



Department
for Education

Relationships Education, Relationships and Sex Education and Health Education

**Equality Impact Assessment and Public
Sector Equality Duty**

September 2025

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Part 1: Introduction

This document sets out the equality impact assessment that addresses the potential impact of proposed changes to the Relationships, Education, Relationships and Sex Education and Health Education (RSHE) statutory guidance on groups with protected characteristics who might be impacted by the proposed changes. It also records the analysis undertaken by the Department to enable ministers to fulfil the requirements placed on them by the Public Sector Equality Duty (PSED) in accordance with the Equality Act 2010. This document updates the Equalities Impact Assessment completed and published in February 2019.

Section 149 of the Equality Act 2010 sets out that any public authority must in the exercise of its functions have due regard to the need to:

- a) **Eliminate discrimination**, harassment, victimisation and any other conduct prohibited under the Act.
- b) **Advance equality of opportunity** between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it.
- c) **Foster good relations** between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it.

The relevant protected characteristics for the purposes of (b) and (c) are: sex, race, disability, religion or belief, sexual orientation, pregnancy and maternity, gender reassignment and age (however age is not deemed a relevant protected characteristic in the context of the provision of education, benefits, facilities or services to pupils in schools). The analysis below reviews the impact of the proposed changes on groups with protected characteristics in light of the three limbs of section 149 of the Act.

The Secretary of State's view is that no categories of persons with a protected characteristic will be negatively impacted by the policy. Overall, we expect the policy to have a positive impact on all categories of persons with protected characteristics as set out below.

Part 2: Brief outline of policy / background

Policy context

The Relationships Education, Relationships and Sex Education and Health Education (England) Regulations 2019, made under sections 34 and 35 of the Children and Social Work Act 2017, make Relationships Education compulsory for all pupils receiving primary education and Relationships and Sex Education (RSE) compulsory for all pupils receiving secondary education. They also make Health Education compulsory in all schools except independent schools. Personal, Social, Health and Economic Education (PSHE) continues to be compulsory in independent schools.

The statutory guidance was published in 2019 for first teaching in September 2020, when relationships and health education became compulsory for the first time in all schools, and sex education became compulsory for all secondary schools. The Department committed to reviewing this guidance after three years of first teaching.

The purpose of relationships, sex and health education is to ensure that young people develop the knowledge and skills they need to live well in an increasingly complex world.

We want to equip young people to build healthy, positive relationships, to recognise harmful or abusive behaviour in themselves and others, and to learn to treat all people with respect, regardless of differences. High quality sex education can support young people to avoid unwanted pregnancies and sexually transmitted infections (STIs), and to develop meaningful and rewarding intimate relationships as adults. We want to equip young people to look after their physical and mental health, to avoid harmful behaviour, and to recognise when they need to seek help for themselves or others.

We know that many schools provide excellent, high-quality relationships, sex and health education for their pupils, based on the principles and curriculum content set out in the 2019 guidance, and complementing the role of families in educating their children.

The review process/ proposed changes

In May 2024 the Department published a draft version of the guidance for an eight-week consultation. The draft was informed by insights from a range of stakeholders, including other government departments and over 50 organisations, including teaching unions, faith groups, parent groups, academics and RSHE providers as well as an independent expert panel appointed by the former Secretary of State to specifically advise on at what age it is appropriate to teach certain topics in RSHE.

Proposed changes included introducing age limits, advice that schools should not teach about the concept of gender identity (beyond teaching about gender reassignment) and more detailed content on parental transparency. We also proposed adding several new subjects to the curriculum, and more detail on others. These include:

- Suicide prevention
- Sexual harassment and sexual violence
- Loneliness
- The prevalence of 'deepfakes'
- Healthy behaviours during pregnancy, as well as miscarriage
- Illegal online behaviours including drug and knife supply
- The dangers of vaping
- Menstrual and gynaecological health including endometriosis, polycystic ovary syndrome (PCOS) and heavy menstrual bleeding.

The Department received 14,369 consultation responses from a wide range of people, including parents, young people and professionals working across the sector. The consultation responses were analysed by Nous Group using a combined text and statistical analysis approach.

As set out below, we have also reviewed the latest evidence in this area (including the [Cass Review](#)), and listened to the views of stakeholders, including teachers, parents, young people, local authorities and key stakeholders such as unions, faith groups, charities and RSHE providers, and unions on the revised draft guidance and latest evidence.

Following this work, we updated the guiding principles to include a focus on engagement with pupils, transparency with parents, building positive attitudes and skills, and careful sequencing that is relevant, responsive and accessible to all pupils. We also emphasise that the curriculum should be delivered by a skilled, knowledgeable and confident workforce including safeguarding, and underpinned by a whole school approach.

We kept or made minor amendments to the language against some of proposals in the 2024 draft, such as the new module on personal safety and content on knife crime.

