

October 2024

From: Natural Women's Council, Parents' Rights Alliance, Irish Education Alliance.

To: Deputy/Senator

Re: SPHE/Sex Education DCU Training Course and Junior Cycle School Curriculum

Dear TD/Senator

On the 26th of September last, the Natural Women's Council released a thirty-minute interview with an SPHE teacher who relayed the contents of a DCU year-long course she attended on the new Social Personal and Health Education (which incorporates RSE - Relationship and Sexuality Education) curriculums in post primary schools starting with Junior Cycle SPHE Curriculum in Sept 2023. We ask you to please view this interview which is available at:

<https://www.naturalwomenscouncil.ie/petition>

Please note that to date 14,360 signatures came in on the petition the first week, calling for the immediate cessation and review of the new Junior Cycle SPHE Curriculum which is available alongside the video.

Another teacher who has taught SPHE for over 25 years wrote a detailed letter to Gript Media on the content of the new SPHE curriculum, which Gript Media published on the 20th of September 2024: See in link below -

<https://gript.ie/im-a-sphe-teacher-and-im-horrified-at-whats-in-the-new-curriculum/>

New Junior Cycle SPHE/RSE Curriculum and Parents Reaction

Last year, Minister for Education Norma Foley signed off on a new SPHE Curriculum for 12 to 15 year olds that includes controversial learning outcomes, overriding parents' objections. These objections were submitted in 2022 to the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA) pursuant to its Junior Cycle SPHE consultation process. 4,353 parents provided their comments to the NCCA and we have good reason to believe that the vast majority of those comments were extremely concerned about highly sexualised elements of the proposed curriculum. The Catholic Parents Association (CSSPA) was copied by most parents who made written submissions to the NCCA on the new Senior Cycle SPHE consultation, so we know their views. However, those concerns were almost completely ignored by the NCCA. This is a serious overreach and violates parents' legal rights under the Constitution and the Education Act 1998.

We have been very encouraged by the tremendous public response to the SPHE teacher interview which has got over 600,000 views on our two channels alone, not including other social media channels and parent WhatsApp groups. This highlights the fact that it

should now be a priority for the Department of Education and the NCCA to revisit the controversial RSE learning outcomes.

Graphic Sexualised Material on DCU Training Course for SPHE Teachers

The teacher in the video gave graphic details of the material presented during the year-long SPHE Graduate Diploma teacher-training course she attended at DCU from February 2023 to February 2024. This course is designed to train SPHE teachers for the roll out of Minister Foley's and the NCCA's new SPHE course.

The teachers participated in activities led by DCU lecturers that could be mirrored in the classroom, and these activities did in fact reference sexual activities including rimming, fisting, anal sex, masturbation and pornography, as explained in the interview. The materials shown in the interview are photographs and copies of the actual materials used on the DCU Graduate Diploma course to instruct the SPHE teachers on what could be used in RSE classes in the classroom.

Liberal Sex Educators and NGO activists are driving the new SPHE Curriculums The motivations of some of the lecturers and guest lecturers on this DCU course are very concerning. For example, EJ Renold, who was invited as a guest lecturer, has written widely on challenging 'children's presumed sexual innocence'. This extremely controversial and potentially dangerous dismissal of childhood innocence has no place on teacher training courses and should not be finding its way into our children's classrooms. See link below -

<https://gript.ie/on-dcus-sphe-course-prof-who-challenges-childrens-presumed-sexual-innocence/>

Other lecturers in the team who delivered the DCU SPHE course for teachers have worked with Renold in relation to preparing a new RSE curriculum in Welsh schools, including Dr Leanne Coll, who wrote to the SPHE teachers taking part saying they had "the absolute pleasure of welcoming Prof EJ Renold and Dr Ester McGeeney to the DCU campus as guest speakers and workshop leads" .

Dr Aoife Neary is an advocate for EJ Renold approach to RSE and was also a member of the **NCCA Curriculum Development Group** overseeing the drafting of the Junior Cycle SPHE Curriculum, The presence of very liberal sex educators and transgender advocates on the Primary as well as the Post Primary Curriculum Development Groups overseeing the drafting of the new SPHE Curriculums was a major concern for parent groups who wrote to the Minister about this, but nothing was done. The composition of the NCCA groups driving the development of the new SPHE Curriculums must be changed to have more parents represented and a better balance of viewpoints about sexuality education. For example, there is no focus or hardly a mention of marriage in the new Curriculum, which adopted a 'sex is for pleasure' approach to relationship and sexuality education, as reflected in the focus on sexual activities in the JC SPHE textbooks. The appointment process and membership of the NCCA Curriculum Development Groups and the NCCA Education Council need to be investigated.

