach to reproduction, where it can be understood and appreciated. Sexual attraction and orientation has no place at intermediate - including that at this age is totally inappropriate, and feels like a dangerous opportunity for grooming. (Survey; School)

There is a huge amount I disagree with in this age group. We have suddenly gone from age-appropriate to suddenly teaching 11-12 yr olds about sexual attraction, sexual orientation, harmful sexual behaviours... Do you honestly think that "mutual attraction and consent can lead to healthy romantic relationships" in a 12 year old? I mean seriously! The legal age for sexual consent is 16 so why do we need to tell them about it at 12? This type of education

just creates either horror, fear or curiosity and throws children into an adult world that they definitely aren't all ready for. We seem to feel the need to educate our young people earlier and earlier before they find out anyway & I absolutely disagree with this strategy. (Survey; Member of the public or whānau)

Thinking critically about digital safety and online harm

Members of the “more or earlier RSE” group were concerned that the draft RSE framework did not reflect the realities of students’ online lives and therefore would not adequately equip them to navigate this world. They wanted to see more content in Year 7-8 Safety and Consent in sections such as “Online risks, content sharing and social media” and “Identifying harmful behaviours, online content, or situations”.

Overall, across many of the year level/age group categories around one quarter of this group wanted to see more focus on critical thinking in these sections. At this age topics could include online pornography, sexting, social media pressure, online portrayals of body image, and the role of influencers. Critical thinking was only mentioned by a small proportion of “less or later RSE” respondents.

Students also needed safety education in terms of developing their understanding of how they might experience grooming or harassment in online spaces and how to recognise and report this. Some respondents noted that the framework would be enhanced by a clearer progression of concepts relating to consent that covered what this might look like in an online environment.

Online safety is mentioned initially at Year 5 but needs to be earlier. This suggests that for Year 7-8 students, who are increasingly active online, the current placement might still be too late to adequately address the risks they face, including those related to online child sexual exploitation and abuse, a concern highlighted by ECPAT International. Furthermore, while the framework likely builds upon earlier introductions to consent, We want to re-emphasise the need for a clearer and more robust progression of consent concepts, including in online interactions. For Year 7-8 students, navigating more complex social and online relationships, a nuanced understanding of consent is crucial. (Survey; School staff)

Online safety needs to be mentioned earlier, and for Year 7-8, expanded upon with more in-depth discussion around identifying risks and recognising unsafe situations as well as how they can respond appropriately and understand the resources available to them should they need help. This should go hand in hand with teaching taiohi about navigating more complex social and online relationships and developing a nuanced understanding of consent. (Survey; Member of the public or whānau)

While online behaviours were most mentioned by respondents in relation to Years 7-8, a number considered that, as students use digital devices from young ages, some considered that a focus on online safety needed to start earlier (such as Year 3 as noted in the Framework). This focus could be followed up with additional topics or more detail in later years. Some wanted a more explicit connection to be made between online environments and harm to mental health (which is also a focus area for Health and PE learning).

[Years 4-6] I strongly disagree because the framework for Years 4-6 does not go far enough in preparing children for the complex emotional, digital, and social environments they are already navigating by this age. By 8 to 11 years old, many children are exposed to online content, peer pressures, and relationship dynamics that are far more mature than the curriculum appears to acknowledge. This age group is increasingly engaging with devices, social media platforms (even unofficially), and conversations that include sexual references, harmful stereotypes, and unrealistic portrayals of relationships. The framework needs to address: Digital resilience: how to recognise manipulative content, understand consent in a digital context, and know what to do when things go wrong. Media literacy and critical thinking: to help children question portrayals of beauty, gender roles, power, and popularity. Pressure and safety: children this age may already be facing pressure from peers or older individuals about their bodies, private information, or social behaviours. We must give them tools to navigate those situations with confidence and safety. (Survey; Member of the public or whānau)

Online behaviours was only mentioned by a few of the “less or later RSE” group, and mostly in relation to younger year level/age groups.

I have concerns about the expectation that young people should even be using digital information when a growing body of evidence indicates that digital device addiction contributes to poor mental health. Mental health is also part of the health curriculum. (Survey; School staff)

7. Years 9–10 (age 13–15)

Figure 9 shows the extent to which respondents agreed the draft content was appropriate for Years 9-10. This graph showed a similar pattern to the previous graphs with school and youth/student respondents showing less disagreement than the other groups.

