

2nd National Survey of Australian Teachers of Sexuality Education 2018

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5.0 Executive Summary

5.0.1 Introduction

The introduction to this report explains the importance of revisiting and extending the 2010 Australian survey of teachers of sexuality education; acknowledging school-based sexuality education delivered by well-trained and supported teachers as the most effective means of educating young people on sex and relationships, with the most positive outcomes for reducing the sexual risks they face. This revised run of the survey aims to capture the impacts of the new AC:HPE, endorsed in 2015, on teachers' current experiences of sexuality education.

5.0.2 Method & Sample

The research team revised the *1st National Survey of Australian Secondary Teachers of Sexuality Education* to include topics from the AC:HPE and new questions around teacher training and comfort with key themes. The anonymous survey targeted Australian teachers ($N = 156$) from all states and territories who had taught sexuality education since the 2015 release of the AC:HPE.

5.0.3 Characteristics of Teachers Delivering Sexuality Education

Though all the teachers had taught sexuality education since the release of the AC:HPE, only half taught in the HPE subject area in which the curriculum is located. The

remainder were spread across various other subjects including Science, Humanities and Social Sciences, and Maths. Most of the teachers were women in younger age groups from 20 to 39 years of age, with fewer years of sexuality education teaching experience. Over half of the teachers had taught sexuality education for five years or less.

5.0.4 Training in Sexuality Education

Teacher training on sexuality education was most commonly reported as occurring at teachers' pre-service training institution or in PD prior to the release of the AC:HPE. Most teachers rated such training as "extremely useful". Teachers rated all four objectives of the new curriculum as effective. However, less than a third of respondents indicated that they had received any PD training in sexuality education after the AC:HPE's release; only 14% had received training specifically on it. Most participants had read some of the national or state curriculum related to sexuality education and rated it as only "somewhat useful".

5.0.5 Delivery of Sexuality Education: What, When, How, and How Much?

Most teachers surveyed taught under 20 hours of sexuality education per year. The resources most used included state health curricula, the national health curriculum, and additional state curriculum packages. Most topics are taught between Years 7 and 10, in a classroom-based format with an interactive approach encouraging questions and discussion. Puberty and peer pressure were covered mostly in Years 7–8. STIs, decision-making, and contraception/birth control were mostly taught in Years 9–10, and reproduction split almost evenly between Years 7–8 and 9–10. LGBTIQ Topics were mostly taught in Years 9–10, though around half of teachers surveyed did not cover transphobia or intersex issues. Other topics taught less often included teen parenting, abortion, sex acts other than intercourse, and sexual pleasure.

5.0.6 Teachers' Views and Opinions on Sexuality Education

Teachers strongly agreed that all students are entitled to sexuality education and are keen to provide a foundation in sexual health management. Most teachers strongly agreed that information about birth control and safe sex should be given whether young people are sexually active or not. Most agreed with the inclusion of sexuality education in the AC:HPE, specifically in HPE. About two thirds were extremely comfortable teaching sexuality education; particularly reproduction, sexual health, and relationships. They were least comfortable teaching about sexuality and gender diversity, though most had a progressive stance on homosexuality.

5.0.7 Teacher Supports

Teachers overall felt supported by their school administration and parents in teaching sexuality education that meets students' needs. However, most were careful about what they taught due to possible adverse community reactions. The state curriculum, school policy, faculty/curriculum area, students, and teachers' own feelings of confidence and competence all influenced sexuality education delivery. Schools often required that teachers take cultural, ethnic, and sexual diversity into account. Items extremely useful in aiding teachers' efforts included specific websites, resources, and PD training; students themselves could also be an aid.

