



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

**By True Relationships and Reproductive Health
August 2017**

Dr Claire Moran
Manager – Tertiary education and respectful relationships education
Phone [REDACTED]
Email: [REDACTED]

About True Relationships and Reproductive Health

True Relationships and Reproductive Health (True), formally known as Family Planning Queensland (FPQ), is the leading provider of sexual and reproductive health services and respectful relationships education in Queensland. True offers a comprehensive range of clinical, counselling, education and training services from metropolitan and regional locations throughout Queensland.

This submission is based on research and our unique experience in working within school and community settings delivering respectful relationships and sexuality education.

True has expertise in the following areas:

- Respectful relationships and sexuality education (RRSE),
- Sexual Assault service provision,
- Education to prevent childhood sexual abuse,
- Understanding and responding to sexual behaviours,
- Sexual and Reproductive Health (SRH) clinical services.

True has gained practice knowledge through service provision to a broad cross section of the community, including:

- Professionals such as teachers, doctors, nurses, police
- Families and carers
- Children and young people
- Schools and early childhood care
- Organisations working in disability services
- Organisations working in child protection
- Youth services
- Correctional facilities and detention centres
- Faith-based organisations
- Mental health organisations
- Culturally and Linguistically Diverse (CALD) communities, and
- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities.

Preamble

True welcomes the opportunity to provide input into the Inquiry into improving the delivery of respectful relationships and sex education relevant to the use of technology in Queensland state schools. This submission has been prepared with guidance from the Information Paper provided by the Education, Tourism, Innovation and Small Business Committee.

Question 1: How prevalent are sexting, non-consensual sharing of sexual images, and other sexualised use of technology in Queensland state schools?

In contemporary Australian society, digital technology is a fundamental part of young people's lives. Today's young people are digital natives, in that they were born and brought up during the age of digital technology and so computers and the internet have always been around for them. As such, young people use digital technology in myriad ways including for sexual reasons. For example, the National Survey of Australian Secondary Students and Sexual Health, (2014 p62) found that the majority of sexually active students engage with technology for sexual reasons:

"Most sexually active students reported receiving (84%) and sending (72%) sexually explicit text messages, and receiving a sexually explicit nude or nearly nude photo or video of someone else (70%), while 50% reported sending a sexually explicit nude or nearly nude photo or video of themselves. Nearly one third of sexually active students have used a social media site for sexual reasons (31%) while 17% have sent a sexually explicit image of someone else. Higher proportions of young men than young women reported sending (25% vs 11%) and receiving (76% vs 66%) explicit images of someone else and using social media for sexual reasons (45% vs 23%)"

Research also indicates that most sexual interactions between young people through digital technology are consensual, and apart from the legal implications, not problematic (Crofts, Lee, McGovern, & Milivojevic, 2014). Young people are by and large using technology in ways that are ethical, safe and enhance their relationships (e.g., Albury, et al. 2013). The reality is that the use of digital technology for sexual reasons is extremely nuanced, and this is frequently not captured in research and policy in the area. For example, policy makers frequently refer to 'sexing' but this is in fact not a term used by young people themselves. Research shows that young people do use a specific term and resist the one-size-fits-all definition, instead emphasising the range of contexts / practices such as: joke images, private selfies, public selfies, contextual images where a level of undress is expected such as the beach, inoffensive sexual pictures shared consensually between partners, and offensive and unethical sexual pictures referring to 'revenge porn' and images that are otherwise shared or produced without consent (Albury, 2013).

Recommendation 1:

The nuanced nature of digital technology use for sexual reasons requires further exploration. There needs to be clear distinctions made between consensual and non-consensual digital technology use. Young people's capacity for safe and ethical digital technology use needs to be further developed.

Question 2: 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?

Recent research indicates that young people do not feel that school relationships and sexuality education supported them to understand respectful relationships and important issues such as consent (e.g., ERA, 2015). Furthermore, the recent Human Rights Commission's university sexual harassment survey indicates that sexual harassment is rife at university level. These findings suggest that nationally, there are significant shortcomings in sexuality education and respectful relationships education delivery at secondary school level. The latest international evidence highlights the importance of a whole school approach to content related to sexuality education and respectful relationships and the importance of building young people capacity to have respectful and ethical

relationships (Our Watch, 201(Gleeson, Kearney, Leung, & Brislan, 2015)

The recent Our Watch respectful relationships pilot in schools in Victoria highlights the benefits of a whole school approach, and also of taking a systematic approach to delivery and evaluation (for more information please see https://www.ourwatch.org.au/getmedia/634efd9c-dd7d-4e66-ba2c-5dc4780cff2f/RREiS_R3_Final_AA.pdf.aspx).

Recommendation 2:

In line with research, capacity needs to be built to take a whole school approach to sexuality education and respectful relationships education in schools.

By having a standardised evaluation mechanism, outcomes can be measured, ensuring that programs are effective and learning outcomes are being met.

A consistent, national approach is required. A key step towards building this approach is the creation of a national working group of key researchers in the field.