Figure 9 For Years 9–10, the draft content is appropriate for 13–15 year-olds

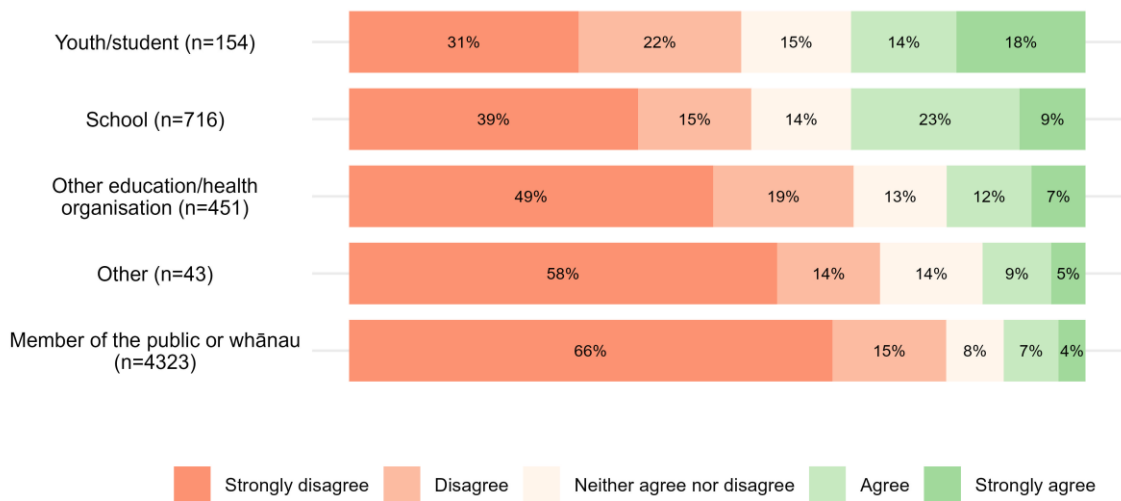


Table 7 shows the most often mentioned themes and content respondents mentioned in an open-ended question about aligning content differently for Years 9–10. Sexuality education was more of a focus for these year level/age groups.

Table 7 Respondent views about content that should be aligned differently for Years 9–10

Theme or content area (mentioned by 20% or more of each group)	Less or later RSE group	More or earlier RSE group
Concern about the best age for content	X	
Consent and safety education	X	X
Values	X	X
Parents' role	X*	
Diversity of gender identities		X*
Diversity of sexuality		X
Diversity of cultures		X
Sexuality, intimate relationships, safe sex (new mention)	X	X
Wellbeing: Diversity and wellbeing		X
Wellbeing: Impact of gender ideology	X	

*Indicates the most frequently mentioned theme

Content that should be aligned differently (Years 9-10)

At Year 9-10 respondents became more concerned about RSE content relating to intimate relationships, sexual activity and consent, as well as harmful behaviour and impacts (e.g., sexual violence and pornography). One theme relating to Years 9-13 students was that young people need to be able to have open and honest discussions about these topics and their own experiences in a safe environment.

“There are laws relating to sexual violence” makes it sound like the only thing wrong with sexual violence is that it is illegal. These guidelines should explicitly state that there is a negative impact from sexual violence. They should create a framework to build on so that students are able to contribute to a discussion on the problems of sexual violence based on their own prior knowledge. This quote highlights that one of the issues I have with the draft is how neutral its language is on topics that shouldn’t be neutral... Yes, go into the laws, but the understanding of right and wrong should be clear in places we can all agree on.... (Survey; Facilitator/Professional development provider)

Another concern, primarily from educators, was that the RSE guidelines focused more on sex and sexuality more in terms of risk reduction than building students’ ability to have healthy relationships.

As Head of Health Education at a College, I must strongly emphasize that this draft fundamentally fails to meet evidence-based best practice for students in years 9-10. The previous guide was grounded in robust research evidence, but these draft changes abandon this scientific foundation. Most concerning is how the draft has reduced pubertal change to a simplistic, individualistic approach focusing narrowly on disease and pregnancy risks. This contradicts contemporary pedagogical understanding that rejects such outdated framing. Current best practice recognizes the essential social and cultural dimensions of relationships and sexuality education - dimensions conspicuously absent from this draft. (Survey; School staff)

Learning about sexual violence and harassment

Common themes from the “more or earlier RSE” group included more focus on assisting students to learn about and build strategies to recognise and address sexual violence and harassment. Another theme was that learning about sexual harassment at Year 10 was too late given that some students are likely to have experienced these behaviours at younger ages.