The consultation also asked respondents to provide views regarding the potential impact of the guidance on those who share a protected characteristic under the Equality Act 2010, whether negative or positive. How could any adverse impact be reduced and are there any other ways we could advance equality of opportunity or foster good relations between those who share a protected characteristic and those who do not?

Analysis showed that most respondents shared general perspectives on this question, which could not be attributed to this theme. Respondents shared comments that the guidance will have a positive impact on those with protected characteristics. Other respondents shared that the Guidance would have a negative impact on those with protected characteristics. Comments were made regarding the impact on members of the LGBT community.

In response to the main questions the consultation posed, we have made changes to the following areas

Engagement with parents There is a strong public interest in parents being consulted on the RSHE curriculum, able to see all materials used in RSHE teaching if they would

like to, and schools should not agree to any contractual restrictions on showing parents this content. The new guidance makes it clear that parents are not able to veto curriculum content, but that parents must be consulted on the RSE policy and should be able to see what their children are being taught.

Violence against women and girls to increase the focus on participative interactive learning including developing age-appropriate knowledge and skills in primary, and the addition of areas such as sexual ethics, AI and deepfakes at secondary. By providing primary school pupils with clear content on healthy relationships and introducing more complex concepts at secondary school, we hope pupils will understand and recognise unhealthy relationships and know how to challenge and report them.

Mental health the guidance has shifted the tone slightly to emphasise that anxiety and low mood are normal, and teaching should focus on building resilience and coping when things go wrong. Content on mental wellbeing already addresses much of what should be taught to prevent suicide and recognise suicide ideation. In recognising the breadth of emotions ranging from normal to dangerous we hope to support pupils to help themselves and know when to seek advice from a professional / trusted other.

Age restrictions Schools must cover all content, but sequencing should be informed by their local context and should be preventative. Schools have flexibility over when to teach certain content. The guidance is clear that using age-appropriate content and language is important, that pupils should have the skills and knowledge they need at the right time and that parents should be consulted on sensitive content in advance.

LGBT inclusivity The guidance is clear that pupils should understand the importance of equality and respect and learn about the law relating to the protected characteristics, including sexual orientation and gender reassignment. The revised guidance recognises that, beyond the facts and law in this area, there is significant public debate and states that schools should not endorse any particular view and should avoid language and activities which repeat or enforce gender stereotypes. The text also gives factual advice about using resources and what to avoid. The guidance strongly encourages primaries to include same sex parents when discussing different types of families.

To make the guidance more user friendly we have also changed the layout of the content and removed duplication.

Links to departmental priorities

The Opportunity Mission: every child achieving and thriving

The Opportunity mission aims to break down the barriers to opportunity for every child and young person, equipping them with the essential knowledge and skills to enable them to achieve and thrive in the world. In particular, building children's wellbeing and sense of belonging through positive environments at school, home, and within their communities. The pillars are:

1. Best start in life
2. Every child achieving and thriving

3. Skills for opportunity and growth
4. Cross cutting: Family Security (tackling child poverty, keeping children safe)

The RSHE curriculum supports children and young people across all four pillars of the opportunity mission.

Safer Streets Mission (SSM)

Through the RSHE curriculum, the DfE supports the Home Office to meet its aim to reduce serious violent harms, including halving knife crime and halving violence against women and girls.

The Health Mission

Through the RSHE curriculum the DfE supports DHSC to improve the health of children and young people, making sure they have the knowledge to make healthy choices as they grow into adults. The curriculum contributes to the government's aim of raising the healthiest generation ever.

Evidence base

This assessment draws on evidence from a number of sources, including:

- Department for Education (2025): Relationships education, relationships and sex education and health education consultation.
- [Relationships, sex and health education: 2020 curriculum implementation - GOV.UK \(2024\)](#)
- Ofsted [Review of sexual abuse in schools and colleges - GOV.UK](#)
- [‘A lot of it is actually just abuse’- Young people and pornography | Children's Commissioner for England \(2023\)](#)
- [Experiences of relationships and sex education and sexual risk taking \(2021\) - GOV.UK](#)
- [Tackling violence against women and girls - NAO report](#)
- [Education for wellbeing programme findings - GOV.UK](#)
- [School-based suicide prevention strategies](#)
- The SEYLE cluster-randomised, controlled trial. *The Lancet*, 385(9977), 1536-1544.
- Water safety: [Active Lives | Sport England](#)
- [WAID | National Water Safety Forum](#)
- [The prevalence of sexually transmitted infections in young people and other high risk groups - Women and Equalities Committee](#)
- [Tackling non-consensual intimate image abuse 2025](#)

- [Boys and girls experiences | Youth Endowment Fund](#)
- [Schools, pupils and their characteristics, Academic year 2023/24 - Explore education statistics - GOV.UK](#)
- [Creating a safer world: the challenge of regulating online pornography - GOV.UK](#)
- [Teaching relationships education to prevent sexual abuse](#)

There are limitations to the current evidence base in terms of the protected characteristics. We do not have detailed information on:

- 1) The number and distribution of pupils with some protected characteristics, such as sexual orientation and gender reassignment.
- 2) There is little evidence that specifically focuses on the effect of the subjects on groups with particular protected characteristics.

