

Teach Us Consent + The Foundation for Young Australians

**Equipping teachers to deliver
quality respectful relationship,
sex and consent education**

August 2021

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CONSENT. **fya**

1. Executive summary

Teach Us Consent and the Foundation for Young Australians (FYA) welcomes the opportunity to provide policy analysis and recommendations to the Quality Initial Teacher Education Review (Review) undertaken by the Department of Education, Skills and Employment (DESE).

This submission responds to two questions under Part B) Preparing ITE students to be effective teachers:

Question 6: What more can we do to ensure that ITE curriculum is evidence based and all future teachers are equipped to implement evidence-based teaching practices?

Question 7: What more can ITE providers and employers do to ensure ITE students are getting the practical experience they need before they start their teaching careers?

This submission highlights the following:

1. There is a need to better address consent, sexuality and respectful relationships education in schools. Effective respectful relationship, sex and consent education in schools is reliant on three key areas:
 - a. The content (through the curriculum),
 - b. Who is delivering the content (the teacher themselves), and;
 - c. How the content is delivered (the pedagogical approach).
2. All teachers should be equipped with the knowledge and skills to promote respectful relationships among students, and effectively deliver sex and consent education. This includes:
 - a. Building an understanding of best practice pedagogy in delivering the sex education curriculum,
 - b. Methods to include student voice in the classroom, and
 - c. Trauma-informed practices in delivering sensitive content.
3. Young people across the country support better access to consent, sexuality and respectful relationships education - this submission shares the stories of 9 people from across Australia who shared their stories as part of the [Teach Us Consent petition](#).

Summary of recommendations

Teach Us Consent and the Foundation for Young Australians recommends that the Department of Education, Skills and Employment take the following actions in relation to Initial Teacher Education:

1. Ensure teachers have an understanding of best practice pedagogy in delivering respectful relationship, sex and consent education and have methods for inclusion of student voice.
2. Ensure teachers are equipped with the knowledge and skills to implement trauma-informed practices in delivering respectful relationships, sex and consent education.

CONTENT WARNING: Sexual assault & violence

The Appendix at the end of this submission from pages six to seven includes a sample of testimonies of people's experiences of consent education from students and may include references to sexual assault and violence. These accounts have not been edited, and include accounts from young people under 18 about their firsthand experiences.

Reading this content may be difficult or triggering. We encourage you to care for your safety and well-being if you choose to engage with this content. This content is included to highlight the experiences of students and the impact that teachers' pedagogy and personal bias can have on students' knowledge and behaviour. It is not necessary to engage with these testimonies to understand the content of the submission.

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2. Need for better consent, sexuality and respectful relationships education in schools

Young people across the country support better access to consent, sexuality and respectful relationships education. This has been clearly demonstrated through the [Teach Us Consent petition](#) and many other calls from young people and extensive research on this topic.¹ There is substantial evidence that effective consent, sexuality and respectful relationships education can improve outcomes, knowledge and sexual behaviour amongst young people.²

Young people in Australia prefer to be educated on these topics in a school setting,³ and evidence shows young people want more experienced and open-minded teachers and more time allocated to consent, sexuality and respectful relationships education.⁴ Teachers need to be better equipped with the skills, knowledge and practical experience to effectively deliver this content.

Effective professional preparation develops a teacher's confidence and comfort in teaching sex education and improves student achievement.⁵ Multiple studies have identified educator training as the most important indicator in determining the quality of sex education instruction that meets a range of student needs.⁶

Research has also shown that providing a sex positive learning environment that promotes an open, tolerant, and positive attitude toward sex and sexuality, has been shown to enhance young people's ability to take action to protect themselves from the potential harms of sexual activity.⁷

3. Training teachers in pedagogy and student voice

¹ Paulina Ezer, Lucille Kerr, Christopher M. Fisher, Andrea Waling, Rosalind Bellamy & Jayne Lucke (2020) School-based relationship and sexuality education: what has changed since the release of the Australian Curriculum?, *Sex Education*, 20:6, 642-657, DOI: 10.1080/14681811.2020.1720634

² *ibid.*

³ *ibid.*

⁴ *ibid.*

⁵ K. Ann Sondag, Andrew G. Johnson & Mary E. Parrish (2020): School sex education: Teachers' and young adults' perceptions of relevance for LGBT students, *Journal of LGBT Youth*, DOI: 10.1080/19361653.2020.1789530

⁶ *ibid.*

⁷ *ibid.*

There is huge diversity among young people in Australia, from their identities, sexualities, faiths and cultures. In spite of this, the curriculum and pedagogical approaches remain focused on “young people” as a homogenous group.⁸ Although there is consensus that sex education is an important subject - there is little agreement over how it should be taught and how teachers are equipped with the skills to deliver this content.⁹ Teacher pedagogies on this subject as a result tend to vary based on individual practices, which in turn impacts student outcomes.¹⁰

Teachers should be equipped with an understanding of best practice pedagogies in delivering respectful relationship, sex and consent education. This should include an exploration of pedagogies that address power dynamics in the teacher/student relationship, in particular critical pedagogy that seeks to level the playing field and promote a more equitable learning environment.¹¹ Central to this approach is embedding student voice, and allowing them to have more agency over their own learning.

