

Public Petitions Committee
Thursday 24 September 2026
3rd Meeting, 2026 (Session 7)

PE2225: Urgent Independent Safeguarding Review and Temporary Suspension of Relationships, Sexual Health and Parenthood (RSHP) education in Scotland

Introduction

Petitioner Mandy McGurk

Petition Summary Calling on the Scottish Parliament to urge the Scottish Government to commission an urgent, independent safeguarding review of Relationships, Sexual Health and Parenthood (RSHP) education in Scottish schools, and to introduce a temporary suspension of delivery of RSHP education while this review is carried out.

This review must examine whether RSHP content is consistently age-appropriate and suitable for children's developmental stages across all year groups.

Website <https://petitions.parliament.scot/petitions/PE2225>

1. This is a new petition that was published on 2 July 2026.
2. A full summary of this petition and its aims can be found at **Annexe A**.
3. Every petition collects signatures while it remains under consideration. At the time of writing, 922 signatures have been received on this petition.
4. A SPICe briefing has been prepared to inform the Committee's consideration of the petition and can be found at **Annexe B**.
5. The Committee seeks views from the Scottish Government on all new petitions before they are formally considered.
6. The Committee has received submissions from the Scottish Government and the Petitioner which are set out in **Annexe C** of this paper.

Action

7. The Committee is invited to consider what action it wishes to take.

Clerks to the Committee
September 2026

Annexe A: Summary of petition

PE2225: Urgent Independent Safeguarding Review and Temporary Suspension of Relationships, Sexual Health and Parenthood (RSHP) education in Scotland

Petitioner:

Mandy McGurk

Date published:

2 July 2026

Petition summary:

Calling on the Scottish Parliament to urge the Scottish Government to commission an urgent, independent safeguarding review of Relationships, Sexual Health and Parenthood (RSHP) education in Scottish schools, and to introduce a temporary suspension of delivery of RSHP education while this review is carried out.

This review must examine whether RSHP content is consistently age-appropriate and suitable for children's developmental stages across all year groups.

Background information:

Concerns have been raised by some parents and carers that there is significant inconsistency in how RSHP education is delivered across Scotland, particularly in relation to the age-appropriateness of materials and the way sensitive topics are introduced in primary education.

There is concern that some children may be exposed to content that they are not developmentally ready to process, which may lead to confusion, distress, or difficulty in understanding personal boundaries and safeguarding concepts without sufficient context or support.

Concerns have also been raised regarding safeguarding capacity within the classroom environment, including whether all teaching staff are adequately trained and supported to manage sensitive discussions and potential pupil disclosures in a safe and appropriate manner.

Further concern exists regarding children with additional support needs or trauma histories.

Annexe B: SPICe Briefing



Scottish Parliament
Information Centre
Ionad Fiosrachaidh
Pàrlamaid na h-Alba

Briefing for the Public Petitions Committee on petition PE2225: Urgent Independent Safeguarding Review and Temporary Suspension of Relationships, Sexual Health and Parenthood (RSHP) education in Scotland, lodged by Mandy Mcgurk

Brief overview of issues raised by the petition

The petition is concerned with the provision of Relationships, Sexual Health and Parenthood education (RSHP).

The content of the curriculum, and the way in which the curriculum is taught, is largely a matter for classroom teachers and schools. There is statutory guidance on RSHP as well as Scottish Government-funded resources for teachers on [rshp.scot](https://www.rshp.scot).

Education Scotland is currently undertaking [a wider review of Curriculum for Excellence](#).

Statutory guidance

[Revised statutory guidance on delivering relationships, sexual health and parenthood education in Scottish schools was published in February 2026.](#)

This guidance suggests a “whole school approach” RSHP and that “schools and settings are expected to work collaboratively with children and young people, as well as parents and carers, when developing their RSHP education programme.”

It also notes that what is taught and how the content is taught is a matter for professional judgement. It says:

“Each individual is unique, and to ensure effective practice in the delivery of RSHP education, teachers and practitioners will need to use their professional judgement to adapt the curriculum to meet the individual children and young people’s educational needs, ensuring they receive an age and stage appropriate education in line with their peers.”

