

# **A Review of the Relationships and Sexuality Education Curriculum in Wales**

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# Foreword

This is a review of the core documents behind Wales's new Relationships and Sexuality Education curriculum mandatory code and guidance. This work has been undertaken independently by anonymous citizens in Wales in order to understand its content, origins and intent. The authors wish to remain anonymous due to the abuse that now commonly arises from such essential discussions.

At the time of writing, the authors were aware that a Judicial Review had been granted in relation to the Welsh RSE curriculum. The authors are not affiliated to the claimants nor the defendants, nor do they have any knowledge of the case. They have also been entirely unpaid to do this work, as such the review is not comprehensive. The purpose of this report is simply to collate and examine information that is already available in the public domain for further consideration. It is not a comment on any case or claim that may be going through the courts.

This review is not an argument for or against good quality, pluralistic and developmentally appropriate relationships and sex education. It seeks only to understand the reasoning behind the RSE curriculum now in use in schools across Wales. Furthermore, this review makes no reference to any specific child or young person that may be affected or has been affected by the content reviewed herein.

## Executive Summary

This review was produced by a group of independent citizens in Wales from a range of backgrounds and professions. The review's aim was to understand the conceptual framework behind the Welsh government's compulsory Relationships and Sexuality Education curriculum code. The findings were extremely disturbing.

Four publicly available documents were analysed. The first is the [Curriculum for Wales: Relationships and Sexuality Education Code](#). Schools are legally mandated to design and deliver their sex and relationships education curriculum to all children aged 3-16 in line with this document, as decreed by the Curriculum and Assessment (Wales) Act 2021. The second is the guidance which accompanies the code, entitled [Cross-cutting themes for designing your curriculum](#).

It was found that these two documents had been informed by two preparatory documents created for the Cabinet Secretary for Education by the RSE Expert Panel, led by staff at Cardiff University. These are [The future of the sex and relationships education curriculum in Wales](#) and [Informing the future of the sex and relationships education curriculum in Wales](#), both published in 2017. The latter of these provides the academic justification for the curriculum recommendations. No other documents could be found providing any other analysis, justification, recommendations or academic approach in association with the legally mandated Welsh RSE curriculum code.

This review took a chronological approach to identify conceptual themes in the earliest documents before exploring their origin and influence upon the final mandated code. It was discovered Wales's new Relationships and Education Curriculum is based on the following approach and principles:

- The academic approach to the curriculum is that of posthumanism and Queer Theory. This involves reconceptualising, and specifically sexualising, established concepts such as the child. This is part of an “ethico-political project” known as “queering”.
- Children and young people are therefore considered to be sexual beings from birth. Normal healthy development in infancy is reframed as sexually motivated.
- Safeguarding and child protection is identified as an inhibitor to children’s development
- The curriculum code’s “sex positive” approach is grounded in socio-political theory and activism, which endorses criminal sexual activity, including for and among children
- A child’s sense of self is their “gender”
- The posthumanist approach imagines a “post-human” society based upon “assemblage” theory. This is prioritised over human beings and human characteristics to enable “inclusivity”
- The erasure and obfuscation of biological sex and the ideological redefinition of associated terms is essential (aka “queering”). This includes diverging from established legal definitions, including sex and sexual orientation
- Moral considerations are deemed irrelevant to a “sex positive” curriculum

This review also discovered that:

- The curriculum was not created from a robust evidence base.
- Young people, parents, teachers, early years practitioners, school nurses and other relevant stakeholders were not consulted during its initial development.
- Research in Wales was not undertaken in preparation for the curriculum
- Any opposition is implied as motivated by the “political New Right”, establishing a foundation to prejudge all criticism, including legitimate safeguarding concerns, as dismissible.
- The curriculum’s informing documents endorse parental alienation from children’s education, and disregard for family life
- The curriculum’s informing documents endorse sidelining and redefining protected characteristics, such as religion/belief, in favour of its own pseudo theological constructs.
- The Posthumanist and Queer Theory approach used to inform the curriculum code is ultimately built on the work of an alleged paedophile (Foucault)

It was found that these principles and approaches were foundational in the creation of the legally mandated RSE code, raising issues of pluralism and safeguarding.

This review has been entirely unfunded and therefore is not comprehensive and could not explore the full range of concepts and themes underpinning curriculum recommendations. Therefore, a full independent inquiry is recommended to comprehensively investigate the issues raised herein.

## Introduction

In September 2022 the Welsh government rolled out its new Relationships and Sexuality Education curriculum code, made mandatory by the Curriculum and Assessment Wales Act (2021)<sup>1</sup> for all Welsh children from the age of three years old to sixteen years of age.

The academic positioning of this new compulsory Relationships and Sexuality Education curriculum code is that of Cardiff University Professor EJ Renold, who works with ‘feminist, queer and post-humanist approaches’, and her colleague Esther McGeeney. Renold was appointed Chair of the RSE Expert Panel and charged with directing the creation of the Sex and Relationships Education (SRE) curriculum in Wales, likely as a result of her academic focus on sexuality in education. This resulted in two preparatory documents written primarily by Renold:

- [Informing the future of the sex and relationships education curriculum in Wales](#)<sup>2</sup> (RSE Document A); and,
- [The Future of Sex and Relationships Education Curriculum in Wales](#)<sup>3</sup> (RSE Document B).

Established by the then Cabinet Secretary for Education, Kirsty Williams, the Expert Panel were specifically tasked to a) provide recommendations to the Cabinet Secretary for Education on how current SRE practice might be improved before 2022 and the new curriculum being introduced, and b) provide recommendations for the Cabinet Secretary for Education and the pioneer schools on the future of Sex and Relationships Education in Wales as part of Health and Wellbeing AoLE. No other similar work of any kind could be found, indicating the development of Wales’s curriculum recommendations was entirely and exclusively reliant upon the output of this appointed panel.

The work of the Expert Panel under the leadership of EJ Renold informed the creation of the finalised mandatory curriculum code and accompanying guidance released by the Welsh government:

- [Curriculum for Wales: Relationships and Sexuality Education Code](#) (RSE Document C)<sup>4</sup>
- [Cross-cutting themes for designing your curriculum](#) (RSE Document D)<sup>5</sup>

RSE Document A also contains examples from EJ Renold’s experimental [AGENDA](#)<sup>6</sup> resources, aimed at primary and secondary age children. The Welsh government logo appears on the AGENDA website and this resource is linked on the Welsh government’s Hwb website, implying this content and its associated CRUSH resource is fully endorsed for promotion in schools. It is not unreasonable to expect teachers will refer to all four documents and signposted third parties in the development and sourcing of their schools’ curriculum and resources.

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<sup>1</sup> [Curriculum for Wales: Summary of Legislation](#) Welsh Government. Accessed 24 September, 2022

<sup>2</sup> Renold, EJ & McGeeney, E (2017) [Informing the Future of the Sex and Relationships Education Curriculum in Wales](#) Cardiff University, Accessed 24 September, 2022

<sup>3</sup> Renold, EJ (2017) [The Future of the Sex and Relationships Education Curriculum in Wales](#) Accessed 24 September, 2022

<sup>4</sup> [Curriculum for Wales: Relationships and Sexuality Education Code](#) Accessed 24 September, 2022

<sup>5</sup> [Cross-cutting themes for designing your curriculum - Hwb](#) Accessed 24 September, 2022

<sup>6</sup> Renold (2016) AGENDA <https://agenda.wales> Accessed 24 September, 2022

Further resources supporting the roll out of the new curriculum are now being released on the Welsh government's Hwb website,<sup>7</sup> for which schools provide children, rather than their parents, with a log in ID and password. There appears to be no filtering of content on this site on the basis of age; therefore, children in the youngest age groups may be able to directly access any content and resources for any age group, regardless of whether it may be developmentally appropriate.

## Curriculum Purpose

The RSE curriculum is intended to support children and young people to become 'ambitious, capable learners, ready to learn throughout their lives; enterprising, creative contributors, ready to play a full part in life and work; ethical, informed citizens of Wales and the world; and healthy, confident individuals, ready to lead fulfilling lives as valued members of society.'

The curriculum guidance seeks to equip children and young people with an "understanding of sexuality with an emphasis on rights, health, equality and equity" that "empowers learners to understand themselves, take responsibility for their own decisions and behaviours, and form relationships that are fully inclusive, reflecting diversity and promoting respect.' (RSE Document D).

From the initial planning document, the intent of the curriculum appears to have been initiated from broad, positive intentions:

'In 2010 Wales issued new guidance on Sex and Relationships Education, which places SRE firmly in the context of the UNCRC, emphasising children's rights to access educational and health services, and their right to be listened to and to participate in the decisions that affect them, which includes being given the knowledge, skills and understanding to make informed choices that support the development of positive life experiences for sexual well-being and respectful relationship cultures (see Haberlan and Rogow 2016).'

(RSE Document A, Pp12)

Further it states an aim is to reduce gender inequality, asserting that women and girls should benefit from the curriculum:

Regarding gender equity and equality, the Welsh Government Strategic Equality Plan 2016-2021 contains a specific objective, which relates to embedding SRE in a gender equalities framework (Objective 4). Welsh Ministers are also under a duty to comply with the European Convention on [sic] The Welsh Ministers also support the principles contained in the UN Sustainable Development Goal: "this includes goal 5 - Achieve Gender Equality and empower all women and girls which includes a target in relation to violence against women and girls" (Welsh Government 2016)

(RSE Document A, Pp13)

The final curriculum code and guidance has three broad strands:

1. **Relationships and identity:** helping learners develop the skills they need to develop healthy, safe, and fulfilling relationships with others and helping them to make sense of their thoughts and feelings.