Part 3: Equality Analysis

Section 149 of the Equality Act 2010 sets out that any public authority must in the exercise of its functions have due regard to protected characteristics against each of the 3 limbs below (except for marriage and civil partnership, where only the first limb applies):

- a) **Eliminate discrimination**, harassment, victimisation and any other conduct prohibited under the Act.
- b) **Advance equality of opportunity** between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it.
- c) **Foster good relations** between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it.

Age

The equality impact assessment prepared in relation to the 2020 RSHE guidance found there to be no impact under limb (a). We consider that this remains the case and anticipate no impact under this limb.

The RSHE curriculum should encourage respect between people in different age groups. Through content on the conventions of courtesy and manners, bullying, permission-seeking and giving, the current curriculum teaches pupils that they can expect to be treated with respect by others in school and wider society, and that in turn they should show due respect to others. We therefore expect there to continue to be a positive impact in these areas (limbs (b) and (c)).

The 2025 guidance is still clear that using age-appropriate language is important and places greater emphasis on schools to have meaningful engagement with parents and pupils to inform the design of their RSHE curriculum but it is also clear that teaching should be preventative and ensure that pupils have the skills and knowledge they need at the right time. This should help schools to sequence the content so that it feels relevant and responds to their cohort's interest and challenges whilst also balancing the views and concerns of parents and lead to better participation.

Concerns were raised prior to this review that content was being taught in schools that was not appropriate to the age of those being taught. Applying age limits to prevent sensitive topics being taught too early was considered by an expert panel who carried out a small review in 2023. They proposed some age limits for teaching content on particular subjects, which we consulted on in 2024.

Consultation responses demonstrated very mixed views on the introduction of age limits in RSHE and expressed concerns that a lack of knowledge could leave younger children vulnerable to harmful situations. Key stakeholders also advised that applying age limits in this way would run contrary to all the latest evidence, which indicates that children are being exposed to topics such as LGBT content, sexual harassment and sexual violence, pornography, sex education, and the changing adolescent body at younger ages.

Stakeholders also did not recommend any changes to the guidance which restrict schools using their professional judgment over when subjects should be taught in order to safeguard and promote the welfare of all pupils.

Other examples of wider research which indicates that these risks are affecting children earlier include:

- Research from the Children's Commissioner tells us that 10% of children have accessed pornography which normalises sexual violence by the age of nine¹, that 38% of children who have seen pornography, had stumbled across pornography accidentally online, often on social media sites like Twitter.
- Evidence suggests that year 9 is too late to only begin conversations on violence and abuse when we know 55% of survivors of abuse state that their abuse started before the age of 11 (and 30% before the age of 9)². Similarly, year 7 may be too late to discuss sending and receiving sexual images given evidence from Internet Watch Foundation of an increase in the proportion of this type of imagery seen by children, including children aged 7-10 in 2023, up 65% from 2022 (104,282 in 2023 vs 63,057 in 2022).³ The NHS notes that 'FGM is usually carried out on young girls between infancy and the age of 15, most commonly before puberty starts'.⁴
- Researchers identify the need for prevention education programmes to be developmental (McWhirter, 2009; Department for Education, 2015), taking into consideration the **changing needs of pupils as they grow**. Programmes should start early enough to have an impact (Department for Education, 2015; Nation et al., 2003), and be appropriately timed to the age, maturity, needs and assets of pupils. Some research suggests that preventative education is most effective between 7-12 years, although others suggest that older students learn concepts more quickly than younger children ([Topping & Barron, 2009](#), [Bovarnick & Scott, 2016](#)).
- Research suggests that RSE education should take a **strengths-based approach** focusing on young people's capabilities and enabling them to make **informed choices** about their lives and relationships, taking into account the realities of how young people socialise and communicate.

The 2025 version of the guidance does not stipulate age limits for certain content, as was proposed in the consultation draft. As set out above, we have taken into account the consultation responses, available evidence and feedback from stakeholders, including teachers, which shows that having the flexibility to sequence the curriculum to build age-appropriate knowledge and skills, and that responds to local intelligence, is critical to keeping our children safe and supporting their wellbeing.

This means that, as before, schools have flexibility over when to teach certain content. This guidance places trust in teachers to deliver content in an age and developmentally

¹ [New evidence on pornography's influence on harmful sexual behaviour among children | Children's Commissioner for England](#)

² [Child sexual abuse – Appendix tables - Office for National Statistics](#)

³ ['Self-generated' Child Sex Abuse | IWF 2023 Annual Report](#)

⁴ [Female genital mutilation \(FGM\) - NHS](#)

appropriate and timely manner that protects and supports children, which can improve both attendance and attainment (limbs (b) and (c)).