Beginning in junior school we believe there is missing content around coercive control in that there is no acknowledgement of how gender, age, or past trauma shape someone’s ability to consent. There is currently no scope for us to give tools for recognising red flags in real relationships. We believe that changing emotions should be removed from Year 9/10 or moved to earlier in the curriculum. (Survey; School staff)

...information about laws around sexual violence is not mentioned until age 13-14. At this age, some students are already exploring intimate relationships and may sometimes be in abusive relationship with adults. Teaching them about these laws and about consent at an

earlier age could help them to stay safe and to also choose more respectful, consensual behaviour with others. (Survey; Member of the public or whānau)

Intimate relationships: Safe and pleasurable sex

Respondents from the “more or earlier RSE” group wanted more focus on teaching about decision-making in relation to intimate relationships and sex (and the role that peers and alcohol and drugs might play as noted in the Year 9: “Healthy relationships” section of the framework). They supported the focus on teaching about STIs at this age and suggested some enhancements such as including more information about HIV and STI testing, and extending the focus on alcohol and drugs to Year 10.

... it's important that young people are taught in an inclusive way about sex and STIs, so that they understand how to keep themselves safe. Education about safe sex needs to include all students, not only the heterosexual ones. It's also important that education around HIV is provided in a health-focused, non-stigmatising way. (Survey; Member of the public or whānau)

The STI information involved is good, but could be improved with a conversation about testing as this tends to be the most stigmatised thing regarding STIs. Prevention is great, but we also need people to be informed on how to seek help regarding STIs when there is a risk of or confirmed infection. (Survey; Member of the public or whānau)

We also believe that teaching around alcohol and drugs impacting decision making should be in Year 10 that gets continued discussion around in senior school as parties etc become more common. (Survey; School staff)

Some also wanted more focus on the positive aspects of sex and relationships as opposed to mitigating risks.

There is also a distinct absence of positive aspects of sex and intimacy. While the framework covers important safety and risk-related topics, for students in Year 9-10 who are likely developing more complex relationships and understandings of sexuality, a more balanced approach that includes positive messaging about healthy relationships, consent, and sexual well-being might be more appropriate. The consultation process should consider these aspects to ensure the framework effectively meets the needs of students in this age group. (Survey; Other)

Respondents from the “less or later RSE” group were less likely to support the focus on intimate relationships, contraceptives, and information about STIs. Some noted that many students were not sexually active at this age. Common themes from this group included increasing the focus on abstinence and that introducing this content might lead to early sexual experiences and pregnancy.

...additional content that should be included: 1. Why is abstinence or tools to abstain from sexual activity not included? "Abstinence" is only mentioned once under the year 9 section. This should be encouraged and enforced in our kids in all levels where sex or content are discussed (especially from year 9 through to year 11), instead of encouraging sexual activities. The majority of kids in NZ schools choose to abstain from sexual activities, and this

framework does not provide them with the necessary reinforcement, encouragement and tools to be successful at abstaining. Instead it does the opposite. 2. Where are the risks of sexual activity, risks in using contraception (its ineffectiveness), and other complications that arise from sexual activity such as emotional trauma coupled with unexpected pregnancy or scare of skipped menstruation periods. These things do not seem to be covered well and would otherwise help encourage abstinence. (Survey; Member of the public or whānau)

Thinking critically about pornography and other online content

Around one-quarter of “more or earlier RSE” respondents wanted to see more emphasis on critical thinking with a focus on online content which builds over Years 9-10. Topics mentioned included online pornography as well as a more in-depth focus on the misogynistic behaviours commonly displayed in online pornography and the harms that it can cause. Other topics included thinking critically about the role of online influencers and their messages, and how people might become addicted to online content.

[For Years 9-10] I think there is a lot of good things here, but pornography has to be included as a substantive topic. There is no point including consent if you don't address the elephant in the room that many young people are having their views on consent warped by viewing explicit sexual content online. The idea that choking, hitting, hurting, verbally abusing and coercing women into various sex acts that cause them pain is normal has to be tackled head on and addressed directly at 13-15. This should include the addictive nature of pornography and how the makers and distributors of porn use brain science to hook males especially on porn and drag them deeper into more extreme (and often illegal) content... The age of consent sent should also feature strongly within teaching about sex and sexuality. Under 16 a person cannot legally consent to sex. (Survey; Student or whānau)

[For Years 9-10] Start Incorporating information about social media negative influences such as Andrew Tate, pornography being fictional and fantasy i.e. paid actors. (Survey; member of the public or whānau)

Although touched on in Y8, online safety needs to continue on through to Y9-Y11. With a focus on pornography, sharing of content, unspoken rules of social media and content sharing. These needs to be touched on consistently over the years and also updated regularly as they online world is forever changing. I suggest this topic is reviewed yearly and in consultation with young people to inform content related to this topic and what support young people require. A strengths-based approach should also be included here where young people learn to love themselves, learn more about themselves their strengths and passions. Topics such as ko wai au - who am I and what makes me me, taking a holistic approach. (Submission)

Promoting the legal age of consent

Common themes from the “less or later RSE” group include promoting the legal age of consent at 16 or abstinence. Others did not want coverage of sex and contraception to occur before the age of 16.