Question 3: 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?**

Endorsed and explicit curriculum frameworks play a critical role in supporting sexuality education and respectful relationships by normalising the subject area and making it visible and public. However, as noted in the information paper, sexuality education and respectful relationships are not compulsorily in Queensland state schools, they are options within the curriculum with the potential for significant variability in the delivery or sexuality education and respectful relationships content. Individual Principals are charged with making decisions regarding whether these items are delivered, and to what extent. Whilst some schools offer comprehensive education to their students, others offer minimal or no sexuality education and respectful relationships meaning some students are missing out entirely, particularly the most vulnerable students, who may not be able to access information elsewhere.

True's vision is 'Sexual and reproductive health and safe, respectful relationships for all.' Our sexuality education and respectful relationships resources and programs are inclusive of and promote sexual abuse prevention. Children and young people who receive comprehensive sexuality education and respectful relationships education (inclusive of sexual abuse prevention education) from an early age are more likely to:

- feel good about themselves
- understand and accept changes
- appreciate and accept individual differences
- are more likely to make informed and responsible sexual decisions later in life
- are less vulnerable sexual abuse
- understand appropriate and inappropriate behaviour
- talk about their feelings and experiences (Brick et al (1989); FPQ (1997); SIECUS (1996))
-

To support schools to deliver sexuality education and respectful relationships education, True has recently launched our *All School* program. This is a structured education program for students from prep to year 12. The *All School* program is available to schools Queensland wide, is mapped to the HPE national curriculum for prep to year 10 and aligned with QCAA syllabus for senior secondary school students.

For more information about the *All School* program, including curriculum linkages, please see <https://www.true.org.au/Education/allschool>.

Recommendation 3:

All students at all schools should have access to comprehensive sexuality and respectful relationships education that takes a whole school approach. All teachers need access to training and professional development to facilitate this.

Question 4: 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?

Research consistently shows that and sexuality education and respectful relationships education is most effective when teachers have the following support:

1. Access to professional development opportunities
2. Access to up to date resources and sufficient funding
3. Endorsement from management
4. Explicit curriculum and policy linkages
5. Engagement with parents and carers

1. Access to professional development opportunities

The majority of teachers see their professional skills as applicable to and relevant for teaching sexuality education and respectful relationships (Milton, 2000; Woo, Soon, Thomas & Kaneshiro, 2011). Some teachers report that they would like additional professional development to increase their confidence to provide programs and to maintain currency (Gabhainn et al., 2010). Teachers who participate in professional development are significantly more likely to provide sexuality education and respectful relationships than those teachers who do not (Woo et al., 2011).

When teachers access professional development to teach sexuality education and respectful relationships, benefits follow for both teacher and student. Teachers report increases in their confidence, competence and their comfort levels after participating in sexuality education and respectful relationships professional development (Gabhainn et al., 2010; Lokanc-Diluzio, Cobb, Harrison & Nelson, 2007). Teachers also report perceived increases in their knowledge and their

ability to provide accurate information to students (Lokanc-Diluzio et al., 2007). Professional development can also help teachers to reflect on their own personal attitudes and positions around sexuality. This self-awareness is an essential component of providing a positive and inclusive environment for students learning about sexuality (Ollis, 2010; Woo et al., 2011).

True is currently developing a suite of respectful relationships webinars as a professional development resource for teachers

2. Access to up to date resources and sufficient funding

Many teachers report that easy access to current and relevant resources supports their teaching practice in sexuality education and respectful relationships and is a key factor influencing the success of sexuality education and respectful relationships in schools (Alldred et al., 2003; Gabhainn et al., 2010). Access to a wide range of teaching resources can build teachers' confidence and increase the quality of the sexuality education and respectful relationships program provided to students (Gabhainn, et al., 2010).

Ensuring that a school's sexuality education and respectful relationships program is sufficiently funded demonstrates its importance and value to the broader school community, and is a long term investment in its implementation and success (Alldred et al., 2003).

3. Endorsement from management

Research shows that some barriers to the implementation of sexuality education and respectful relationships programs perceived by teachers relate to school and community culture (Milton, 2000).

When there is a lack of solid endorsement from management, teachers report concerns that they may not be adequately supported in relation to any potential queries or contention from parents and carers about the sexuality education and respectful relationships program (Milton, 2000; Woo et al., 2011).

When teachers perceive and receive support for sexuality education and respectful relationships from school and departmental management, teacher confidence to provide sexuality education and respectful relationships programs for students is enhanced (Gabhainn, et al., 2010).

School administrators can show their support by prioritising sexuality education and respectful relationships in time-tabling and resource planning and by committing to teacher professional development opportunities (Lokanc-Diluzio et al., 2007).

4. Explicit curriculum and policy linkages

Endorsed and explicit curriculum frameworks play a critical role in supporting sexuality education and respectful relationships by normalising the subject area and making it visible and public.

In Queensland, the Department of Education and Training (DET) provides curriculum and policy documents that provide linkages which validate inclusion sexuality education and respectful relationships education through the Scope and Sequence Charts to assist with the interpretation of curriculum documents. These curriculum links provide teachers and schools with support to deliver sexuality education and respectful relationships to Queensland students.