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<sup>7</sup> Hwb <https://hwb.gov.wales/> Welsh Government. Accessed 24 September, 2022



2. **Sexual health and well-being:** helping learners to draw on factual sources regarding their sexual and reproductive health and well-being, allowing them to make informed decisions throughout their lives.
3. **Empowerment, safety and respect:** helping to protect learners from all forms of discrimination, violence, abuse and neglect and enabling them to recognise unsafe or harmful relationships and situations, supporting them to recognise when, how and where to seek support and advice.

All four RSE documents espouse the benefits of sex and relationships education for children and young people, with references to a range of existing legislation.

## Comprehensive Sexuality Education (CSE)

RSE Document A is listed on the online UNESCO library<sup>8</sup> with links to their Comprehensive Sexuality Education (CSE) toolkit, which is endorsed by the World Health Organisation (WHO).<sup>9</sup> RSE Document A led directly to the creation of the legally mandated RSE curriculum code and guidance in Wales. The influence of RSE Document A is visible within the more decisive RSE Document B, and subsequently published versions of the Curriculum Code and Guidance (RSE Documents C and D).

In Expert Panel meeting 2, members of the RSE Expert Panel were required to read UNESCO's materials on comprehensive sexuality education. UNESCO is also referenced multiple times in the bibliography of RSE Document A.

UNESCO is also featured in RSE Expert Panel Chair EJ Renold's CRUSH<sup>10</sup> resources for schools. CRUSH is presented as part of the AGENDA resources at <https://agendaonline.co.uk/> and is linked directly to Wales's new Relationships and Sexuality Education curriculum.



<sup>8</sup> [UNESCO](#) Accessed 24 September, 2022 Accessed 24 September, 2022

<sup>9</sup> WHO [International Technical Guidance on sexuality education](#) Accessed 24 September, 2022

<sup>10</sup> Renold, EJ (2016) CRUSH <https://agendaonline.co.uk/crush/> Accessed 24 September, 2022

RSE Document A's definition of sexuality was taken from the WHO definition, and centralised in the curriculum, including in its rebrand from **Sex** and Relationships Education (SRE) to Relationships and **Sexuality** Education (RSE), although it was proposed to put sexuality first. The definition of sexuality taken from WHO (2006) is as follows:

'...a central aspect of being human throughout life and encompasses sex, gender identities and roles, sexual orientation, eroticism, pleasure, intimacy and reproduction. Sexuality is experienced and expressed in thoughts, fantasies, desires, beliefs, attitudes, values, behaviours, practices, roles and relationships. While sexuality can include all of these dimensions, not all of them are always experienced or expressed. Sexuality is influenced by the interaction of biological, psychological, social, economic, political, cultural, legal, historical, religious and spiritual factors.' (WHO 2006)

The argument for replacing the word 'sex' is that 'sexuality' is a more comprehensive term that is claimed will 'ensure a holistic and inclusive understanding and approach' (RSE Document B, pp9). This definition of sexuality is carried into RSE Documents C and D. However the final Welsh RSE curriculum guidance diverges significantly and materially from the WHO definition of sex. This is discussed further in the section entitled The Redefinition of Sex, below.

In August 2022, the Welsh government released a statement that seems to assert that their curriculum has no association with UNESCO's Comprehensive Sexuality Education (CSE), and does not sexualise children:

'At the core of this literature is the group's claims that RSE in Wales is part of a co-ordinated "global rollout" of "comprehensive sexuality education" which it is claimed will sexualise children. That is profoundly wrong and is a deeply dangerous claim.'<sup>11</sup>

RSE Document A goes on to create its own definition of relationships in the absence of any third party definition (pp14). The definition of relationships is reasonably comprehensive, however relationships that are not sexual are given little further mention in RSE Document A.

## Methodology

The methodological approach of this review is one of conceptual analysis. First, the earliest document - Informing the Future of the Sex and Relationships Education Curriculum in Wales (Document A) - was analysed to identify key concepts, such as sex and gender and sexuality. Following this, the academic evidence provided in Document A was explored to understand the origins, background and conceptual framework applied in the creation of the mandated curriculum code and guidance. This was then evaluated with consideration of existing legal definitions, cultural approaches, professional practice and wider legislation. The inclusion and representations of these concepts and associated recommendations was then mapped through the subsequent three documents.

The authors of this review are not professional academics, nevertheless a broadly academic approach is applied in sympathy with the academic basis of the curriculum code and guidance. Given the posthumanist origins of the curriculum, the subsequent analysis was also considered

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<sup>11</sup> Miles, Jeremy (2022) [Written Statement: Misleading Claims about RSE](#) Welsh Government. Accessed 24 September, 2022



from a humanist perspective to identify any areas of possible progress and conflict. At all times the authors sought to maintain political neutrality in support of plurality, and in order to reveal any biases that may exist in the curriculum planning materials.

At no point do the authors seek to make any personal comment or judgement of any named academics. However, it was found that the work of a small group of academics, closely linked to the development of the curriculum planning documents, did require some detailed scrutiny, as required by the scope of this review.

# Review

The ontology behind the curriculum maps its core principles and values. The Welsh RSE curriculum does not clearly state it has a specified ontology, and instead defers to the academic positioning of the writers that developed the planning documents, and in particular the Chair of the Expert Panel, Professor EJ Renold. This influence has fundamentally shaped the curriculum. Renold's academic specialism is described thus:



Renold and McGeeney draw on no less than ten of their own articles and books to justify the recommendations for the curriculum, alongside numerous other academics in their field. They had previously collaborated with many of these. The questions that therefore must be asked are:

- What is the contemporary posthumanist and Queer Theory led position that has been used to inform Wales's compulsory Relationships and Sexuality Education curriculum code and guidance?
- Is this based upon robust and ethical evidence and reason?
- Is the curriculum non-partisan and pluralistic as a result?
- Does this posthumanism led curriculum respect human existence and legal rights?

As asserted by Expert Panel Chair, EJ Renold, charged with developing the curriculum, and co-writer McGeeney:

'In the absence of a robust research base for mapping how current SRE practice might be improved before 2022, and in light of the rapid development of the health and well-being AoLE, the group focused its attention on providing recommendations on the future of SRE in the context of the new curriculum.'

(RSE Document A, p8)

They further clarify that the recommendations were not based on robust research and evidence, but solely upon the rushed contributions of the writers and select panel:

'The panel was not funded to undertake original research, consultation (e.g. with practitioners, parents/carers or young people)'

In response to this dearth of research, the RSE Document A recommends the Welsh government sets up a research network. Beyond this, the majority of the document appears to be the writers' own assessment and conjecture, drawing on numerous selected academic references and their own experimental resources to act as justification. All of this is entirely reliant upon Renold & McGeeney's posthumanist and Queer Theory approach.

There is no clear mention of specific contributions from any other individual panel members beyond acknowledgement of pre-existing Stonewall and Brook materials.

## Posthumanism & Queer Theory

There are major concerns over the exclusive use of posthumanism and Queer Theory to underpin this RSE curriculum, the latter of which is an activist led field of study, and 'continues Foucault's rejection of biological explanations of sexuality by thinking about the way that sexual identities as well as behaviors are hierarchically organized through systems of sexual classifications.'<sup>12</sup> Such an approach is a significant ideological shift, initially recognisable in the curriculum's title change from sex to sexuality. Foucault is referenced frequently in posthumanist and Queer Theory discourse, with his perspectives often accepted as fact. He was also an alleged paedophile.<sup>13</sup>

Fundamentally, posthumanism is the rejection of Western humanism.<sup>14</sup> It aims to decentre human beings in discourse, with contemporary forms of posthumanism and transhumanism emerging in the 1990s, which pursue and explore the destabilisation of human reality and society in pursuit of an imagined and hypothetical "posthuman" future. It has been discovered that the Welsh RSE curriculum is firmly grounded in such an approach.

Bolter (2016)<sup>15</sup> asserts that:

"the term "posthumanism" ...designates a series of breaks with foundational assumptions of modern Western culture: in particular, a new way of understanding the human subject in relationship to the natural world in general. Posthumanist theory claims to offer a new epistemology that is not anthropocentric and therefore not centered in Cartesian dualism. It seeks to undermine the traditional boundaries between the human, the animal, and the technological.'

This begs the further question; can an RSE curriculum based in the pursuit of contemporary posthumanism, which seeks to de-centre human beings, recognise and respect the human being and their human rights?

In many contemporary postmodern analyses, particularly in activist driven research that draws on Critical Theory, anthropocentrism often bears the brunt of the blame for humankind's misdeeds,

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<sup>12</sup> University of Illinois (2022) [Queer Theory Background](#) Accessed 24 September, 2022

<sup>13</sup> Jeffries, Stuart [How Foucault was shielded from scandal by French reverence for intellectuals](#), 31 July 2021, *The Spectator*, Accessed 24 September, 2022

<sup>14</sup> Damle, Amaleena (2012) *Posthuman Encounters: Technology, Embodiment and Gender in Recent Feminist Thought and in the Work of Marie Darrieussecq* Edinburgh University Press. Accessed 24 September, 2022

<sup>15</sup> Bolter, David Jay (2016) [Posthumanism](#) Georgia Institute of Technology, USA, Accessed 24 September, 2022

especially the horrors of colonialism, environmental damage and climate change<sup>16</sup>. Post-colonial discourses in Critical Theory identify a power and privilege imbalance between the self and the dehumanised Other, which is identified as a root cause of such inequalities and injustices as racism, homophobia, and sexism. New posthumanist discourses have been developed as a result with a view to “social justice” and “climate justice”. However, modern approaches in posthumanism are fractured, as explained by Miah (2008):

‘...there is no single form of posthumanism that we can identify that portrays a unified history of the term. Moreover, theories of posthumanism do not wholly reveal the moral import of enhancement ambitions.’<sup>17</sup>

Here the shift from rational explorations of humankind’s existence and place in nature and the universe departs significantly from humanist principles and values, and the fantasising about a new hypothetical “post-human” with the potential for dominance can be seen to drive discourses. Within literature, posthumanist exploration of cultural metaphors have emerged which often put human beings on a “spectrum” of existence, for example man and machine.<sup>18</sup> Contrary to established scientific evidence,<sup>19</sup> Queer Theory claims sex is also a spectrum. Such explorations are sold as subversive to Cartesian Dualism. In this, the exceptionalism of humankind is dismantled and replaced with a new focus of exceptionalism.

