

dáil
na nÓg



Life skills matter – not just points

A survey of implementation of
Social, Personal and Health Education (SPHE)
and Relationships and Sexuality Education (RSE)
in second-level schools



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MAY 2010

OFFICE OF THE MINISTER FOR CHILDREN AND YOUTH AFFAIRS

This report was compiled by Sandra Roe, an independent Social Research Consultant who specialises in research involving children and young people. Sandra trained the young Dáil na nÓg Councillors in conducting peer research and supported them in compiling the questionnaires for this study.

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The header features a decorative border with various icons: a blue male symbol, a pink exclamation mark, a yellow speech bubble with a mouse cursor, a light blue female symbol, a teal female symbol with a pink exclamation mark, a pink question mark, a pink female symbol, a purple male symbol, and a white female symbol. Below these are several light green circular icons containing arrows and a mouse cursor.

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Foreword

Life skills matter – not just points is an important milestone in children and young people having a voice on issues that affect their lives. The study originated from two of the key recommendations made at Dáil na nÓg 2009 relating to the implementation of Social, Personal and Health Education (SPHE) and Relationships and Sexuality Education (RSE) in second-level schools. The study was conducted by young people from the Dáil na nÓg Council, which is the body elected to follow up on recommendations from Dáil na nÓg and which tries to make changes for young people through engaging with appropriate Ministers and policy-makers.

On taking up office in April 2009, members of the Dáil na nÓg Council contacted policy-makers and stakeholders to explore the key facts and developments on SPHE and RSE. They wrote to key stakeholder organisations and individuals seeking their support for effective implementation of SPHE and RSE at senior cycle level. Letters of support for the work of the Dáil na nÓg Council were received from over 40 organisations. In January 2010, I attended a meeting of the Council with my colleague Mary Harney, TD, Minister for Health and Children, and was most impressed with the quality of their work and research.

In the course of their work, it became clear to the young Councillors that the evidence from existing research on the implementation of SPHE and RSE in senior cycle was at variance with their own experience, particularly in relation to RSE. With the help of a professional researcher, they developed questionnaires aimed at investigating the views of young people on the implementation of SPHE and RSE in their schools. They conducted the research in late November/early December 2009 with young people at Comhairle na nÓg meetings around the country.

The findings of their research indicate good implementation levels of SPHE at junior cycle level, but an unacceptably low level of implementation of RSE in senior cycle. This finding is a source of concern, given the challenges and risks that teenagers face in the 21st century. It also indicates that schools are failing to comply with the requirement of the Department of Education and Skills that obliges schools to provide RSE up to 6th year. The report identifies a number of key measures which young people believe will improve the implementation of SPHE and RSE.

This study highlights the importance and value of ensuring that young people's voices are heard in relation to matters that affect their lives. I look forward to working with my Government colleagues in addressing the important issues highlighted in this study. Teenagers are entitled to a full and rounded education that prepares them for all aspects of life.

Barry Andrews, TD
Minister for Children and Youth Affairs



Executive Summary

The aim of this study was to investigate the implementation of Social, Personal and Health Education (SPHE) and Relationships and Sexuality Education (RSE) in secondary schools in Ireland and to examine ways in which these programmes could be improved.

The study originated from recommendations arising from teenage delegates at the 2009 Dáil na nÓg (the National Youth Parliament) in relation to sex education and SPHE. These recommendations included:


- all young people should have access to sex education, which is appropriate to individual needs, comprehensive and varied in delivery;
- a structured SPHE course should be implemented for senior cycle students, incorporating positive mental health awareness and development of an on-line support service.

To explore these matters, members of the Dáil na nÓg Council (the group of young delegates elected to follow up during the year on recommendations made at Dáil na nÓg) were involved in developing two questionnaires – one aimed at investigating the implementation of SPHE among 1st, 2nd and 3rd year students, and one investigating the implementation of RSE among Transition Year, 5th and 6th year students. Members of the Dáil na nÓg Council were trained as Social Researchers and then conducted the research among Comhairlí at local level.

A total of 134 young people (aged 12-16) from 68 secondary schools in 12 different counties completed the questionnaire on the SPHE programme and 220 young people (aged 15-18) from 94 secondary schools in 13 different counties completed the questionnaire on the RSE programme.

The survey found that the majority of young people (88%) received SPHE classes in 2009 and that SPHE is timetabled as a class in almost all schools surveyed (97%). In contrast, almost three-quarters of young people (74%) did not receive RSE classes during the year and RSE is timetabled in only 15% of schools surveyed.

The most emphasized theme in the SPHE syllabus was found to be 'alcohol, drug and solvent use', while the least emphasized theme was 'decisions and people who influence me'. The most emphasized theme in the RSE syllabus was 'healthy relationships', while 'understanding sexual orientation' was the least emphasized theme.



Young people studying the SPHE programme felt that they had learnt more than young people studying the RSE programme. The most significant outcome for young people taking part in SPHE classes was an increased understanding on how to make good decisions, whereas for those studying RSE the most significant outcome was helping to develop a positive attitude towards their relationships with others.

Young people would like either teachers from their school or people from outside their school to teach SPHE, whereas the majority of young people would prefer people from outside their school to teach RSE. Outside facilitators were more likely to be provided by schools to give talks on RSE than on SPHE.

The main topics discussed by outside facilitators in SPHE were sex education/puberty, alcohol and drug misuse, and mental health. Contraception, sexually transmitted infections, crisis pregnancy and sexual abstinence were the most commonly discussed topics by outside facilitators in RSE.

The main recommendations given by young people to improve SPHE classes were to have more classes, better teachers and a wider curriculum. The main recommendations for improving RSE classes were for classes to be mandatory, for the curriculum to be wider and to cover more topics in detail about relationships and sexuality, and for teachers to be better trained to deliver RSE classes.



1. Introduction



Background

Dáil na nÓg is the annual National Youth Parliament for young people aged 12 to 18 years. It is funded and overseen by the Office of the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (OMCYA). Each year, 200 delegates are elected through their local Comhairle na nÓg to attend Dáil na nÓg and they select and vote on themes that they feel are important to young people, both locally and nationally.

During 2009, 200 teenage delegates attended the 8th annual Dáil na nÓg, which took place on 20th February in Croke Park, Dublin. They discussed a range of issues on physical and mental health.

The top recommendations voted by delegates on **physical health** were:

- The cervical cancer vaccine should be made available free of charge for all 12-18 year-old girls.
- All young people should have access to sex education, which is appropriate to individual needs, comprehensive and varied in delivery.


The top recommendation voted by delegates on **mental health** was:

- A structured SPHE course should be implemented for senior cycle students, incorporating positive mental health awareness and development of an on-line support service.

One representative from each of the 34 Comhairlí na nÓg is elected to the Dáil na nÓg Council, which follows up throughout the year on the recommendations made during the Dáil meeting and tries to effect changes for young people in those areas. The Council has a term of office of one year and meets once a month. It is supported by staff from the OMCYA, who ensure that Council members get the opportunity to engage with appropriate Ministers and policy-makers during their year of activity.

In the past, the Council has undertaken its work in two groups, with each group addressing a single theme. However, in 2009 the strong links between RSE and SPHE meant that both Council groups were able to pursue some elements of their work together.

The Council met with relevant policy-makers during 2009 to establish what schools should currently be providing for students in terms of SPHE and RSE. It was found that all schools must deliver SPHE from Primary to 3rd year; that RSE is part of SPHE up to 3rd year; that schools are obliged to continue teaching RSE up to the end of 6th year; and that all schools should have an RSE policy.



For over 3 years, the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment has worked on developing a curriculum for SPHE in senior cycle. The committee involved proposed that it should be implemented on a phased basis. The Dáil na nÓg Council reviewed the curriculum and agreed it to be an excellent framework. The Council also met students from a school in Cork where SPHE is being delivered as a priority, proving that it can be done if the school and management are supportive. Despite all this, the Department of Education and Science do not feel that SPHE is a priority for the foreseeable future.

The Dáil na nÓg Council also studied evaluations and research on SPHE and RSE. The studies (including a Crisis Pregnancy Agency survey conducted with school principals and teachers) showed high levels of implementation of both programmes – which is contrary to the findings of the present study – while also highlighting the difficulties that schools and teachers feel prevent them from delivering certain elements of the curriculum. These results were at odds with the experience of members of the Council, who felt they did not reflect the poor levels of implementation of RSE that they had personally received. These concerns lead the Council to undertake local surveys on RSE in schools and the results showed a very low level of implementation. These preliminary investigations led to the decision to undertake more systematic and formal research on SPHE and RSE directly with young people in their local Comhairle na nÓg. The Council worked with a professional researcher to develop a research plan and questionnaire. Once the research tool had been developed and piloted, Council members were trained in social research methods and then undertook the research at local level.

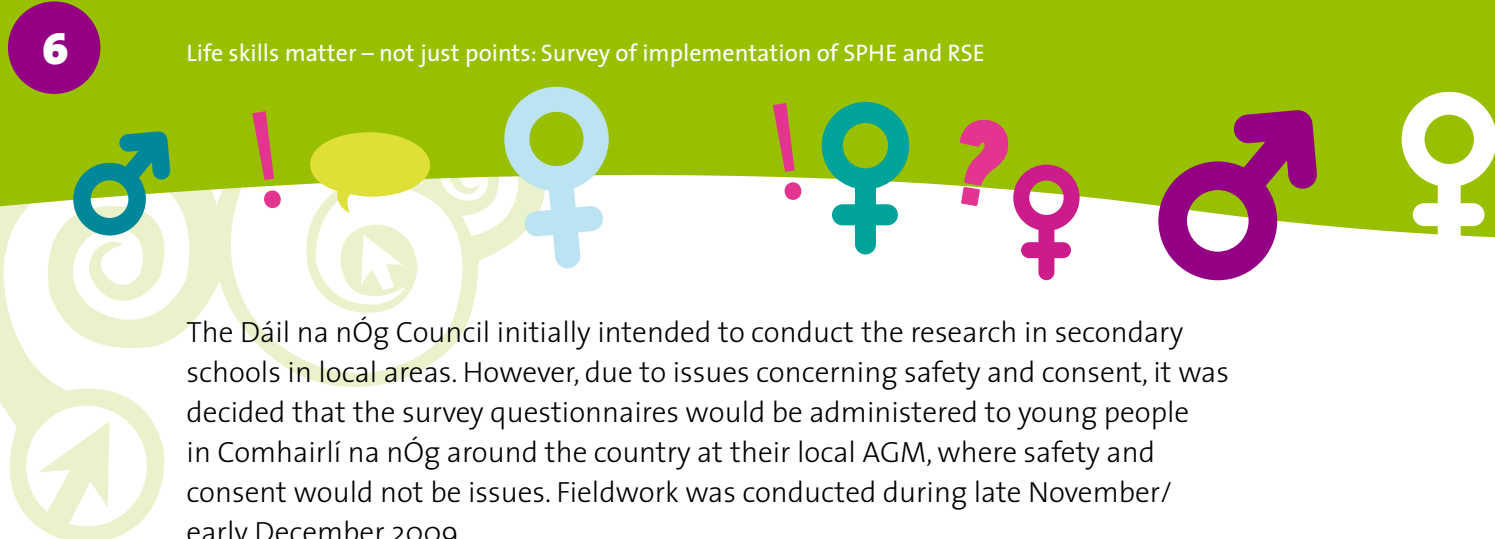
Aim of the study

The aim of this study was to investigate the implementation of SPHE and RSE in secondary schools and to examine ways in which these programmes could be improved.