Impact assessment

Our impact assessment in relation to the protected characteristic of age remains unchanged as compared to the impact assessment undertaken in 2019. We are clear that the content should be age and developmentally appropriate and allow schools the flexibility to teach the curriculum in a way that meets the needs of their pupils. As before, we consider that this will have a positive impact under limbs (b) and (c).

Sex

The 2019 equality impact assessment considered that there would be no impact under limb (a). The goal of the policy continues to be to ensure that relationships, sex and health education are equally relevant to male and female pupils and address the particular issues they face. As before, schools must comply with their duties under the Equality Act in ensuring equal access to this subject. We therefore consider that there is no change in the impact assessment under limb (a).

As well as including curriculum content on stereotypes, the guidance advises that staff should be conscious of everyday sexism, misogyny, homophobia and stereotypes, and should take action to build a culture where prejudice is identified and tackled.

The updated RSHE statutory guidance includes a discrete section on addressing sexual harassment and sexual violence which continues to emphasise the building blocks of healthy relationships, including mutual respect, but also directly addresses risks such as coercion, cyberbullying, and how technology can be used to groom, harass and stalk people.

This responds to evidence that forms of sexual harassment and VAWG can lead to lower school engagement, anxiety, poor self-esteem, alienation from teachers, and poor academic achievement⁵. Another study found that almost a third of girls surveyed by EVAW don't feel safe from sexual harassment in school, and 80% of girls think schools need to do more to tackle this and support young people's sex and relationships education.⁶ This underscores the need for schools to be actively involved in safeguarding pupils, for pupils to be widely consulted in the prevention of VAWG, and for a Whole School Approach to be adopted as part of a whole society commitment to preventing VAWG. We consider that the new content on addressing sexual harassment and sexual violence will have a positive impact on all children but will particularly address the issues for girls highlighted by this research.

The guidance is clear that in talking about sexual harassment and sexual violence, boys should not be stigmatised, and teachers should be careful not to perpetuate harmful

⁵ [Comparing the impact of bullying and sexual harassment victimization on the mental and physical health of adolescents.](#)

⁶ [New report: It's #AboutTime - A Whole School Approach to Ending Violence Against Women and Girls | End Violence Against Women](#)

stereotypes of masculinity.

We have taken into account evidence on effective education for boys^{7 8} and have added additional content on sexual ethics, the incel subculture, unsolicited sexual language / attention / touching, taking of and sharing intimate sexual images without consent, sexual harassment including public sexual harassment, upskirting and pressuring other young people to do sexual things.

The Youth Endowment Foundation [social skills training](#) also shows the benefit of starting early intervention with boys age around 9-10, but also the evidence says that there are benefits of social skills training being universal.

The Women's Health Strategy for England⁹ called for 'Increased education and awareness about women's health, for both genders, from school onwards.' This follows a focus group study on 'women's priorities for women's health' which found that the 'Lack of awareness and debate was viewed as reinforcing continued misplaced embarrassment about 'taboo' subjects such as menstruation, fertility problems and menopause, reducing women's empowerment in health care and in other settings such as schools and workplaces'¹⁰.

In response we now include more content on the facts about reproductive health, including fertility and menopause, and the potential impact of lifestyle on fertility for men and women. Plus more focus on women's health such as menstrual and gynaecological health, including endometriosis and polycystic ovary syndrome (PCOS).

We believe that these changes will have positive impacts across limbs b and c.

We recognise the sensitive content taught within the RSHE curriculum and that teachers may have experienced some of the issues they are required to teach about or not feel appropriately skilled to do so. The guidance signposts to government funded resources to help ensure effective RSHE teaching. In addition, the department is considering what further evidenced based support we may wish to provide.

Impact assessment

We believe that the updated guidance should continue to help to foster positive, respectful relationships between boys and girls. Emphasising mutual respect in relationships has the potential to help to reduce harassment and sexual violence in schools. Relationships Education, RSE and Health Education is designed to be equally relevant and beneficial to male and female pupils and address the particular issues they face. Our impact assessment in relation to this protected characteristic therefore remains unchanged. We believe that the implementation of the proposed changes to the statutory guidance around strengthening the content on sexual harassment and sexual violence, the additional content on not stigmatising boys and additional content about reproductive health and women's health will have a positive impact (limbs (b) and (c)).

⁷ [PDF-3-Teenage-Boys-and-Sexual-Consent-v2.pdf](#).