According to the Oxford English Dictionary (1998), humanism is defined as ‘a system of thought concerned with human rather than divine or supernatural matters; an outlook emphasising common human needs and concerned with humankind as responsible and progressive intellectual beings; and literary culture, esp. That of the Renaissance humanists.’<sup>20</sup> It is therefore reasonable that humanism should have a role to play in the development of this RSE curriculum, but it does not. Meanwhile “posthumanism” does not appear in this 1998 edition of the Oxford English Dictionary, nor any printed dictionary or encyclopaedia available to the authors at the time of writing, further indicating that the posthumanist school of thought is extremely new and experimental.

The exclusive adoption of a posthumanist and Queer Theory approach is likely the result of the influence of EJ Renold, and it presents an explicit and overt challenge to humanity, rationality and morality. It is preoccupied with dismantling what it identifies to be regulatory and oppressive regimes including heteronormativity, morality, the political right, child safeguarding, and elements of the human condition such as biological sex.

Traditionally, humanism centres man rather than god in the pursuit of knowledge. Thriving in the Enlightenment, humanism empowered human beings to seek their own answers through human observation, rationality and morality. Humanism facilitates secularism in education in the pursuit of shared human understanding. Over the centuries, rudimentary interpretations, that human beings are literally the centre of the universe and separate from nature, were challenged by the principles that underpin humanism - reason, morality and the power of human observation, foundational to

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<sup>16</sup> Fox, Nick & Alldred, Pam (2019) [Sustainability, feminist posthumanism and the unusual capacities of \(post\)humans](#) Taylor & Francis Online. Accessed 24 September, 2022

<sup>17</sup> Miah, Andy (2008) *A Critical History of Posthumanism*

<sup>18</sup> Harraway, Donna (1985) *A Cyborg Manifesto: Science, Technology and Socialist-Feminism in the Late Twentieth Century* University of Minnesota Press

<sup>19</sup> Byng et al (2019) [Written submission to Women and Equalities Select Committee](#) Accessed 24 September, 2022

<sup>20</sup> DK Ltd (1998) *Illustrated Oxford Dictionary* Oxford University Press: Oxford, pp396

the creation of the Scientific Method. As Carl Sagan (1994), the famous astronomer observed in his seminal work The Pale Blue Dot: A Vision of the Human Future in Space:

“Then science came along and taught us that we are not the measure of all things, that there are wonders unimagined, that the Universe is not obliged to conform to what we consider comfortable or plausible. We have learned something about the idiosyncratic nature of our common sense. Science has carried human self-consciousness to a higher level. This is surely a rite of passage, a step towards maturity.”

Posthumanist and queer theorists such as EJ Renold, appear to believe they are now the cutting edge of a new and revolutionary challenge to humanism, with a perspective and subsequent activism known as ‘queering’. EJ Renold’s work on posthumanism, queer theory and sexuality is featured alongside her fellow theorists in a book called The Palgrave Handbook of Sexuality Education. It is referenced in RSE Document A and presents a clearer insight to the curriculum’s ontological origins and intent. A chapter in this book by Taylor and Blaine (2017) explains that ‘queering’ is an ‘ethico-political project’:

‘We concur with Donna Haraway’s assertion that the primary job of ‘queering’ is that of ‘undoing “normal” categories’, and that ‘none is more critical than the human/nonhuman sorting operation.’ To this end, we set out to de-centre the human subject of queer theory to reposition queer scholarship as a more-than-human wordly ethico-political project, and in so doing, to offer a new set of provocations to the field of sexuality education.’<sup>21</sup>

Furthermore, theorists among EJ Renold’s academic peers appear to believe they are operating on a new, evocative, higher level of consciousness, so much so that a new lexicon is required:

‘In order to circumvent the binary logic of the nature/culture divide, scholars involved in these interdisciplinary conversations have invented a new lexicon...this new lexicon offers a repertoire of terms that evoke human/nonhuman relationality, entanglement and collectivity’ (pp594)

This new lexicon appears to include the terms “assemblages” and “more than human”, alongside the redefinition of commonly used words that describe the human experience, such as sex and gender. Additional terms such as “cisgender” have also been introduced, which can be exploited to create new “human/nonhuman” discourses. In The Palgrave Handbook of Sexuality Education, it is extremely important to the theorists that such ideas make their way into the classroom as part of a perpetual revolution:

‘we suggest that one sure way to unsettle the liberalist ‘habits of thought’ within the human centric brand of queer theory that has taken hold in the field of sexuality education, is for educational scholars, including sexuality education scholars, to enter into dialogue with theories that reposition the human within more-than-human worlds...Reconceptualizing nature beyond the nature/culture divide is tantamount to queering nature and thereby queering what it means to be human...it is important to keep queering queer theory so it does not turn into a new kind of normal.’ Pp594-595

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<sup>21</sup> Taylor, Affrica; Blaise, Mindy (2017) *Queer Departures into More-Than-Human Worlds* in The Palgrave Handbook of Sexuality Education Palgrave Macmillan: London

RSE Document B asserts that the term 'queer' is 'an umbrella term to refer to non-conforming gender and sexual identities, expressions and orientations.' (pp30)

RSE Document A avoids direct mention of "posthumanism", "post human" and "queer theory", having failed to declare its ontological position clearly from the outset, but the influence of contemporary posthumanism, transhumanism, liberal feminism, Queer Theory and Critical Theory is clearly visible in the substantial references and subsequent reports, curriculum code and guidance.

Insight into the curriculum creators' particular approach to posthumanism can be seen in the RSE Panel Chair's 2017 contribution to The Palgrave Handbook of Sexuality Education entitled, *Pin-Balling and Boners: The Posthuman Phallus and Intra-Activist Sexuality Assemblages in Secondary School*, which was produced around the same time as RSE Documents A and B, and co-authored by Jessica Ringrose who was referenced in RSE Document A. "Assemblages" is a term used in the curriculum planning materials along with "life-worlds", both of which appear synonymous with post-humanist terminology. It is explained:

'This research is beginning to unsettle our understandings, through new onto-epistemologies, of the ways in which bodies, affect, objects, history, place, and discourse entangle and come to matter in and indeed make their mark on children and young people's everyday lives—and not always in the ways we might anticipate and imagine (Holford et al. 2013; Davies 2014). Central to the idea of the posthuman is a post-individual and non-anthropocentric theory of power. 'Sexual violence' is thus understood not as locked inside and emerging from the human, rational (masculine) individual (thus leading to pedagogies which charge the individual as the sole and responsible 'agent of change') but as emerging in configurations of power relations that include the more-than-human.'<sup>22</sup>

Renold & Ringrose appear to posit that the "post human" is a hypothetical entity that is more than the sum of its parts, or as they describe it, "more than human", whose existence is constructed of "assemblages",<sup>23</sup> of which each is 'a material performance of composing agencies together'<sup>24</sup>. In pseudo-theological style, they argue against human beings having agency, instead positing that they are components of a hierarchy of power that operates beyond them, in which the "more-than-human" manifests. As Lahti (2021) explains,

'Assemblage theory initiates a consideration of multiplicity, not just in terms of multiple gender identities, but in opening up thinking of gender as a radically open and unpredictable process...Instead of seeing gender as an identity residing within an individual, gender is thought of as emerging out of the dynamic encounters of multiple elements and relations that come together in an assemblage'<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> Renold, Emma & Ringrose, Jessica (2017) *Pin-Balling and Boners: The Posthuman Phallus and Intra-Activist Sexuality Assemblages in Secondary School* in The Palgrave Handbook of Sexuality Education Palgrave Macmillan: London

<sup>23</sup> Charteris, Jennifer & Nye, Adele (2019) *Posthuman Methodology and Pedagogy: Uneasy Assemblages and Affective Choreographies* in Posthumanism and Higher Education pp329-347 Palgrave Macmillan: London

<sup>24</sup> New Materialism (2018) Apparatus x Assemblage <https://newmaterialism.eu/almanac/a/apparatus-x-assemblage.html> Accessed 24 September, 2022

<sup>25</sup> Lahti, Annukka (2021) *Affective intimacies of gender assemblages* Manchester University Press: Open Access Archive

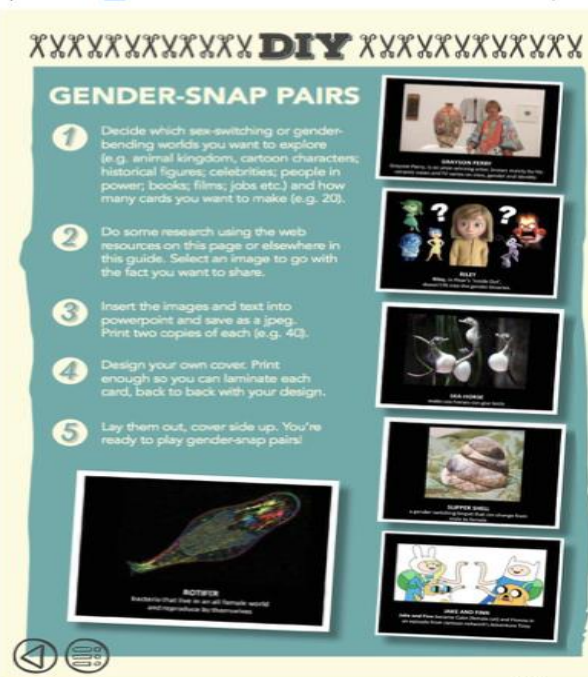


This posthumanist and queer theory perspective appears to depend upon accepting regressive stereotypes as a baseline for what is human, for example sexist and archaic perceptions of masculinity (rationality) and exploring the subversion of those as the imagining of a post-individual, post-human state that is somehow “more-than-human”. Thus, a new power dynamic is created between the maligned human, which may be considered outdated, heteronormative, heterosexual, corporeal, and biologically binary, while the “post-human” is said to depart from such assumptions. In describing this non-conformity to regressive views of what it is to be human as “more than human”, the ontology implies elevation of some “bodies” from human beings to another hypothesised and superior post-human existential state. As is inconsistent with humanism, the centring of irrational and pseudo-theological constructs is essential to its approach.