The topic of consent in relation to sexual activity is proposed to be covered in Year 10 (14-15 year olds). Given these teenagers are under the age of consent to sexual activity, we think there needs to be a strong emphasis that underage sex is against the law and that sexual activity is a choice to be made only by those aged over 16.... Laws relating to sexual assault and rape are included in the proposed Year 9 (13-14 year olds) curriculum. We think this may be more appropriate in Year 11 (15-16 year olds) when factors affecting the ability to give consent such as alcohol are to be considered. (Submission; Other)

If we are going to teach all the 'safe' ways to have indiscriminate sex and how to deal with the aftermath of potential complications, let's spend an equal if not greater amount of time reaffirming the freedom from all associated problems and entire safety of simply abstaining. After all, the majority of students will not be sexually active and deserve our support and affirmation of their wise decision do they not? Let's ensure they feel incredibly supported too. (Survey; Member of the public or whānau)

Involving parents in RSE

Some respondents (mostly from the “less or later RSE” group) wanted to see more connection and sharing between home and school so they could understand what content was being taught and support the youth in their family. Some wanted parent representatives in class, others wanted to know more about the content being taught.

You mention that one of the important aspects of this RSE framework is to "ensure that the content is reinforced by open conversations at home with parents or caregivers, through which RSE ensures consistent messaging and deepens students' understanding of themselves and others". However, parents have little insight into what exactly our kids are being taught in class since until now most schools refuse to share this information with us. How can we have deep conversations with our children to reinforce the content of what they cover at school if we are not first informed of what will be taught and given a copy of the material? What should actually happen is that the material be passed onto the parents before our children are taught at school and then the school would reinforce what we discussed at home with our kids. (Survey; Member of the public or whānau)

Some of the “less or later RSE” group were concerned about the ‘safety and consent’ section that informed students of their right to access confidential advice. They tended to hold the belief that students should not be able to access services without the knowledge of their parents.

With regards to teaching students to "get confidential advice and help with sexual health, including where and when to get testing and treatment."... this age group should be encouraged to speak to someone they trust within their family in the first instance, and teaching staff should not be allowed provide advice that they know is in conflict with parental advice (unless there is concern for the safety of the student). I have been in a school setting where I was aware that teachers were actively promoting advice to a student when they knew it was in direct conflict with the advice the student was receiving at home from her parents. (Survey; Member of the public or whānau)

8. Years 11–13 (age 15–18)

Figure 10 shows the extent to which respondents from different groups agreed the draft content was appropriate for this Years 11-13. This graph showed a similar pattern to the previous graphs with school and youth/student respondents showing less disagreement than the other groups about the fit of the content.

Figure 10 For Years 11–13, the draft content is appropriate for 15–18 year-olds

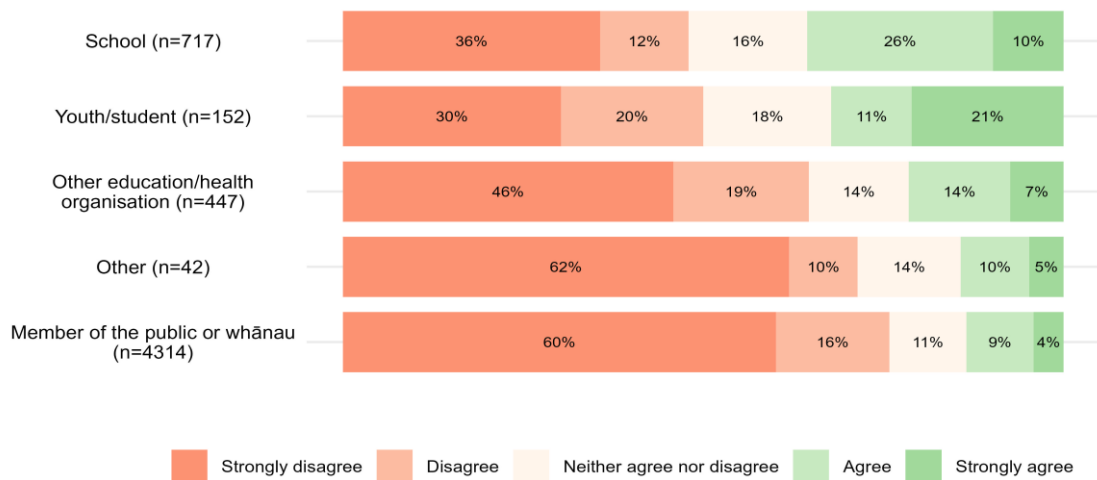


Table 8 shows the most often mentioned themes and content that should be aligned differently for Years 11–13. Critical thinking was a focus for these year level/age groups.

