

United Kingdom – RSE / Sex Education Parental Rights & Exemptions



United Kingdom – RSE / Sex Education Parental Rights & Exemptions (by nation).

Disclaimer

This information does not include the recently published guidance for England, which is due to come into force in September 2026. It is provided as a general overview only and does not account for differences in policy or practice at individual schools or within local authorities. Withdrawal rights and procedures may change, and parents should always check the most up-to-date guidance and their school's own policy before taking action.

Summary Table

Nation	Statutory?	Parental Right to Withdraw	Notes
WALES	Yes, RSE compulsory ages 3–16	<i>Limited exemptions</i> (s.41 & s.42; human rights challenges)	Most restrictive – contested in courts
ENGLAND	Yes (primary = Relationships only; secondary = RSE)	Yes, from sex education (until 3 terms before 16)	Science curriculum sex ed is compulsory
SCOTLAND	Yes, RSHP part of curriculum	Yes, parents can withdraw from all/part of RSHP	Consultation and transparency duties
N. IRELAND	Yes, part of curriculum	Yes, parents can withdraw	Stronger protection due to faith-based governance

Wales

- Under the **Curriculum and Assessment (Wales) Act 2021**, RSE is **statutory for all ages (3–16)**.
- The Welsh Government initially claimed “no parental right to withdraw.”
- However, **Sections 41 & 42** outline:

- **Exceptions & exemptions** may apply, particularly where safeguarding, wellbeing, or ALN (Additional Learning Needs) are relevant.
- Parents can formally challenge on **human rights grounds** (Article 2 Protocol 1 ECHR).
- Case law (including **Isherwood & Ors v Welsh Ministers**) is testing how absolute the requirement is.

➡ Wales is the **strictest**, but exemptions **do exist in law** — though rarely publicised.

England

- **Primary schools:**
 - Relationships Education is **statutory**.
 - Sex Education is **non-statutory**. Parents have the right to withdraw their child from sex education lessons (other than compulsory science content in the National Curriculum).
- **Secondary schools:**
 - Relationships & Sex Education (RSE) is **statutory**.
 - Parents can **request withdrawal** from *sex education* (but **not** relationships education or science curriculum).
 - Schools must respect the withdrawal request until **3 terms before the child's 16th birthday**. After that, the decision passes to the young person.

Scotland

- **Relationships, Sexual Health & Parenthood (RSHP)** education is part of the national curriculum but is **not statutory** in the same way as England/Wales.
- The Scottish Government guidance (2014, updated 2019) confirms:
 - Parents **have the right to withdraw** their children from *all or part of sexual health education*.
 - Schools must consult parents before RSHP is delivered and give opportunities to view resources.
 - Young people should be included in discussions, particularly in secondary school.

Northern Ireland

- Relationships and Sexuality Education (RSE) is part of the curriculum but is **determined locally by each school's Board of Governors** (often influenced by religious ethos).
- The **Department of Education guidance (2015, updated 2023)** requires RSE delivery, but:

- Parents retain the **right to withdraw their child from some or all of RSE**.
- Schools must develop and publish an RSE policy in consultation with parents.
- The parental right of withdrawal is strong and remains protected.

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Parent Withdrawal/Exemption Letters – RSE (UK)

Note: The following pages contain template letters for parental withdrawal from RSE in **England, Scotland, and Northern Ireland**. Templates for **Wales section 41 & section 42 exemption** can be found on the **Public Child Protection Wales website** under the Templates tab: publicchildprotectionwales.org.

England – Exemption Request (Section 405)

[Parent Name]

[Address]

[Date]

To: The Headteacher, [School Name]

Dear [Headteacher],

I am writing to formally request that my child, [Child's Name, DOB], be **exempt from sex education lessons** delivered outside of the National Curriculum for Science, in accordance with **Section 405 of the Education Act 1996**.

This request applies to all sex education content covered in the school's RSE programme that falls under these provisions.

I request written confirmation that this exemption has been acknowledged and implemented.

Yours sincerely,

[Parent/Carer Name]

Scotland (Guidance-based right of withdrawal)

[Parent Name]

[Address]

[Date]

To: The Headteacher, [School Name]

Dear [Headteacher],

I am writing to request the withdrawal of my child, [Child's Name, DOB], from the **sexual health education** elements of Relationships, Sexual Health and Parenthood (RSHP) education, in line with **Scottish Government guidance (2014, updated 2019)**.

While RSHP is part of the national curriculum, parents have the right to request withdrawal from sexual health components, and schools are expected to respect such requests.

Please confirm in writing that this withdrawal has been acknowledged and explain how alternative arrangements will be provided for my child during these lessons.

Yours sincerely,

[Parent/Carer Name]

Northern Ireland (DOE Circular 2010/01 & 2023 update)

[Parent Name]

[Address]

[Date]

To: The Headteacher, **[School Name]**

Dear **[Headteacher/Board of Governors]**,

I am writing to request that my child, **[Child's Name, DOB]**, be withdrawn from some or all of the school's Relationships and Sexuality Education (RSE) programme, in line with the parental rights outlined in **Department of Education guidance (Circular 2010/01, updated 2023)**.

Please confirm in writing that this withdrawal has been acknowledged and advise how alternative arrangements will be provided for my child during these lessons.