The guidance highlights the following areas of learning:

- Consent and Healthy Relationships
- Faith and Belief
- Gender Equality Education
- LGBT Inclusive Education.

The guidance also includes “Thematic Outcomes” which are replicated in the annexe to this briefing.

The statutory guidance also highlights a range of policy, guidance and learning and teaching resources.

rshp.scot

A non-statutory resource was launched in 2021, rshp.scot. The RSHP resource has been developed by a partnership of local authorities and health boards, with advice from Education Scotland and the Scottish Government. [The Scottish Government news release for the launch of RSHP.scot](#) stated—

“[RSHP.scot is a] new teaching website that strengthens the quality, consistency and relevance of education on relationships, sexual health and parenthood ... It aims to give teachers greater confidence in having valuable and engaging age-appropriate conversations with their pupils.”

This resource includes activity plans aimed at all levels of schooling, from pre-school/P1 up to the end of secondary school. Whether teachers or schools use these resources is a matter for those teachers and schools.

Key Organisations and relevant links

- COSLA
- Teaching unions
- Connect

Ned Sharratt
Senior Researcher
August 2026

The purpose of this briefing is to provide a brief overview of issues raised by the petition. SPICe research specialists are not able to discuss the content of petition briefings with petitioners or other members of the public. However, if you have any comments on any petition briefing you can email us at spice@parliament.scot

Every effort is made to ensure that the information contained in petition briefings is correct at the time of publication. Readers should be aware however that these briefings are not necessarily updated or otherwise amended to reflect subsequent changes.

Published by the Scottish Parliament Information Centre (SPICe), an office of the Scottish Parliamentary Corporate Body, The Scottish Parliament, Edinburgh, EH99 1SP

SPICe Annexe: Statutory guidance - 'Thematic Outcomes'

[Schools: guidance on the delivery of relationships, sexual health and parenthood education](#) includes a number of 'Thematic Outcomes'. These are:

- **Consent and Healthy Relationships**

Children and young people learn to build healthy, positive and respectful relationships by developing a strong understanding of consent, personal boundaries and the laws that protect them. Teaching should begin with helping pupils recognise bodily autonomy and appropriate behaviour, and progress to understanding different forms of abuse, digital consent and the legal implications of sharing intimate images. This supports learners to identify harmful behaviours, challenge harassment and inequality, and know where to get help, empowering them to make informed, safe and consensual choices both online and offline.

- **Faith and Belief**

Children and young people explore how relationships, values and identities are shaped by the diverse religious, belief and non-belief traditions found within their school community. Learning is designed to be balanced, inclusive and sensitive so that pupils encounter multiple perspectives, understand how beliefs can contribute to wellbeing and develop respect for others' values. By representing diversity, promoting open discussion and addressing the impact of prejudice and stereotypes, teachers help ensure all learners feel included, valued and safe in expressing their viewpoints.

- **Gender Equality Education**

Children and young people learn to recognise, question and challenge gender stereotypes and unconscious bias, understanding that gender must never restrict a person's interests, ambitions or opportunities. Teaching should highlight how stereotypes shape experiences and choices, promote equality of opportunity, and encourage pupils of all genders to take part in dismantling harmful norms. This helps create inclusive classroom environments where responsibilities are shared fairly, diversity is represented, and all pupils are supported to develop positive identities free from limiting gender expectations.

- **LGBT Inclusive Education**

Children and young people learn within an environment where LGBT identities, families and experiences are recognised, respected and included across the curriculum. Learning is factual, relevant and age-appropriate, helping pupils understand diversity, challenge prejudice and recognise the impact of discrimination on LGBT young people. Teachers foster safe, supportive spaces for discussion, are alert to confidentiality needs and respond sensitively to disclosures. By embedding inclusive content across subjects and modelling respect, teachers help ensure every learner feels seen, valued and able to develop a confident sense of identity.

Annexe C: Written Submissions

PE2225/A: Urgent Independent Safeguarding Review and Temporary Suspension of Relationships, Sexual Health and Parenthood (RSHP) education in Scotland

Scottish Government written submission, 21 July 2026

1. Does the Scottish Government consider the specific ask[s] of the petition to be practical or achievable? If not, please explain why

No. The Scottish Government does not believe there is a case for an independent review of safeguarding in respect of RSHP education. Updated guidance on RSHP education was published in February 2026 and remains a core element of the curriculum in Scotland.