Methodology

Two questionnaires were developed for the study:

- the first questionnaire investigated the implementation of SPHE at junior cycle level among 1st, 2nd and 3rd year students;
- the second questionnaire investigated the implementation of RSE at senior cycle level among Transition Year, 5th and 6th year students.



The Dáil na nÓg Council initially intended to conduct the research in secondary schools in local areas. However, due to issues concerning safety and consent, it was decided that the survey questionnaires would be administered to young people in Comhairlí na nÓg around the country at their local AGM, where safety and consent would not be issues. Fieldwork was conducted during late November/early December 2009.

Study limitations

While there was a very low rate of unanswered questions in the SPHE survey, there was a much higher rate of unanswered questions in the RSE survey. This was perhaps due to the fact that the vast majority of young people reported receiving SPHE classes, while a large number of young people reported not receiving RSE classes, therefore making it difficult for them to answer many of the questions. While this is a limitation of the study, it also clearly illustrates the main issue at the centre of this research – i.e. the lack of implementation of RSE at senior cycle level.

Structure of report

The following chapters present:

- results of SPHE survey (*Chapter 2*);
- results of RSE survey (*Chapter 3*);
- summary of the main findings and recommendations (*Chapter 4*).



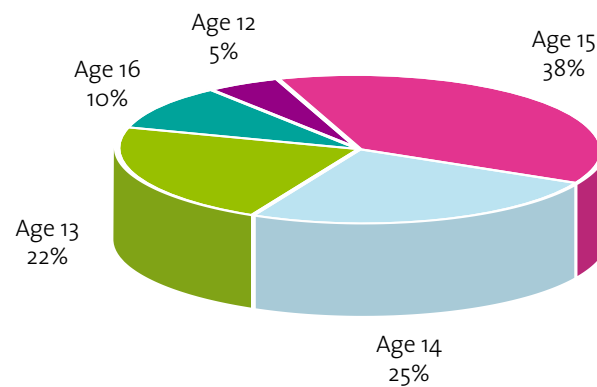
2. Results of SPHE Survey

A survey of the Social, Personal and Health Education (SPHE) programme in secondary schools was conducted during 2009 among students in 1st, 2nd and 3rd years attending Comhairle na nÓg AGMs around the country. The questionnaire was administered by specially trained members of the Dáil na nÓg Council.

Profile of sample

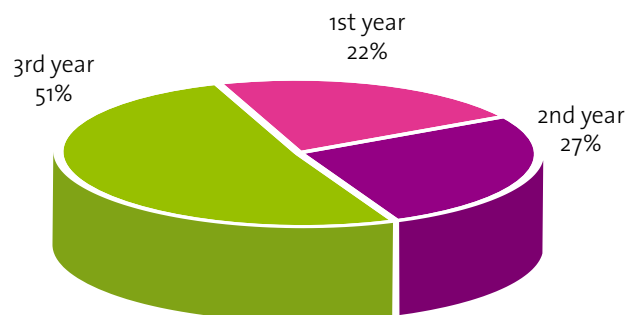
A total of 134 young people from 68 secondary schools in 12 different counties completed the questionnaire on the SPHE programme. 53% of respondents were male and 47% were female. Respondents ranged in age from 12 to 16 years: the largest number of young people were aged 15 (38%), one quarter (25%) were aged 14, 22% were aged 13, 10% were aged 16 and 5% were aged 12 (see Figure 1).

Figure 1: Age of SPHE respondents



Over half of the secondary school students (51%) were in 3rd year, 27% were in 2nd year and 22% were in 1st year (see Figure 2).

Figure 2: School year of SPHE respondents



Geographical spread of schools

Students from a total of 68 secondary schools from 12 different counties completed the SPHE questionnaire. As Table 1 shows, the largest numbers of respondents were from schools based in Cos. Kildare (24%), Kerry (18%) and Dublin (14%). Other students were from schools based in Cos. Roscommon (9%), Waterford (8%), Cork (6%), Wexford (5%), Galway (4%), Louth (4%), Kilkenny (3%), Leitrim (3%) and Meath (2%).

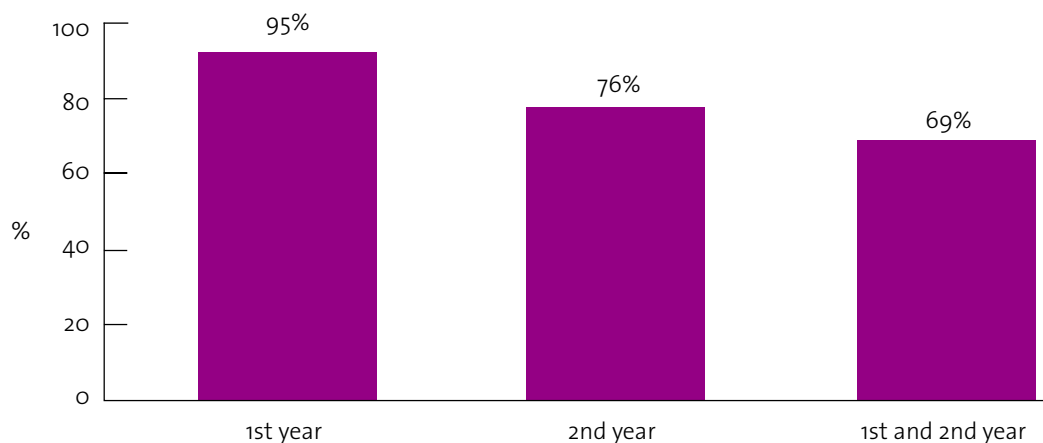
Table 1: Geographical spread of schools

County	No. of students	%
Kildare	26	24%
Kerry	20	18%
Dublin	15	14%
Roscommon	10	9%
Waterford	9	8%
Cork	7	6%
Wexford	6	5%
Galway	4	4%
Louth	4	4%
Kilkenny	3	3%
Leitrim	3	3%
Meath	2	2%
Total	109	100%

SPHE classes in 1st and 2nd year

Respondents were asked if they had received classes in SPHE in 1st and 2nd year. As Figure 3 shows, 95% of respondents reported receiving SPHE classes in 1st year, just over three-quarters (76%) received classes in 2nd year and 69% received classes in 1st *and* 2nd year. It should be noted that 22% of respondents were in 1st year.

Figure 3: SPHE classes in 1st and 2nd year

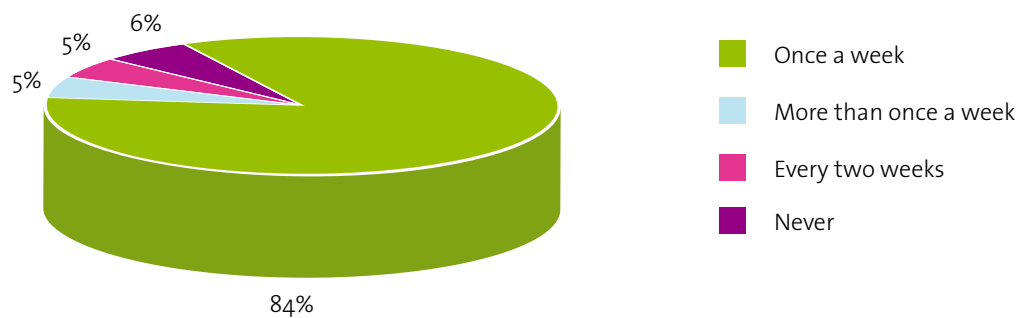


SPHE classes in 2009, their frequency and length

The majority of young people (88%) reported receiving SPHE classes in 2009, while 12% reported not having classes (the research took place in late November/early December 2009).

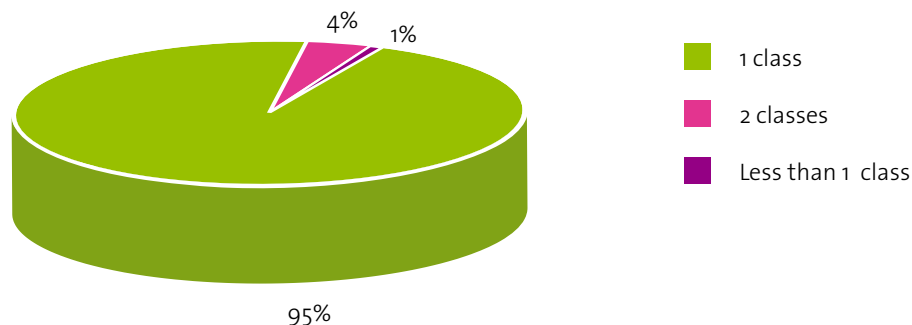
Respondents were also asked how often, on average, they received SPHE classes in 2009. As Figure 4 shows, the majority of students (84%) had SPHE classes once a week during the year, 5% had classes more than once a week, 5% had classes once every two weeks and 6% said they never had any SPHE classes in the year.

Figure 4: Frequency of SPHE classes in 2009



The majority of respondents (95%) said that SPHE classes, on average, lasted one class, 4% said SPHE lasted two classes and 1% said SPHE lasted less than one class (see Figure 5).

Figure 5: Average length of SPHE classes



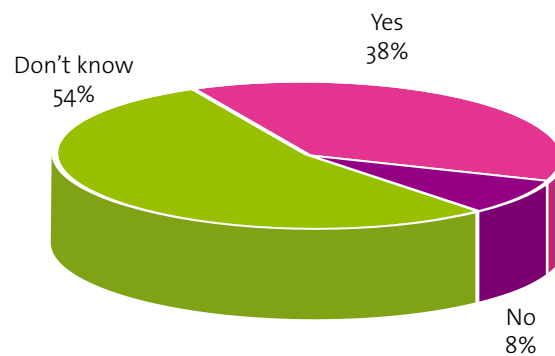
Timetabling

A total of 97% of respondents said SPHE was timetabled as a class in their school, while 3% said it was not. Only two respondents said SPHE was delivered as part of other classes, which were Personal Development and Religion.

