



Queensland Parliament

Education, Tourism, Innovation and Small Business Committee

Inquiry into improving the delivery of respectful relationships and sex education relevant to the use of technology in Queensland state schools

Call for submissions

The Committee invites submissions from individuals and organisations on issues relevant to the terms of reference below. Submissions should be received by 4.00pm, **Monday 14 August 2017** by email or post to:

Committee Secretary OR etisbc@parliament.qld.gov.au
ETISBC
Parliament House
Brisbane 4000

Terms of reference

The Queensland Parliament asked the committee to inquire into these terms of reference:

1. That the Education, Tourism, Innovation and Small Business Committee consider and report on how to improve the delivery of respectful relationships and sex education in regards to the use of technology in Queensland state schools.

The Committee is asked to consider the following:

- a) the prevalence of sexualised content and the unsafe use of technology by students;
 - b) how adequately the Health and Physical Education curriculum supports students to make safe and healthy choices and understand respectful relationships, particularly given students' greater access to technology; and
 - c) consideration of other jurisdictions' approach to tackling sex education and the issue of at risk behaviour and sexualised content creation by students.
2. In undertaking the inquiry, the committee should also consider the potential benefits of students being better informed about the risks behind the use of technology in a sexual nature.

This paper

This paper provides background and some questions (on page 5) which may assist you in preparing a submission. It is not necessary to respond to those questions, however submissions should be relevant to the terms of reference.

Committee Inquiry process

The committee will hold public hearings later in 2017, after written submissions are considered. Public hearing dates and venues will be published on the committee's [website](#). Submissions and transcripts of public hearings will be added to the website during the inquiry.

Scope of the Inquiry

The committee will consider:

- how respectful relationships education and sex education relevant to the use of technology could be improved in Queensland state schools
- current respectful relationships education and sex education that is relevant to the use of technology in Queensland state schools, and in other jurisdictions
- how the delivery of respectful relationships and sex education relevant to the use of technology could be improved
- the extent to which students use technology to create, send or view sexualised content, and the prevalence of unsafe or risky use of technology
- whether students in Queensland state schools are adequately supported by the Health and Physical Education curriculum:
 - to make safe choices about the sexualised use of technology, and
 - to understand respectful relationships
- education relevant to image based abuse (also known as ‘revenge porn’), sharing sexualised images (also known as ‘sexting’), and other sexualised use of technology
- the risks associated with students’ use of technology to create, share or view sexualised content
- the potential benefits if students are better informed about the risks of using technology to create, share or view sexualised content.

The committee is not considering:

- sex education or respectful relationships education in independent or faith-based schools
- complaints or individual cases of image based abuse (‘revenge porn’), sharing of sexualised images or sexualised cyber-bullying
- how Queensland state schools respond (other than providing education) to individual cases, or
- legal measures to address image based abuse or cyber-bullying.

Where to get help

- Information about cyber-safety, cyber-bullying, image-based abuse, and how to make a complaint is available from the eSafety Commissioner - www.esafety.gov.au
- Free, confidential online and phone counselling (24/7) - Kids Helpline, 1800 55 1800 or <https://kidshelpline.com.au/kids/get-help/webchat-counselling/>
- eheadspace online and telephone service supports young people and their families going through a tough time: 1800 650 890 or <https://www.eheadspace.org.au/>

Sexualised use of technology – some examples

Sharing nude, semi-nude or sexualised pictures – ‘sexting’

‘Sexting’ is sharing provocative or sexual photos or videos, commonly by mobile phone. Images might be shared consensually between romantic partners or be shared as a way of flirting. Images or texts may also be shared with others, potentially without consent.

Image based abuse – ‘revenge porn’

Image-based abuse is sharing intimate or sexual photos or videos on social media or websites without consent. It may be done out of ‘revenge’, with the intention of shaming someone, or to ‘entertain’ others. Images may have been obtained with consent and later shared without consent, or obtained after devices or cloud storage have been hacked.

Viewing sexual content on-line

Free on-line sexual content is readily available and may be accessed by young people intentionally or accidentally (e.g. through pop-ups). Approximately one quarter of all searches on the Internet in 2006 were for pornographic material.¹ The impact of viewing sexual content is contested. Some research suggests that exposure to pornography among young people, particularly boys, is common, and that girls have concerns about boys’ sexual expectations of girls that are informed by the content of porn.²

Current sex education and respectful relationships education relevant to the sexualised use of technology

Australian Curriculum

The Australian Curriculum grew from a 2008 commitment by all Australian governments to goals of Australian schooling.³ Education Ministers endorsed a revised Australian Health and Physical Education Curriculum (Australian Curriculum HPE) in 2015. It includes respectful relationships and sexuality education. The content is designed for prep to year 10 and varies according to students' year level.