5.0.8 Recommendations

Some findings contrasted against previous research. Firstly, we argue that provision of training for delivery of sexuality education based on the new AC:HPE, especially regarding its focus on sexual and gender diversity, is needed to ensure its successful implementation in classrooms. Secondly, we argue for training that increases teachers' comfort teaching gender and sexual diversity and sexual behaviours. Thirdly, given that anyone could be teaching sexuality education despite what previous literature assumes,

we recommend all teachers need to be trained and supported to do so, and that those most likely to be delivering it need more explicit training. Finally, our sample suggested that sexuality education delivery continues to be dominated by women; thus, we recommend increasing qualified and trained male teachers in sexuality education.

5.0.9 Conclusions

The provision of a national sexuality education curriculum marks a significant shift in Australian education. To complement it, national sexuality education training is needed to better support teachers.

5.1 Introduction

School-based sexuality education delivered by teachers who are trained and supported in the delivery of sexuality education remains an effective means of educating young people on sex and relationships (UNESCO, 2018). International research on school-based sexuality education continues to show evidence of its positive effects on students' knowledge related to sexual behaviours, sexual risks (such as unwanted pregnancy, HIV, or other STIs), and sexuality (UNESCO, 2016). When taught effectively, school-based sexuality education is able to delay sexual debut and increase the use of condoms and other forms of contraception (UNESCO, 2016).

This research study is based on the first ever Australian survey of teachers of sexuality education, which was conducted in 2010 (Smith et al., 2011). Since then, Australia has seen some major changes to sexuality education, namely in the form of a national curriculum. The AC:HPE, which incorporates RSE topics, was endorsed in 2015. The AC is both a policy document and an online resource for educators. Little is known about the way in which sexuality education is taught since the release of the AC:HPE (ACARA, 2016). This study seeks to address this gap and to elucidate teachers' experiences with sexuality education since the release of the AC:HPE.

This research study complements the series of Secondary Students and Sexual Health surveys conducted six times with the first survey in 1992 and the most recent in 2018. The findings of these surveys have been widely used throughout Australia to inform the work of key stakeholders in young peoples' sexual health and wellbeing, including educational policy and practice. In particular, results from these surveys continue to inform important sexuality education curricula, such the national, online teaching resource, *LoveSexRelationships.edu.au* (Australian Research Centre in Sex, 2015) and Western Australia's *Growing and Developing Healthy Relationships* (Government of Western Australia Department of Health, 2019).

Findings of the most recent Secondary Students and Sexual Health survey indicate that about half of young people in Years 10 through 12 are sexually active (Fisher et al., 2019). Most student survey respondents indicated that they had received sexuality education at school, but teachers received low to moderate ratings of students' confidence in talking to them, frequency of seeking information from them, and trust in the accuracy of their information (Fisher et al., 2019). Only one in three students found their school-based sexuality education very or extremely relevant (Fisher et al., 2019). Students further indicated that they want their sexuality education delivered by teachers or other professionals who are well-trained and comfortable with the topic (Fisher et al., 2019). This sentiment is consistent over time: student respondents from the 2013 survey indicated the same needs and desires for their school-based sexuality education experiences (Ezer, Kerr, Fisher, Heywood, & Lucke, 2019; Ezer et al., 2020).

This teacher survey contributes further to our understanding of sexuality education in Australian schools since the release of the AC:HPE from the perspective of teachers. In particular, we focus on the characteristics of teachers delivering sexuality education; training in, delivery of, and views and opinions on sexuality education; and teacher supports.

5.2 Methods & Sample

5.2.1 The Survey Questionnaire

The survey was developed based on the *1st National Survey of Australian Secondary Teachers of Sexuality Education*, which was developed by experts in academic research, education, and policy making, and representatives from all Australian state and territory government authorities (Smith et al., 2011). Modifications were made to the original survey based on topics found in the AC:HPE. Additional questions specific to teaching training and comfort with sexuality education topics were developed by the research team and added to this iteration of the survey.