⁸ [Full article: From 'harmful sexual behaviour' to 'harmful sexual culture': addressing school-related sexual and gender-based violence among young people in England through 'post-digital sexual citizenship'](#)

⁹ [Womens's Health Strategy for England 2022](#)

¹⁰ [Womens Priorities for Womens Health - a focus group study.pdf](#)

Disability

This protected characteristic covers a wide spectrum of pupils, including those with a variety of learning disabilities, physical disabilities and complex medical needs, including those with education, health and care (EHC) plans. The 2019 equality impact assessment considered there to be no impact under limb (a). Our assessment remains unchanged - as before, all schools delivering RSHE are required to comply with the Equality Act and we consider there to be no impact under limb (a) in relation to the access of disabled pupils to these subjects.

In order to continue to enable all pupils to access these subjects, schools will need to continue to ensure high-quality differentiated teaching and tailoring of content to pupils with special educational needs and disabilities, including taking account of any developmental differences relative to other pupils their age. Support for schools to do this is already set out in the *0-25 Special Educational Needs and Disabilities code of practice* (2015)¹¹ and this is also referenced in the guidance. Effective teaching may also require a differentiated curriculum and there are already specific duties set out in the Equality Act 2010 (schedule 10)¹² to increase the extent to which disabled pupils can participate in the curriculum. Some pupils, including those with an identified special educational needs or disabilities (SEND) and EHC plans, may use assistive technology. As with all other aspects of the curriculum and school life, teachers will need to ensure that in teaching the revised content that pupils with a SEND continue to have parity of access by making reasonable adjustments.

Some stakeholders were concerned that applying age limits to topics taught within this curriculum would result in incoherent sequencing of some of the age restricted topics for SEND children, and the subsequent lack of clarity in which these topics could then be taught. As set out above, we have decided not to make the changes proposed by the consultation draft in this area.

The evidence suggests that teaching the content of the curriculum in this area to young people with learning disabilities will have a positive impact under limb (b). Young people with mild to moderate learning disabilities are as likely to have had sexual intercourse by the age of 19/20 as their peers from the general population. However, young people with mild to moderate learning disabilities are more likely to practice unsafe sex compared to young people from the general population.¹³ Young women with mild to moderate learning disabilities are more likely to have been pregnant or be a mother.¹⁴ More than 1 in 3 adults with a learning disability experience sexual abuse in adulthood in the UK.¹⁵ This high prevalence is attributable to the lack of education, overprotection due to social

¹¹ [SEND code of practice: 0 to 25 years - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/426281/SEND_Code_of_Practice_0_to_25_years.pdf)

¹² [Equality Act 2010: guidance - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/426281/Equality_Act_2010_guidance.pdf)

¹³ Public Health England, "Health inequalities: Sexual Health" (2019).

¹⁴ Baines S, et al. (2018), "Sexual activity and sexual health among young adults with and without mild/moderate intellectual disability" *BMCPublic Health*, 18(1).

¹⁵ Tomsa, R. et al. (2021), "Prevalence of sexual abuse in adults with intellectual disability: Systematic review and meta-analysis", *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health* 18(4).

stereotypes and reduced societal expectations, and denial of people with a learning disability's sexuality.¹⁶

The guidance makes clear that some pupils with disabilities (and special educational needs) may be the target of bullying because of the attitudes and behaviours some people have towards those who are different from themselves. The overall focus of building respectful relationships is aimed at ensuring that schools will address this both as part of these subjects and as part of their whole school approach, having a positive impact under limb (c). Pupils with disabilities may also be more vulnerable to sexual exploitation which will be directly addressed through the teaching of these subjects¹⁷. Adults with learning disabilities are known to die earlier than their non-disabled peers from preventable causes ([Learning from Lives and Deaths – people with a learning disability and autistic people \(LeDeR\) | King's College London](#)). Teaching pupils with SEND about healthy lifestyles and to recognise when they need support will help to counter this.

Schools also need to meet their responsibilities as set out in the Special Educational Needs and Disabilities Code of Practice 0-25 years (2015) to enable disabled pupils to access their education and prepare them for adulthood. Therefore, the guidance will continue to have a positive impact under limbs (b) and (c).

We have included some revised content in the guidance concerning mental health as set out above, with a view to helping schools support pupils to know when it is appropriate to seek advice or help from a professional or trusted other.

Impact assessment

The guidance continues to recommend that schools are mindful of these additional factors when planning their curriculum to meet the needs of all pupils and take advantage of the opportunity that these subjects offer to address them through their curriculum, including through whole school approaches. Relatedly, when delivering this content, schools and teachers need to ensure that they do not inadvertently single out pupils with disabilities from their peers by emphasising their “difference” which may have a negative impact on their self-esteem and relationships with peers. When teaching this content, they should also ensure that messages about balancing and rationing time online and excessive use of devices, are not misinterpreted as applying to assistive technology. The updated guidance continues to help foster a greater awareness among all pupils of the potentially different and similar needs of young people with disabilities. We believe it will advance equality of opportunity and help foster better relationships (and therefore have a positive impact under limbs b and c).

Religion / belief

The 2019 equality impact assessment considered there to be no impact under limb (a). RSHE is mandatory in all schools, including faith schools, therefore there continues to be no discriminatory impact (under limb (a)) on those with the protected characteristic of religion / belief in terms of access to the subjects.