Example A: On page 67 of RSE Document A, an AGENDA resource named the Rotifer Project is described. This project introduces queer theory and includes an exercise focused on trans-speciesism, using alleged quotes from young people to undermine the law, including the Schools Premises Regulations (2012) ISS Regulation 23A section B and Equality Act 2010. This activity seeks to conflate and obfuscate the biological distinction between males and females and between human beings and other animals.

"In our school some of us are expressing our gender in ways that challenge society's expectations of what a boy or girl might be or do. Some of us want to change our gender pronouns (e.g. from he to she). Some of us don't want to be identified as gendered at all (e.g. agender). Some of us are just fed up with how sex and gender norms get under our skin and stop us doing things."

## FACT FINDING



Any posthuman “assemblages”, including for example “gender identities”, may be argued to be indicative of the “more-than-human”, and as such, Document A indicates exceptions must be made to enable functionality in society, initiating the transition to a “post-human” society:

‘More than half of trans young people reported that they are not able to use the toilets they feel comfortable in at school, while two in five are not able to be known by their preferred name at school. Three in four trans young people have harmed themselves at some point.’  
(RSE Document A, pp23)

These statistics, given in RSE Document A, are based on a single and very small Stonewall survey of 267 respondents in Wales, and are used to imply that fundamental changes to both school culture and the law across the nation are required. In order to ensure the inclusion of “LGBTQ+ lives”, the use of a “whole school approach” is deemed essential to the mandatory curriculum code (Document C). To implement this, the disruption of school culture and the dissolution of boundaries is required, including those intended to safeguard human beings. For example, this may include allowing biological males who claim to have a female gender identity unrestricted access to female only services and facilities.

It is therefore unsurprising that RSE Document A fails to give due regard to any of the protected characteristics in the Equality Act 2010, going so far as to redefine the meaning of sex and failing to mention gender reassignment at all. It also fails to provide necessary recommendations to ensure human characteristics are accommodated by the curriculum. Instead, the RSE curriculum presents a direct affront to a number of characteristics including sex, sexual orientation, gender reassignment and disability. In the subsequent RSE curriculum code and guidance, the “more-than-human” takes precedent. First, sex is globally redefined such that male and female are no longer biological sexes, but “genders” with which one might identify. In posthumanist and Queer Theory schools of thought, this “queering” is considered a necessary act in pursuit of a “post-human”, “post-individual” and “inclusive” future.

Biological sex is fundamental to human existence and society. To dismantle humankind’s well evidenced understanding of it by mandating the deliberate ideological corruption of children’s education across the nation is to tear at the fabric of society.

## **The Redefinition of Sex**

The redefinition of biological sex within the Welsh government curriculum code and guidance is indicative of the influence of posthumanism and Queer Theory. In the Welsh curriculum guidance (Document D), which is now in use in schools across Wales, male and female instead follow the tenets of Queer Theory, and are redefined as “genders” from a spectrum with which one must identify, distinctly separate from sex. The transition to this posthumanist mode of thought begins with the scientifically inaccurate definition of sex contained in RSE Document A.

The WHO definition of sex, while weak, recognises it is biological and binary:

‘Sex refers to the biological characteristics that define humans as female or male. While these sets of biological characteristics are not mutually exclusive, as there are individuals who possess both, they tend to differentiate humans as males and females. In general use in many languages, the term sex is often used to mean “sexual activity”, but for technical

purposes in the context of sexuality and sexual health discussions, the above definition is preferred.’<sup>26</sup>

However in Document A, the Welsh RSE curriculum begins to diverge significantly and materially from the anthropocentric and binary WHO definition, changing it such that human beings are de-centred, and it closely resembles a social construct and a spectrum:

“Sex’ is used in this report to refer to the biological processes and attributes that societies use to assign sex categories (e.g. male, female, intersex). These biological attributes include chromosomes, hormones and internal and external physical sexual and reproductive anatomy.’

(RSE Document A, pp131 and RSE Document B, pp29)

This also redefines sex such that “intersex” is incorrectly presented as a third sex. This is scientifically inaccurate. A very small minority of people have Differences of Sex Development (DSDs), but this does not mean that sex is a spectrum. These medical conditions affect either male or female people. Meanwhile, DSD Families, an organisation that provides information and support to families with Differences of Sex Development, does not include the word ‘intersex’ on their list of relevant terminology.<sup>27</sup>

This ideologically corrupted definition of sex is carried into the guidance documentation, but prior to final publication it moved even further away from a scientifically recognisable and empirically evidenced definition of sex, and significantly towards a Queer Theory led definition in which male and female were entirely separated from sex and redefined as gender identities. This guidance has already been distributed to schools in [Cross-cutting themes for designing your curriculum](#), which was published on the Welsh government’s Hwb website and available at the roll out of the curriculum in September 2022:

Sex	<p>ethnicity, social economic background, disability, or <u>sex</u>, <u>gender</u> or <u>sexuality</u></p> <p>(Rhyw) attributed to a person on the basis of primary sex characteristics (genitalia) and reproductive functions.</p>
Gender	<p>ethnicity, social economic background, disability, or <u>sex</u>, <u>gender</u> or <u>sexuality</u></p> <p>(Rhywedd) often used to refer to whether someone identifies as female, male or non-binary. Gender can also refer to the social and cultural norms and differences that different societies have about how people behave, look or dress. People often find an important sense of identity in these but they can also perpetuate discrimination, inequalities and harms.</p>

<sup>26</sup> WHO [Sexual Health](#) Accessed 24 September, 2022

<sup>27</sup> DSD Families [Terminology](#) Accessed 24 September, 2022

The importance of sex specific language cannot be underestimated. It is recognised by The British Pregnancy Advice Service (BPAS), which outlined their reasons for continuing to use sex-specific language in their 2020 strategy document:

‘If we cannot clearly articulate that it is predominantly women, rather than people at large, who are affected by [pregnancy] we will find it much harder to dismantle a framework that today is still underpinned by sexism, and achieve a broader goal of ensuring that everyone, no matter how they identify, can access the care and support they need as swiftly and straightforwardly as possible.’<sup>28</sup>

An open letter signed by 1,743 practitioners and stakeholders, including maternity and health workers, academics, activists, researchers, service users, professionals, and campaigners supported BPAS’s approach:

‘The use of unambiguous sexed language is important when describing and challenging issues which are specific to biological sex, rather than relative to gender identity.... We believe BPAS pave the way for others and show us how the inclusion of marginalised groups does not have to be at the expense of sex based language.’<sup>29</sup>

Furthermore, Public Health Wales, from which a representative was part of the RSE Expert Panel, uses sex-specific language in their campaigns.<sup>30</sup>

Meanwhile the final compulsory RSE curriculum code completely avoids the words male, female, man, woman, boy or girl (Document C).

It seems incomprehensible that any government would endorse ideological redefinitions of such important terminology, especially when the decision to do so is not based on evidence, but conceptual experimentation. It is possible that the consequences upon public health will be profound.

## Whole School Approach

The redefinition of sex is extremely relevant to the whole school approach, with the required consequence being that whole school cultures and safeguarding practices must be dismantled, abandoned or reorganised around it:

‘A whole school approach to SRE means that the core principles informing the learning and experience from planned SRE sessions (in or outside the classroom) will be reinforced (and importantly, not undermined) across different areas of the school and community.’

(RSE Document B pp14)

This recommendation is adopted and reinforced in the mandatory curriculum code (Document C): ‘The learning for RSE refers to both what is taught expressly and what is embedded throughout the curriculum and in the school environment through the whole school approach.’ (pp4)

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<sup>28</sup> British Pregnancy and Advisory Service [Our Values. Our Vision. Our Ambitions](#) Accessed 24 September, 2022

<sup>29</sup> [Open Letter to the Board of Trustees and Senior Management Team](#) Accessed 24 September, 2022

<sup>30</sup> Public Health Wales [Pregnancy](#) Accessed 24 September, 2022

In RSE Document A, the whole school approach has 8 key domains:

1. School leadership and policy
2. Professional learning
3. Student learning
4. Community partnership building
5. Safeguarding and support for staff and students
6. School culture and environment.
7. Student voice and participation
8. Evaluation and impact

This therefore calls for fundamental changes to school culture and policy to centre the ideological bias and demands of this particular RSE curriculum. For example, the Schools Premises Regulations (2012) ISS Regulation 23A section B states that schools must provide separate toilet facilities for boys and girls from the age of 8. However this law can be subverted and facilities rendered mixed sex, if a posthumanist and Queer Theory approach is applied, which requires the meaning of the words boy, girl, man, woman, male and female to be altered by ideological means. Given those words are entirely missing from the legally mandated RSE Curriculum Code, it is clear that the curriculum is post-humanist and queer theory led activism in action. Further evidence of the post-humanist approach is apparent in the argument for a 'holistic' curriculum:

'Rather than segregating the curriculum into single issue based 'lessons' (e.g. on 'pornography', 'consent', 'gender identity' etc.), a holistic SRE is characterized by its capacity to integrate these issues with reference to how they connect with the wider assemblage of life-worlds (e.g. biological, cultural, digital, economic, environmental, historical, political, psychological and social domains.)'