SPHE policy

In terms of a SPHE policy, 38% of young people said that their school had a SPHE policy, 8% said their school had no SPHE policy and 54% did not know if such a policy existed. Only 14% of young people were involved in the development of their school's SPHE policy, while 86% were not.

Figure 6: Schools with a SPHE policy



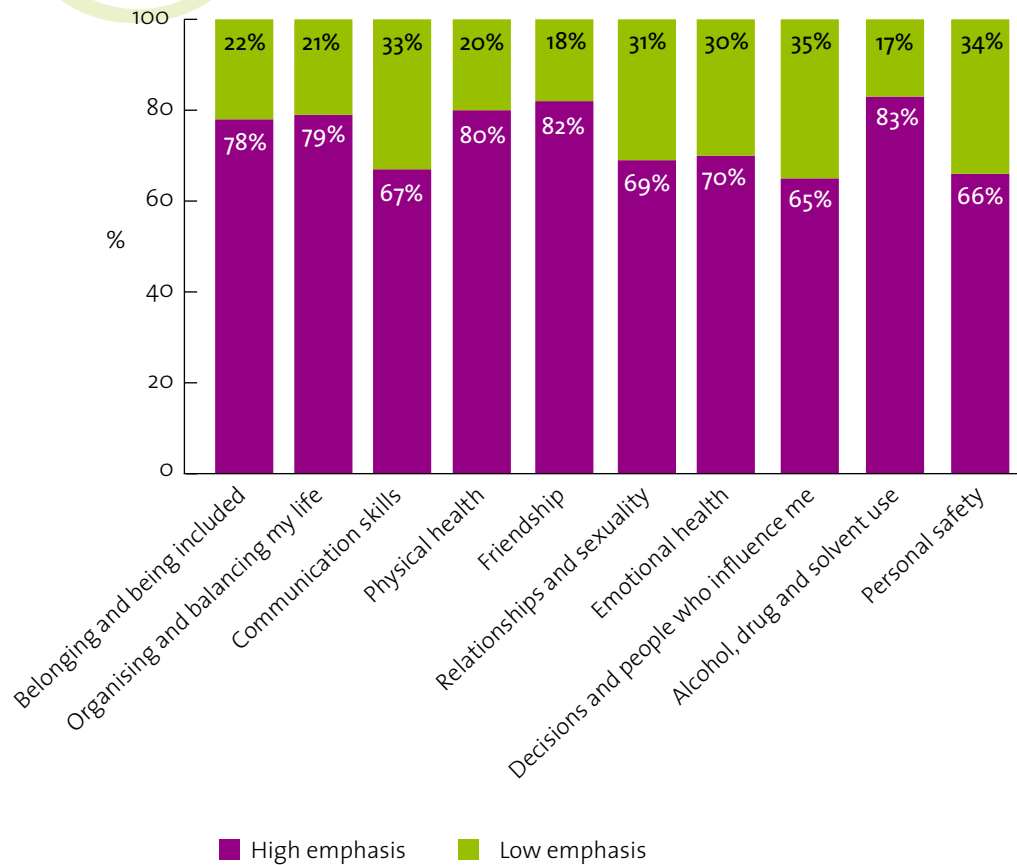
Emphasis on SPHE themes

Respondents were asked to indicate the emphasis placed on the various themes of the SPHE syllabus in their school, marking whether there was a high or a low emphasis put on them (see Figure 7).

SPHE themes with the highest through to the lowest emphasis were as follows:

- alcohol, drug and solvent use (83%)
- friendship (82%)
- physical health (e.g. diet, hygiene, being active) (80%)
- organising and balancing my life (79%)
- belonging and being included (78%)
- emotional health (70%)
- relationships and sexuality (69%)
- communication skills (67%)
- personal safety (66%)
- decisions and people who influence me (65%)

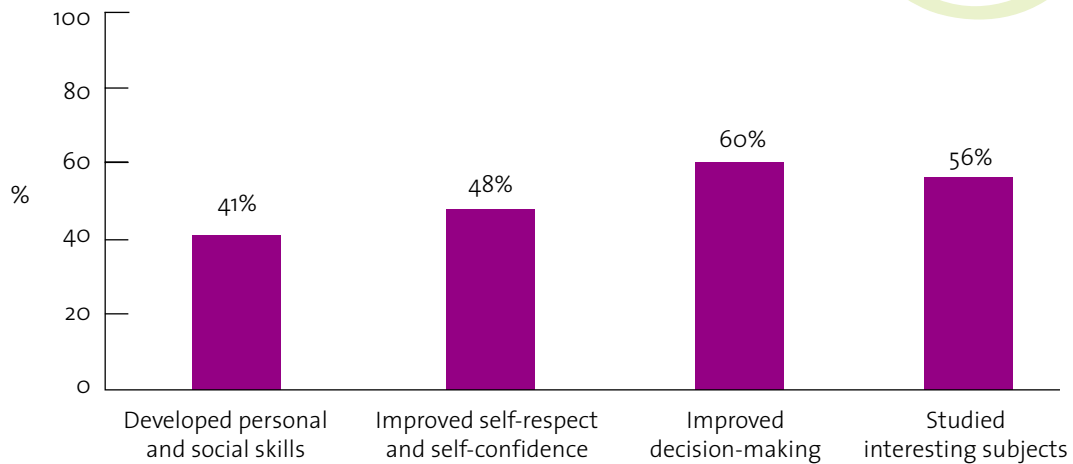
Figure 7: Emphasis placed on SPHE syllabus themes



SPHE outcomes

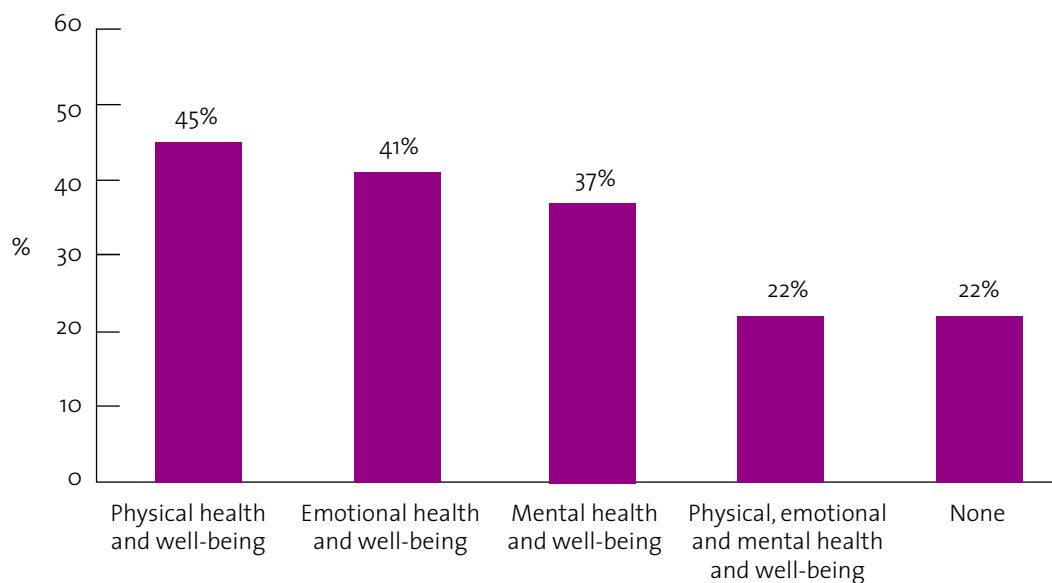
Respondents were asked about the outcomes for them of participating in SPHE classes. As can be seen in Figure 8:

- 41% of young people said that SPHE classes helped them develop personal and social skills, such as self-confidence and self-esteem;
- 48% said that SPHE classes had improved their self-respect and self-confidence;
- 60% said that SPHE classes had helped them understand how to make good decisions;
- 56% said that SPHE classes had given them the chance to think and talk about interesting subjects.

Figure 8: Outcomes of participation in SPHE classes

Physical, mental, emotional health and well-being

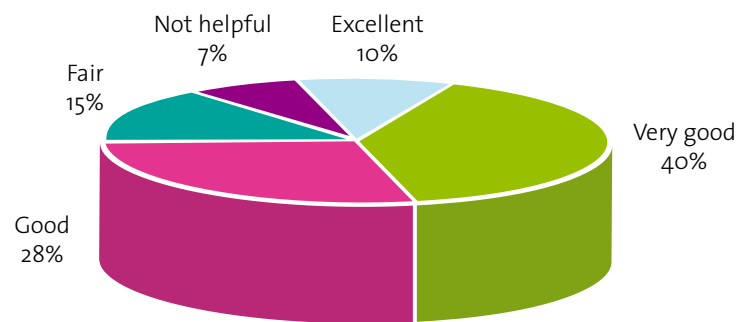
Respondents were asked whether SPHE classes had improved their physical, emotional and mental health and well-being. As Figure 9 shows, 45% of young people felt that SPHE classes had improved their physical health and well-being, 41% felt that classes had improved their emotional health and well-being, and 37% felt that classes had improved their mental health and well-being. Overall, 22% of young people reported that SPHE classes had improved their physical, emotional and mental health and well-being. However, another 22% said that classes had not improved any of these attributes for them.

Figure 9: Improvement of physical, emotional and mental health and well-being

Topics and key messages

Respondents were asked to rate the topics and key messages in SPHE classes. One in 10 respondents (10%) rated the topics and key messages as excellent, 40% of respondents rated them as very good, 28% rated them as good, 15% rated them as fair and 7% said they were not helpful (see Figure 10).

Figure 10: SPHE topics and key messages



SPHE teaching methods

Tables 2 and 3 outline the most commonly used teaching methods in SPHE classes and what respondents considered to be the most useful methods. As can be seen, workbooks were reported as the most commonly used teaching method, while discussions or debates were considered the most popular among students.

Table 2: Most commonly used teaching methods in SPHE classes

Teaching method	No. of respondents	% *
Workbooks	81	60%
Group work	67	50%
Worksheets	65	49%
Discussions/Debates	64	48%
DVDs	42	31%
Brainstorming	33	25%
Games	29	22%
Project work	27	20%
Role play	25	19%
Artwork	20	15%
Case studies	15	11%

* Percentages do not add up to 100% because respondents could choose multiple choice answers.