Yours sincerely,

[Parent/Carer Name]

Human Rights-Based Exemption Letters – RSE

ALL FOUR NATIONS

Wales

Formal Version

[Parent Name]

[Address]

[Date]

To: The Headteacher, [School Name]

Dear [Headteacher],

I am writing to request that my child, [Child's Name, DOB], be **excused from certain elements of Relationships and Sexuality Education (RSE)** on the grounds that the content conflicts with our **rights under the European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR)**, including:

- **Article 2, Protocol 1** – the right of parents to ensure education is in accordance with their religious and philosophical convictions.
- **Article 9** – freedom of thought, conscience, and religion.

Under **Sections 41 & 42 of the Curriculum and Assessment (Wales) Act 2021**, parents may seek exemptions where aspects of RSE conflict with their beliefs. I request that **alternative arrangements** be provided for my child during these lessons and that you confirm in writing how this exemption will be accommodated.

Yours sincerely,

[Parent/Carer Name]

Plain English Version

[Parent Name]

[Address]

[Date]

To: The Headteacher, [School Name]

Dear [Headteacher],

I am writing to ask that my child, [Child's Name, DOB], **does not take part in parts of the RSE lessons** because they conflict with our **human rights**.

Specifically:

- The right for parents to make sure education fits our **religious or personal beliefs** (Article 2, Protocol 1).
- The right to **freedom of thought and belief** (Article 9).

Under **Sections 41 & 42 of the Curriculum and Assessment (Wales) Act 2021**, parents can request exemptions when lessons conflict with their beliefs. I ask that my child be allowed to **sit out or do alternative work** during these lessons. Please confirm in writing how this will be arranged.

Yours sincerely,

[Parent/Carer Name]

England

Formal Version

[Parent Name]
[Address]
[Date]

To: The Headteacher, [School Name]

Dear [Headteacher],

I am writing to formally request that my child, [Child's Name, DOB], be **excused from certain elements of the Relationships and Sexuality Education (RSE) programme**, on the grounds that the content conflicts with our **rights under the European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR)**, including:

- **Article 2, Protocol 1** – the right of parents to ensure education aligns with their religious and philosophical convictions.
- **Article 9** – freedom of thought, conscience, and religion.

While I understand that aspects of RSE are statutory, I request an exemption for lessons that conflict with these rights. I also ask that **alternative educational arrangements** be provided during these lessons.

Please confirm in writing that this request has been received and how the school intends to accommodate it.

Yours sincerely,
[Parent/Carer Name]

Plain English Version

[Parent Name]

[Address]

[Date]

To: The Headteacher, [School Name]

Dear [Headteacher],

I am writing to ask that my child, [Child's Name, DOB], **does not take part in parts of the RSE lessons** because they conflict with our **human rights**.

This includes:

- The right for parents to make sure education fits our **religious or personal beliefs** (Article 2, Protocol 1).
- The right to **freedom of thought and belief** (Article 9).

I understand some parts of RSE are required by law, but I am asking that my child be allowed to **sit out or do alternative work** during lessons that conflict with these rights.

Please confirm in writing that you have received this request and tell me what arrangements will be made for my child.

Yours sincerely,

[Parent/Carer Name]

Scotland

Formal Version

[Parent Name]

[Address]

[Date]

To: The Headteacher, [School Name]

Dear [Headteacher],

I am requesting that my child, [Child's Name, DOB], be **excused from certain sexual health education components** of RSHP (Relationships, Sexual Health and Parenthood) lessons, on the basis that these lessons conflict with our **ECHR rights**, including:

- **Article 2, Protocol 1** – parental right to education in accordance with religious and philosophical convictions.
- **Article 9** – freedom of thought, conscience, and religion.

I ask that the school provide **alternative arrangements** for my child during these lessons and confirm in writing that this exemption has been recorded.

Yours sincerely,

[Parent/Carer Name]

Plain English Version

[Parent Name]

[Address]

[Date]

To: The Headteacher, [School Name]

Dear [Headteacher],

I am writing to ask that my child, [Child's Name, DOB], does not take part in parts of the **RSHP lessons** because they conflict with our **human rights**.

Specifically:

- The right for parents to make sure education fits our **religious or personal beliefs** (Article 2, Protocol 1).
- The right to **freedom of thought and belief** (Article 9).

I ask that my child be given **alternative work or activities** during lessons that conflict with these rights. Please confirm in writing how this will be arranged.

Yours sincerely,

[Parent/Carer Name]

Northern Ireland

Formal Version

[Parent Name]

[Address]

[Date]

To: The Headteacher, [School Name]

Dear [Headteacher/Board of Governors],

I am requesting that my child, [Child's Name, DOB], be **excused from some or all of the RSE programme** on the grounds that certain content conflicts with our **ECHR rights**, including:

- **Article 2, Protocol 1** – parental right to ensure education aligns with our convictions.
- **Article 9** – freedom of thought, conscience, and religion.

I request that the school provide **alternative arrangements** during these lessons and confirm in writing that this exemption has been acknowledged.

Yours sincerely,

[Parent/Carer Name]

Plain English Version

[Parent Name]

[Address]

[Date]

To: The Headteacher, [School Name]

Dear [Headteacher],

I am writing to ask that my child, [Child's Name, DOB], **does not take part in parts of the RSE lessons** because they conflict with our **human rights**.

This includes:

- The right for parents to make sure education fits our **religious or personal beliefs** (Article 2, Protocol 1).
- The right to **freedom of thought and belief** (Article 9).

Please provide **alternative work or activities** for my child during these lessons and confirm in writing that the request has been accepted.

Yours sincerely,

[Parent/Carer Name]