

## **Uplift Submission to the NCCA on the Review of Relationship and Sex Education in Ireland**

**24 Oct 2019**

### **About Uplift**

Uplift is a people powered campaigning community of more than 220,000 people who take coordinated action together for a more progressive, equal, socially just and democratic Ireland. Uplift members come from all over Ireland and have many different experiences and backgrounds.

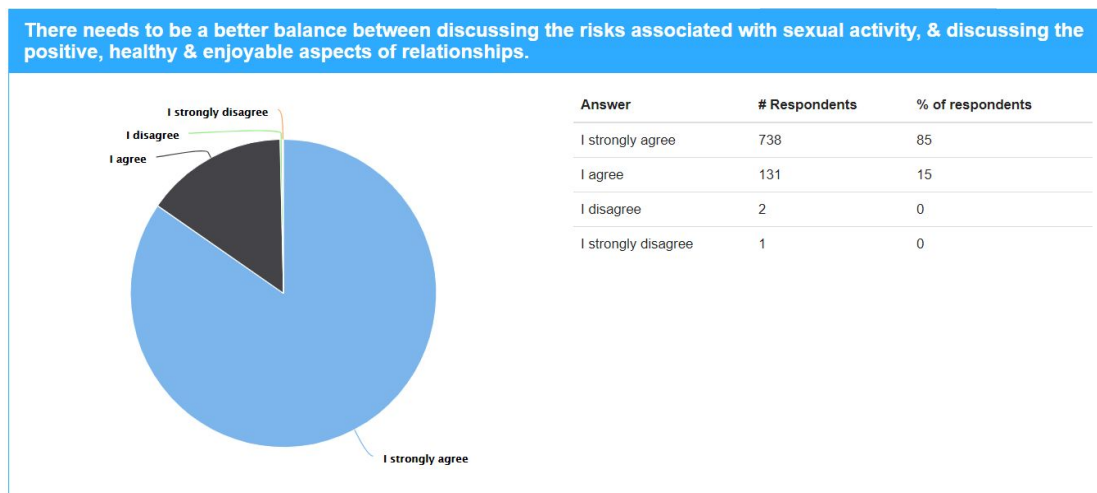
### **About this Submission**

Uplift members have been campaigning in areas related to gender equality, LGBTQIAA+ rights and sex education reform. An opinion poll was first taken by Uplift members, who expressed their high interest in this matter.

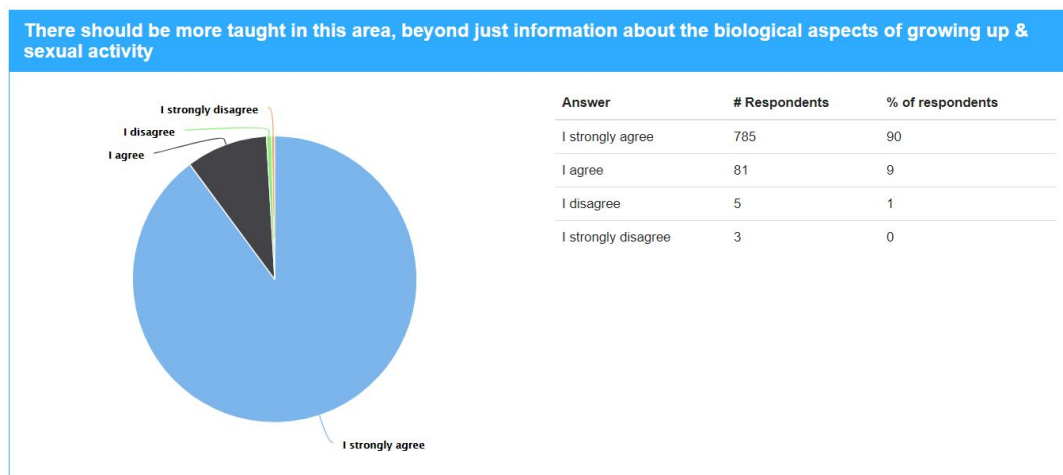
Uplift members were invited to participate in this submission over a period of 6 weeks from September and October 2019. 880 members in total contributed to this submission.

## The approach to teaching relationship and sex education

85% of people who participated in this submission process strongly agree there needs to be better balance discussing the risks associated with sexual activity, and discussing the positive, healthy and enjoyable aspects of a relationship. A further 15% agree, with just two members disagreeing with this statement.



90% of people who participated in this submission process strongly agree there should be more taught in this area, beyond just information about biological aspects of growing up and sexual activity.



As a community we believe that a holistic approach is vital when it comes to relationship and sex education. Sex education needs to be factual, holistic and inclusive. Open discussions on health relationships are essential when approaching matters around sex education.

Young people must be positively informed when engaging in sex and relationships. They should have the ability to ask questions, informed about their own bodies and understand bodily autonomy.

