

Private Members Bill Briefing: Extending Relationships and Sex Education to 18



Children are legally required to be in education until they turn 18, but mandatory Relationships and Sex Education (RSE) ends at 16.

The 2025 RSE guidance states that : “ the statutory requirements do not apply to sixth form colleges, 16-19 academies or Further Education (FE) colleges, although we would encourage them to support students by offering these subjects” (DfE, 2025, p.4).

This gap has real consequences. ONS data shows that 16-19 year olds experience the highest rates of domestic abuse of any age group (ONS,2025) and in April 2026 the first domestic abuse related suicide in a child under 18 was reported (Domestic Homicide Project, 2026). Yet at precisely this age, when young people are entering their first relationships, the law stops requiring schools and colleges to teach them how to recognise coercive control or discuss what a healthy relationship looks like.

The current legislation is also inconsistently applied. Young people in sixth forms attached to schools receive mandatory RSE up to 18. Those in Further education colleges are not mandated to offer RSE, although there is good, voluntary provision in some colleges. Whether a student receives this education depends entirely on which institution they attend, creating a dangerous postcode lottery.

This is the gap a Private Member's Bill can close by extending mandatory RSE to 18.

The Government has committed to introducing mandatory RSE for all 16 to 18 year olds, both on the floor of the House and in their landmark VAWG Strategy. With 600,000 students in further education each year, this legislation cannot wait.

Our Ask:

The Government's Violence Against Women and Girls (VAWG) Strategy 2025 committed to mandating RSE to 18. The Minister for FE Jacqui Smith also committed to this in February 2026 and voiced her support for a Private Members Bill route. Furthermore, the Secretary of State for Education Bridget Phillipson personally reaffirmed her commitment to mandate RSE to 18 following a meeting with Make it Mandatory and bereaved families in April 2026. However, a legislative vehicle is needed to turn this commitment into law. The sooner that legislation is put in place, the sooner all students aged 16–18 can be guaranteed RSE as part of their further education.

We are calling on Parliamentarians to help make this happen by balloting for a Private Members Bill, given the urgency of the need for change.

The Private Members Bill ballot is expected to take place mid May 2026. We are asking you to enter the ballot with the intention of introducing a Bill extending mandatory Relationships and Sex Education up to 18 years old. If you are not selected in the ballot, we are asking you to introduce a Ten Minute Rule Bill to bring this issue to the floor of the House, build parliamentary momentum, and signal your support for change the Government has already committed to deliver.

Summary of key points

- Extending Relationships and Sex Education (RSE) to young people in post-16 education would contribute to the prevention of violence against women and girls (VAWG) and the Government target to halve VAWG in a decade. Over 2 million women and girls aged 16+ experience domestic abuse in 2025 (ONS,2025) and 2 women a week are killed by a man in England and Wales (Killed Women).
- 72% of girls under 18 reported experiencing some form of emotional partner abuse and 31% of girls and 16% of boys reported experiencing some form of sexual partner violence (The Children's Society, 2020). Furthermore, the 2025 Youth Endowment Fund survey of 11,000 13-17-year-olds found that 2 in 5 teenagers in England and Wales have experienced emotional or physical abuse in the past year.
- Young people aged 15 to 24 years are the most likely to be diagnosed with the most common types of STI (WEC Report, 2024). The average age of first sexual intercourse is 16 years old (Natsal-3) and 79% of young people have accessed violent pornography by the age of 18 (Office of the Children's Commissioner, 2023).
- 16-19-year-olds face the highest rates of domestic abuse than any other age group (ONS,2024). Moreover, 16-18 is also a crucial period in education for young people with SEND who face significantly higher risks of sexual exploitation and poor sexual health outcomes (Alma Economics, 2024).
- Social media was the joint highest influence on student mental health (82%) equal to home circumstances (AoC 2024). Other influences include drugs and alcohol misuse (62%) and gender identity (62%). Gaps in students' core social skills, difficulties with managing relationships, and increase in social anxiety are noted by colleges.
- Further education is a glaring gap in RSE legislation: RSE is mandatory up to the end of secondary education, but not in further education. Over 600,000 16-18-year olds attend a sixth form or FE college (AoC). Universities have been mandated by the Office of Students (condition E6) to have policies on harassment and sexual misconduct including a requirement to inform students about these topics, but further education is a gap that needs closing.

Support for RSE to 18

- There is widespread societal and cross-party political support for extending Relationships and Sex Education (RSE) to young people up to the age of 18, with over 106,400 signatories backing this change via a petition started by Faustine Petron, a survivor of an abusive relationship at 16 years old and the founder of Make it Mandatory.
- This call is backed by over 55 expert organisations, including Killed women, NSPCC, Women's Aid, and the further education sector such as AoC, ASCL, NUS, NEU, NAHT, NAMSS and SCFA.
- The Women and Equalities Select Committee recommends that RSE be extended to 18. Witnesses to their inquiry into sexually transmitted infections (2024) support the extension including Professor Sir Chris Whitty, Chief Medical Officer for England, Dame Rachel de Souza, Children's Commissioner for England, and Dr Claire Dewsnap, President of BASSH.
- There was cross party support from peers across the House of Lords who voiced their support for the swift implementation of mandatory RSE to 18 years old in the Children and Wellbeing Schools Bill debates (2026) and amendments were tabled to the bill by Baroness Nicky Morgan and Baroness Ruth Lister.
- Mandatory RSE to 18 is essential to ensuring victims can identify abuse before it escalates to police involvement. At the Domestic Abuse Act 2021 Committee hearing (March 2026) which discussed RSE to 18, Assistant Commissioner Louisa Rolfe QPM warned that "by the time it gets to us [the police] the harm has often been done", underscoring the need for early education, not late crisis response. Rolfe's call for a "whole society approach" directly supports extending RSE as a preventative mechanism to build recognition of abusive behaviours before they become entrenched
- Crucially young people themselves support this ask with 56% of young people aged 16-17 supporting RSE beyond Year 11 (SEF, 2024) and 58% wanting wider PSHE to be mandatory up to 18 (HEPI, 2025).

The loophole that Make it Mandatory has exposed has received much attention in the national press



'My daughter would still be alive': Campaigners call for teen education on relationship abuse

POLITICS | EDUCATION | Tuesday 17 June 2025 at 10:29am

 Lewis Denison
Digital Political Reporter



About the campaign partners:

- Make It Mandatory is a multi-award-winning, grassroots, and youth-led campaign with over 106,000 signatures. Founded by young survivor of teenage domestic abuse, Faustine Petron, the campaign calls on the Government to extend RSE to 18.
- Brook is the UK sexual health charity, providing clinical sexual healthcare, and delivering and supporting high quality RSE in England and Wales.
- End Violence Against Women Coalition (EVAW) is a membership organisation representing over 160 specialist violence against women and girls (VAWG) services, researchers, survivors and NGOs working to end VAWG in all its forms.
- Sex Education Forum is a charity that brings together over 70 Partner organisations to make sure the RSE young people get is right for them and is the best it can be.

About the campaign supporter:

- ASCL is the leading trade union and professional association for all school, college and trust leaders.

To find out more or to discuss introducing this Bill, please contact **laura.morris@evaw.org.uk** or **lucy@sexeducationforum.org.uk**