

FPAA feedback and recommendations for the Revised Australian Health and Physical Education (HPE) Curriculum 2021

1. Integration of comprehensive sexuality education throughout the HPE Curriculum

FPAA strongly believe all key elements of comprehensive sexuality education (CSE), also referred to as *relationships and sexuality education*, should be integrated throughout the Australian HPE Curriculum in age- and stage-appropriate ways from Foundation to Year 10 (F-10). The consistent provision of CSE, guided by implementation of the Australian Curriculum, will ensure all young people have sufficient opportunity to develop the knowledge, skills and attitudes needed to experience positive, respectful and healthy relationships and optimal reproductive and sexual health throughout their life. FPAA endorses the UNESCO (2018) definition of CSE:

Comprehensive sexuality education (CSE) is a curriculum-based process of teaching and learning about the cognitive, emotional, physical and social aspects of sexuality. It aims to equip children and young people with knowledge, skills, attitudes and values that will empower them to: realize their health, well-being and dignity; develop respectful social and sexual relationships; consider how their choices affect their own well-being and that of others; and, understand and ensure the protection of their rights throughout their lives (UNESCO, 2018, p.16).

2. Specificity of age- and developmentally-appropriate CSE

There is a notable reliance on the term “appropriate” throughout the HPE Curriculum, leaving it unclear as to what “appropriate” refers to in each year level. Specific content detail, located within the content descriptors, is needed at each year level to provide teachers with clear guidance in relation to the provision of CSE. Teachers will be looking for key words such as penis, vagina, sex, reproduction, contraception and pornography, to obtain specific guidance around teaching of core CSE topics.

We recommend ACARA draw on UNESCO’s internationally recognised and evidence-based *International Technical Guidance on Sexuality Education* (2018) for age- and developmentally-appropriate teaching and learning about the following key concepts: (1) relationships; (2) values, rights, culture and sexuality; (3) understanding gender; (4) violence and staying safe; (5) skills for health and well-being; (6) the human body and development; (7) sexuality and sexual behaviour; and (8) sexual and reproductive health. These UNESCO guidelines are available at: www.unfpa.org/sites/default/files/pub-pdf/ITGSE.pdf

3. Inclusion and visibility of CSE across Learning Areas, content descriptors and in elaborations

Many key concepts within CSE are relevant to and should be integrated across Learning Area curricula to scaffold and reinforce student learning, and to minimise overcrowding within the HPE curriculum. A distributed curricula approach to incorporating CSE concepts, using specific language and content relevant to the Learning Area, is recommended. Learning Areas within which there are opportunities to integrate CSE include:

- Digital Technologies (e.g., ethical considerations and behaviours, interpersonal online communication, respectful relationships, online identity and safety)
- Visual Media and Arts (e.g. social and emotional wellbeing, challenging stereotypes, media literacy, representation, audiences and relationships)
- Science (e.g., addressing the human body and development, reproductive and sexual health, sexual diversity)
- Humanities and Social Sciences (e.g., addressing relationships, values, rights, culture, diversity, violence and safety)
- English (e.g., studying text relating to RSE topics, studying text from authors of all genders)

4. Topic-specific feedback and recommendations

Consent

We are pleased to see increased reference to consent throughout the revised HPE Curriculum, and specific guidance around advocacy and bystander action. However, FPAA is concerned that the current references to consent are made in a de-contextualised and scattered way. Consent also appears to have taken the place of a number of key reproductive and sexual health topics.

FPAA recommend that:

- Further sequencing and detail be provided across F-10, to ensure that consent education is well-contextualised and specifically aligned with student stages of learning about relationships and sexuality
- Consent be integrated as a core concept across Learning Areas (e.g., ICT capabilities, Media Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences)
- Essential teachings of consent be described in a separate “*Read More*” section, rather than detailed within the Relationships and Sexuality Focus Area
- The focus on protective behaviours (primarily giving consent) be shifted to a focus on *gaining* consent, and managing feelings of rejection and disappointment, e.g., (AC9HP2P02_E3) - *practising strategies they can use when they need to give consent; for example, saying yes and no in an assertive manner, using non-verbal body cues and gestures*
- Specific reference be made to sexual consent, i.e., seeking and giving sexual consent
- Reference be made to the impact of coercion, drugs and alcohol on consent in the Alcohol and Other Drugs HPE Focus Area
- Consent education be inclusive of online interactions, content sharing, relationships and sexuality
- Consent be integrated as part of the General Capabilities ‘Ethical Understanding’ and ‘Personal and Social Capability’

Relationships and sexuality

FPAA support the inclusion of CSE throughout years F-10, and do not believe that this should be reduced to ‘*relationships only*’ education from years F-2. We advocate for a sex-positive and preventive approach to CSE, whereby topics of relationships and sexuality are integrated in age- and developmentally-appropriate ways when it is most timely for young people’s health and well-being, as outlined in UNESCO’s (2018) International Technical Guidance on Sexuality Education.