The survey comprised four sections. Section 1 included questions about demographics and school characteristics. Section 2 asked a series of questions about who teaches sexuality education at school, in what format and year level, teacher attitudes, and school policies. Section 3 covered questions on pre- and post-service teacher training in sexuality education and on training related to the release of the AC:HPE. Section 4 asked questions about teachers experiences with sexuality education. Questions in this section included positive and negative influences that have affected their classroom delivery of sexuality education and comfort with various aspects of teaching sexuality education. This section also provided a list of sexuality education topics and asked if and in what year level (Foundation to Year 12) these topics were taught. The questionnaire used in this study is available upon request; email ARCSHS@latrobe.edu.au.

5.2.2 Sampling Method & Participation Rates

The target population for this study was Australian teachers who had recently taught sexuality education (i.e., since the release of the AC:HPE in 2015). The lack of a national database of identified sexuality education teachers in Australia required sampling methods to be purposive resulting in a convenience sample. Recruitment strategies

included three approaches: advertisements via emails to community organisations and professional networks, Facebook advertisements, and word of mouth.

Overall, 444 people accessed the survey. Of those, 150 respondents consented to their participation, but did not respond to any questions. A further 51 respondents were eliminated by the filter questions in the survey because sexuality education was not taught at their school and/or they had never personally delivered sexuality education at a school in the last two years (i.e., time since AC:HPE was released). Finally, four respondents did not respond to any questions after the filter questions. Of the 444 people who accessed the survey, 235 met inclusion criteria and completed most or all of the survey.

5.2.3 Survey Administration and Recruitment

Three rounds of emails were sent to community organisations and professional networks asking them to distribute the survey information and link on their social media platforms and to their teacher list-serves. Community organisations consisted of family planning groups across Australia, a national sex education newsletter listserv, the Australian Education Union, and others. Professional networks were those of the study authors. Facebook advertisements targeted teachers in Australia and the advertisements benefited from snowball sampling with the use of Facebook's "tagging" feature (i.e., Facebook users who had seen the advertisement could "tag" their "friends" and invite them to interact with the advertisement). Finally, advertisements, emails and the survey encouraged people to share the link via word of mouth with others who may have qualified to participate. Data were collected between September 2017 and February 2018.

To protect confidentiality of the responses, the survey was designed as an anonymous online survey. Participants were able to stop and resume the survey at a later date if they were unable to complete the survey in one session.

5.2.4 Data Management and Analysis

The survey was hosted by Qualtrics, and responses to the survey were automatically saved upon completion or timeout (i.e., if the survey was started but not completed within one week). At the conclusion of data collection, data from Qualtrics were exported to SPSS 25 and stored on a secure, password-protected La Trobe University server. Data cleaning and analysis was undertaken by a trained researcher. Because all questions were voluntary and some were skipped by respondents, valid percentages are reported throughout this report (i.e., percent to total of those who answered the question).

5.2.5 Sample Distribution: School Type, Location, and Size

Table 5.1 below shows the samples sizes in each state and territory. Most respondents were from Victoria (25%) and New South Wales (23%), the two most populated states in Australia. Table 5.2–Table 5.5 below show the sample distribution by school type, location, and size. The majority of teachers taught at government schools (77%) which were co-educational (94%). Most respondents were either from a capital city (49%) or regional town or city (35%). Schools from remote or rural areas were in the minority (16%). Most respondents (47%) taught in a medium-sized school (between 250 and 1300 students).

Table 5.1. Sample Size in Each State and Territory

State	%	<i>n</i>
Victoria	25.1	59
New South Wales	23.4	55
South Australia	17.9	42
Queensland	16.2	38
Western Australia	8.1	19

State	%	<i>n</i>
Tasmania	4.2	10
Australian Capital Territory	3.4	8
Northern Territory	1.7	4
Total	100.0	235

Table 5.2. Sample Size by School Type

School type	%	<i>n</i>
Government	76.8	179
Independent	14.6	34
Catholic	8.6	20
Total	100.0	233

Table 5.3. Sample Size by Co- or Single-Educational School Type

Co- or single-educational school type	%	<i>n</i>
Co-educational	94.0	219
Girls only	5.1	12
Boys only	0.9	2
Total	100.0	233