¹⁶ Meer, T. & Combrinck, H. (2015). “Invisible intersections: understanding the complex stigmatisation of women with intellectual disabilities in their vulnerability to gender-based violence” Agenda, 29 (2).

¹⁷ [Child sexual abuse and exploitation: Understanding risk and vulnerability | Early Intervention Foundation \(eif.org.uk\)](#)

All schools are required to have regard to the revised statutory guidance, when teaching these subjects.

The subjects cover topics where some faith communities' hold views on what is right which may differ from what is permitted under the law, for example, contraception and abortion. We continue to expect schools to work in partnership with parents and the wider community. In most cases, this will enable schools to design a curriculum that meets the requirements of the guidance and addresses any concerns held by members of the school community.

When teaching the curriculum, the religious background of all pupils should be taken into consideration, so that beliefs and values of the pupils and school community are acknowledged and respected. This is essential in all schools, not only faith schools. All schools must have due regard to the guidance and teach in accordance with the requirements of the Equality Act 2010.

Parents will continue to be allowed to request that their child be withdrawn from sex education with the exception of those aspects included in the Science Curriculum (in maintained schools), and subject to the qualification set out below regarding the circumstances in which that request should be respected. There are many reasons why parents choose to withdraw their child from sex education. These include when parents are able and willing to teach their child about sex or where they make alternative arrangements for this to be provided in line with, for example, their religious background. In addition, some pupils are withdrawn due to their or their parents' beliefs about the age that pupils should access this type of information. There is no right to withdraw from relationships or health education.

The guidance is clear that schools should be able to teach these subjects to people of all faiths, and within the ethos of their school. There will be teachers who do not agree with elements of the curriculum as it contradicts their faith, but, as with any other subject, teachers are expected to deliver content in a balanced and impartial way. Some organisations have developed faith specific resources to facilitate teaching and others have developed materials to support inclusive practice in secular schools for example the [Model Catholic Primary RSE Curriculum](#) and the [Model Catholic Secondary RSE Curriculum](#).

Impact assessment

We do not think the revisions to the guidance alter the original impact assessment in relation to this protected characteristic. We believe the policy will continue to advance equality of opportunity (b) for young people of a variety of faiths (including those who are withdrawn from sex education within RSHE and those with no faith) as they gain access to RSHE that equips them to deal with modern life and meets the needs of everyone in their school and wider community. This greater access may also lead to greater integration and better relationships (c) with young people of another or no faith. Our impact assessment in relation to this protected characteristic therefore remains unchanged.

Sexual Orientation

We have made some changes to the section of the guidance concerning Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender content.

Schools will continue to need to ensure that young people, whatever their developing sexuality, feel that RSE, Relationships education and health education is relevant to them and sensitive to their needs. All schools have to meet the requirements of the Equality Act 2010. Therefore, we expect no new discriminatory impact limb (a) or removal of discrimination in terms of access to these subjects.

The guidance continues to ensure that all young people learn about different types of relationships and develop skills that help build kindness and respect. We believe this will continue to build greater understanding and better relationships (c) between young people of different sexual orientations and may help reduce homophobia and biphobia. The guidance continues to be relevant to young people of all sexual orientations, thus increasing equality of opportunity for young people with different sexual orientations, or who are in different family models. We have also made changes to the 2025 version of the guidance to strongly encourage primary schools to teach about same sex parents when discussing different types of families (limbs (b) and (c)).

Impact assessment

We consider that the existing content, together with this change to the guidance will ensure that pupils' own life experience is reflected in the teaching they receive and will foster good relations between those who have this protected characteristic or have family members who do and those who do not. Our impact assessment in relation to this protected characteristic therefore remains unchanged – we consider the updated guidance will have a positive impact under limbs (b) and (c).

Gender Reassignment

As before, children and young people with this protected characteristic, or in a family model which includes members with this characteristic, will have equal access to these subjects. We are also clear that the content should be taught in a way that is relevant for all pupils, including those who are gender questioning. Therefore, we continue to consider that there is no discriminatory impact or removal of discrimination in terms of access to the subjects (limb (a)).

We continue to be clear that schools should teach the facts and the law about gender reassignment so that pupils with this protected characteristic will find the education relevant to their needs and greater understanding of this area will be fostered (limbs (b) and (c)). As before, there is a potential risk that some children with this protected characteristic or in a family model that includes members with the characteristic might feel that the new subjects are not fully applicable to them if they do not see themselves reflected in the teaching. However, we would expect that the teaching of these subjects will be tailored by schools to the needs of the school population.