Although these curriculum and support resources exist, uptake has not been uniform. Each schools approach to sexuality education and respectful relationships is individual and while some offer comprehensive education to their students, other offer minimal or no sexuality education and respectful relationships or sexual abuse prevention education.

5. Engagement with parents and carers

The majority of parents and carers support school sexuality education and respectful relationships programs and perceive that school sexuality education and respectful relationships programs make it

easier for them to talk about sexuality within the home environment (Berne et al., 2000).

When children and young people can talk to trusted, familiar adults about sexuality and these adults work in partnership to support each other, children and young people receive information to support their healthy and safe development (Eisenberg, Bernat, Bearinger & Resnick, 2008; Milton, 2000). Parents and carers are also supportive of addressing topics that are sometimes perceived to be controversial in sexuality education and respectful relationships (Eisenberg et al., 2008).

A small proportion of the parent and carer community may express opposition to sexuality education and respectful relationships and attempt to influence its implementation (Eisenberg et al., 2008).

School administrators can build and maintain parent and carer support for sexuality education and respectful relationships by communicating about the sexuality education and respectful relationships program with the parent/carer community and by providing clear research, supporting the majority consensus, validating its importance and the health and wellbeing benefits of sexuality education and respectful relationships (Alldred et al., 2003; Berne et al., 2000).

Recommendation 4:

As outlined, teachers should have the following support:

1. Access to professional development opportunities
2. Access to up to date resources and sufficient funding
3. Endorsement from management
4. Explicit curriculum and policy linkages
5. Engagement with parents and carers

References

- Albury, K., Crawford, Kate, Byron, Paul and Mathews, Ben, . (2013). Young People and Sexting in Australia: Ethics, Representation and the Law. *Media International Australia incorporating Culture and Policy*(148), 156.
- Albury, K. (2013). Young people, media and sexual learning: rethinking representation. *Sex Education*, 13 (sup1), S32-S44.
- Allred, P., David, M., & Smith, P. (2003). Teachers' views of teaching sex education: pedagogy and models of delivery. *Journal of Educational Enquiry*, 4(1), 80-96. Retrieved from <http://bura.brunel.ac.uk/bitstream/2438/1348/1/Fulltext.pdf>
- Berne, L., Patton, W., Milton, J., Hunt, L., Wright, S., Pappard, J., & Dodd, J. (2000). A qualitative assessment of Australian parent's perceptions of sexuality education and communication. *Journal Of Sex Education And Therapy*, 25(1), 161-168. Retrieved from <http://connection.ebscohost.com/c/articles/3802451/qualitative-assessment-australian-parents-perceptions-sexuality-education-communication>
- Brick, P. (1989). *Fostering Positive Sexuality* (1st ed.). Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development. Retrieved from http://www.ascd.org/ASCD/pdf/journals/ed_lead/el_199109_brick.pdf
- Crofts, T., Lee, M., McGovern, A., & Milivojevic, S. (2014). Sexting and young people. *Legaldate*, 26(4), 2.
- Eisenberg, M., Bernat, D., Bearinger, L., & Resnick, M. (2008). Support for Comprehensive Sexuality Education: Perspectives from Parents of School-Age Youth. *Journal of Adolescent Health*, 42(4), 352-359. doi:10.1016/j.jadohealth.2007.09.019
- ERA (2015). YWAG's 2015 national Survey: Let's talk. Retrieved from: <https://www.equalityrightsalliance.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2016/10/Lets-Talk-Final-Report.pdf>
- Gabhainn, S., O'Higgins, S., & Barry, M. (2010). The implementation of social, personal and health education in Irish schools. *Health education*, 110(6), 452-470.
- Gleeson, C., Kearney, S., Leung, L., & Brislan, J. (2015). Evidence Paper: Respectful Relationships Education in Schools. Retrieved from
- Lokanc-Diluzio, W., Cobb, H., Harrison, R., & Nelson, A. (2007). Building Capacity to Talk, Teach, and Tackle Sexual Health. *Canadian Journal of Human Sexuality*, 16(3-4), 135.
- Milton, J. (2000). Sexuality Education for the Future. *Primary Education*, 6(2), 3-13.
- Mitchell, A., Patrick, K., Heywood, W., Blackman, P., & Pitts, M. (2014). National survey of Australian secondary students and sexual health 2013. Melbourne: Australian Research Centre in Sex Health and Society & La Trobe University.
- Ollis, D. (2010). 'I haven't changed bigots but...' reflections on the impact of teacher professional learning in sexuality education. *Sex Education*, 10(2), 217-230. doi:10.1080/14681811003666523
- Sexuality Information and Education Council of the U.S. (2003). What teachers want, need and deserve (pp. 18-20).
- Woo, G., Soon, R., Thomas, J., & Kaneshiro, B. (2011). Factors Affecting Sex Education in the School System. *Journal of Pediatric And Adolescent Gynecology*, 24(3), 142-146. doi:10.1016/j.jpag.2010.12.005