Child Safeguarding Issues arising from DCU Course and the Junior Cycle SPHE Curriculum

The Child Safeguarding and child welfare implications of the SPHE curriculum and the teaching resources that are used for it must be assessed. It is notable that no experts in this field were included in the consultation process. Schools should also have carried out detailed Risk Assessments before implementing the new curriculum, and despite requests from parents, to our knowledge this has not been done.

There is real concern that the sex education content intended for the SPHE course would come within the definition of sexual abuse in the Children First Act 2015, and would breach Child Safeguarding requirements under the *Children First National Guidelines for the Protection and Welfare of Children*, which includes the following examples of sexual abuse:

‘Showing sexually explicit material to children, which is often a feature of the ‘grooming’ process by perpetrators of abuse.

‘Exposing a child to inappropriate or abusive material through information and communication technology.’

The Guidance also gives an example of emotional abuse as:

‘Seriously inappropriate expectations of a child relative to his/her age and stage of development.’

Some of the material shown from the DCU course is very inappropriate for children in Junior Cycle aged 12-15 years and the concepts beyond their understanding.

In view of this, it appears that the Minister for Education and the NCCA are in breach of their statutory duties for the safeguarding of children in implementing the Junior Cycle SPHE Curriculum in schools.

OIDE In-Service Training, Textbooks and Online Resources

Thirty-four teachers to date have completed this year-long DCU Diploma course, and others have completed the two-day OIDE in-service SPHE course. OIDE’s role is to support the professional learning of school leaders and teachers. The SPHE teacher interviewed also attended training from OIDE on the new Junior Cycle SPHE specification. During these training sessions, she was guided to the supporting documents for the new Junior Cycle SPHE Curriculum on ‘what makes a safe and inclusive classroom’. These documents advised teachers to greet their students using their preferred gender identity pronouns, e.g. He/Him, which is a promotion of gender identity ideology. This contradicts advice in the Final Report of the **Cass Review** published in April 2024, which was a definitive review of gender identity services for young people in the UK. We demand that gender identity ideology (transgenderism) be removed from all schools’ curricula material.

The OIDE course also included advice on how to ensure that students maintain confidentiality in the classroom. The SPHE Toolkit document which was referred to by OIDE on the Inservice course stated: *“What is said in the group/class stays in the group”* (this document was updated on the 09/10/24 from which this offending line has been removed). This is obviously very concerning to parents who will not be privy to what their children are being taught, now that schoolbooks are provided by the school and not brought home. Extremely concerning content has also emerged from SPHE textbooks and online curriculum teaching resources. A few examples are included in the Appendix to this letter.

Whole School Approach

The ‘whole school approach’ to teaching SPHE, which results in themes from SPHE appearing across the curriculum and in other school activities, is also extremely concerning and a subversion of parent’s rights to opt their child out of SPHE if they are uncomfortable with what is being taught. It can also have a negative impact on other subjects. For example, a Junior Cycle English textbook ‘Louder than Words’ by has several pages on Non-Binary gender identities and pro-nouns’ courtesy of TENI (Transgender Equality Network Ireland).

Ministers and Department of Education efforts to downplay sexualised resources

The SPHE teacher in the video is very disappointed that the Department of Education and Minister Foley would release a statement to principals in the Irish school system stating that what she expressed was misrepresentation and disinformation, rather than investigating the serious concerns she raised. This teacher can categorically state that it was never made clear that the materials used in the DCU course were for adults only, as the intent was that these were potential resources that could be used in the classroom.

A second teacher who was on the DCU Diploma course, was interviewed by Gript Media, and confirmed that the intent of the materials provided and the activities undertaken on the DCU course was to bring them into the classroom: See Gript article <https://gript.ie/photos-inside-the-dcu-sphe-course-fisting-writing-sex-scenes-porn-terms-examined/>

Parents Views Ignored in NCCA consultation Process on new SPHE Curriculum

Activist NGO’s and LGBTQ groups were heavily consulted and engaged with directly at meetings by the NCCA during the consultation process. By contrast, parents groups, including the Catholic Secondary School Parents Association, were excluded from face-to-face meetings. The National Parents Council post primary was consulted, but the NPCpp by this time, as recorded by the Dept. of Education Governance Review, no longer represented either Catholic or ETB parents - 85% of the total - and has since been terminated.

As set out in Article 42 of the Constitution of Ireland, parents are the primary educators of their children and Section 9 (d) of the Education Act 1998 obliges schools to:

'promote the moral, spiritual, social and personal development of students and provide health education for them, in consultation with their parents, having regard to the characteristic spirit of the school'

While over four thousand parents wrote comments in relation to the SPHE consultations, the NCCA were dismissive of those responses, and the Minister either ignored parents' concerns or she was not advised of them. Either way, parents are deeply upset about the new Junior Cycle SPHE Curriculum, are concerned about the detrimental effects on their children, and are pursuing all legitimate means to have it rejected.