Table 8 Respondent views about content that should be aligned differently for Years 11–13

Theme or content area (mentioned by 20% or more of each group)	Less or later RSE group	More or earlier RSE group
Concern about the best age for content	X	
Consent and safety education	X	X
Values	X	X
Parents' role	X*	
Diversity of gender identities		X*
Diversity of sexuality		X
Diversity of cultures		X
Sexuality, intimate relationships, safe sex	X	X
Critical thinking (new theme for this age group)		X
Wellbeing: Diversity and wellbeing		X
Wellbeing: Impact of gender ideology	X	

*Indicates the most frequently mentioned theme

Addition of content for Years 11-13

In general fewer respondents commented on the Year 11-13 content. Some respondents from both groups welcomed the inclusion of content for senior secondary students. However they also were concerned that, as health learning is not compulsory in the senior secondary programme, some students are likely to miss out on this learning.

...It is positive that the framework covers years 12 and 13. The guidance for these year levels is brief and could be much more specific and in depth, however the expansion of coverage is a step in the right direction and shows that the Ministry of Education has taken in the finding from the report by ERO which indicated that older age groups wanted more RSE... (Submission; Other education or health)

Finally something we can both agree on FOR STUDENTS AGED 16-18 ONLY. Now they are old enough to access this information in my view. AND seeing how I teach teenagers on a daily basis, I have a constant front-row seat to their maturity levels. (Survey; School staff)

However, some felt the content did not go far enough in meeting the needs of students at this age, particularly in relation to intimate and family relationships, students' online lives, and the impact of alcohol and other drugs.

The draft does not meet the needs of Years 11-13 students. RSE is essential at this stage due to intimate relationships, peer dynamics, social media, and exposure to drugs and alcohol. Young people at this age carry increasing responsibilities in families, cultural institutions, and communities. The draft fails to respect the capabilities and complex realities of senior students. The 2020 guidelines included learning on desire, pleasure, consent, and attraction as social and ethical concepts. It promoted positive, equitable relationships and critical analysis of gender, identity, and sexuality. It supported critical engagement with topics like online dating, pornography, and the impacts of reproductive technologies. It encouraged advocacy for sexual and environmental justice and inclusive cultures. All of which are not included in these revised guidelines. (Survey; School staff)

Content that should be aligned differently (Years 11-13)

A continued focus on healthy and positive relationships

At Years 11-13 some respondents from both groups wanted to see a continued focus on supporting students to have healthy, positive, and inclusive relationships. Generally the feedback suggested the framework needed more focus on promoting healthy relationships and a positive approach to sexuality, rather than prioritising risk and harm.

I think that the new framework focuses on sex and reproduction mostly from a heterosexual context and doesn't develop students' knowledge which doesn't reflect the reality of our students. No mention of Mātauranga Māori concepts especially wellbeing and manaakitanga which is core to a healthy relationship. (Survey; School staff)

I like the areas on healthy relationships and some of safety and consent, but the areas covering my body do not seem to teach the beauty of a good sexual relationship within a

loving committed relationship or maintaining abstinence until finding a truly loving committed relationship. This should be taught by the parents and supported in their learning at school. Children today are wanting to find good friendships and real relationships not necessarily just finding a sexual partner! (Survey; Member of the public or whānau)

Some respondents wanted more focus on learning which enabled students to develop and practice the communication strategies they might need to maintain healthy, positive, and inclusive relationships.

For Ages 16-18... Teach decision-making frameworks for relationships, including considering consequences and values. Role-playing scenarios to practice navigating complex social situations. Long-term Relationships vs. Casual Relationships: Discuss the differences between long-term commitments and casual relationships, focusing on communication and expectations in each. (Survey; Member of the public or whānau)

A continued focus on sexual health

Some also wanted a continued and more detailed focus on pregnancy, STIs, and more accurate information about contraception options in the “pubertal change and sexual health” section of the framework.

Talk more about pleasure and normalise messaging around this. Include factual information and support services relating to pregnancy loss and miscarriage given that it happens to 1 in 4 pregnancies. Teach evidence-based knowledge of pregnancy options, providing signposting services, and information about their rights. Remove that students should “evaluate the most common methods of contraception and protection that may be used if participating in sexual behaviours” as not everyone can use all methods of contraception (it depends on their medical history) so students to work out what is most effective may give confusing messaging. (Survey; Member of the public or whānau)

Making stronger connections between RSE and mental health

As noted earlier in the report, some respondents would like to see stronger connection made between RSE topics and managing mental health (another Health and PE topic area).