Flexibility is built into the Australian Curriculum HPE: 'while every student has the same entitlement to learning in this very important area, schools can adjust their delivery depending on their context, locality and resources'.⁴ Queensland schools have until 2020 to fully implement the Australian Curriculum.

Queensland state schools - respectful relationships education and sex education

Sex education and respectful relationships education are not compulsory in Queensland state schools; they are options within the curriculum. The Queensland respectful relationships education program is aligned to the Australian Curriculum HPE. It can be delivered as part of HPE or as part of the school's pastoral care program. The Department of Education and Training does not have a specific sex education curriculum.⁵

An outline of the Queensland *Respectful relationships education program*, along with links to teaching resource materials is on the Department of Education and Training website. The content differs according to students' year level. For example, for years Prep to Year 2 the program is 'designed to develop students' capacity to understand and self-regulate their emotions in ways that account for their feelings and the feelings of others. They also develop skills to initiate social interactions.'⁶

In years 11 and 12 of the *Respectful relationships education program*:

*... students learn about the importance of ethics in relationships and how ethical relationships lead to positive and healthy interactions. Students are also challenged to evaluate personal or collective beliefs and behaviours that support the use of violence. They explore gender inequality and its connection to domestic and family violence and are encouraged to become active citizens by committing to making improvements in their community.*⁶

Queensland produces Curriculum into the Classroom (C2C) material for schools. It includes units and resources about sexuality and respectful relationships, including cyber-safety. Schools may adapt the C2C units to suit the school context and community. Topics include: managing emotions; selfie culture; cyber-bullying; ethical decision-making and sexuality; physical, social, emotional and intellectual changes in adolescence; respect and communication skills; risk-taking; and the impacts of technology.

Other states and territories

While all states and territories have committed to the Australian Curriculum, there are differences in how they deliver respectful relationships and sex education. For example, in 2016 the Victorian Government launched a new Respectful Relationships curriculum following a trial of a whole-of-school approach that was conducted in 19 schools by Our Watch and the Department of Education and Training.⁷

How prevalent is sexualised use of technology in Queensland state schools?

A survey of Australian secondary students reported they access the internet using computers (95%) and mobile phones (85%). Social networking sites were accessed daily by 87 per cent of students.⁸

Many secondary students send sexually suggestive or explicit texts or images via digital technology, commonly with consent, using various apps. Data about the prevalence of sexualised use of technology among secondary students is variable. A 2013 survey of over 2,000 year 10, 11 and 12 students from Government, Catholic and Independent schools in all states and territories found that over 50 percent of students reported receiving a sexually explicit written text message. Forty two percent had received a sexually explicit photo of someone else. Just over a quarter of young people reported that they sent a sexually explicit photo of themselves. Young males were more likely than females to have sent and received sexually explicit photos or videos of someone else.⁹

Another survey found 38 percent of 13 to 15 year olds had sent a sexual picture or video and 62 percent had received one. Among 16 to 18 year olds, 50 percent had sent a sexual picture or video and 70 percent had received one.¹⁰

How could respectful relationships education and sex education in Queensland state schools be improved?

Background

The 2016 *UNESCO Strategy on Education for Health and Well-Being* promotes comprehensive sexuality education and safe and inclusive learning environments, and emphasises the role of schools in promoting health.¹¹ UNESCO suggests effective sexuality education includes age-appropriate, culturally relevant and accurate information. It will provide young people with the opportunity to explore values, attitudes and biases, preparing them for a world in which they are knowledgeable and able to make informed choices about their sexual and social relationships.¹²

The sources from which students gather information about sexuality and sexual health are varied. School programs were the second most used source of information (42.7 %) after websites (43.6%) in a 2013 national survey of students.¹³ Another study of Victorian and South Australian students found school programs ranked first as a source of information (74.4%), followed by friends (61.2%) and 'Mum' (57%).¹⁴

Queensland state schools

The respectful relationships and sex education that is delivered varies between state schools. Within the framework of the Australian Curriculum, C2C units and learning resources provided by the Department of Education and Training, Queensland state schools have flexibility about what respectful relationships or sex education is delivered. A range of learning resources is available, for example, from the Daniel Morcombe Foundation, and non-government and private providers (see the national Children's eSafety Commissioner's website for examples – www.esafety.gov.au).¹⁵