Need to Rescind Junior Cycle SPHE Curriculum and DCU SPHE Course

We call on the Minister for Education to immediately rescind the Junior Cycle SPHE curriculum. The DCU course designed to roll out the SPHE curriculum must be shut down. All schools should be instructed to remove the SPHE textbooks issued pursuant to the new curriculum and to cease teaching it. We also call on the proposed new Senior Cycle SPHE and Primary School Wellbeing/SPHE curriculums to be halted until a full investigation is carried out.

Need for Follow up Actions by Elected Representatives

As our elected representatives in the Dail and Seanad, we ask you to urgently oversee a full and formal investigation into the DCU course and the new SPHE Curriculum, and the sexualisation of Irish children in our schools. The appointment process and membership of the NCCA Curriculum Development Groups and the NCCA Education Council also need to be investigated.

A root and branch investigation is required into who is pushing this sexualised agenda and for what reasons. This is likely to be a general election issue given the strong reaction of so many parents to the SPHE teacher's video.

We strongly urge you to support the overwhelming majority of parents concerned about the sexualisation of their children in our schools, take the lead on rescinding the new SPHE Curriculum, and initiate an investigation into how this type of material could be put in front of children as young as 12 years old. We stand ready to assist you with whatever support you require.

Yours sincerely

Natural Women's Council

<https://www.naturalwomenscouncil.ie/>

Irish Education Alliance

<https://irisheducationalliance.com>

Parents Rights Alliance

<https://parentsrightsalliance.com>

Appendix

1. Relationships and Sexuality Education 1 (RSE1)

<https://www.hse.ie/eng/about/who/healthwellbeing/hse-education-programme/junior-cycle-sphe-training-resources/rse/relationships-and-sexuality-education-1-unit-of-learning1.pdf>

This document Relationship and Sexuality Education 1 (RSE1) was produced by the HSE and approved by the Department of Education for use by the NCCA and is on the NCCA SPHE Toolkit for use by teachers. This is the resource officially sanctioned by the Department of Education and recommended by the DoE to use as a resource by teachers of 1st year students in post primary schools to deliver Relationships and Sexuality Education as part of the new Junior Cycle SPHE 2023 specification. Please note this Resource is for 1st year students only . There is a Relationships and Sexuality Education 2 for teachers to use with second year students .

Please consider the following pages of this resource

On page 11, 12 and 13 yr olds are introduced to the Sexuality Wheel where Gender Identity is listed

On page 16, pupils will read the story of ‘CinderFella’, a resource designed to smash gender Stereotypes

On page 16, children are introduced to definitions of Drag Queen, Cross Dresser, Gender Identity and Non Binary

On page 18 students are introduced to the term Transgender through a video clip - “What is Transgender” See link below –

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LSjVWizgqoQ>

On page 18 students learn about Names and Pronouns using a video clip

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kVxdlkt8zMs>

On page 19 students learn about Being an Ally to LGBTQ students? through a video clip on “Being an Ally”, see link -

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3_52-hUf7MM

On page 20 of this resource book, 12 and 13 yr olds students can be given a Gender word list handout which includes definitions of Gender Identity, Gender Expression , Transgender or trans, Cisgender and Gender non Binary.(reminding you again this is the Dept of Education resource for teachers to use for 1st year students. There is a Relationship and Sexuality Education 2 (RSE2) resource for 2nd Year Students also), also produced by the HSE and approved by the Department of Education for use as an NCCA RSE resource.

On page 21, students through a video “The Love Salad” students are introduced to terms such as Demisexual, Pansexual, and Asexual

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wrUYs2FngA>

On page 23, Children can fill out a handout to match the definitions given with the appropriate terms just learned in the video, including Bisexual, Pansexual, heteronormativity .

On page 24, 12/13 yrs old students are introduced to the concept of ‘coming out’ to others where the teacher is given suggested points to discuss with the students, see link –

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bWfdQ-5NU4g>

On page 34 and 35, Case study cards of maintaining healthy relationships can be given to children to discuss where names of characters are gender neutral to reflect diversity and inclusiveness .

2. NCCA Information Note for Parents on new SPHE Curriculum

In this Information Note for parents from the SPHE toolkit it states the following -

“The SPHE curriculum sets out the topics to be taught in schools, and teachers have freedom to choose the classroom resources they will use when teaching the curriculum”

Parents have concerns about this statement as it is the teacher who decides what resources will be used in the SPHE classroom

Some of the sensitive issues specified in Strand 3: Relationships and Sexuality of the SPHE course which are not mentioned at all in the NCCA Information Note for Parents about the new Junior Cycle SPHE course are –

Learning Outcome 3.6: states ‘how sexual orientation and gender identity are experienced and expressed in diverse ways’: this seems to refer to terms like pansexual, bisexual, transgender etc, which are covered in the NCCA SPHE toolkit document RSE1 reviewed above.