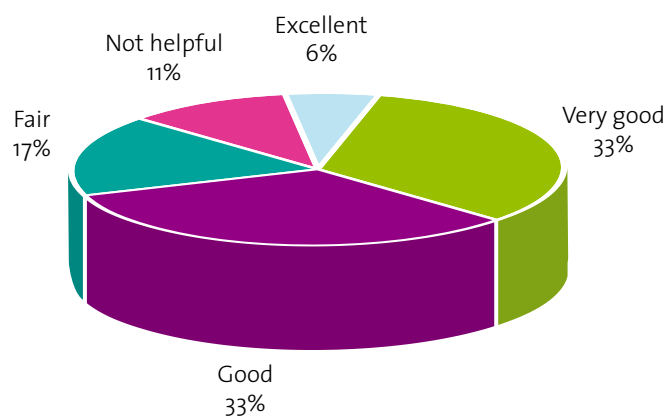
Table 3: Most useful SPHE teaching methods

Teaching method	No. of respondents	% *
Discussions/Debates	27	20%
Workbooks	19	14%
Group work	18	13%
DVDs	17	13%
Role play	10	7%
Worksheets	8	6%
Artwork	8	6%
Games	6	4%
Brainstorming	2	2%
Project work	2	2%
Case studies	1	1%

* Percentages do not add up to 100% because respondents could choose multiple choice answers.

How SPHE classes work

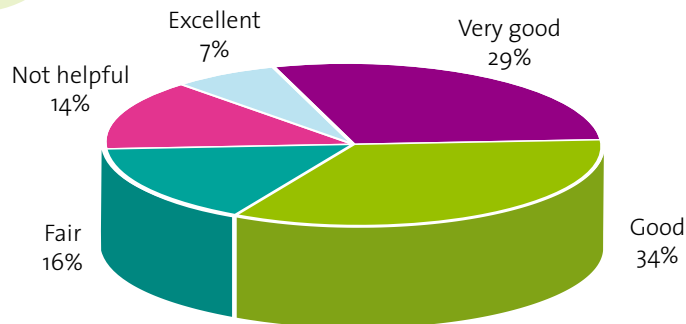
Respondents were asked what they thought of the way SPHE classes work, in terms of teaching methods and content. Figure 11 shows that 6% of respondents classified the way SPHE classes work as excellent, one third of respondents (33%) classified them as very good, another third (33%) classified them as good, 17% classified them as fair and 11% classified them as not helpful.

Figure 11: How SPHE classes work

Usefulness of SPHE classes

Young people were asked how useful they have found SPHE classes to be, for their lives now and into the future. In terms of usefulness, 7% reported SPHE classes as excellent, 29% found them very good, over one third (34%) found them good, 16% found them fair and 14% found them not helpful (see Figure 12).

Figure 12: Usefulness of SPHE classes



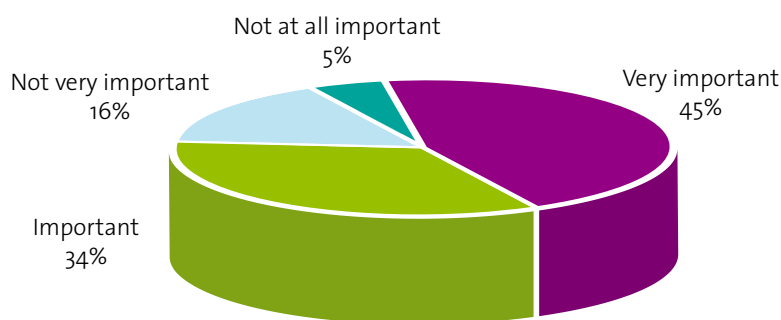
Learning

Students were asked if they felt they had learned much from SPHE classes. Over half of the respondents (55%) felt that they had learnt a lot from SPHE classes, while 45% felt that they had not.

Importance of SPHE in school

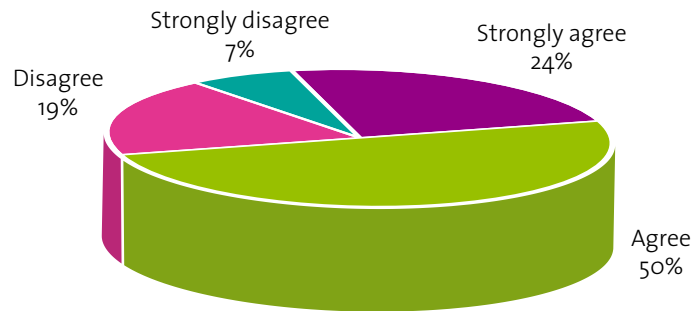
Respondents were asked how important they felt it was for young people to learn SPHE in school. The majority of young people (45%) said it was very important for them to learn SPHE in school, 34% said it was important, 16% said it was not very important and 5% said it was not at all important (see Figure 13).

Figure 13: Importance of learning SPHE in school



Respondents were asked if they agreed with the following statement in relation to SPHE: 'SPHE classes cover all the important relationships and sexuality topics I need to know at this stage in my life'. Almost one quarter of respondents (24%) strongly agreed with this statement, half (50%) agreed, 19% disagreed and 7% strongly disagreed (see Figure 14).

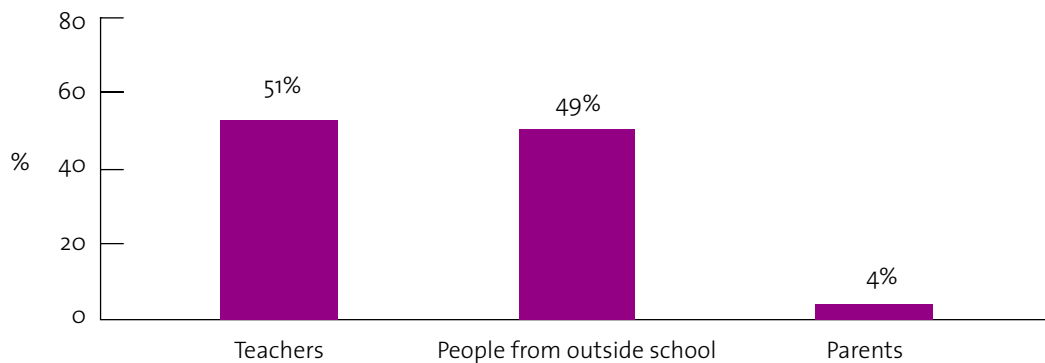
Figure 14: Agree or disagree with statement 'SPHE classes cover all the important relationships and sexuality topics I need to know at this stage in my life'



Preferred teachers of SPHE

Respondents were asked who they would like to teach SPHE in their school. Just over half of respondents (51%) said that they would like teachers from their own school to teach SPHE, 49% said they would like people from outside their school to teach it and only 4% said they would like their parents to teach it (see Figure 15).

Figure 15: Preferred teachers of SPHE



Outside facilitators

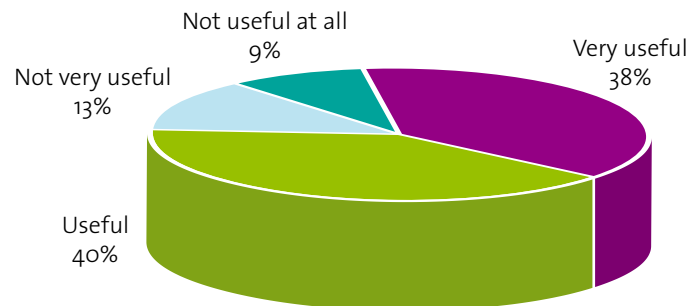
Over one third of respondents (35%) reported that people or groups from outside their school had come in to talk to them about SPHE issues, while just under two-thirds (65%) had not had this experience. Respondents were asked who these outside facilitators or guest speakers were and what they talked about. The three main issues discussed were:

- sex education/puberty;
- alcohol and drug misuse;
- mental health.

Those who spoke on the topic of sex education/puberty, relationships and sexuality included a nurse and staff from the HSE and Aids West (a voluntary organisation partly funded by HSE West). A member of the Garda Síochána talked about drugs, speeding, drinking, smoking and social networking websites. Foróige was the only group mentioned in relation to talks on mental health issues. Other groups and individuals who gave talks included local youth service workers, TDs, a member of the Traveller community, a representative from a Credit Union, a person with a disability, a counsellor and an actor performing a one-man play.

Those young people who had received SPHE talks from outside facilitators were asked how useful they found them to be – 38% found the talks very useful, 40% found them useful, 13% found them not very useful and 9% found them not at all useful (see Figure 16).

Figure 16: Usefulness of outside facilitators in SPHE



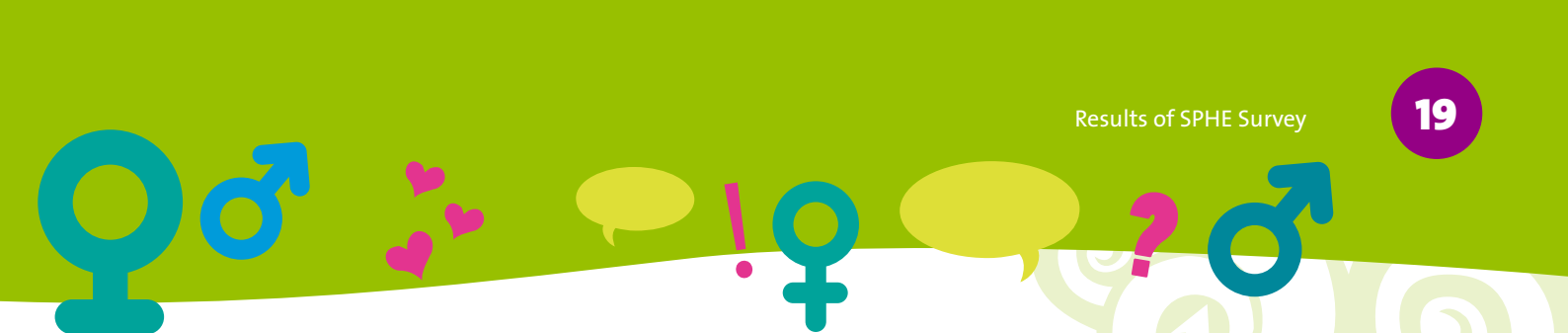
How SPHE classes could be improved

Although a small number of young people felt there was no need to improve SPHE classes, most agreed on the following main recommendations:

- to have more SPHE classes;
- to have better teachers;
- to have a wider curriculum.