For Ages 16-18... Navigating Breakups and Heartbreak: Provide support strategies for managing emotional pain associated with breakups. Discuss healthy coping mechanisms and the importance of seeking support from friends and family. Integrated Discussions on Mental Health: Embed discussions about mental health and its relationship with personal and romantic relationships. Emphasize the importance of seeking help and talking about feelings openly. (Survey; Member of the public or whānau)

Include more on sexual abuse and power dynamics in relationships

One of the sub-themes within the broader area of healthy relationships and a positive approach to sexuality, was the need for young people to continue to develop the knowledge and skills they need to keep themselves and their peers safe. Those who mentioned this theme mostly aligned with the “more or earlier RSE” group. They considered that Year 11-13 students needed the ability to recognise and avoid sexual violence, abuse, and harassment.

They also needed strategies to communicate in these situations. Respondents wanted more focus in the “safety and consent” section on dangerous practices such as choking, and dynamics such as power relationships, coercive control, stalking, and grooming which can be common in the online world.

Relationships: *More onus on people to not use harmful behaviours, rather than for people to identify and avoid unhealthy relationships; see specialist family violence organisations for language and approach towards this. Include understanding of coercive control and subtle behaviours that are abusive. Include relationship abuse relating to reproductive abuse and monitoring/stalking using technology. Build skills and confidence to talk to safe adults about relationships. Build bystander intervention skills and knowledge around if they see relationship abuse/violence. Continue to build communication skills around sexual negotiation ‘this could be condom use, what they like/don’t like’, asking their partner to get an STI check. (Survey; Member of the public or whānau)*

Safety and consent:... *Encourage and skill-build around upstanding and creating communities that don’t accept sexual and relationship violence....(Survey; Member of the public or whānau)*

Critical thinking

Critical thinking was a topical concern for this year level/age group. Overall critical thinking was mostly mentioned by respondents from the “more or earlier RSE” group. At this age critical thinking about a wider range of topics was important to respondents. These topics included online content, particularly that which could encourage or normalise sexual assault, harassment, ‘toxic masculinity’, gender violence, or misogyny. They wanted more focus on sexting, online dating behaviours, online pornography, ALT-right influencers such as Andrew Tate on YouTube and TikTok, or sites such as Only Fans. Some identified RSE as an important protective factor for mitigating Aotearoa New Zealand’s high rates of family and sexual violence.

Safety and consent:... *At later years, include content relating to mainstream/online sex work, such as Only Fans many young people are exposed to this, or are engaging in it..... Continue to teach about how social media can impact body image. (Survey; Member of the public or whānau)*

The content is good but doesn't go far enough to embrace diversity and develop critical thinking to give young people the tools to unpick media influences of topics just as body image, understand the societal drivers of pornography and discrimination based on sexual and gender orientation, and how normative models of identity and family can be corrosive for the mental health and wellbeing of people whose identity does not align with normative concepts. (Survey; Member of the public or whānau)

Critical thinking was less of a concern of the “less or later RSE” group at this age. Members of this group were concerned about the promotion of sex, and wanted to see more focus on behaviours such as abstinence and a wider range of options for dealing with unintended pregnancy in the “pubertal changes and sexual health” section of the framework.

The year 11 content should be for 16 year olds and above. 15 year olds should be discouraged from sexual activity and alcohol as they are minors! (Survey; Parent)

In this section there is a total bias towards students being sexually active. There is a lack of any reference to the very legitimate choice of abstinence. Surveys show that the majority of students are choosing to abstain. It would also seem that the information suggested for help with 'unintended pregnancy' is probably leaning heavily toward abortion. Where is the pregnancy support? (Survey; School staff)

At year 11 I'm not sure we need to talk about infertility. I think this could be left until Year 12. Reinforce talking to your parents about safe sex AFTER 16 yrs old if you're planning on having it. If you don't feel able or confident to discuss with your parents - cover where else can you go. GP, Family planning etc. (Survey; Member of the public or whānau)

9. Summing up

The consultation results summarised in this report reflect a wide range of community perspectives on RSE. A variety of perspectives was also shown in a recent review of RSE (ERO, 2024).

RSE, and particularly diversity of gender and sexuality, are topical issues which tend to generate strong views. The RSE framework consultation was widely published and promoted by a range of interest groups. The method used to seek feedback was a self-selected survey and therefore the findings cannot be assumed to be generalisable to the wider population. Self-selected methods can introduce bias as those with strongly held views are more likely to give feedback. In addition, some interest groups encouraged their members to submit similar content. The identical or nearly identical content submitted by members of one conservative interest group appeared to account for around 15% of all survey respondents. This volume of identical feedback has exaggerated the bias we would already expect from a self-selected sample and therefore the results are unlikely to be an accurate reflection of public opinion. For these reasons we suggest caution in how this feedback is viewed and used as the data appears to be biased towards “less or later RSE” perspectives.

The Ministry may wish to consider how future engagement approaches could be designed to ensure they gather a more accurate representative sample of public feedback, and are less able to be captured by interest groups seeking to manipulate the outcomes of the engagement process.