In the section of the guidance dealing with Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender content, the content on gender reassignment reflects the judgment of the Supreme Court in the case of *For Women Scotland* on the interpretation of the Equality Act. It explains that teaching should recognise that people have legal rights by virtue of their biological sex, which are different from the rights of those of the opposite sex who have undergone gender reassignment. Pupils should also be taught to recognise that people with the protected characteristic of gender reassignment, as with the other protected characteristics, have protection from discrimination and should be treated with respect and dignity.

The new content also recognises that, beyond the law and facts about gender reassignment and biological sex, there is significant public debate in this area and advises that schools should not endorse any particular view and should avoid language and activities which repeat or enforce gender stereotypes.

Impact Assessment

We believe that the guidance will help schools provide education in this potentially contentious area to all pupils, including those with this protected characteristic, and will build greater understanding and better relationships between young people who share this protected characteristic or are in a family model that includes members with the characteristic and those who do or are not (a positive impact under limbs (b) and (c)). Our impact assessment in relation to this protected characteristic therefore remains unchanged.

Marriage and civil partnership

Unmarried couples living together in a stable intimate relationship are often referred to as 'common law spouses'. Although the legal entitlements and rights available to spouses and civil partners do not apply to cohabitants, many people falsely believe that they do. A 2019 British Social Attitudes Survey demonstrates the prevalence of this 'common law marriage myth'. Almost half (46%) the total England and Wales population wrongly assumed cohabitants living together form a 'common law marriage'. In households with children, 55% of people believed in common law marriage.¹⁸ Belief in the myth has not decreased significantly over the last fifteen years.

Schools have been required to teach about marriage and civil partnerships since RSHE was introduced in 2020, but to address the above and the 2022 Women and Equalities Committee report on 'The rights of cohabiting partners' ¹⁹ the guidance now places equal weight on the importance of both institutions including the legal rights and myths of cohabitation.

The law to criminalise child marriage and prohibit registered marriages under the age of 18 was enacted on 27 February 2023. A report by Karma Nirvana, A British human

¹⁸ [Annual Report and Accounts 2019 | National Centre for Social Research](#)

¹⁹ [The rights of cohabiting partners: Government response to the Committee's Second Report](#)

rights charity supporting victims of honour-based abuse and forced marriage, shows that the average age of reported child marriage is 15 years old.

Most reported perpetrators are the victim's parents. Victims of suspected child marriage have disclosed experiencing physical abuse (39%) from perpetrators, with the youngest child affected being 3 years old. Additionally, threats of victims being taken abroad for child marriage have been reported in 61% of cases. Victims have reported being taken abroad to Pakistan, India, Spain, Iraq and Turkey. Referrals to the national helpline have predominantly originated from children social care (39%) and schools (16%).²⁰ The updated curriculum now requires schools to teach about forced marriage and that marrying before the age of 18 is illegal.

Karma Nirvana data reveals that a substantial proportion of professionals contacting the national honour-based abuse helpline about suspected child marriages lacked understanding of the new legal framework. Data from Karma Nirvana indicates that a substantial proportion of professionals are unaware of the new child marriage law, hindering their ability to identify and respond to cases effectively. All professionals contacting the helpline regarding a child 'at risk', reported not receiving any training on the new law.

Impact Assessment

The revised content in the guidance will help ensure that teachers will have a better understanding of risk, and increase their knowledge of the law, support and safeguarding processes. This is not a relevant protected characteristic for the purposes of part 6 of the Equality Act 2010 and therefore limbs (a), (b) and (c) do not apply.

Race

We expect no new discriminatory impact in relation to access to these subjects – our assessment in relation to limb (a) therefore remains unchanged.

As covered under marriage, FGM is traditionally performed in many parts of Africa, the Middle East and Asia. Building awareness should help to better safeguard children from these communities from this form of abuse.

There is evidence to show that a higher proportion of black children are concerned about being victims of violence as compared to the population as a whole. The [Children, violence and vulnerability 2024 Report funded by Youth Endowment Fund](#) showed that 67% of 13-17 years olds are concerned about being victims of violence, rising to 74% for black children and 81% for pupils in pupil referral units (PRUs). The new personal safety topic, expects schools to teach pupils about how to recognise and manage peer influence in relation to personal safety, understanding which trusted adult they can talk to if they are worried a violence and/or knife crime and risk of grooming or exploitation.

There is also research that shows for Black and minoritised girls and young women in particular, how their experiences of gender-based violence (GBV) are distinct from their

²⁰ Karma Nirvana 2024 one year on report [Assessing-the-Impact-of-Legislation-v4.pdf](#)

White peers in several ways. Black girls and young women have reported being oversexualised compared to their White peers. 88% of mixed-race girls and 82% black, African, Caribbean and Black British girls reported to have experienced public sexual harassment as a form of gender-based violence²¹

As set out above under Sex, we have added content on sexual violence and harassment to support increased awareness in this area and foster good relations (b and c).