Other issues raised by young people in relation to improving SPHE classes included:

- to have longer classes;
- for people from outside schools to teach SPHE;
- to have more guest speakers who have experience of topics;
- to be allowed to debate subjects more freely;
- to be asked their opinion;
- to make classes more fun and interesting;
- to focus more on sex education and sexuality;
- to make SPHE an exam subject;

- 
- for SPHE to be taught in primary school;
 - for classes to be led by young people;
 - for classes to be taken more seriously;
 - to have a more comfortable environment or atmosphere in classes so that discussions could be more open and friendly;
 - to do more case studies;
 - to do more project work;
 - to watch more DVDs;
 - to go on more trips.

The following quotes illustrate some of the ways that young people would like SPHE classes to be improved:

‘You could have them more than once a week because you kind of forget what you’ve learned.’

‘Good teachers are essential. I had a bad one in 1st year and no one got anything out of SPHE. However, I have had two good teachers, which benefited everyone.’

‘To be honest, we do very little in SPHE. As my SPHE teacher is also my English teacher, they usually use it to correct homework.’

‘The books used are terrible. They simply state the obvious.’

‘Not just being told from textbooks. Be asked opinion.’

‘Yes, you should get a sex education programme in SPHE, which in my school we don’t get.’

‘People who experience the topics to be part of class.’

‘By talking more about sexuality so that way people will be able to make wise decisions.’



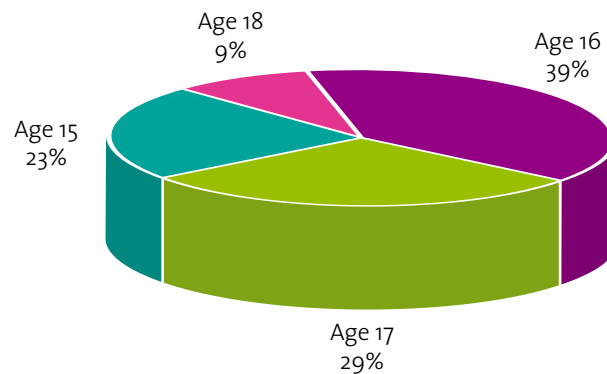
3. Results of RSE Survey

A survey of the Relationships and Sexuality Education (RSE) programme in secondary schools was conducted during 2009 among students in 5th, 6th and Transition Years attending Comhairle na nÓg AGMs. The questionnaire was administered by specially trained members of the Dáil na nÓg Council.

Profile of sample

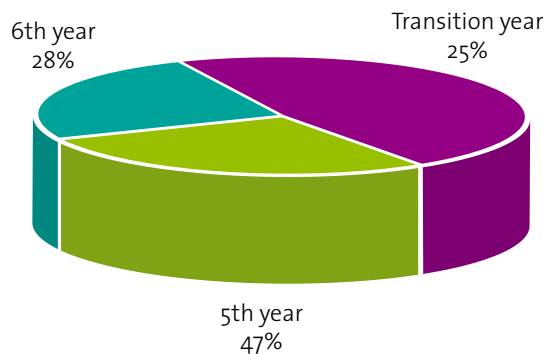
A total of 220 young people from 94 secondary schools in 13 different counties completed the questionnaire on the RSE programme. 42% were male and 58% were female. Respondents ranged in age from 15 to 18 years. As Figure 17 shows, the majority (39%) were aged 16, followed by those aged 17 (29%), aged 15 (23%) and aged 18 (9%).

Figure 17: Age of RSE respondents



The majority of respondents (47%) were in 5th year in secondary school, 28% were in 6th year and one quarter (25%) were in Transition Year (see Figure 18).

Figure 18: School year of RSE respondents



Of those respondents who were in 5th and 6th year, 55% had completed a Transition Year and 45% had not. Of those who had completed a Transition Year, one third (33%) had classes in SPHE or RSE that year and two-thirds (67%) did not.

Geographical spread of schools

Students from a total of 94 secondary schools in 13 different counties completed the RSE questionnaire. As Table 4 highlights, the largest numbers of respondents were from schools based in Cos. Kerry (14%), Waterford (14%) and Kildare (13%). Other counties included Roscommon (10%), Dublin (9%), Cork (8%), Donegal (7%), Leitrim (5%), Kilkenny (5%), Galway (3%), Wexford (2%), Meath (1%) and Carlow (1%). 17 students, or 8% of the sample, came from unspecified counties.

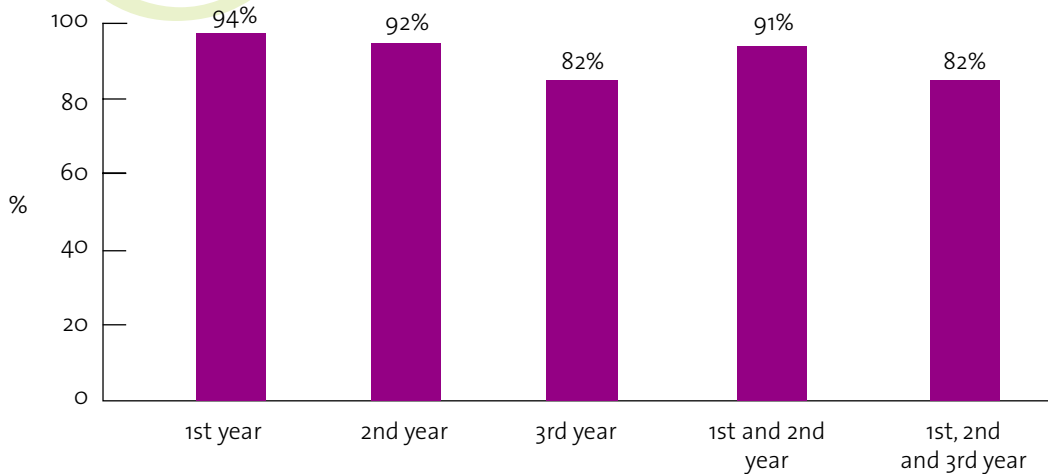
Table 4: Geographical spread of schools

County	No. of students	%
Kerry	31	14%
Waterford	31	14%
Kildare	28	13%
Roscommon	22	10%
Dublin	19	9%
Cork	18	8%
Donegal	16	7%
Leitrim	12	5%
Kilkenny	10	5%
Galway	7	3%
Wexford	5	2%
Meath	3	1%
Carlow	1	1%
Unknown	17	8%
Total	220	100%

SPHE classes

Respondents were asked if they had received classes in Social, Personal and Health Education (SPHE) in their 1st, 2nd and 3rd years of secondary school. Figure 19 shows that 94% of young people had SPHE classes in 1st year, 92% had classes in 2nd year and 82% had classes in 3rd year. Overall, 91% of young people had SPHE classes in 1st and 2nd year, and 82% had SPHE classes in 1st, 2nd and 3rd year.

Figure 19: SPHE classes in 1st, 2nd and 3rd year



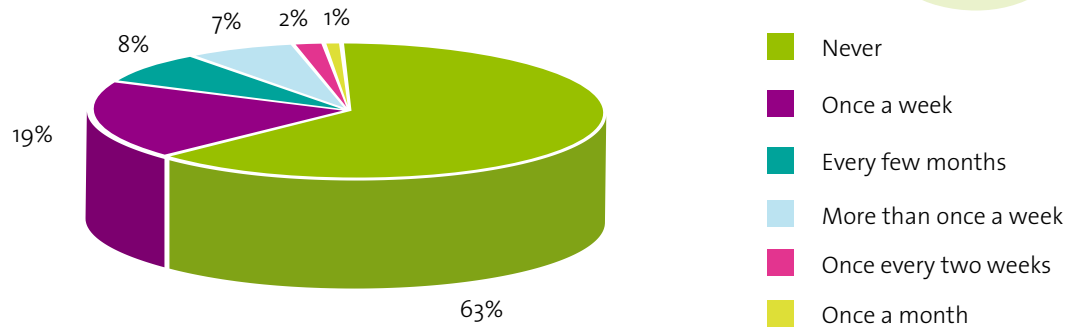
RSE classes in 2009, their frequency and length

Just over one quarter of young people (26%) reported receiving Relationships and Sexuality Education (RSE) classes in 2009, while almost three-quarters (74%) did not receive such classes during the year. As stated previously, the research took place in late November/early December 2009.

Young people were asked how often, on average, they received RSE classes in 2009. Of those who answered this question, 63% said they never had RSE classes in 2009, 19% had classes once a week, 8% had classes once every few months, 7% had classes more than once a week, 2% had classes once every two weeks and 1% had classes once a month (see Figure 20).

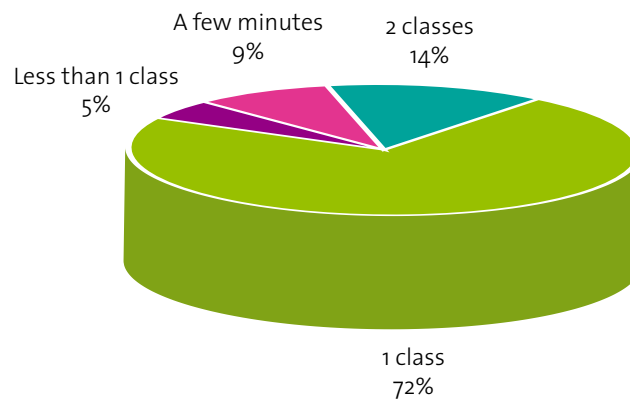
It should be noted that there was an 81% response rate to this 'frequency' question, compared with a 98% response rate to the previous question on whether RSE had been received during the year. This may explain the difference between those who said they did not receive RSE classes in 2009 (74%) and those who said they never received RSE classes in 2009 (63%). 19% of young people did not perhaps respond to this question because it was not relevant to them since they did not receive any RSE classes in 2009.

Figure 20: Frequency of RSE classes in 2009



Young people were asked how long, on average, RSE classes in their school lasted. Of those who answered, 14% said RSE lasted two classes in length on average, the majority (72%) said RSE lasted one class, 5% said RSE lasted less than one class and 9% said RSE was just a few minutes long (see Figure 21).

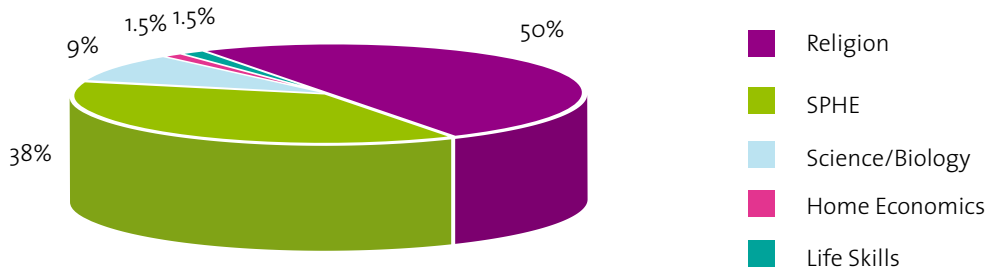
Figure 21: Average length of RSE classes



Timetabling

Respondents were asked if RSE was timetabled as a class in their school. The majority (85%) said it is not timetabled as a class, while 15% said it was. Of those who reported RSE being timetabled as a class, 50% reported that it was delivered as part of Religion class, 38% as part of SPHE, 9% as part of Science/Biology, 1.5% as part of Home Economics and 1.5% as part of Life Skills (see Figure 22).