(RSE Document A, pp 74)

Documents A, B, C and D all insist upon a whole school approach, a recommendation that was central to the final curriculum. Requiring that the premise and values of this RSE curriculum are embedded throughout all school subjects, activities and culture is otherwise known as 'queering'. Given the posthumanist and Queer Theory led recommendations, this will mean:

- Gender identity should be prioritised over biological sex in terms of rights and recognition, and children should be taught inconsistent and biologically inaccurate information, for example that male and female do not denote biological sex but mixed sex gender identities based upon sexist social constructs and stereotypes.
- Any male that claims a female gender identity should be given unrestricted access to female only facilities, services and activities including toilets, changing rooms and sports and vice versa.
- Males (including mid and post-pubertal males) should be allowed to participate in female sports if they claim a female identity, despite scientific evidence of male advantage and serious safety concerns
- The words mother, girl and female should no longer refer exclusively to the female sex and instead denote mixed sex categories
- Same-sex attracted young people should be taught that their sexual orientation is prejudicial, thus lesbian women should be pressured into sexual relationships with males given Queer Theory seeks to redefine sexual attraction as based on gender rather than biological sex. Thus the curriculum requires a homophobic and misogynistic rape culture to be embedded in schools in order to avoid "transphobia" and pursue "fully inclusive relationships".

- Children and young people's behaviour and sense of self must be viewed through a lens of sexuality, with the normalisation of sexual activities as part of school life. For example, detailed discussions of a child's body with adults (who may be strangers from third party organisations) in the context of "sexuality" is required by the curriculum from age three. It is unclear how these elements are to be rolled out in a whole school approach, nor the impact sexualised perspectives of the human body will have upon the teaching of different subjects, for example biology.
- A culture of secrecy is permissible to facilitate dialogue between children, teachers and third party providers, with parents necessarily excluded from decisions that involve their children, especially in relation to issues around sex, sexuality and gender.

This list of potential consequences is not comprehensive, and the wider implications of the shift away from an objective and scientifically grounded understanding of sex must be considered further.

## The Sexualisation of Children and Young People

The sexualisation of children and young people is extremely apparent in the preparatory documents of the RSE curriculum. Evidence has been cherry picked by Renold & McGeeney to support the predetermined belief that children are 'sexual beings' and 'sexually active' from birth. Any challenge to such a claim is considered dismissible as 'protectionist' and likely to be of homophobic and right wing origin.

The message that children are sexual beings is introduced softly in RSE Document A, before being expanded and reinforced throughout:

'Evidence from international qualitative research suggests that schools often struggle to accept that young people are sexual beings who may be sexually active (Pound et al. 2016).' Pp21<sup>31</sup>

Many people would not disagree with this statement at face value, as adolescence is well-known to be a period of sexual discovery and one of many reasons why good quality relationships and sex education for young people is deemed so essential. Yet a few pages later the paper seeks to shatter the well established worldview that children, as young as newborn babies, are not sexually motivated beings:

'Children's learning and experience of sexuality and relationships (as defined above) begins as soon as they enter the social world. Frequently children and young people are viewed as 'innocent' or 'pre-sexual' beings, sparking unproven concerns within schools about the potential for SRE to 'corrupt childhood innocence' or 'prematurely sexualise' young people (Blaise 2005; Kehily and Montgomery 2013; Robinson 2013; Taylor 2010; Faulkner 2010; Renold 2003; 2013; Epstein, Kehily and Renold 2010; Bhana 2016). Yet expressing sexuality through sexual behaviours and relationships with others is a natural, healthy part of growing up. For example, for children aged between 0-5, behaviours such as holding or playing with own genitals, curiosity about other children's genitals, interest in body parts and what they do and curiosity about sex and gender differences reflect 'safe and healthy development' (see Brook 2015).'

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<sup>31</sup>Pound et al (2016) [What do young people think about their school-based sex and relationship education? A qualitative synthesis of young people's views and experiences](#) BMJ



The premise that children are born ready sexualised in this report is extremely significant. The establishment of such an idea is based on weak and unethical use of evidence. It relies on examples taken from a safeguarding tool intended to help those working with children and young people identify whether behaviours are part of normal childhood development, or indicative of sexual abuse. Renold & McGeeney appear to have recontextualised such a tool to create and sustain the assertion that babies and children are sexually motivated from birth. This is done without any robust supporting evidence, nor responsible reference to child protection and safeguarding practices. It is a clear call for the dissolution of healthy social boundaries, and the demolition and destabilisation of widely accepted social discourse around safeguarding children. Such a claim transforms a child's involvement in sexual activity with others, including adults, from sexual abuse to simply an issue of knowledge and consent. This is an extremely dangerous premise upon which to build a sex and relationships education curriculum, and one which is patently illegal and for all intents and purposes, paedophilic.

Further this presumptive and dubiously evidenced claim of infant sexuality absolves the curriculum of any risk of sexualising children. If the basis of the curriculum is that children are already sexualised before they reach school, then the government places itself in the position of being able to claim that the curriculum does not sexualise children. It is merely helping them become more empowered, understanding, proficient and knowledgeable in the sexual activities they already do and more.

Yet there is also contradiction in Renold & McGeeney's claims:

'Evidence from NATSAL suggests that most young people (around 70%) do not know enough about sex when they first have some sexual experience.'

(RSE Document A pp30)

While simultaneously insisting that children as young as newborns are sexually active, the report recognises that children and young people are unknowing and inexperienced in their first sexual activity as 'young people', suggesting therefore, that they can also be pre-sexual. There is a contradiction. How can children be at one and the same time be sexually active beings from birth and be pre-sexual? Such a leap requires a fundamental reimagining of the child, in which their normal non-sexual behaviour must be reframed as inherently sexually motivated, and the curriculum consequently requires that this reframing must take place in the classroom. It is extremely difficult to reconcile Renold & McGeeney's conceptual manipulation and disingenuous use of safeguarding tools with the Welsh government's claim that the curriculum does not sexualise children.

It is not unreasonable to suspect a dangerous agenda is at work, one which selects and manipulates evidence to support the anarchistic aim of breaking down essential social barriers in society, namely those that protect children from sexual abuse. Parents objecting to this curriculum may recognise that to present children with sexual discourse, content and images, and to encourage them to consider normal developmental behaviour and self-exploration as intrinsically sexually motivated, is undeniably an act of child sexualisation. It is a subversion of established societal norms and perceptions, based on dubious academic justification, and one that normalises and encourages sexual activity for and among children. It is an overt attempt to induce a Queer Theory led post-human society - one in which children are sexually liberated and available. This is not a principle upon which any responsible RSE should be based, yet the immorality of the

proposition is not lost on Renold and McGeeney, as evidenced in their critique of past SRE guidance:

‘As several critics have noted however the conceptual framework that underpins the guidance is contradictory, with protectionist concerns about childhood sexuality and a morally informed public health agenda limiting the potential of the guidance to realise the broader aims of SRE’

(RSE Document A, pp11)

The conceptual framework that underpins the RSE curriculum in Wales overtly undermines the law. As is consistent with socio-political sex positivism, the report also undermines issues of morality by tying them to homophobia, creating the impression that morality is to be considered universally oppressive, archaic if not an abhorrent consideration in the relationships and sex education of children:

‘These concerns are reflected in the 1986 Education Act in which schools are instructed to ‘have due regard to moral considerations and the value of family life’ (Section 46) and in the introduction of section 28 of the Local Government act that banned schools from ‘promoting’ homosexuality.’

(RSE Document A, pp10)

Example B from Renold’s CRUSH resources (linked to AGENDA, referenced in Document A) introduces professionals to the idea that children are sexual beings from birth and undermines the principles of developmentally appropriate education while giving no clear reference to current legislation



## Sex Positivity

RSE Documents A recommends a “sex positive” approach to the curriculum, which is carried into Document B and the code and guidance (Documents C and D). However, the approach to “sex positivity” that underpins the curriculum goes far beyond simply viewing safe, healthy and legal sexual relationships as a positive thing, and into advocating for criminal sexual activity.