With regards to health, physical activity levels differ between ethnic groups and genders. People from Asian and Black groups, women in particular, are least likely to report being active. The proportion of people eating recommended portions of fruit or vegetables per day is lower in ethnic minority groups than in white groups and compared with the White British group, the proportion of people who are overweight or obese is higher in Black adults and lower among most other minority groups²². The RSHE curriculum continues to cover all these topics regarding limbs (b) and (c).

Impact

We believe the above changes to the content of the guidance will have a positive impact under limbs (b) and (c) in relation to this protected characteristic. Together with existing content, this will support schools in challenging stereotypes and advancing equality of opportunity limb (b) and greater integration and better relationships limb (c) between young people from different races and ethnicities by encouraging respectful, healthy relationships and a healthy lifestyle.

Pregnancy and maternity

As set out in our 2019 equality impact assessment, all schools have to meet the requirements of the Equality Act 2010. We expect no new discriminatory impact (a) or removal of discrimination as a result of the 2025 update to the statutory guidance. Our assessment against limb (a) therefore remains unchanged.

The guidance remains clear that pupils should be taught the facts around pregnancy.

As set out under the analysis in relation to the protected characteristic of sex, following the 'The Women's Health Strategy for England'²³ we have updated guidance to include more on the importance of preparing for a healthy pregnancy, healthy behaviours before and during pregnancy, pelvic floor health, information on miscarriage and pregnancy loss, including how to access care and support.

A new reference has been added to the 'Families' topic, at secondary school, which sets out that pupils should be taught about the roles and responsibilities of parents with respect to raising children, including the characteristics of successful parenting and the importance of the early years of a child's life for brain development, which has the potential to have a

²¹ [Sundaram, V., Jessop, N Bell, B & Jackson, E \(2022\) Everything is racialised on top: Black and minoritised girls and young women experiences of public sexual harassment in the UK. Plan International](#)

²² [The Health Of People From Ethnic Minority Groups In England | The King's Fund](#)

²³ [Womens's Health Strategy for England 2022](#)

further positive impact on pupils who are pregnant and who have children.

Impact

As a result, the policy is likely to continue to have a positive impact (limbs (b) and (c)) on those with this protected characteristic, in increasing the understanding of all children in these areas.

Part 4: Conclusion

This assessment has updated the analysis completed in 2019 on the impact of the introduction of compulsory RSE, Relationships education and health education in schools, in line with section 149 of the Equality Act 2010 and the PSED. It has been updated to reflect the changes to the statutory guidance following public consultation.

Following this analysis, we believe the proposed changes to the statutory guidance in schools has the potential to have a positive impact on pupils with certain protected characteristics.

A major tool of mitigating any potentially negative impacts and increasing positive impacts is the continued engagement process, the school support offers to implement these changes, and the flexibility schools have to design how they deliver the content including the sequencing of topics and local data about prevalence of experiences and harms.

The table below lists the protected characteristics and sets out where we anticipate positive and negative impacts:

| Protected characteristics | Eliminate discrimination | Advance equality of opportunity | Foster good relationships |
|----------------------------------|---------------------------------|--|----------------------------------|
| Sex | No impact | Potential positive impact | Potential positive impact |
| Disability | No impact | Potential positive impact | Potential positive impact |
| Religion / belief | No impact | Potential positive impact | Potential positive impact |
| Sexual orientation | No impact | Potential positive impact | Potential positive impact |
| Gender reassignment | No impact | Potential positive impact | Potential positive impact |
| Race | No impact | Potential positive impact | Potential positive impact |

| | | | |
|-------------------------|-----------|---------------------------|---------------------------|
| Pregnancy and maternity | No impact | Potential positive impact | Potential positive impact |
|-------------------------|-----------|---------------------------|---------------------------|

| Protected characteristics | Eliminate discrimination | Advance equality of opportunity | Foster good relationships |
|--------------------------------|--------------------------|---|--|
| Age | No impact | Potential positive impact | Potential positive impact |
| Marriage and civil partnership | No impact | N/A – not a relevant protected characteristic | N/A – not a relevant protected characteristic. |

We believe that the policy will overall have a positive impact on groups protected by the Equality Act 2010 and have ensured there are reasonable mitigations for any potential negative impacts.

We continue to expect schools to work in partnership, locally and nationally, to provide high quality Relationships education, RSE and health education and develop effective ways of meeting the particular needs of all their pupils. We also anticipate, and will work to encourage, those organisations that represent those with relevant protected characteristics to help schools fulfil their equalities duties in delivering the provision and ensure that all pupils are able to achieve.

Part 5: Monitoring and evaluation

The RSHE statutory guidance is clear that we are required to regularly review the contents to make sure the policies, curriculum content and resources referenced are kept up to date and in line with wider government policies and regulatory changes. We will therefore continue to monitor and assess the equalities impacts as part of this formal review cycle.

In addition, we will also ensure that effective monitoring and evaluation is built into the design process for any delivery support that we may provide to support the sector implement these changes and the findings from these arrangements to inform the formal review cycle.



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