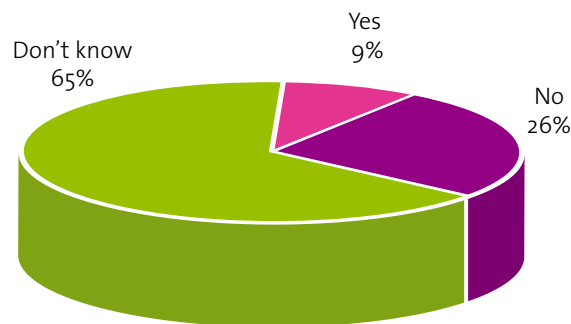
Figure 22: RSE as part of another class



RSE policy

Young people were asked whether their school had a written RSE policy or not. Less than one in 10 (9%) said that their school did have a RSE policy, just over one quarter (26%) said their school did not have such a policy, while the majority (65%) did not know (see Figure 23). The questionnaire also asked young people if they were involved in the development of their school's RSE policy – only 2% of students reported that they were involved, while the majority (98%) were not.

Figure 23: Schools with a RSE policy



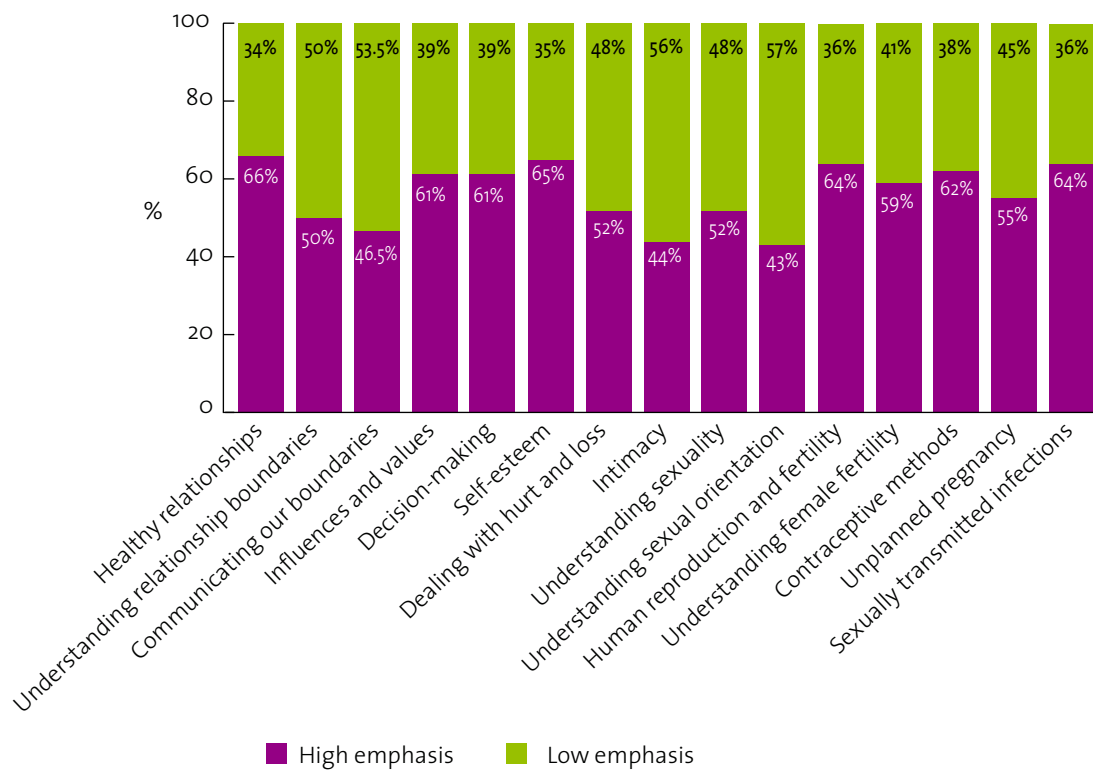
Emphasis on RSE themes

Young people were asked to indicate the emphasis placed on various themes from the RSE syllabus in their school, marking whether there was a high or a low emphasis put on them (see Figure 24).

RSE themes with the highest through to the lowest emphasis were as follows:

- healthy relationships (66%)
- self-esteem (65%)
- human reproduction and fertility (64%)
- sexually transmitted infections (64%)
- contraception methods (62%)
- influences and values (61%)
- decision-making (61%)
- understanding female fertility (59%)
- unplanned pregnancy (55%)
- dealing with hurt and loss (52%)
- understanding sexuality (52%)
- understanding relationships boundaries (50%)
- communicating our boundaries (46.5%)
- intimacy (44%)
- understanding sexual orientation (heterosexuality, homosexuality, bisexuality) (43%)

Figure 24: Emphasis placed on RSE syllabus themes

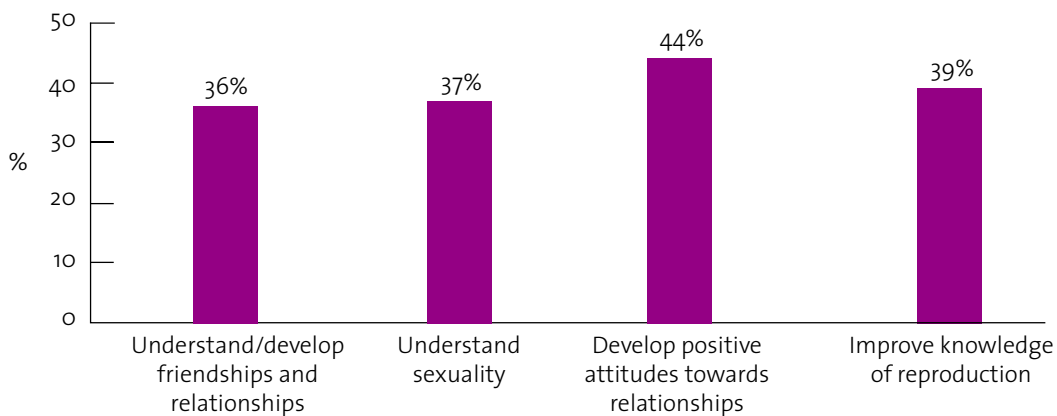


RSE outcomes

Respondents were asked about the outcomes for them of participating in RSE classes. As can be seen in Figure 25:

- 36% of young people said that RSE classes had helped them understand and develop friendships and relationships;
- 37% said that RSE classes had helped them understand their own sexuality better and that of others;
- 44% said that RSE classes had helped them develop a positive attitude towards their relationships with others;
- 39% said that RSE classes had improved their knowledge of reproduction.

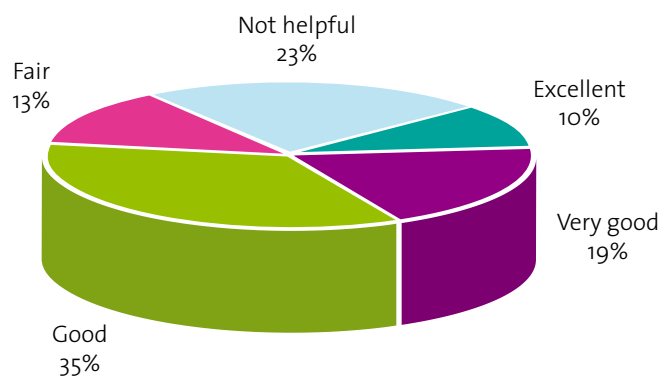
Figure 25: Outcomes of participation in RSE classes



Topics and key messages

When respondents were asked to rate the topics and key messages in RSE classes, 10% thought they were excellent, 19% rated them as very good, 35% rated them as good, 13% rated them as fair and 23% said they were not helpful (see Figure 26).

Figure 26: RSE topics and key messages



RSE teaching methods

Tables 5 and 6 outline the most commonly used teaching methods in RSE classes and what respondents considered to be the most useful teaching methods. Discussions proved to be the most common teaching method employed and, as for SPHE, also the most popular among students.

Table 5: Most common RSE teaching methods

Teaching method	No. of respondents	% *
Discussions	65	30%
Worksheets	62	28%
Group work	61	28%
Case studies	23	10%
Brainstorming	19	9%
Role play	17	8%
Walking debates	16	7%
Project work	15	7%

* Percentages do not add up to 100% because respondents could choose multiple choice answers.

Table 6: Most useful RSE teaching methods

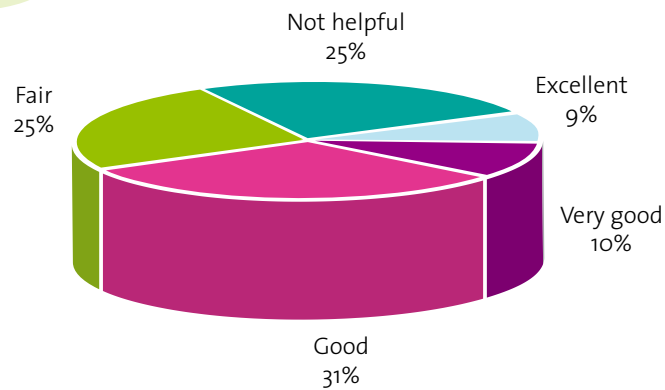
Teaching method	No. of respondents	% *
Discussions	54	25%
Group work	22	10%
Role play	6	3%
Case studies	6	3%
Brainstorming	6	3%
Worksheets	5	2%
Walking debates	4	2%
Project work	1	0.5%

* Percentages do not add up to 100% because respondents could choose multiple choice answers.

How RSE classes work

Respondents were asked what they thought of the way RSE classes work, in terms of teaching methods and content. As Figure 27 shows, 9% of respondents classified the way RSE classes work as excellent, 10% as very good, 31% as good, 25% as fair and 25% as not helpful.