Table 5.4. Sample Size by School Location

School location	%	<i>n</i>
Capital city	48.9	115
Regional town or city	34.9	82

School location	%	<i>n</i>
Rural area	13.2	31
Remote area	3.0	7
Total	100.0	235

Table 5.5. Sample Size by Number of Students at School

Number of students at school	%	<i>n</i>
Up to 250 students	21.0	46
251–1299 students	47.5	104
Over 1300 students	31.5	69
Total	100.0	219

5.2.6 Limitations of the Survey

The *2nd National Survey of Teachers and Sexuality Education* provides data on workforce characteristics, content of sexuality education, and influences on teaching sexuality education including training, school policies, support, and personal challenges. The survey is most useful to inform a review of current educational practices in relation to recent curriculum and policy guidelines released as the AC:HPE. This survey will support the further refinement and development of appropriate programs that improve young people’s experiences of sexual health and relationship education. This research, however, does contain some limitations.

Firstly, it is not a representative sample of Australian sexuality educators with some states and territories being under-represented in terms of their teacher populations. A convenience sample that combined a variety of recruitment methods was necessary to reach a broader range of teachers. Results therefore cannot be generalised to all

Australian sexuality educators, but are an indication of current trends, especially among motivated teachers who completed the survey. In addition, the data may be biased towards such motivated teachers who are particularly passionate for or against sexuality education.

As with the *1st National Survey of Australian Secondary Teachers of Sexuality Education*, it was difficult to recruit teachers to participate and to avoid attrition throughout the survey. Recruitment strategies were intentionally different from the first survey, which relied on the support of school principals to agree to administer the survey in their schools. Following the report's suggestion to develop alternative recruitment strategies for future research with teachers, this iteration of the research relied primarily on online recruitment to target sexuality educators, but yielded a similar sample size.

The small sample sizes of both iterations of the survey are an indication of the difficulty in recruiting this particular population that may not have the time to commit to such a research study. Additional reasons for not completing the survey could include: discomfort with the topic/question, loss of interest, interruption during completion and lack of time or forgetting to complete it, and length of the survey. Future research in this area would benefit from a larger sample and a wider spread across states, school types, and rural/remote teachers. As such, specific strategies that take into account teachers' workloads may be necessary to help increase the number of responses and the representativeness of the sample data.

5.3 Characteristics of Teachers Delivering Sexuality

Education

5.3.1 Key Findings

- All respondents had taught sexuality education since the release of the AC:HPE in 2015. However, only half of respondents were HPE teachers where sexuality education is usually located in school curricula. The remaining half of teachers were spread across various other subject areas, including Science, Humanities and Social Sciences, and Maths.
- When asked who else taught sexuality education at their school respondents indicated most often other HPE teachers (66%).
- The majority of teachers in the sample were women (79%).
- The sample shows higher numbers of teachers in younger age groups, from 20 to 39 years of age, and with fewer years of sexuality education teaching experience (51% of teachers had taught sexuality education for five or fewer years).

5.3.2 Teaching Area and Year Level

The data in this section presents characteristics of teachers delivering sexuality education. The total number of respondents can vary for each question since respondents might have chosen not to respond to some questions.

All respondents had taught sexuality education in an Australian school since the AC:HPE was released in 2015. Sexuality education is usually taught by HPE teachers (Mitchell et al., 2011), but this was not the only main subject area for teachers in this study. Table 5.6 below shows that only half of respondents (54%) were primarily HPE teachers with the other half of teachers spread across various other main subject areas, including Science (25%), Humanities and Social Sciences (25%), and Maths (24%).

When asked who else taught sexuality education at their school respondents indicated most often HPE teachers (66%) (see Table 5.7 below).

Table 5.6. Responses to “What is Your Main Subject Area?”