Research into sex and relationship education has found that how students conceptualise effective and meaningful education often diverge from teachers who design and deliver the content.¹² Often the content of school-based sex and relationship education does not match the reality of students’ experiences and is therefore unlikely to be effective.¹³ Students should have the opportunity to identify their own health needs, issues, concerns and anxieties, resulting in creating more meaningful experiences that help meet young people’s fundamental developmental needs.¹⁴

The National Survey of Australian Secondary Students and Sexual Health highlighted some of the problems not only with the content of the relationship and sex education and its inapplicability to their real life experiences but also how it was delivered.¹⁵ For many students, the way the content and the way it was delivered did not adequately cover sexual health and healthy and diverse relationships in a non-judgemental, affirming manner.¹⁶

Quotes from young people taken from the 6th National Survey of Australian Secondary Students and Sexual Health:

The education I received didn't prepare me at all for a sexual relationship. I learnt how to use a condom and that only bad things happen ever. Now I'm too scared to have sex from fear of getting my partner pregnant. Just getting more education about what can happen and the good things would've been great. (Male, 17, heterosexual, Year 12, Victoria)

It's slightly useful but it's done really badly and there are so many subjects that need to be covered that are not covered in high school like different contraception types and healthy/abusive relationships and

⁸ Fida Sanjakdar, Louisa Allen, Mary Lou Rasmussen, Kathleen Quinlivan, Annette Brömdal & Clive Aspin (2015) In Search of Critical Pedagogy in Sexuality Education: Visions, Imaginations, and Paradoxes, *Review of Education, Pedagogy, and Cultural Studies*, 37:1, 53-70, DOI: 10.1080/10714413.2015.988537

⁹ *ibid.*

¹⁰ *ibid.*

¹¹ *ibid.*

¹² Sarah Oerton & Helen Bowen (2014) Key Issues in Sex Education: reflecting on teaching, learning and assessment, *Sex Education*, 14:6, 679-691, DOI: 10.1080/14681811.2014.924919

¹³ *ibid.*

¹⁴ *ibid.*

¹⁵ Latrobe University (2019), “National Survey of Secondary Students and Sexual Health 2018.” Available at: <http://teenhealth.org.au/resources/Reports/SSASH%202018%20National%20Report%20-%20V10%20-%20web.pdf>

¹⁶ *ibid.*

body positivity and stuff like that that people in high school need to learn about. (Female, 17, bisexual, Year 11, South Australia)

It doesn't tell us the real stuff about sex and as much as they tell people to use condoms and not have underage sex they're still going to do it so they may as well educate us on what it's really going to be like and what to expect. (Female, 15, heterosexual, Year 10, Western Australia)

It would be more useful if we talked about sex explicitly instead of the teachers being awkward and doing everything formally. (Female, 15, heterosexual, Year 11, Queensland)

Source: Latrobe University (2019), "National Survey of Secondary Students and Sexual Health 2018." Available at: <http://teenhealth.org.au/resources/Reports/SSASH%202018%20National%20Report%20-%20V10%20-%20web.pdf>

RECOMMENDATION 1

Ensure teachers have an understanding of best practice pedagogy in delivering respectful relationship, sex and consent education and have methods for inclusion of student voice.

4. Trauma-informed practices

Carello and Butler (2014) define trauma-informed practice as an understanding of how violence, victimisation, and other traumatic experiences may have impacted people and to apply that understanding to service provision and system design to best support trauma survivors.¹⁷

In the case of delivering consent, sexuality and respectful relationships, a trauma-informed approach to pedagogy recognises these risks, and prioritises student emotional safety in learning, particularly where trauma or traumatic experiences are taught or disclosed.¹⁸ The principle of harm reduction should be adopted to decrease the risk of retraumatisation and secondary traumatization.¹⁹

Trauma-informed education models composed of evidence-informed pedagogical strategies, have assisted teachers to understand and teach students who have experienced trauma. These models result in better outcomes for teachers and students.²⁰

¹⁷ Janice Carello MA LMSW & Lisa D. Butler PhD (2014) Potentially Perilous Pedagogies: Teaching Trauma Is Not the Same as Trauma-Informed Teaching, *Journal of Trauma & Dissociation*, 15:2, 153-168, DOI: 10.1080/15299732.2014.867571

¹⁸ *ibid.*

¹⁹ Janice Carello MA LMSW & Lisa D. Butler PhD (2014) Potentially Perilous Pedagogies: Teaching Trauma Is Not the Same as Trauma-Informed Teaching, *Journal of Trauma & Dissociation*, 15:2, 153-168, DOI: 10.1080/15299732.2014.867571
Note: Retraumatisation refers to the triggering or reactivation of trauma-related symptoms originating in earlier traumatic life events, which can be prompted by new traumatic material or cues reminiscent of an earlier adverse event. The concept of secondary traumatization (or vicarious traumatization) can come from learning others' stories of loss and victimization.