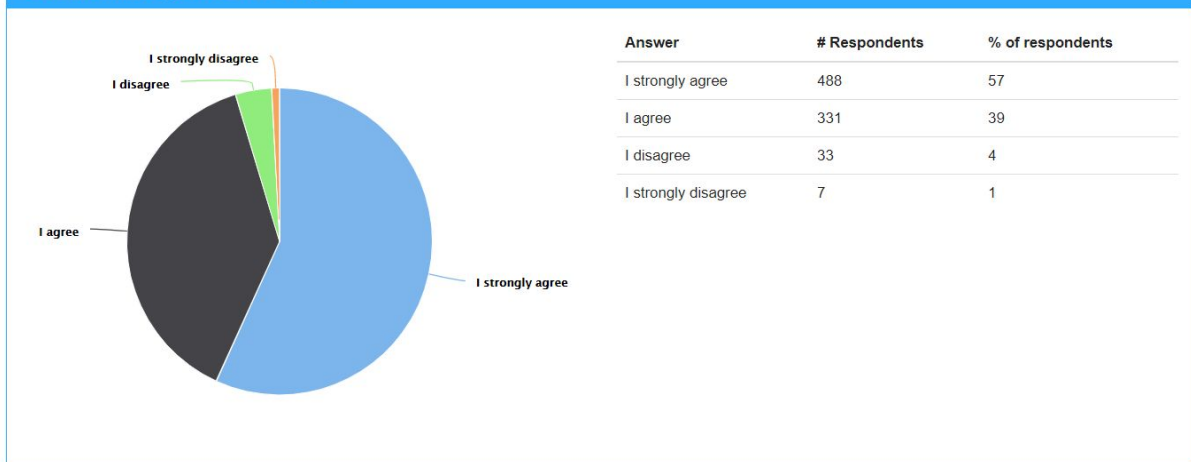
Members acknowledge the role social media and the internet played in the role of ideology in sex and relationships, with many making the connection to body positivity, online bullying, unrealistic approaches to sex and the risks associated to all the above-mentioned.

*“My son is a gay 17 year old boy and gets no form of LGBTQ+ sex ed/relationship talks/advice in schools. It makes him feel like an outsider in his classroom. He is never going to use sex to reproduce but for love and pleasure and why should he be ashamed of that!”*

## **The Relationship and Sex Education Curriculum**

**96% of people who participated in this submission process, agree that the RSE programme should be more integrated into the school curriculum and the SPHE programme should be taught as one subject**

**It is proposed that the RSE programme is more integrated into the school curriculum i.e., the SPHE Programme should be taught as one subject**



Many Uplift members outlined the importance of having the curriculum provide clarity on how topics can be taught in a more inclusive manner, in doing so incorporate current themes identified by the review.

Members also outlined the structural difference between Social Personal and Health (SPE) to Relationship and Sexual Education and that both need in-depth and specified attention.

Members expressed that it is imperative to have both programmes appropriately adapted to the development of children.

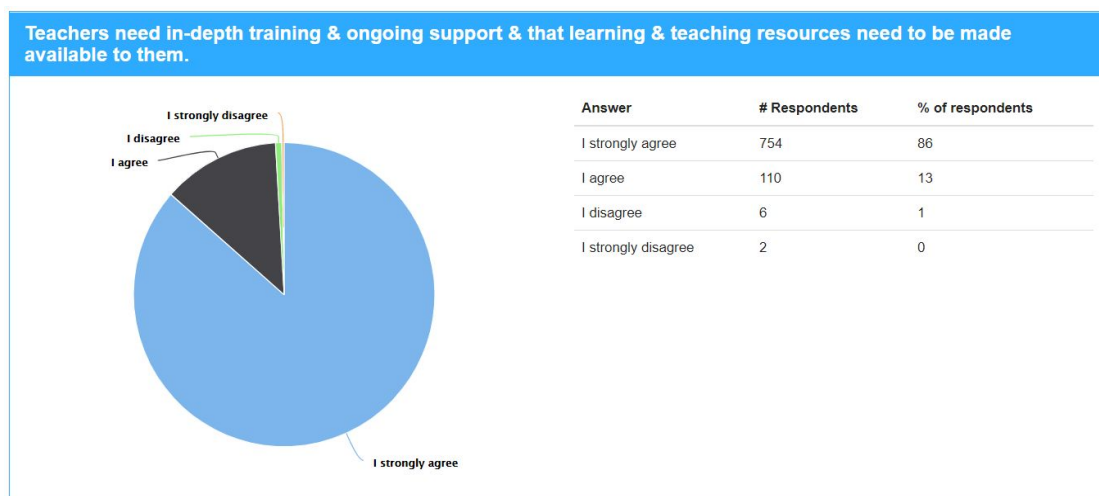
The areas of top importance to members was an inclusive curriculum, taught in a non-judgemental and objective way without the ethos of religion.