Curriculum for Excellence (CfE) is the national approach to learning and teaching for young people aged 3-18 in Scotland. It is unique in the British Isles and the result of wide-ranging and ongoing engagement and consultation with parents, teachers, educationalists and other key stakeholders since the National Debate on Education in 2002. Its implementation in schools commenced in August 2010.

CfE provides learners with a range of personalised learning experiences and qualifications that meet their individual needs and aspirations. This ensures their learning is age and stage appropriate.

Health and Wellbeing (HWB) is one of the eight curricular areas in CfE. Learning in HWB is designed to ensure children and young people develop the knowledge and understanding, skills, capabilities and attributes which they need for mental, emotional, social and physical wellbeing. RSHP education, an integral part of HWB, helps children and young people build positive relationships as they grow older and is designed to present facts in an objective, balanced and sensitive manner within the framework of curricular values and an awareness of the law.

2. What, if any, action is the Scottish Government currently taking to address the issues raised by this petition, and is any further action being considered that will achieve the ask[s] of this petition?

Education Scotland is leading on development and delivery of the Curriculum Improvement Cycle (CIC).

This represents a planned and systemic approach to strengthening the curriculum to ensure it remains forward looking, and supports more consistent teaching and learning experiences and improved attainment and achievement of our children and young people.

The CIC, which covers all curricular areas including health and wellbeing, where work is already underway, drawing on robust interrogation of evidence and a co-design process with practitioners and wider stakeholders of the curriculum. It is expected that the updated curriculum will be adopted in schools from August 2028.

3. Is there any further information the Scottish Government wish to bring to the Committee's attention, which would assist it in considering this petition?

The Scottish Government published [updated teaching guidance on RSHP education in February 2026](#), following the recommendations from both the PSE Review and LGBTI Inclusive Education Working Group that the guidance, [last published in 2014](#), be reviewed and revised. The revised guidance reflects over 4,000 responses we received to the public consultation on the revised RSHP teaching guidance, which included views from children and young people.

Since guidance was last published in 2014, we know children and young people are interacting more often online – and the updated guidance ensures children and young people are educated in online safety and the potential harms posed on the internet.

The revised guidance will be kept under review to ensure it keeps pace with the outcomes of the ongoing Curriculum Improvement Cycle and wider societal and technological developments.

The Scottish Government is required by law, under [Section 56 of the Standards in Scotland's Schools etc. Act 2000](#), to issue statutory guidance to education authorities on how relationships and sex education should be conducted in schools. There has been no change to the Scottish Government's position in the revised guidance, which sees a greater focus on the areas of importance to our children young people, as well as providing more inclusivity

**Curriculum Unit: Maths, STEM, Health and Wellbeing & Reform
Curriculum, Qualifications and Achievement Division**

**PE2225/B: Urgent Independent Safeguarding Review and
Temporary Suspension of Relationships, Sexual Health and
Parenthood (RSHP) education in Scotland**

Petitioner written submission, 2 September 2026

Introduction

I welcome the opportunity to respond to the Scottish Government's submission regarding PE2225. I respectfully disagree with its conclusion that there is no case for an independent safeguarding review.

This petition is not arguing that children should receive no education about relationships, personal safety, consent or sexual health. It asks a fundamental safeguarding question:

Has the Scottish Government independently established that Relationships, Sexual Health and Parenthood (RSHP) education is consistently age appropriate, developmentally appropriate, psychologically safe, properly safeguarded and delivered by appropriately trained adults across Scotland?

Statutory guidance does not, by itself, demonstrate that policy is safe in practice, consistently implemented, or that adults delivering sensitive material are adequately

trained. PE2225 records concerns about delivery, age appropriateness, developmental readiness, teacher training and children with additional support needs or trauma histories. These concerns warrant independent scrutiny.

1. Guidance is not independent safeguarding assurance

The Government's response relies heavily on updated RSHP guidance, published in February 2026. Guidance explains what should happen. It does not independently establish what is happening in classrooms or whether safeguards are working effectively.