²⁰ Brunzell, Stokes and Waters (2019), "Shifting Teacher Practice in Trauma-Affected Classrooms: Practice Pedagogy Strategies Within a Trauma-Informed Positive Education Model." Available via: <https://doi.org/10.1007/s12310-018-09308-8>

RECOMMENDATION 2

Ensure teachers are equipped with the knowledge and skills to implement trauma-informed practices in delivering respectful relationships, sex and consent education.

Content warning

Appendix: Testimonies shared with Teach Us Consent

CONTENT WARNING: Sexual assault & violence

The below are a sample of testimonies of people's experiences of consent education from students and may include references to sexual assault and violence. These accounts have not been edited, and include accounts from young people under 18 about their firsthand experiences.

Reading this content may be difficult or triggering. We encourage you to care for your safety and well-being if you choose to engage with this content. This content is included to highlight the experiences of students and the impact that teachers' pedagogy and personal bias can have on students' knowledge and behaviour. It is not necessary to engage with these testimonies to understand the content of the submission.

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I also went to Ravenswood and I remember them showing us a teen pregnancy documentary/reality tv show as a scare tactic!

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“

The only time sex education was actually even addressed to me at school was NOT in pdhpe, but in year 10 religion class, by a strict catholic, male teacher. He taught us that 'silence is consent', along with many disgusting and misinformed personal opinions on and around the concept of sexual activities.

”

“

Went to Tangara School for Girls, finally moved out of there. Anyways barely gave us a sex ed talk, and the PE classes were always rushed (when it got to this topic aswell as mental health). It was a full on catholic school that told me sex is a SIN. Also brought up that we shouldnt use contraception because we should be saving it for marriage anyways, and that the purpose of sex is purely and only to conceive.

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“

Also dont remember learning anything about consent properly which ended up me getting sexually assaulted by my ex and other guys.

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”

One of my teachers was teaching us about masterbation. Told us that trying it once or twice was normal but if you did it more, something was wrong with you. You need help.

”

”

Our first sex ed class in year 9 was taught by a known religious teacher and she refused to show us condoms/explain how they worked. After we egged her on a bit, she opened it, touched the condom and said “oh!! It’s sticky!” Threw it in the bin and said “you girls won’t be needing that anyway”. Her communication basically suggested that she wouldn’t teach us the biological facts because “we wouldn’t need it”. We told a science teacher about it next lesson and she set aside her planned lesson to give us a proper sex ed/human biology lesson. We were so grateful to that science teacher.

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“And this is why it’s important to make sure you dress appropriately!” and also “see, don’t drink alcohol when your out!” Saint Scholastica’s College (Schols) was where it was said in year 9.

”

”

The only form of sex education I remember from high school was labelling diagrams of female and male anatomy, and being told not to have sex before we were married. In once class we were given a piece of sticky tape, and told to stick it on different objects around the classroom. When we returned to our desks the teacher asked us to notice how the sticky tape was no longer sticky, and that it was now covered in dirt and fluff. This was supposed to show us that having sex with numerous people before marriage meant taking on a piece of each person, and losing some of your 'stickiness', preventing you from having any significant connection with subsequent sexual partners. There was no discourse around the complexities of sex, or sexual relationships. We were simply taught 'don't do it'.

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”

In our school they made us write up slurs about sexuality and made people say them out loud. They also made us raise our hands if we felt uncomfortable with gay people. For the queer people in the room it was so uncomfortable and upsetting.

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About FYA

Today's generation of young people in Australia are facing unprecedented and intersecting crises. They also have the skills, insight and ambition to address them.

FYA's vision is that young people have the power to beat injustice and transform the future. In pursuit of this vision, our purpose is to back young people with the trust, resources, skills, and connections to make change.

Contact:

Lee Carnie (they/them)
Executive Director - Advocacy



About Teach Us Consent

Teach Us Consent was started by former Kambala student Chanel Contos because she "was sick of constantly hearing my friends' experience of sexual abuse", and is now calling for a bigger focus on consent in sexual education in schools.

There needs to be conversations targeted towards girls that talk about issues that affect them more adversely like slut-shaming, sexual coercion, consent, peer pressure and then there need to be conversations towards boys that talk about toxic masculinity.

Contact:

Chanel Contos
Founder