Sexual orientation and gender identity are not mentioned in the parents Information Note, so parents may be unaware that these topics are part of the new Junior Cycle SPHE Course rolled out into schools in Sept 2023

Learning Outcome 3.9: covers ‘the importance of safer sexual activity with reference to methods of contraception’ –

The Information Note to parents does not indicate that this will be taught. The paragraph describing the Relationships and Sexuality section in the Parents Information Note begins – ‘Here the key focus is on creating and maintaining healthy and respectful relationships’ – no reference to sexual relationships.

Learning Outcome 3.10: covers ‘the influence of pornography on young peoples understanding, expectations and social norms in relation to sexual expression’. There is

no indication in the Information Note for Parents that there would be teaching about pornography in Junior Cycle SPHE classes; in fact the word pornography is not used in the information for parents. See link to information for parents -

[jc-sphe-information-for-parents-en.pdf \(ncca.ie\)](https://www.ncca.ie/jc-sphe-information-for-parents-en.pdf)

The Information Note for parents did not inform parents that these explicit topics would be covered on the SPHE course. By contrast, the NCCA additional Guidance documents for teachers to deliver these Learning Outcomes in the classroom clearly specified how these topics should be taught. This indicates that there was a clear intent to conceal this information from parents. The links to the guidance documents for teachers to support -

See link to NCCA guidance documents for teachers re L.O. 3.6 and 3.10 -

https://curriculumonline.ie/getmedia/36fed287-2133-4e21-9ec8-cd460f30ca59/JC_SPHE_explaining_LO_3-6.pdf

https://curriculumonline.ie/getmedia/b4465aea-f9e0-4e98-93ef-3bc716575780/JC_SPHE_explaining_LO_3-10.pdf

3. Note Examples of Junior Cycle Textbook Content:

Health and Wellbeing SPHE 1 by Anne Potts and Nollaig O’Grady. Publisher: Edco.

-Page 155: The Genderbread Person. “Gender Identity is about how you see and feel about yourself, as male, female, both or neither, irrespective of the sex you were assigned at birth.”

-Page 160: Attraction and Sexual Orientation. This teaches children the definitions of ‘heterosexual, asexual, gay, pansexual, coming out, gay, lesbian and bisexual...’

-Page 163: Children will learn terms such as: “Non-Binary: I do not identify as being either male or female”, “Cisgender: My gender identity is the same as the sex I was assigned at birth.” “Transgender: My gender identity is different from the one I was assigned when I was born. I wish to live as my preferred gender.”, “Gender Identity:” This is how I feel inside about my gender.”

‘My Wellbeing Journey’ Book 2 by Edel O’Brien, Eoghan Cleary and Pam O’Leary,(a graduate of the DCU SPHE /RSE Diploma course) Publisher: Gill Education.

-Page 2: “Class contract and Goal Setting”.

-Page 4: The children are asked to sign this “Class Contract”

-Page 114: Lesson 17 “Congratulations You’re Becoming a Sexual Being!” This chapter teaches about “Desire, Arousal, Pleasure and Masturbation”

-Page 117-121 Masturbation including asking children to identify what animals also masturbate/page 118 “Is it possible to masturbate someone else?” -page 121

‘You’ve Got this’ Book 2, Junior Cycle 2nd Year by Genevieve Cooney and Denise Dalton, Publisher: Educate.ie

-Page 122: Consent references “Vaginal sex, anal sex and oral sex”.

-Page 123: Sexual Consent and the Law. This chapter defines various sexual acts including “sexual intercourse (vaginal or anal), penetration of the anus by mouth or by the penis, penetration of the vagina by an object, or aggravated sexual assault (severe and violent form of sexual assault, often involving force, weapons or causing serious harm to the victim)”

‘Louder Than Words’ A Three-Year Course in Junior Cycle English by Aly Allsop, Seanagh McCarthy and Ciara Morris. Publisher: Educate.ie.

-Page 362 to 371: Children are introduced to “TENI Life Hacks” (Transgender Equality Network Ireland) and Non-Binary gender identities. The pronouns they/them are presented as a singular pronoun. They are asked to write sentences using the ‘gender neutral pronouns’ they/them. The book teaches children that: “There are many pronouns to choose from and it is important to choose ones that you feel comfortable with. You may choose pronouns on how they make you feel, their practicality, on how popular they are or they’re not. What’s important is that you choose your own pronouns.” (page 370).

End