An independent review would examine policy, implementation, training, materials, safeguarding procedures, complaints, children's experiences and evidence of safety or harm. It should neither assume RSHP education is harmful nor dismiss parents' concerns. It should establish the evidence.

2. The Government's own consultation identified concerns

The Government's consultation identified concerns about age and developmental appropriateness, the complexity of some material for younger children, children's ability to understand sensitive subjects, clarity around what should be taught at different ages and stages, and potential distress. It also recorded concerns about support following distress or safeguarding disclosures.

These concerns cannot reasonably be dismissed as objections created after the policy was developed. They were identified through the Government's own consultation. However, consultation is not the same as independent safeguarding assessment. A consultation gathers views; a safeguarding review examines evidence, risk, implementation and outcomes.

3. Safeguarding must be preventative

Safeguarding should prevent avoidable harm rather than wait for harm to demonstrate that safeguards were necessary.

We should not have to wait for significant numbers of children to experience distress or trauma before asking whether particular content or delivery methods are appropriate. The absence of evidence of widespread harm cannot automatically be treated as evidence that there is no risk.

Have potential risks been properly identified, assessed and independently scrutinised? The Scottish Government should be able to demonstrate this.

4. Children and vulnerable pupils must be considered individually

Children develop at different rates. Chronological age alone cannot determine whether every child is emotionally or developmentally ready to process sensitive information.

An independent review should consider children with additional support needs, developmental or communication difficulties, previous abuse or exploitation, trauma or safeguarding histories, and difficulties processing sensitive concepts.

5. Training and third-party providers

The Government's guidance recognises that third-party organisations may contribute to RSHP delivery. The review should establish minimum training requirements for teachers, support staff and external providers, whether training is nationally consistent, and whether it covers child development, safeguarding, trauma awareness, recognising distress and responding to disclosures.

It should also examine approval of external providers and teaching materials, safeguarding checks, parental information and how concerns are investigated. Safeguarding standards should not vary materially between schools or providers.

6. Parental involvement and transparency

The Government's guidance recognises the role of parents and carers and states that schools should involve them in discussions about RSHP content. The review should establish whether this happens consistently.

Parents should receive meaningful information about what is being taught and when, and where appropriate have an opportunity to review relevant materials and raise concerns. Parental concerns should not automatically determine educational policy, but genuine safeguarding concerns should be examined objectively.

7. The 2028 curriculum review does not resolve current concerns

The Government refers to an updated curriculum expected from August 2028. Curriculum improvement is welcome, but it does not answer the immediate safeguarding question raised by PE2225.

Children are being taught under the current arrangements now. Safeguarding responsibilities exist now. An independent review could form part of the improvement process rather than waiting until 2028.

8. Questions for the Committee

I ask the Committee to seek clear answers from the Scottish Government:

- What independent safeguarding assessment was undertaken before concluding that no review was necessary?
- What evidence demonstrates that RSHP education is consistently age and developmentally appropriate across Scotland?
- How are classroom delivery, training, third-party providers and teaching materials independently monitored?
- Does training cover child development, safeguarding, trauma awareness and responding to disclosures?
- How are parents informed and enabled to raise concerns, and what evidence exists concerning children's distress, complaints or safeguarding concerns?

- How are children with additional support needs or previous trauma protected?
- Why is an independent review considered unnecessary when the Government's own consultation identified concerns about age, developmental readiness, clarity and potential distress?

Conclusion

PE2225 does not ask Parliament to accept that all RSHP education is harmful. It asks Parliament to recognise significant safeguarding questions concerning content, age, developmental appropriateness, psychological impact, delivery, training, third-party providers and parental involvement.

The Government has demonstrated that guidance exists, consultation has taken place and curriculum reform is underway. It has not demonstrated that the current system has been independently assessed and shown to be safe and consistently safeguarded in practice.

An independent review would not prejudge the outcome. If evidence demonstrates that the system is safe and appropriate, it would provide reassurance. If weaknesses are identified, they can be addressed before avoidable harm occurs.

I therefore ask the Public Petitions Committee to continue consideration of PE2225, seek further evidence from the Scottish Government, and support an urgent independent safeguarding review of RSHP education, with appropriate temporary safeguards, including consideration of suspension, while that review takes place.