Sex positivity is a socio-political movement that aims to bring about social and cultural change in relation to sexuality. While it recognises the importance of “safe sex”, for example protecting

against sexually transmitted infections, it otherwise absolves itself of all moral considerations in relation to sexual activity, notwithstanding consent.<sup>32</sup>

This extreme approach to “sex positivity” is evident in RSE Document A’s reference to the ‘Good Sex’ project (2014), for which McGeeney was a contributing researcher. In her work, McGeeney cites the ‘Charmed Circle’, theorised by sex-positive feminist Gayle Rubin.<sup>33</sup> She proposes that society has a number of blessed sexual activities. These activities are considered acceptable to society and include sex that is heterosexual, with people within the same generation, and monogamous. This is opposed to the ‘Outer Limits’ which includes sex that is cross-generational, casual, sadomasochistic and involves prostitution and pornography. The illegality of children’s involvement in sex is discussed by Rubin in the context of “erotic injustice”:

‘...it was commonly thought that ‘premature’ interest in sex, sexual excitement, and, above all, sexual release, would impair the health and maturation of a child...For over a century, no tactic for stirring up erotic hysteria has been as reliable as the appeal to protect children. The current wave of erotic terror has reached deepest into those areas bordered in some way, if only symbolically, by the sexuality of the young...A radical theory of sex must identify, describe, explain, and denounce erotic injustice and sexual oppression.... Sexual ideology plays a crucial role in sexual experience...Those who consider themselves progressive need to examine their preconceptions, update their sexual educations, and acquaint themselves with the existence and operation of sexual hierarchy. It is time to recognize the political dimensions of erotic life.’<sup>34</sup>

On page 102 of Renold’s CRUSH resource, she references A Grown Up Conversation about Children and Porn Online Starts Here by Nash et al, who assert:

‘Pornography is fiction: a media product, not an objective depiction of real-life relationships, yet it may be the source of our children’s sexual education, with expectations adjusted accordingly. It’s also part of a wider, increasingly sexualised culture in which mainstream films, television, music videos and videogames can contain graphic and even violent sexual scenes. This should be the start, not the end, of the conversation.’<sup>35</sup>

The message throughout the article suggests a balance is required between protecting children from harm and censoring adults from their legal right to pornography. It is sympathetic to perspectives that argue children are going to be exposed to pornography no matter what is done, and especially online, so society may as well respond by embracing the sexualisation of children in what is already a sexualised society.<sup>36</sup> Such views pay little regard to the non-fictional victims of pornography (who are ‘put aside’ in Nash et al’s article), including victims of Child Sexual

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<sup>32</sup> Gabosch (2014) [A Sex Positive Renaissance](#) Accessed 24 September, 2022

<sup>33</sup> McGeeney, E (2014) [The Good Sex Project: Definitions of Sexual Pleasure](#) Accessed 24 September, 2022

<sup>34</sup> Rubin, Gayle (1984) *Thinking Sex: Notes for a Radical Theory of the Politics of Sexuality* in *Deviations* Duke University Press

<sup>35</sup> Nash et al February 17, 2016 [A grown-up conversation about children and porn online starts here](#) *The Conversation* Accessed 24 September, 2022

<sup>36</sup> Keen et al (2019) [Exposing children to pornography: How competing constructions of childhood shape state regulation of online pornographic material](#) *New Media and Society*, Sage Accessed 2 October, 2022

Exploitation (CSE). Nor does it consider how children will respond to the idea that pornography does not depict real sexual activity, but make-believe.

Sex positivism in the Welsh RSE curriculum is fully enmeshed in queer theory and associated sex positivity. It is rooted in a clear intent to dismantle hierarchies that criminalise and shame certain sexual acts, referring to the decriminalisation of homosexuality as precedent to justify limitless sexual liberation in society, including the involvement of children.

Further, healthy emotional connection in sexual relationships is considered dismissible. McGeeney co-wrote a book, currently available on Amazon, entitled 'Great Relationships and Sex Education: 200+ Activities for Educators Working with Young People' (2019), in which it is explained:

'It can be a good idea to leave feelings until last. Here you can emphasise that love and affection are often parts of good sex but not always. For others sex is quick, rough and anonymous' (pp.215)

The attitude that "age appropriateness", child protection and safeguarding are part of an oppressive regime is very clear in both Rubin's work and the RSE preparatory documents. The curriculum's approach to sex positivism requires dissolution of healthy social boundaries, including those that are integral to safeguarding and delivering effective sex and relationships education. This dissolution of boundaries, otherwise known as "queering" is achieved through undermining the humankind's shared understanding of established concepts, including that of the child.

Example C from Renold's CRUSH resource. Here 13 year old students were presented with a number of objects, including some commonly found together in pornographic and BDSM scenarios, leading them to imagine, discover and discuss such topics.

**Doing the creative audit**

We started with year 9 for one day, talking each class off timetable for half an hour. We carried out the sessions in the drama studio where we laid out a set of objects that were lit up by the studio lighting. There was a toy gun, a bra, a doll, a tampon, an iPad, a teddy, a high-heeled shoe, a striped flag, a pack of condoms, a football, a boxing glove, a mask, a bottle and some handcuffs. We asked young people to sort the objects into categories, but we didn't tell them what the categories were. They had to do this three times, ensuring that they used new categories each time.

**The objects opened up conversations about the topics they were interested in - gender, relationships, body image, violence, pornography, anxiety, parenting. They could set the tone and pace of what they were comfortable talking about.**

We also did the *What jars you?* activity where we gave each young person a jar and asked them to fill it with all their thoughts about what 'jars' them about RSE at our school. This was followed by the *Stop / Start* plate activity where each young person was given a red and green plate and asked to write what they would like to STOP about RSE (on the red plate) and what they would like to START about RSE (on the green plate). We hung the plates up and took them with us when we worked with the teachers so that they could hear what young people had to say.

Next we worked with year 10 on one of our Health and Wellbeing drop-down days. This time we used the **CRUSH cards** from the professional learning programme rather than objects. On the back of each card is a story about a young person, based on research. We asked young people to sort the images into categories of their own choice, before flipping the cards over and reading the stories about other children and young people's lives and experiences.

We asked our Design and Technology department to create a tree to help 'grow' young people's knowledge about health and wellbeing. Every young person was given a label and asked to write down a question they had and tie it to the tree.

**We've used these questions to help us build the new curriculum and to spark conversation in the staff room!**

**Starting to listen: working with year 12**

On the one of the Health and Wellbeing drop-down days we worked with the 6th formers and did the *What jars you?* and the *STOP / START* plates activities. Through these conversations we realised how little 6th formers knew about sexual health and safer sex. As a result we planned three RSE sessions for year 12 called *Drugs, Sex and Rock and Roll*.

We used the **DO...RSE session plan** to explore safer sex, a **British red cross session plan** to explore partying, staying safe and what to do if someone becomes unwell and a third session on drug use. Doing these sessions raised some alarms.

Young people thought the best form of contraception was withdrawal and that, anal sex was a lot safer than penis-in-vagina sex, because you can't get somebody pregnant.

We've got a lot more work to do with year twelve. We never would have realised if we hadn't had the initial conversation and started listening.



Consistent with sex positivity, the CRUSH and AGENDA materials (the latter of which is heavily referenced in the curriculum recommendations,) also adopt a pro-pornography position, despite the widespread evidence of abuse motivated by its creation. The resources fail to appropriately reference safeguarding factors and overlook legislation in relation to young people's engagement in sexual activity. Established principles of child protection and safeguarding appear wholly absent from Document A, with the exception that they are framed as inhibitive to child development.

Renold & McGeeney cite:

'The overemphasis on risk understood through a safeguarding lens does not "allow for children's participation even in risky opportunities" (Livingstone 2014).'

(RSE Document A pp12)

Through this Renold & McGeeney introduce the concept of 'children's digital sexual rights' in what is identified as 'a rapidly changing digital sexual age'. In such a context, RSE Document A implies support for children engaging in sexual activity online as part of their developing 'sexual identities'. While they reference A Global Research Agenda for Children's Rights in the Digital Age to justify this, they fail to assert that it recognises the risks of pornography to children, seeks to minimise harm, and contains no direct reference to 'children's digital sexual rights'.

Renold and McGeeney (2017) also undermine teachers' responsibilities to safeguard when they cite Pound et al's (2016) observation that 'children and young people dislike their teachers delivering SRE, particularly in secondary schools as they don't trust teachers to keep things confidential'. The approach taken implies that it may be justifiable for an adult to keep secrets with a child, which is a direct affront to fundamental child safeguarding principles, and indicates a need for "specialist" third parties (i.e. strangers) to discuss sex and sexuality with children. The need for third party involvement in curriculum delivery was featured in the consultation documents put to the public by the Welsh government with no details on vetting, nor measures for quality assurance.

Resources connected to the curriculum, such as CRUSH, also link to a number of organisations that have promoted extreme sexual material to primary and secondary schools, including BISH and The Proud Trust, the latter of which made national news with its Dice Game resource. This sex game, redesigned for the classroom, encouraged children as young as thirteen to imagine various extreme sexual activities. Furthermore, a significant proportion of the signposted organisations focus mostly or exclusively on promoting the constructs of "gender" and "gender identity", including Mermaids, which advocates for blocking the healthy physical development of gender non-conforming children and young people.<sup>37</sup>

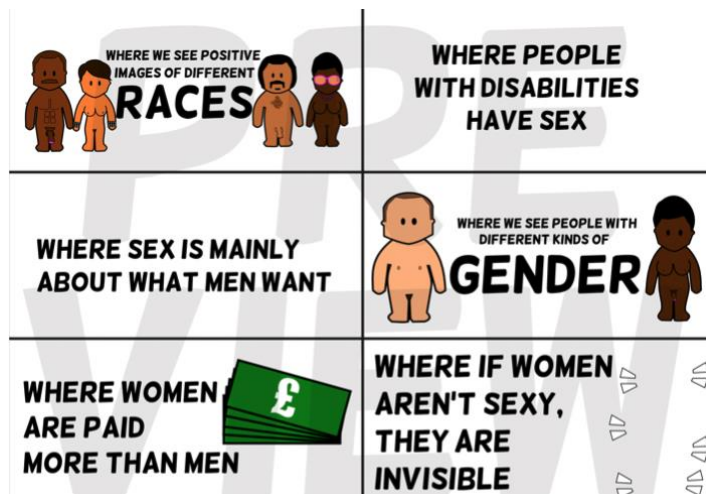
The curriculum and resources as designed by Renold do not recognise basic safeguarding principles and practice. They reframe indicators of abuse as indicators of sexuality. They frame children's access to and engagement with pornography as a digital right, rather than a source of serious harm. They undermine teachers' responsibility to respond to safeguarding concerns. The age of consent is 16, below which all sexual acts are illegal. Health professionals have the right to support young people from the age of 13 in line with Gillick Competency and the Fraser Guidelines, notwithstanding the legal age of consent. Prostitution is illegal, as is the purchase of pornography by anyone younger than 18 years of age. Sexual activity between adults and children

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<sup>37</sup> Dixon, Hayley [Exclusive: Trans charity Mermaids giving breast binders to children behind parents' backs](#) [breast-binders-children/](#) 25 September, 2022 *The Telegraph*

is sexual abuse. Any child involved in the sale of sex acts, as proposed by Rubin's 'Outer Limits' (1984), would be a victim of Child Sexual Exploitation (CSE).