Risky behaviour and sexuality education

Views about the impact of sexuality and relationships education vary. Some believe that sex education will encourage young people to engage in sexual risk behaviours and result in earlier sexual activity, higher rates of pregnancy and sexually transmitted infection. A systematic review of research suggests that comprehensive sexuality education delay sex, reduce its frequency and the number of partners, and increase condom use and contraceptive use. Curriculum based sex education programs did not increase any measure of sexual activity.¹⁶ Assessments of the impact of abstinence-only education programs are inconclusive or have found them to be ineffective.¹⁷ A comparison of sex education policies and indicators of young people's sexual health in France, Australia, the Netherlands and the USA indicated that youth pregnancy, births and abortions were higher in the USA where an abstinence-only sex education policy was widespread. For example, in 1998 there were 30.4 births per 1,000 young women aged 15 to 17 in the USA, compared to 9.5 per 1,000 in Australia and 2.2 and 3.4 per 1,000 in the Netherlands and France respectively.¹⁸

Respectful relationships education

Respectful relationships education is the holistic approach to school based prevention of gender-based violence.¹⁹ It aims to build positive gender relationships and acceptance of difference and diversity. 'The focus .. in primary years is on treating everyone with respect and dignity, with the secondary years subject building on this by teaching students about the relationship between gender and power.'²⁰

A UNESCO review of 22 curriculum-based sexuality education programmes found that 80 per cent of those that addressed gender or power relations were associated with a significant decrease in pregnancy, childbearing or sexually transmitted infections.²¹

The evaluation of a pilot project of respectful relationships education in 19 Victorian schools recommended a staged state-wide rollout of respectful relationships education. It also recommended actions to support teachers, schools, parents and community organisations to work together. The evaluation findings emphasised that pre-planning, school readiness, school community engagement and capacity building and planning are essential considerations in a whole-of-school approach.²²

Students and teachers views about sex education and respectful relationships education

Over ten percent of Australian year 10 to 12 students reported they had no sexuality or relationships education at school. Of those who received sexuality or relationships education, almost seven percent said it was 'not relevant at all' and 41 percent said it was 'somewhat relevant'. The remaining 52 per cent said the education was very or extremely relevant. Students' comments about their sexuality and relationships education identified gaps and inadequacies in their education. The research concluded that the study called to question 'the quality of [sexuality and relationship] education and these data suggest this should become the issue of concern for advocates rather than the more common push for mandating.'²³

A study of secondary students' views about sex and relationships education in Victoria and South Australia reported that the majority of students trusted school programs as a source of information. Students suggested improvements in sex and relationships education. They wanted less repetition of biology, and more explicit and accurate information or greater depth about gender diversity, violence in relationships, intimacy, sexual pleasure, love, on-line safety, and starting and ending relationships.²⁴

A national survey of teachers of sexuality education found that more than half of the teachers reported time constraints and exclusion from the curriculum as reasons that some sexuality education topics were not taught. Teachers suggested that sexuality education could be improved by including it in the school curriculum and as part of the mandatory content in health education. They also suggested there was a need for up to date teaching material, time allocated to sex education, greater curriculum and policy support, clear guidelines, and more professional development and training.²⁵

How to make a submission

Submissions should be in writing and address the terms of reference. Guidelines for making a submission are available [here](#). Submissions close: **4.00pm, Monday 14 August 2017.**

Issues for consideration

- How prevalent are sexting, non-consensual sharing of sexual images, and other sexualised use of technology in Queensland state schools?
- Compared to Queensland state schools, are there advantages or disadvantages in the ways that other states and territories deliver sex education, respectful relationships education and education about at-risk behaviour and the use of digital technologies?

Please give reasons for your opinions.

- Does the Queensland Health and Physical Education (HPE) curriculum:
 - meet students' needs?
 - help students to make safe and healthy choices?
 - help students understand respectful relationships?
- In what ways could the delivery of respectful relationships education and sex education in Queensland state schools be improved? For example, should changes be made to:
 - curriculum, including ethical decision making
 - involvement of students, parents and the school community in the content of sexuality education
 - policies at the school or state-wide level
 - teacher training and professional development
 - other changes?