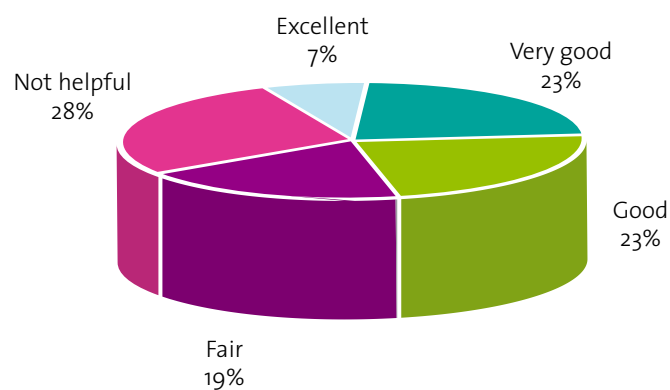
Figure 27: How RSE classes work



Usefulness of RSE classes

Young people were asked how useful they have found RSE classes to be, for their lives now and into the future. Overall, 7% considered RSE classes as excellent in terms of usefulness, 23% found them very good, another 23% found them good, 19% found them fair and 28% reckoned they were not helpful (see Figure 28).

Figure 28: Usefulness of RSE classes



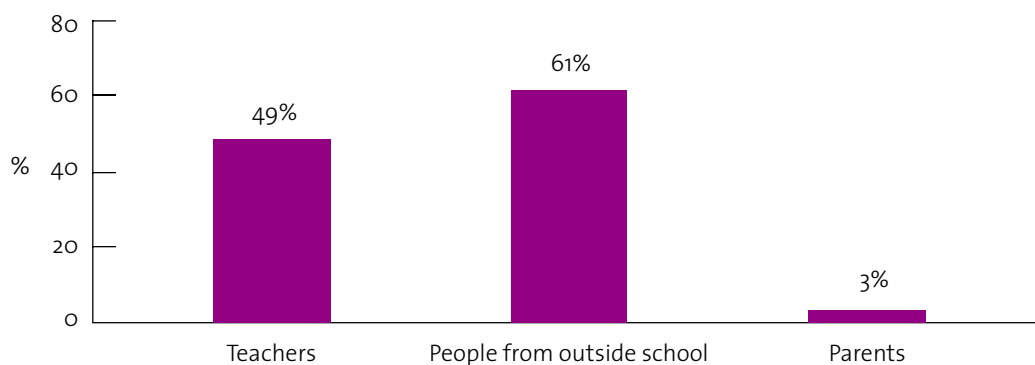
Learning

Overall, 45% of young people felt that they had learned a lot from RSE classes, while 55% felt that they had not.

Preferred teachers of RSE

When respondents were asked who they would like to teach RSE in their school, 61% said they would like people from outside their school to teach it. This compares with almost half the young people (49%) preferring teachers from their own school to teach RSE and just 3% wanting their parents to teach it (see Figure 29).

Figure 29: Preferred teachers of RSE



Outside facilitators

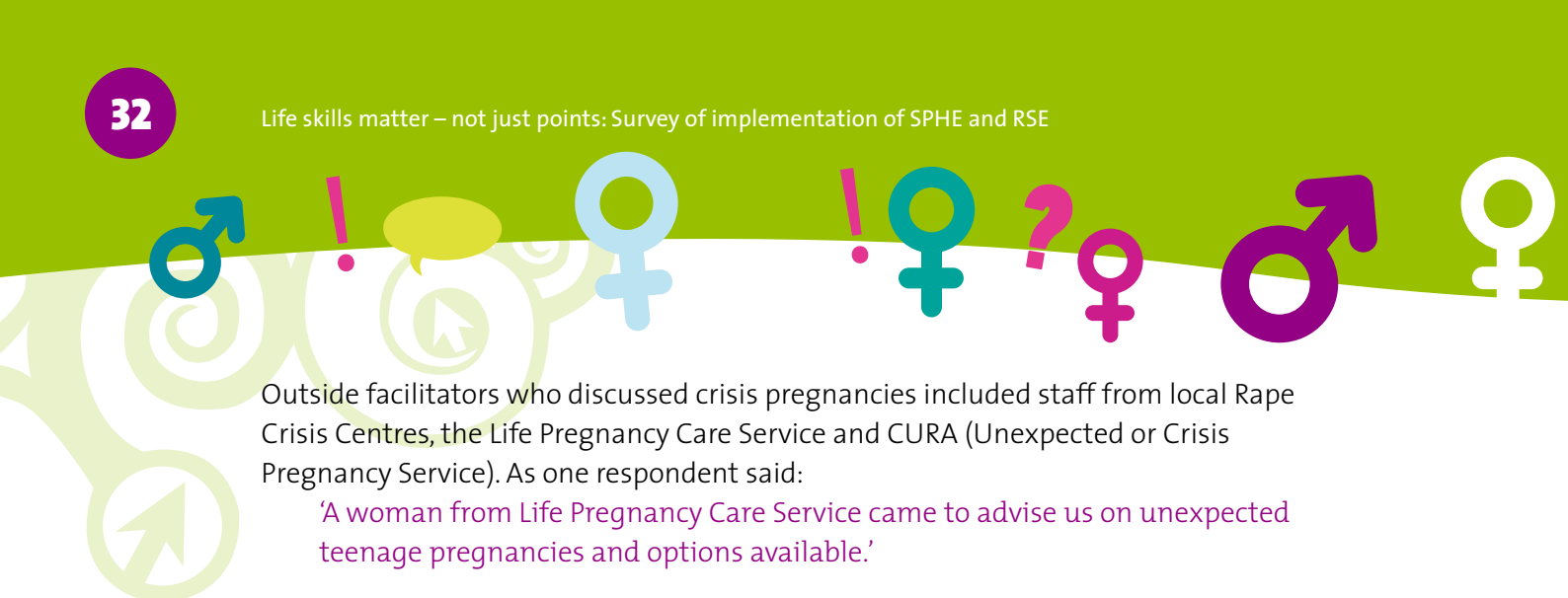
Just under half of respondents (46%) reported that people or groups from outside their school had come in to talk to them about relationships and sexuality issues, while 54% had not experienced such outside facilitators in their schools.

Young people were asked to state who these guest speakers were and what they talked about. The main topics discussed were:

- contraception;
- sexually transmitted infections (STIs);
- crisis pregnancy;
- sexual abstinence.

Outside facilitators who discussed contraception and STIs included individual doctors and nurses, and staff from STI clinics, the HSE, Aids West (a voluntary organisation partly funded by HSE West), Aids Awareness and the Gaf Youth Café (Galway). One respondent described the visits as:

'Doctors not from local surgeries. They talked about sexual transmitted diseases/infections and the importance of contraception and the different types of contraception and how to use them correctly.'

A decorative header featuring a horizontal line with various icons above it. From left to right, there is a blue male symbol, a pink exclamation mark, a yellow speech bubble, a light blue female symbol, a pink exclamation mark, a teal female symbol, a pink question mark, a pink female symbol, a purple male symbol, and a white female symbol. Below the line are faint, larger versions of some of these symbols and a mouse cursor icon.

Outside facilitators who discussed crisis pregnancies included staff from local Rape Crisis Centres, the Life Pregnancy Care Service and CURA (Unexpected or Crisis Pregnancy Service). As one respondent said:

'A woman from Life Pregnancy Care Service came to advise us on unexpected teenage pregnancies and options available.'

Of those who reported outside facilitators coming into their schools, 19% said religious groups had come to talk to them about relationships and sexuality issues, or to give 'retreats'. These groups were promoting abstinence and chastity and were against abortion, sex before marriage, contraception and homosexuality. The majority of young people disagreed with the ethos of these religious groups and described them as 'biased' and 'misguided', and felt they were 'preaching mistruths'. The following quotes highlight some of the young people's experiences of religious groups in their schools:

'God's input into sex. It was quite bad, they ridiculed homosexuality.'

'A religious cult, they said not to have sex before marriage.'

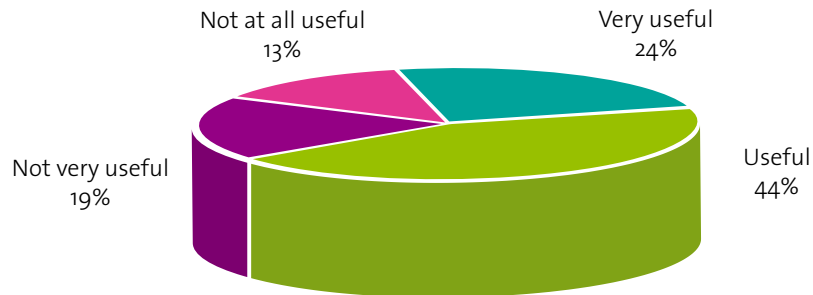
'Catholic youth workers who provided us with untrue facts and gave misguided information. It was solely "the teaching of the Catholic Church" and totally biased.'

Other guest speakers discussed issues including sexuality, values, healthy relationships, reproduction, mental health, suicide, drug and alcohol abuse, disability, volunteering, puberty, development of the child and abortion.

Usefulness of outside facilitators

In terms of the usefulness of outside facilitators in RSE classes, 24% of young people found them very useful, 44% found them useful, 19% found them not very useful and 13% found them not at all useful (*see Figure 30*).

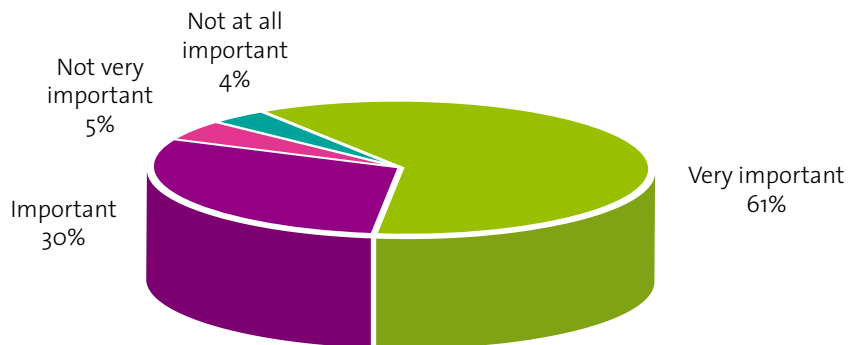
Figure 30: Usefulness of outside facilitators in RSE



Importance of RSE in schools

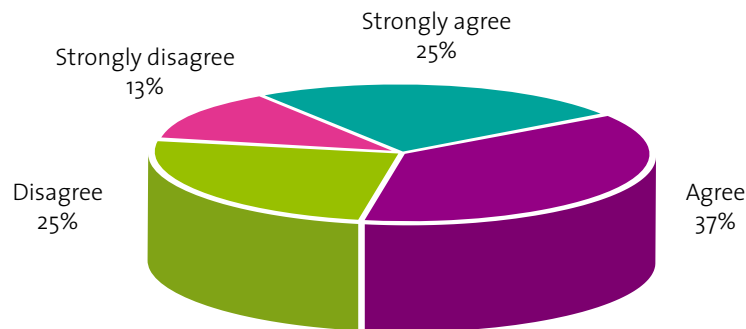
Respondents were asked how important they felt it was for young people to learn RSE in school. The majority (61%) felt that it was very important to learn RSE in school, 30% felt it was important, 5% felt it was not very important and 4% felt it was not at all important (see Figure 31).