Example D from BISH's "Planet Porn" resource currently available for schools to purchase from <https://bishtraining.com/planet-porn/>. The age group this resource is aimed at is unclear, but the illustrations suggest it has been designed to appeal to children under the age of 13. It presents pornography as economically liberating for women, as well as anti-racist. It is also replete with Queer Theory terminology, including "cis-gender" and "genderqueer". The preview provides no apparent information with regards to the illegality of children's access to porn, nor safeguarding considerations. Teachers are directed to BISH resources in EJ Renold's CRUSH materials featured on the AGENDA website at [www.agendaonline.co.uk](http://www.agendaonline.co.uk), in association with the new RSE Relationships and Sexuality Education Curriculum in Wales. This raises serious concerns over the quality and suitability of content entering the classroom.



## RSE and Disability

In Renold & McGeeney's 2017 document, 'Informing the Future of the Sex and Relationships Education Curriculum in Wales' (RSE Document A, pp26), they explain, using 'person-first' language<sup>38</sup> how, "People with disabilities...have historically been excluded from SRE, due to myths about...being either asexual or 'too sexual'". This is a fair reading of history, garnered from reference to Rohleder (2010) & Gougeon (2009). They go on to describe the failure of educators to, "promote and advocate for disabled children and young people". So far so good. However, Renold & McGeeney appear to oppose the status quo by depicting educational practitioners as being overly cautious and protective of their learners – again, citing Rohleder (2010) – they, "express ambivalence...[and] anxiety that SRE will lead to inappropriate sexual behaviour". Renold & McGeeney clearly make the case that young disabled people have been substantially let down by a lack of SRE which has left them vulnerable to increased levels of sexual abuse (twice that of levels compared to non-disabled young people). To reinforce their point, they then talk about autistic children, drawing attention to, "high levels of social anxiety and difficulty in forming social groups and reading the intentions of others" and states that they, "will have specific requirements and needs when it comes to SRE".

<sup>38</sup> In UK organisations, notably the NHS, use 'identity-first language as per the social model (people are 'disabled' by societal barriers). In terms of autism, most of the community prefer the term 'autistic' rather than a 'person with autism', as advocates feel that autism itself is an integral part of their identity. Renold & McGeeney's use of person-first language is therefore, peculiarly, at odds with more progressive ideas of disability.



From all this, Renold & McGeeney set out the argument that such young people should therefore be granted the 'same rights as all other children' along with the same access to high quality SRE. There is no way to counter this, because of course, they are right in that young, disabled people have been neglected in this respect and deserve to be informed as best possible. However, what Renold & McGeeney do not consider, is the original 'ambivalence' and 'anxieties' about the delivery of SRE to learning disabled people, some of whom are autistic. They do not seem to acknowledge that professionals working in special educational needs (SEN) settings have valid concerns that are grounded in direct knowledge and experience of their learners. They fail to explore these concerns and simply propose that they have access to the same education. Equally, they also fail to recognise the wealth of diversity and complexities in the world of (learning) disability, where specialist provision is a must for many. The mere suggestion that there are "specific requirements and needs" for autistic and/or disabled learners does not go far enough to address the gaps in their education. Especially when the final version of the RSE curriculum code offers no guidance whatsoever for SEN schools, but instead leaves the RSE content and approach totally up to the staff involved. The idea that the RSE content and approach be left entirely to the discretion and control of SEN staff, leaves disabled learners wide-open to abuse and ideological teaching by over-zealous staff who believe they are educating and informing learners. Bearing in mind that up to 48%<sup>39</sup> of referrals to the Gender Identity Service (GIDS) were autistic or had autistic traits, it is essential that this area is given more thought and consideration. As it is, the RSE curriculum in its current state, barely mentions disability. Despite the fact that autistic people are more likely to identify as LGB or T<sup>40</sup>, there is not one reference to this throughout the document.

Renold & McGeeney go on to use one organisation's example of SRE with disabled learners, providing an overview of their 7 weekly sessions. The content of the sessions is self-explanatory and while there is no indication of what the learners' cognitive level of understanding is, it appears to cover the basics. However, without any citations or evidence, they dismiss the programme as, "too negative and risk focused" before proceeding to cite unconnected research, which suggests "SRE at secondary schools is overly focussed on the risks and negative consequences of sexual behaviour and online relationships". Renold & McGeeney refer to research that says, "two thirds of young people rated the quality of their SRE as good or very good", but contradictorily persists with the 'negative and narrow' focus and employs an isolated quote from a study conducted by McGeeney, in which their point is further backed up and illustrated by a young person who clearly had a negative experience of RSE.

What seems evident here, is how Renold & McGeeney cherry-pick research and quotes which reflect a predetermined position. While this might seem pedantic to point out, it has to be said that if Renold, as Chair of the Expert Panel, is trying to learn from a plurality of views, she really ought to give them all a fair hearing and find compromise, rather than boil quotes and research down to the elements that will prove her point. Otherwise, this whole exercise in deciphering the future of 'sex education' simply becomes a vehicle for Renold to channel her own ideas and not, as Renold & McGeeney claim, an attempt to find out what young people really want from SRE.

What would be helpful is not just for all evidence to be considered, but for more detailed strategies which can be used to support learning disabled children in their understanding of sex and which take into account issues and matters exclusive to disabled people. This could be achieved by

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<sup>39</sup> Churcher Clarke, Anna & Spiliadis, Anastassis (2019) *Taking the lid off the box: The value of extended clinical assessment for adolescents presenting with gender identity difficulties* Tavistock and Portman NHS Trust, UK in *Clinical Child Psychology and Psychiatry* Sage

<sup>40</sup> Pecora, Laura et al (2016) [Sexuality in High-Functioning Autism: A Systematic Review and Meta-analysis](#) National Library of Medicine

engaging with disability advocacy organisations and organising focus groups of disabled and autistic people to discuss their experiences of sex and what education would have been helpful for them.

## **Reform of the GRA (2004)**

The planning documents for the RSE curriculum were written in the run up to the government's 2020 review of the Gender Recognition Act in which lobby groups such as Stonewall were pushing for erosion of the legal recognition of sex and associated rights. This is demonstrated in Stonewall's submission to the Women and Equalities Select Committee Inquiry Into Transgender Equality, 2015 and their call for:

“A review of the Equality Act 2010 to include ‘gender identity’ rather than ‘gender reassignment’ as a protected characteristic and to remove exemptions, such as access to single-sex spaces”

However, the UK government rejected self-id, which was one of the most controversial elements of the proposed reforms.

Core to RSE Document B is a “gender equality” and “gender equity” based approach. The means by which this should be achieved in the legislative context of the Gender Recognition Act, are as if the lobbying objectives of Stonewall were achieved, even though they were not. Sex has been fundamentally redefined in the curriculum, and the term gender identity is used in place of the legal term gender reassignment, so much so “gender reassignment” does not seem to appear once in RSE Document A. As a result the legal requirement for single sex facilities in schools is undermined with repeated reference to ‘gender inclusive toilets’. This is despite the fact that the Gender Recognition Act applies only to those over the age of 18.

Stonewall was a member of the RSE Expert Panel, and it appears they were successfully able to exercise their lobbying influence over the curriculum development to introduce their own version of the law, which in turn must be applied in a “whole school approach” in educational establishments across Wales.

The centring of this queer theory view of gender originates in RSE Document A:

‘Gender identity’ is used in this report to refer to a person’s inner sense of self. Gender identity does not necessarily relate to the sex a person is assigned at birth. Feelings about gender identity start early, around the age of 2-3.’

It is concerning that the curriculum planning documents aim to reframe a child’s entire “sense of self” as a “gender identity”. This is an extremely limiting perspective of children and it came alongside a more than 4000% increase in the number of children and young people, who are disproportionately female, identifying as transgender and referred to the Gender Identity Service at the Tavistock Clinic (GIDS). The treatment young people received from GIDS has been the subject of multiple inquiries and legal actions, including Keira Bell’s case<sup>41</sup>, and now the prospect of a

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<sup>41</sup> Siddique, Harroon [Appeal court overturns UK puberty blockers ruling for under-16s](#) 17 September, 2021 *The Guardian* Accessed 24 September, 2022

mass legal action by former patients.<sup>42</sup> Furthermore a number of staff resigned from the service, having observed that patients' co-morbidities were ignored, and the children and young people that were referred to this service were disproportionately autistic, same-sex attracted and many had suffered childhood trauma. A study by Griffin et al. (2020) observed that 'same-sex attraction was particularly common among natal females, with only 8.5% of those referred to GIDS describing themselves as primarily attracted to boys. This raises important questions about current societal acceptance of young lesbians even within youth LGBTQ+ culture'.

The interaction between the Public Sector Equality Duty and The Equality Act (2010) is misrepresented throughout the RSE documents and resources. Sex is a protected characteristic in the Equality Act but no accurate reference to it could be found in any of the four RSE documents, nor the AGENDA and CRUSH resources.

The reports and resources relied upon to justify the curriculum appear to have adopted a biased political position in relation to the issue of gender and sex self-identification. This lack of political neutrality is considerable given at the time of writing, the Gender Recognition Act reforms were still under consultation.