FPAA recommend that:

- Relationships *and sexuality* be extended to years F-10, enabling inclusion of topics such as biological sex and gender, understanding body, feelings, rights and safety, and media literacy and safety
- Descriptions of relationships should explicitly include social and sexual relationships, not be solely heteronormative, and inclusive of online sexuality, socialising and relationships
- Reproductive and sexual health continue to be included as a core topic across primary and secondary school, acknowledging that primary students also require age-appropriate basic information about sex and reproduction
- The Curriculum incorporate a sex-positive approach to sexuality education that specifically refers to pleasure and enjoyment
- In years 7-8:
 - AC9HP8P06_E4 *exploring strategies for dealing with relationships when there is an imbalance of power (including seeking help when wanting to end the relationship)* - introduce in primary school, preceded by the concept of power
 - AC9HP8P07_E3 *exploring and evaluating the accessibility and reliability of health information sources from the media that target young people in relation to their health, wellbeing, relationships and other health issues* – include body, sexuality and gender in examples
- In years 9-10:

- AC9HP10P03_E4 - include pleasure in the elaboration
- AC9HP10E03_E6 - amend 'sexting' to be 'such as sexting'
- AC9HP10P05_E2 - include emotions related to rejection

Identity and diversity

FPAA commend ACARA's references in the Curriculum to the importance of affirming sexual and gender diversity. References to sexual and gender identity throughout the revised draft Curriculum are, however, limited.

FPAA recommend that:

- Gender and sexual diversity be explicitly included in sections that elaborate on diversity, including specific reference to LGBTIQ+
- Gender and sexual diversity be integrated across Learning Area curricula (e.g., Science, Media Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences)

Human body, development and reproduction

Puberty is not specifically mentioned in the HPE Curriculum until years 5-6, and reproduction is notably absent throughout years F-10. These are critical subjects that require integration during primary and secondary school years, in line with UNESCO (2018) guidelines.

FPAA recommend that:

- Puberty be explicitly incorporated in years 3-4, *before* the majority of students start experiencing puberty-related changes. It is essential that young people feel informed and prepared for the significant developmental changes they will go through
- Puberty continue to be included in years 5-8, when most students will be experiencing the physical, emotional and social changes associated with puberty. Content should support learning about these changes and positive ways to manage these transitions
- Reproduction be explicitly included from years 5-6 onwards
- Specific descriptors regarding external private body parts be included from Foundation, and internal genitalia from year 3
- Descriptions of body image and self-worth (under mental health and well-being) make specific reference to self-acceptance and self-gratitude

Physical and emotional safety

Specific reference to protective behaviours, body safety and privacy has been reduced in years F-2, making it difficult for teachers to address child protection and safety concerns. Safety is referred to in very broad terms throughout the revised Curriculum, with very little reference to psychological safety, and to physical safety in relation to sex and relationships.

FPAA supports the Royal Commission's (2017) recommendation within the national strategy to prevent child sexual abuse that:

...prevention education is delivered through pre-school, school and other community institutional settings that aims to increase the children's knowledge of child sexual abuse, and build practical skills in strengthening self-protective skills and strategies. The education should be integrated into school curricula and link with areas such as respectful relationships education and sexuality education. It should be mandatory for all preschools and schools (Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse, 2017, pp. 76 -107).

FPAA also specifically recommend that:

- Body awareness, including naming and identification of public and private body parts, and appropriate and inappropriate touch, be included in years F-2
- Content on safety specifically includes psychological safety
- Content on safety specifically addresses physical and psychological safety in relation to sex and relationships

Sexual health

There is an absence of specific reference to essential sexual health topics, including safe sexual decision making and practices, body hygiene, contraception and sexually transmitted infections (STI).

FPAA recommend that:

- Sexual health be explicitly included in age-appropriate ways as per UNESCO's International Technical Guidance on Sexuality Education
- In years 9-10:
 - AC9HP10P06_E6 - include use of condoms and dams under safe blood practices
 - AC9HP10P07_E4 - highlight that pornography is not a reliable source of health information
 - AC9HP10P08_E5 - include examples such as stigma around menstrual health, gender and sexual diversity

5. Teacher preparation, support and resourcing

Access to professional development, support and teaching resources is essential for teachers to competently and confidently provide students with evidence-based, best practice CSE. Teaching and discussion about sexuality and relationships with young people requires specific skills, knowledge and understandings of how to best address and open dialogue about potentially sensitive topics.

FPAA strongly advocate for the integration of CSE in practising and pre-service teacher training to build and support workforce capacity. FPAA's primary member organisations offer a range of professional development training, education and mentorship programs and classroom resources to support teachers. We welcome the opportunity to discuss with ACARA how these programs and resources can be further tailored to meet school and teacher needs nationally.

References

Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse. Canberra: Australian Government; 2017.

United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organization. International technical guidance on sexuality education: An evidence-informed approach, Revised edition. France: UNESCO; 2018.