*“These should not be integrated as these are two different subjects. Sphe teaches us about the effects of sex and our mental health whereas RSE looks more at the scientific ways of intercourse and pregnancy. What should be added to SPHE is lgbt+ relationships and their emotions and how they may feel left out. When I was in school I felt so different from all the other girls because no one dared to teach anything about lgbt or even mention it.”*

*“Young people should be taught to love their bodies, that no-one has a right to access their bodies unless they give it. And with that positive body relationship, pleasure doesn't always have to be dependent on someone else - particularly important & potentially freeing for girls/ women I think.”*

## **Creating the conditions for effective Relationship and Sex Education**

**Virtually every person who participated in this submission process agree that teachers need in-dept training and ongoing support and that learning and teaching resources need to be made available to them**



Teachers play the most imperative role in shaping this reform. In-depth training must be provided to support them. According to the respondents, most to all people were in favour of strong support and training, with access to continued professional development.

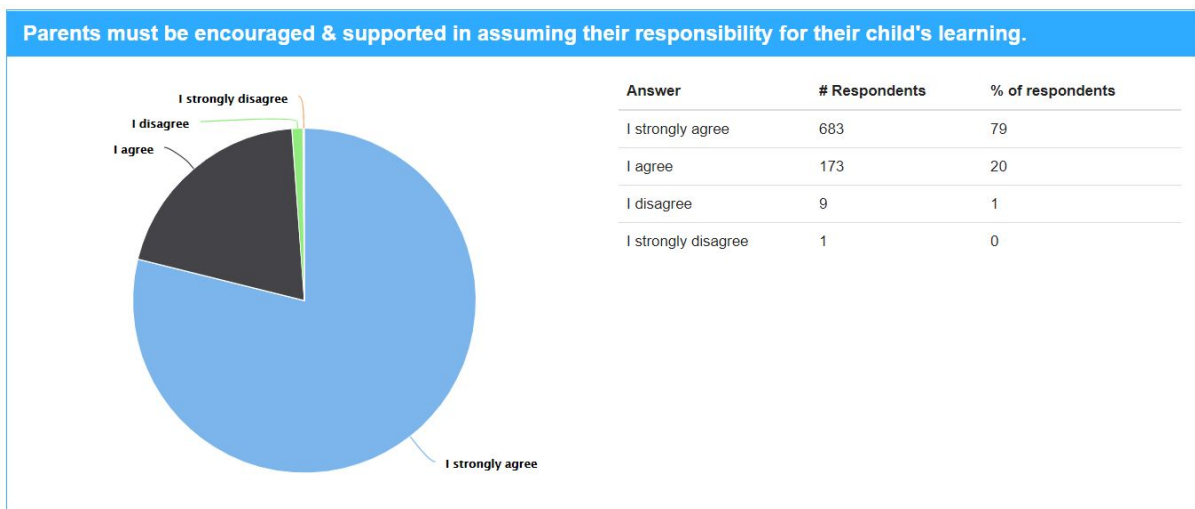
Of the respondents in the petition, 274 people identified as being a teacher and in support of a reformed sex education curriculum - yet acknowledged the importance of having access to the resources, training and support needed to be able to deliver the curriculum effectively and openly.

*“I am a secondary school teacher and have heard first hand the misunderstanding and misinformation that students have”*

*“Whoever is responsible for teaching this programme has to be unbiased and open to hearing everything.”*

### Other considerations raised by Uplift members

**79% of people who participated in this submission process strongly agree that parents must be encouraged and supported in assuming their responsibility for their child’s learning**



**79% of people who participated in this submission process strongly agree that post-primary schools need more support and guidance to deliver relationship and sex education in a way that enhances students learning and wellbeing**

*“There should be education available for parent on how to talk to your child about sex. Sex ed should start as early as possible, with age appropriate lesson. We need to move away from stigmatising sex for girls. Everyone should be able to see sex as a normal part of a healthy relationship. In addition, I think it's really important to have lessons on consent.”*

It was acknowledged that while a specific reformed sex and relationship programme is necessary, ultimately we should be opening up the dialogue about sex and relationships in a broader context. These conversations are what facilitate inclusivity, understanding of different family structures, genders and sexual orientations.

It was concluded that an openness with parents and young people about sex, is highly valuable in reducing earlier pregnancies and reducing STD's.

Uplift members considered that all members in our society will benefit about more conversation surrounding consent, especially with young boys in the era of high accessibility to porn and social media. Further this must come from both parents and teachers.

Many Uplift members expressed that parents should also be an active participant in their child's learning of sex and relationship education. This includes measures such as homework for both the parents and child, evening classes, discussions at parent-teacher interviews, trainings and workshops for parents.

A dominant thread in member opinions was the need to ensure relationship and sex education should not be influenced by religious belief and that the basis for teaching should be non secular.

*“School patronage or Church bias and influence, to be removed from this education.”*

*“It is important that the school ethos does not override the need to have comprehensive relationship and sex education.”*

*“Educational programmes should be offered to parents to teach them how to communicate in open and frank terms with their children about all aspects of sexuality and sexual relationships. This is something that can be a very difficult topic for many parents”*

## **Conclusion**

This submission provides a brief insight into the views of 880 Uplift members in relation to the call for submissions by the NCCA Review of Relationships and Sexuality Education (RSE).

## **Contact**

Rachel Reid

Uplift

28 North Great Georges St

Dublin 1

[rachelreid@uplift.ie](mailto:rachelreid@uplift.ie)