## Equalities Impact

In RSE Document A, in a section entitled 'Implications for Faith Schools', a contradiction emerges. At first it seems respect should be paid to the protected characteristic of religion and belief, before it is undermined:

'All schools should ensure that their SRE policies are inclusive and culturally relevant to the religious and spiritual needs of learners and the wider community... 'while faith schools may apply a particular religious ethos through their sex education policy, they are required to meet the statutory requirements that apply to all maintained schools and take notice of the guidance issued by the Welsh Assembly government.' pp32

As a result, the RSE curriculum requires all schools, cultures, subjects and teachings must be 'queered', regardless of any philosophical or religious objection; and the teaching of unscientific, ideological and inaccurate information about biological sex and gender as fact, is mandated.

RSE Document A indicates multiple areas of conflict between the ideologically driven curriculum and the law. In every case observed, as above, lip-service is paid to relevant legislation, before it is undermined by the recommendations of the Chair/Expert Panel and/or the devolved powers of the Welsh Assembly Government. Upon reading the documentation, accurate references to legislation including The Equality Act 2010 appear as platitudes rather than meaningful assertions. In numerous cases, protected characteristics and articles are redefined or taken out of context to justify an ideological position. This is subsequently visible in the mandatory Code and guidance.

The Welsh government's Integrated Impact Assessment for the Curriculum for Wales 2022 requires detailed review to ensure all the protected characteristics in The Equality Act 2010 are properly represented and considered. However, even a cursory view reveals that this document

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<sup>42</sup> Hayward, Eleanor [Tavistock gender clinic 'to be sued by 1,000 families'](#) 11 August, 2022 *The Times* Accessed 24 September, 2022

completely conflates sex and gender, thus undermining its rare use of the words boys and girls.<sup>43</sup> Further this document seeks to defend the removal of the right to withdraw from RSE, while simultaneously acknowledging the risks of partisanship in the delivery of the curriculum: 'While RE and RSE must be provided pluralistically there is some risk that they may in practice be delivered in a way which in some respects does not meet that requirement.' The Welsh government defers all responsibility for this to schools and ESTYN, despite the curriculum code and guidance, to which schools are legally required to adhere, being politically and ideologically biased to its roots.

## Political Partisanship

In RSE Document A, Renold & McGeeney assert that the 'political New Right' has been an obstacle to providing socially relevant sex education to children. In this it is noted heterosexuality was framed as 'precocious and promiscuous' and homosexuality was maligned, and given the impact of Section 28, it is not invalid to note. However, in heavily implying that concerns and objections to the curriculum will exclusively originate from a prudish and homophobic "political New Right", she introduces further political discourse, opinion and activism to the design of the curriculum through which it therefore becomes an exercise in partisanship rather than the legally required pluralism expected in education. The consequences of this are extremely serious, as the far left leaning Welsh government led by Welsh Labour and Plaid Cymru under a co-operation agreement, has branded concerned parents 'misguided' and refuses to consider there may be any basis for legitimate safeguarding concerns.

Further Renold & McGeeney appear to frame any concern about the appropriateness of sex education to be based upon homophobia. There is great irony in this, given the curriculum is grounded in Queer Theory which seeks to dissolve human understanding that sexuality is based upon sex. This is clear in its redefinition of sex, and the 'queering' of the words male and female. Despite its protestations, the curriculum is fundamentally homophobic because it fails to clearly recognise and respect same-sex attraction.

Renold and McGeeney further assert that bestowing rights upon parents to consent to sex education for their children is 'at odds' with children's entitlement. This is despite parents' right for their children to be educated in line with their values being enshrined in law. The paper overtly seeks to silence and malign opposition and undermine parental authority and involvement in their children's education, despite proposing curriculum "co-production". It also directly challenges child protection protocols, never more visible in the apparent absence of ethical considerations in any of the research undertaken in Welsh schools by EJ Renold, which were viewed as part of this investigation. Such an approach would be consistent with the sex positivist movement, which views legal, moral and ethical considerations in matters of sex and sexuality to be entirely unnecessary.

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<sup>43</sup> [Welsh Government Integrated Impact Assessment: Curriculum for Wales 2022](#) Accessed 24 September, 2022

## Conclusion

This review raised a number of questions and discovered that the contemporary posthumanist and Queer Theory led position that has been taken to Wales's compulsory Relationships and Sexuality Education is not based upon robust evidence and reason. Given the political intent of Queer Theory, the curriculum is not pluralistic, and in a number of areas it seeks to undermine existing legislation. It was further found that this posthumanism led curriculum is unlikely to respect human existence and legal rights.

This review is not an argument against good quality age appropriate relationships and sex education, with a curriculum based on robust evidence and a non-partisan approach. However this review does raise a number of concerns about the Relationships and Sexuality Education Curriculum now in use across Wales. It is not unreasonable to expect that education professionals will refer to the preparatory documents, which enforce a Queer Theory conceptual framework, in their attempts to understand the requirements of the Welsh curriculum code and guidance.

From the outset, it is clear the recommendations are not based on robust evidence but on a predetermined ideological position that does not present human beings as equal in principle. On the contrary it aims to de-centre human beings, with the underlying academic justification positing that some people are "post-human" due to "assemblages" including gender identity, and therefore must be more than equal. As a result the curriculum seeks to undermine existing equality legislation and protections, and privilege a singular minority in particular, which it refers to as "LGBTQ+ lives". This is painted as necessary for inclusion, equality, equity and social justice, and especially gender equity.

The recommendations were evidently based on the rushed opinions and ontologically and politically partisan position of the writers of the informing documents. As a result there are some extremely concerning recommendations, which seek not to ensure inclusivity but to actively destabilise society, as is consistent with an activist-academic led approach. These include:

- The sexualisation ("queering") of the concept of the child
- Undermining parents' role, rights and authority in their children's lives, safeguarding and education
- Dismissing legitimate safeguarding concerns as right wing extremism
- Dismantling societal and conceptual understanding of biological sex and associated human rights protections in pursuit of a posthuman society
- Maligning any moral considerations, especially with regard to sex, as homophobic and inhibitive to children's development
- Challenges to existing legislation
- Facilitating the belief that with education, children can consent to sexual activity. This is framed as "empowerment". It is in defiance of the law, in which children under the age of 16 are recognised as incapable of providing consent. This also undermines the onus that is on adults to safeguard children from harm.

For the Welsh government to adopt an experimental shift in the philosophical positioning of human beings, and especially children, in existence and society, and to embed that at the heart of children's education and school culture with overwhelming disregard for the implications, unintended consequences and collateral damage that could ensue, is either an act of gross negligence or deliberate societal sabotage. It certainly is not progressive. Wales must ask itself if it

is acceptable and responsible for its children and young people's sex and relationships education to be ultimately based on the work of an alleged paedophile (Foucault).

Furthermore, there is considerable irony that the curriculum is based on discourses that explore oppressive institutional power with a view to dismantle it, only for the Welsh government to use its devolved legislative powers to impose Queer Theory, via the curriculum code and guidance, upon children as young as three years old, while failing to balance perspectives, as befitting plurality in education.

The inclusion of people who are same sex attracted and those who identify as "LGBTQ+" must surely begin from the premise that they are all equally human beings, and therefore equally deserving of human rights protection. They are not a construct of imagined post-human assemblages. To propose they are "more than human" and require special dispensation or exception, including the dissolution of safeguarding principles, human rights and children's legal protections, indulges dehumanising discourses that should have no place in children's education. Is Wales ready and willing to abandon secular, compassionate and scientific principles to pursue a post-human society? If not, then this new RSE curriculum must be returned to the drawing board as a matter of urgency.



## Postface

The contents of Documents A, Documents B and the final curriculum code and guidance is collectively substantial, and a full comprehensive analysis would be beyond the scope of a doctorate. Therefore this collation and review is not comprehensive. Professional legal expertise is also required to fully understand the potential implications.

Questions remain in a number of areas, not limited to the curriculum's interpretation of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, the lack of consideration of relationships that are not sexual, issues of sex based violence rather than "gender based violence", and the proliferation and reinforcement of sexist gender stereotypes as the basis of a new "human/nonhuman" sorting exercise. Additionally, more investigation is required to more fully understand how the informing documents (RSE Document A and B) and subsequent public consultation were utilised to create the final RSE curriculum code and guidance (Documents C and D). While the influence is apparent, the method by which the final mandated materials were created is unknown.

The authors of this report are independent and have been entirely unpaid to do this work. It is therefore recommended that a comprehensive independent inquiry is called to explore the validity of the observations made in this review, and identify how and why a scientifically inaccurate and politically partisan curriculum could reach children's classrooms.

Furthermore, the authors of this review call for safeguards to be put in place, as necessary, to ensure any sweeping impositions of ideologies, biases and niche beliefs, such as those found in the Welsh RSE curriculum code and guidance, cannot be imposed by law upon society and in schools by the government without due transparency, consideration, contemplation and agreement from the wider public. In a democratic society governed by a secular Assembly,<sup>44</sup> this should be a given.

There is also a broad concern over an apparent lack of ethical consideration given in the referenced research, which seems to give little to no acknowledgement of participant or parental consent in the experimental activities, nor the consequences and potential impact of the research upon participants. Further, the research upon which the curriculum is based consistently appears to lack academic rigour, with few stated testable hypotheses underpinning investigations, nor robust inductive empirical reasoning.

Unfortunately, it is not within the scope and resources of the authors of this review to propose an alternative to the curriculum. A full independent inquiry is necessary to identify all the issues, including any not mentioned herein, and formulate recommendations that will support plurality and accuracy in education.

It is also notable that the research required to produce this review made for extremely disturbing reading. It was shocking to discover not only an apparent disregard for the ethical considerations of studying children and young people among academic researchers in school settings, but also for any and all moral considerations of any origin. An overriding message is that the only difference between abuse and pleasure at any age is knowledge and consent.

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<sup>44</sup> Humanists UK (2020) [100 years of Welsh secularism: Wales Humanists to mark important anniversary in Senedd](#) Accessed 24 September, 2022