To acknowledge the main perspectives evident in the data, we classified the respondents into broad groups and reported on the views of the two main groups. The largest was the “less or later RSE” group who comprised around half of survey respondents and mostly consisted of community members and family/whānau. Members of this group focused on a smaller range of concerns or topics and some of the areas they commented on, such as the inclusion of “radical ideology” and “gender ideology” which were not discussed in the RSE framework. In general they wanted to see:

- less content overall or content that was introduced later (such as content relating to intimate relationships)
- more focus on the best age to introduce topics (in ways that aligned with legal requirements such as the age of consent)
- more focus on the role of parents and/or RSE left more to the discretion of parents
- more focus on family values and schools communicating with parents about RSE.

The main content areas this group wanted RSE to focus on “less or later” were:

- “gender ideology” and gender identities
- intimate relationships, sexuality, and safe sex
- consent education as it related to consent to sexual activity.

The second group we called “more or earlier RSE” comprised the full range of respondent types, around one-quarter of all survey respondents, and most of the submitters. Members of this group commented on a wider range of topics and provided more in-depth responses. They wanted to see a more holistic and comprehensive approach to RSE that:

- is designed around the reality of the diverse and online world young people live in
- prioritises international and Aotearoa evidence-based practice in relation to RSE
- includes the voices of students in the development process and prioritising the needs of students, especially those who have the most learning and wellbeing challenges. Groups mentioned include females, Māori, Pacific, and rainbow youth, and students with disabilities or extra learning support needs.

Members of the “more or earlier RSE” group wanted content introduced at an age just before or when students are experiencing this content in their lives. Also mentioned was an increased focus on key topics developing over time rather than introduced at discrete year levels. In terms of content, this group would like to see more focus on:

- all forms of diversity (gender identities, sexualities, family types, and cultures)
- values such as inclusion, human rights, and hauora
- consent education that becomes more nuanced over time
- puberty including menstruation (e.g., when some students start around age 8)
- relationships and sexuality (e.g., safe sex, and dealing with pornography)
- content that supports students to stay safe and think critically about their online lives.

Both groups supported the inclusion of consent and safety education and were concerned about the wellbeing of young people but from different perspectives. The “less or later RSE” group were concerned about the potential wellbeing impacts of any, or an early, focus on gender diversity and “gender ideology” (although as noted above this content was not covered in the framework).

The “more or earlier RSE” group were concerned about young people’s mental health and wellbeing from an inclusion perspective. They considered the RSE framework needed to reflect the diversity of young people’s lives to ensure they feel safe, can see themselves within RSE learning, and are not harmed by being “othered” by RSE, their peers, or wider society.

Overall, RSE is ultimately aimed at supporting the wellbeing and learning of young people, as noted in the framework:

RSE is critical to the learning, development, and wellbeing of Aotearoa New Zealand’s young people. Well delivered, comprehensive RSE equips young people with the knowledge and confidence to make informed decisions about their lives and navigate important topics such as consent, healthy relationships, pubertal changes, and online safety (Ministry of Education, 2025, p. 1)

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Appendix 1: AI coding schema

AI code	Additional description (training examples for AI)
General themes	
Parents	Parent role or influence
Best-age	Best age or order to introduce language or concepts
Evidence	References to research or good practice on RSE
Teacher	Concern for teachers or teacher training or resource needs
2020	Discussion of the previous 2020 framework and guidelines
General themes: Wellbeing	
Wellbeing-general	General wellbeing commentary
Wellbeing-diversity	Discussion about diversity being related to wellbeing (e.g. suicide risk)
Wellbeing-ideology	Discussion of gender ideology (also being related to wellbeing e.g. creating identity confusion)
Content themes: Diversity	
Gender-identities	Diversity of gender; gender identity (trans, inter-sexed/DSD)
Sexual-identities	Diversity of sexuality (uses terms like pan-sexual, asexual, queer, gay)
Family-type-diversity	Diversity of family types (e.g. two mums, solo parent, rainbow, not just culture/religious differences)
Culture-diversity	Diversity of culture (such as Māori, Pacific, indigenous concepts, language & terms like irawhiti, takatāpui, fa'afafine, fakaleitī, akava'ine, vakasalewalewa)
Content themes: Other	
Values	Content about values (inclusion, care, respect, acceptance, empathy)
Identity	Content about personal/identity/self-awareness
Friendships	Content about friendships/healthy relationships/solving problems
Feelings	Content on feelings and emotions (e.g. crushes, depression)
Critical-thinking	Anything about 'thinking critically' or similar wording
Consent-safety	Consent & safety (e.g. sexual abuse from family/coaches & less focus on strangers; assertiveness; saying no)
Puberty	Puberty (including earlier onset)
Periods	Menstruation (includes menstrual variations like endometriosis)
Romantic-relationships-safe-sex	Romantic relationships, assertiveness, impact of alcohol/drugs, safe sex (STDs, HIV, prevent pregnancy, dealing with sexual violence/harassment/grooming)
Online	Content like media pressure, influencers, online harm etc
Bullying	Bullying violence or harassment (including transphobic/homophobic slurs)
Legal	Discussion of law or legal rights (age of consent, online posting, sexual offenses)
Other comments	
Mostly-okay	Response generally supports the content
Other	Use for comments that do not fit in any other code and ONLY if nothing else applies

