

## **Anna Keogh – Opening Statement – Joint Committee on Education and Skills – Tuesday 15<sup>th</sup> May**

First of all, I would like to thank you for the invite here today. I have spent the past 4 years researching the RSE programme and I am delighted to see it getting some much-needed attention.

As we are here today to discuss the **future** of the programme, I will make some suggestions on what content I think needs to be included and also on how new lessons could be facilitated and how teachers could be supported.

So in relation to content;

**Consent:** Consent needs to be interweaved in to all lessons to showcase that although it is particularly relevant in relationships and sexual situations, it can be learned from day to day exchanges and does not need to be a big scary awkward conversation.

**Pleasure:** Pleasure needs to be cited as a perfectly healthy, valid reason for people to engage in sexual activity. In fact, if we can talk about pleasure, it can be used as a measure of consent. Put simply, if it doesn't feel good, be that in your head, your body or just your gut instinct, then somethings not right.

**Equality:** All resources should be inclusive of **all** gender identities and sexual orientations and should reflect the ways that our society has developed including marriage equality and gender recognition.

**Sexual Activity:** Young people have reported in previous studies that they are engaging in sexual activity that is **not** intercourse and these types of activities need to become part of the conversation.

**Media Literacy and Pornography:** Young people are bombarded by media influences everyday, many of them sexualised. Media literacy lessons could help them to critically analyse the messages they are being exposed to and discussions on pornography could help them to acknowledge that it does not portray reality.

I could go on and on about all of the information we could include in the RSE programme but as you discussed at the last meeting, a fully comprehensive programme is useless if the people who are teaching it are not comfortable, well trained and supported.

I would like to encourage the DES, NCCA and all of the other stakeholders involved in RSE to utilise the services of professionals in this area. There are many individuals and organisations who **do not** have any other agenda than to provide young people with comprehensive factual information regarding a wide range of topics.

Qualified outside facilitators can provide innovative lesson plans, teacher training and support, additional, focused or more complex modules where needed and parent workshops.

The **model** that I would propose going forward is that each school is assigned an RSE professional who would cover a number of schools in a catchment area. They would work with the whole school to support the RSE programme, keep up to date with matters arising in the media or the local community that may need to be addressed and provide additional workshops when needed, and partake in continual research and professional development which would then be passed on to the teachers they support.

This would allow RSE to be recognised as an integral part of how we help our young people in their development and growth and assist teachers and parents in the already mammoth task of providing guidance to teenagers in the rapidly advancing world of today.