Notes

- ¹ Ropelato J. Internet pornography statistics. 2006. Available online at: <http://internet-filter-review.toptenreviews.com/internet-pornography-statistics.html> cited in Walker S, Temple-Smith M, Higgs P, and Sanci L, 'It's always just there in your face': young people's views on porn, *Sexual Health*, 2015, 12, 200-206
- ² Walker S, Temple-Smith M, Higgs P, and Sanci L, 'It's always just there in your face': young people's views on porn, *Sexual Health*, 2015, 12, 200-206
- ³ Australian Curriculum Assessment and Reporting Authority (acara) *The Shape of the Australian Curriculum*, October 2012, www.acara.edu.au
- ⁴ ACARA, 'New Health and Physical Education Curriculum to Promote Active, Health and Safe Australians', 10 December 2012
- ⁵ Department of Education and Training, Correspondence, 6 March 2017
- ⁶ <http://education.qld.gov.au/parents/information/respectful-relationships/index.html>
- ⁷ <http://www.premier.vic.gov.au/victoria-leading-the-way-on-respectful-relationships/> Our Watch www.ourwatch.org.au
- ⁸ Mitchell A, Patrick K, Heywood W, Blackman P, Pitts M. 2014 *5th National Survey of Australian Secondary Students and Sexual Health 2013* (ARCSHS Monograph Series No. 97), Australian Research Centre in Sex, Health and Society, La Trobe University, Melbourne Australia, p 61
- ⁹ Mitchell et al, 2013, p vii
- ¹⁰ Lee M, Crofts T, McGovern A & Milivojevic S, Trends & issues in crime and criminal justice No 508, *Sexting among young people: Perceptions and practices*, Australian Institute of Criminology, November 2015, p 3
- ¹¹ UNESCO *Strategy on Education for Health and Well-Being*, 2016, <http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0024/002464/246453e.pdf>
- ¹² UNESCO, *International technical guidance on sexuality education*, Paris: UNESCO, 2009
- ¹³ Mitchell et al, *5th National Survey of Australian Secondary Students and Sexual Health 2013*, 2014
- ¹⁴ Johnson B, Harrison L, Ollis D, Flentje J, Arnold P, and Bartholomaeus C, 'It is not all about sex': *Young people's views about sexuality and relationships education*, Engaging Young People in Sexuality Education Research Project, University of South Australia, 2016
- ¹⁵ <https://www.esafety.gov.au/education-resources>
- ¹⁶ Underhill K, Operario D, Montgomery P., 'Systematic Review of Abstinence-Plus HIV Prevention Programs in High-Income Countries' 2007 *PLoS Med* 4(9): e275. <https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pmed.0040275>; Kirby D, 'Sex education: access and impact on sexual behaviour of young people', United Nations Expert Group meeting on adolescents, youth and development' 2011, http://www.un.org/esa/population/meetings/egm-adolescents/p07_kirby.pdf
- ¹⁷ For example, Chin HB1, Sipe TA, Elder R, Mercer SL, Chattopadhyay SK, Jacob V, Wethington HR, Kirby D, Elliston DB, Griffith M, Chuke SO, Briss SC, Ericksen I, Galbraith JS, Herbst JH, Johnson RL, Kraft JM, Noar SM, Romero LM, Santelli J; 'The effectiveness of group-based comprehensive risk-reduction and abstinence education interventions to prevent or reduce the risk of adolescent pregnancy, human immunodeficiency virus, and sexually transmitted infections: two systematic reviews for the Guide to Community Preventive Services.' *Am J Prev Med*. 2012 Mar; 42(3):272-94
- ¹⁸ Weaver, H, Smith G, and Kipax S, 'School-based sex education policies and indicators of sexual health among young people: a comparison of the Netherlands, France, Australia and the United States' *Sex Education*, Vol 5, No 2, May 2005, 171-188.
- ¹⁹ Our Watch, *Respectful Relationships Education in Schools: The Beginnings of Change: Final Evaluation Report*, February 2016, <https://www.ourwatch.org.au/What-We-Do/Respectful-relationships-education/RREiS-Evaluation-Report>
- ²⁰ Premier of Victoria, *Victoria Leading The Way on Respectful Relationships*, 10 October 2016
- ²¹ UNESCO *Emerging evidence, lessons and practice in Comprehensive Sexuality Education*, <http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0023/002357/235707e.pdf>
- ²² See note 19
- ²³ Mitchell et al, 2013, p 71
- ²⁴ Johnson et al, 'It is not all about sex', p 3
- ²⁵ Smith A, Schlichthorst M, Mitchell A, Walsh J, Lyons A, Blackman P and Pitts Marian. *Sexuality Education in Australian Secondary Schools: Results of the 1st national Survey of Australian Secondary Teachers of Sexuality Education 2010*. Australian Research Centre in Sex, Health & Society, La Trobe University, April 2011

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