Appendix 2: Survey themes from AI analysis

Theme category mentioned at least once by respondent	Less or later RSE %*	More or earlier RSE %*	Mixed %*	Neutral %*	Total %
General themes					
Parents	2722 (79%)**	101 (7%)	48 (36%)	52 (6%)	2923
Best-age	2002 (58%)**	503 (34%)	52 (39%)**	105 (12%)**	2662
Evidence-based	137 (4%)	243 (16%)	4 (3%)	24 (3%)	408
2020 (guidelines)	94 (3%)	182 (12%)	4 (3%)	45 (5%)	325
Teacher	350 (10%)	119 (8%)	9 (7%)	99 (11%)	577
General themes: Wellbeing					
Wellbeing-ideology	2262 (66%)**	1 (0%)	22 (17%)	0 (0%)	2285
Wellbeing-diversity	2 (0%)	716 (48%)	4 (3%)	1 (0%)	723
Wellbeing-general	87 (3%)	233 (16%)	7 (5%)	37 (4%)	364
Content themes: Diversity					
Gender-identities	933 (27%)	984 (66%)**	54 (41%)**	25 (3%)	1996
Sexual-identities	663 (19%)	812 (55%)**	40 (30%)	16 (2%)	1531
Culture-diversity	175 (5%)	573 (39%)	17 (13%)	16 (2%)	781
Family-type-diversity	281 (8%)	506 (34%)	11 (8%)	20 (2%)	818
Content themes: Other					
Values	1788 (52%)	693 (47%)	51 (39%)**	151 (17%)**	2683
Consent-safety	1499 (44%)	727 (49%)**	47 (36%)	86 (10%)	2359
Romantic-relationships-safe-sex	1076 (31%)	512 (35%)	48 (36%)	53 (6%)	1689
Puberty	584 (17%)	498 (34%)	30 (23%)	49 (5%)	1161
Periods/menstruation	125 (4%)	399 (27%)	11 (8%)	14 (2%)	549
Online	151 (4%)	471 (32%)	14 (11%)	42 (5%)	678
Critical-thinking	204 (6%)	364 (25%)	30 (23%)	164 (18%)**	762
Bullying	68 (2%)	307 (21%)	2 (2%)	8 (1%)	385
Legal age/laws	605 (18%)	109 (7%)	17 (13%)	26 (3%)	757
Identity (personal)	134 (4%)	281 (19%)	8 (6%)	15 (2%)	438
Friendships	179 (5%)	151 (10%)	9 (7%)	32 (4%)	371
Feelings	98 (3%)	101 (7%)	8 (6%)	13 (1%)	220
Other comments					
Mostly-okay	124 (4%)	431 (29%)	38 (29%)	82 (9%)	675
Other	392 (11%)	6 (0%)	2 (2%)	365 (41%)	765
Total respondents per group**	3436	1481	132	893	

*Percentages are calculated from only those who responded to open-ended comments

**Three most frequently mentioned theme by group

Bold indicates themes mentioned by 30% or more of a group

Appendix 3: Examples of repeat submissions

- 1) **Submission text provided from New Zealand based radio station [Say NO To The Gender Agenda - Reality Check Radio](https://realitycheck.radio/gender/) <https://realitycheck.radio/gender/>**

The provided text stated: *RSE should focus on body safety and respect, family values, biological facts, and the role of parents. The framework goes too far, too young. It undermines parental rights and introduces radical ideology. The material around sexuality, reproductive anatomy, and gender diversity is perverse and inappropriate. Remove all references to gender ideology.*

- 2) **Submission guideline and example text for respondents to adapt provided by InsideOut: [Make an urgent submission on the draft Relationship and Sexuality Education Framework today – before submissions close 9 May 2025 - InsideOUT |](https://insideout.org.nz/make-an-urgent-submission-on-the-draft-relationship-and-sexuality-education-framework-today-before-submissions-close-9-may-2025-2/)**

For the full text see:

<https://insideout.org.nz/make-an-urgent-submission-on-the-draft-relationship-and-sexuality-education-framework-today-before-submissions-close-9-may-2025-2/>