Figure 31: Importance of RSE in schools



When young people were asked whether they agreed or disagreed with the statement '*RSE classes cover all the important relationships and sexuality topics I need to know at this stage in my life*', 25% of respondents strongly agreed with the statement, 37% agreed, 25% disagreed and 13% strongly disagreed (see Figure 32).

Figure 32: Agree or disagree with statement 'RSE classes cover all the important relationships and sexuality topics I need to know at this stage in my life'




How RSE classes could be improved

Although a small number of young people felt there was no need to improve RSE classes, most agreed on the following main recommendations:

- They would like RSE to be taught in their schools and for the teaching of the subject to be mandatory. Those who have classes would like more of them, for them to be timetabled and to be longer.
- They would like the RSE curriculum to be wider and to cover more topics in detail about relationships and sexuality.
- They would like teachers to be better trained to deliver RSE classes. They stated that teachers often do not take RSE seriously and are embarrassed or afraid to talk about sex, in some cases for religious reasons. Young people would also like younger, more open-minded and enthusiastic teachers to teach the subject in their schools.

Other issues raised by young people in relation to improving RSE classes included:

- more debates and discussions;
- to talk more openly about sex;
- more participation from young people;
- more classes to be led by young people;
- more guest speakers with experience of topics;
- wider variety of teaching methods;
- more interesting and fun classes;
- more emphasis on mental health issues;
- subject to be taken seriously by teachers and students;
- to make RSE an exam subject;
- for school guidance counsellors to teach RSE.



The following quotes highlight some of the ways that young people felt RSE classes could be improved:

'First, they should actually be taught!'

'I think the RSE classes should be compulsory because they are very effective.'

'Actually teach it! Have a variety of discussions, questions, workshops, etc. Teach us everything about relationships and sexuality. Don't leave bits out.'

'Could be explored in more detail. We only brushed off certain topics and it was all very basic stuff we covered that everyone already knew.'

'More enthusiastic and open-minded teachers would help it.'

'I think RSE could be better taught by school guidance counsellors rather than Religion and Home Economics teachers (as is done in our school) as they would be more able to talk about emotions and relationships.'

'A strongly Catholic teacher is reluctant to give info.'

'Sex education is extremely important. Schools should not be run by religious institutions. They are a bad influence on the teaching of RSE.'

'By allowing students to share their stories and allow time for discussions to take place, instead of just reading through worksheets and facts.'



4. Summary of Main Findings and Recommendations



SPHE Survey

The main findings from the SPHE survey were as follows:

Teaching of SPHE

- The majority of young people (88%) had SPHE classes in 2009.
- SPHE is timetabled as a class in the majority of respondents' schools (97%).
- The majority of young people (84%) had SPHE classes once a week.
- The majority of SPHE classes (95%) are, on average, one class in length.

Most/least emphasized themes

- The most emphasized theme in the SPHE syllabus was 'alcohol, drug and solvent use'.
- The least emphasized theme in the SPHE syllabus was 'decisions and people who influence me'.

Learning

- Over half of young people (55%) felt they had learnt a lot from SPHE classes.
- Almost three-quarters of young people (74%) agreed or strongly agreed that SPHE covers all the important relationships and sexuality topics they need to know about at this stage in their lives.

Outcomes

- The most significant outcome for young people taking part in SPHE classes was an increased understanding of how to make good decisions.
- Young people reported that SPHE improved their physical health and well-being more than their emotional and mental health and well-being.

Teaching methods

- Workbooks were reported to be the most commonly used teaching method in SPHE classes, whereas discussions and debates were considered by young people to be the most useful teaching methods.

Preferred teachers of SPHE

- Young people were about equally divided on whether they would prefer teachers from their own school to teach SPHE (51%) or to have people come in from outside their school to teach the subject (49%).

Outside facilitators

- Just over one third of young people (35%) had been taught SPHE by outside facilitators.
- The main topics discussed by outside facilitators were sex education/puberty, alcohol and drug misuse, and mental health.

Importance of SPHE

- The majority of young people (79%) felt it was important or very important for young people to learn SPHE in school.

SPHE policy

- 38% of young people were aware that their school has a SPHE policy and 14% were involved in the development of their school's policy.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The main recommendations given by young people to improve SPHE classes were to have:

- more SPHE classes;
- better teachers;
- a wider curriculum.

RSE Survey

The main findings from the RSE survey were as follows:

Teaching of RSE

- Almost three-quarters of young people (74%) did not have RSE classes during 2009.
- RSE is not timetabled as a class in the majority of respondents' schools (85%).
- The majority of young people (63%) said they never have RSE classes in their school.
- The majority of RSE classes (72%) are, on average, one class in length.

Most/least emphasized themes

- The most emphasized theme in the RSE syllabus was 'healthy relationships'.
- The least emphasized theme in the RSE syllabus was 'understanding sexual orientation'.

Learning

- Over half of young people (55%) felt they had not learnt a lot from RSE classes.
- 62% of young people agreed or strongly agreed that RSE covers all the important relationships and sexuality topics that they need to know about at this stage in their lives.

Outcomes

- The most significant outcome for young people taking part in RSE classes was helping them to develop a positive attitude towards their relationships with others.

Teaching methods

- Discussions were reported to be the most commonly used teaching method in RSE classes and were also considered by young people to be the most useful.

Preferred teachers of RSE

- The majority of young people (61%) said they would prefer people from outside their school to teach RSE. However, 49% reported a preference for teachers from their own school to teach the subject.

Outside facilitators

- Just under half of young people (46%) had been taught RSE by outside facilitators.
- The main topics discussed by outside facilitators were contraception, sexually transmitted infections (STIs), crisis pregnancy and sexual abstinence.

Importance of RSE

- The majority of young people (91%) felt it was important or very important for young people to learn RSE in school.

RSE policy

- 9% of young people were aware that their school has a RSE policy and 2% were involved in the development of their school's policy.



RECOMMENDATIONS

The main recommendations given by young people in relation to improving RSE classes were:

- for RSE classes to be mandatory;
- for the curriculum to be wider and to cover more topics in detail about relationships and sexuality;
- for teachers to be better trained to deliver RSE classes.



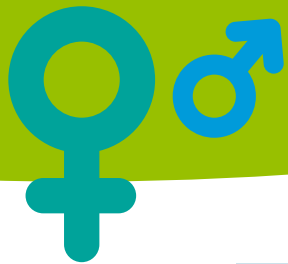
**Appendix:
Dáil na nÓg Council 2009**

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Clare	Carol Nagle
Cork City	Shane Doocey
Cork County	Adam Henson
Donegal	Adel Hickey
Dublin City	Sheelan Yousefizadeh
Dublin South	Miriam Lahart
Dun Laoghaire/Rathdown	Darragh Nolan
Fingal	Aidan McGrath
Galway City	Claire Stone
Kerry	Patrick Fitzgerald
Kildare	Daisy Kate Delaney
Kilkenny	Gary Cooke
Laois	John Delany
Leitrim	Dara Dunne-Lambe
Limerick City	Niall O'Halloran
Louth	Andrew McGahon
Mayo	Eilish Finnerty
Meath	Emma Keane
Monaghan	Nicola Thornton
Offaly	Rebecca Hennessy
Roscommon	Róisín Collier
Sligo	Rachael Kilgallen
Tipperary N.R.	Ciara Ahern
Waterford County	April Duff
Westmeath	Dianne O'Brien
Wexford	Iain Kennell-Web
Wicklow	Joe M. Bradley

Dáil na nÓg Council 2009 – Advisors

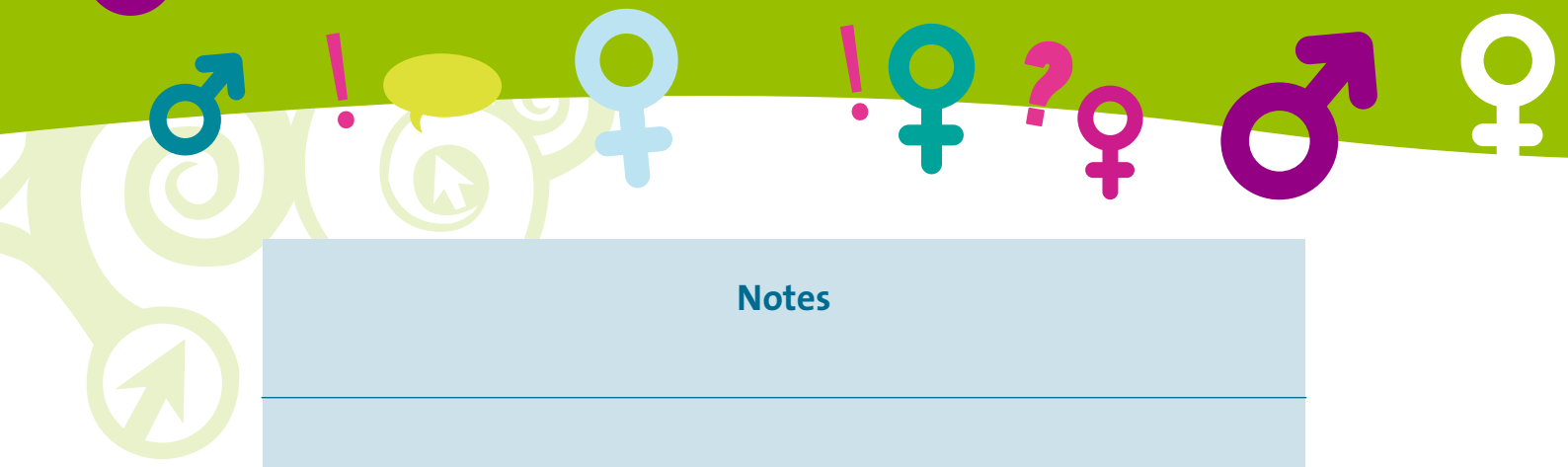
Daniel Stenson
Deirdre Mullen
Maeve Leonard
Jennifer Hegarty



Notes

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Notes

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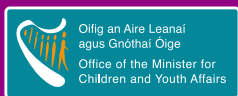
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