Response	Total	
	%	<i>n</i>
Health and physical education	54.0	115
Science	25.4	54
Humanities and social sciences	24.9	53
Maths	23.9	51
English	19.2	41
Arts	18.3	39
Technologies	11.7	25
Foreign language	1.9	4

Note. Due to multiple response options, percentages do not add up to 100%.

Table 5.7. Responses to “Who Else Besides Yourself Delivers Curriculum-based Sexuality Education in Your School?”

Response	Total (<i>n</i> = 192)	
	%	<i>n</i>
Health and physical education teacher	65.6	126
School nurse or sexual health nurse	24.5	47
Other	21.4	41
Student welfare staff	18.8	36

Response	Total (<i>n</i> = 192)	
	%	<i>n</i>
Science teacher	15.6	30
External provider	12.0	23
School counsellor	11.5	22
No one else	7.8	15
SOSE or Humanities teacher	6.3	12
Religion teacher	5.7	11
English teacher	4.7	9
School chaplain	2.1	4

Note. Due to multiple response options, percentages do not add up to 100%.

Most survey respondents taught between Years 7 and 10 (61%, 60%, 63% and 58% respectively) (see Table 5.8 below). Fewer participants who responded to this survey taught primary school.

Table 5.8. Responses to “What Level of Education Do You Teach?”

Response	Total	
	%	<i>n</i>
Foundation	9.8	21
Year 1	12.6	27
Year 2	12.6	27
Year 3	13	28
Year 4	15.3	33
Year 5	20.9	45

Response	Total	
	%	<i>n</i>
Year 6	25.6	55
Year 7	61.4	132
Year 8	60.5	130
Year 9	62.8	135
Year 10	58.1	125
Year 11	49.3	106
Year 12	46	99

Note. Due to multiple response options, percentages do not add up to 100%.

5.3.3 Teachers' Personal Characteristics

The majority of survey respondents were women (79%). Over half (58%) of the participants were aged under 40 years old. Most (51%) had taught sexuality education for five or fewer years. Table 5.9–Table 5.11 below provide a detailed overview of teachers' gender, age, and experience. Most respondents were employed full-time (74%) (see Table 5.12 below) and held, at minimum, a Bachelor's degree (66%) (see Table 5.13 below).

Table 5.9. Responses to "Do You Identify as Male or Female?"

Response	%	<i>n</i>
Female	78.8	182
Male	20.8	48
Other	0.4	1
Total	100.0	231

Table 5.10. Responses to “What Is Your Age?”

Response	%	<i>n</i>
19–29 years	27.2	61
30–39 years	31.2	70
40–49 years	23.7	53
50 and over	17.9	40
Total	100.0	224

Table 5.11. Responses to “Please Select the Number of Years You Taught Sexuality Education (At Any Schools) From the Start of Your Teaching Career Through to 2017”

Response	%	<i>n</i>
1–2 years	23.8	50
3–5 years	26.7	56
6–10 years	21.9	46
11–15 years	10.0	21
16–20 years	10.0	21
Over 20 years	7.6	16
Total	100.0	210

Table 5.12. Responses to “What is Your Employment Status?”

Response	%	<i>n</i>
Full-time	74.4	160
Part-time	14.0	30
Contract	11.6	25
Total	100.0	215

Table 5.13. Responses to “Which of the Following Degrees Do You Hold?”

Response	%	<i>n</i>
Bachelor degree	66.2	153
Graduate diploma	17.7	41
Master degree	12.6	29
Graduate certificate	2.2	5
PhD	0.9	2
High school	0.4	1
Total	100.0	231

5.4 Training in Sexuality Education

5.4.1 Key Findings

- Training types related to sexuality education with the highest number of respondents were at their pre-service training institution (45%) and PD prior to the release of the AC:HPE (46%).
- The majority of those who had received these training types rated them as “extremely useful” (57% and 61% respectively).

- Only 30% of respondents indicated that they had received any PD training in sexuality education after the release of the AC:HPE and even fewer (14%) indicated that they had received specific training related to the AC:HPE.
- Most participants had read the parts of the national or state curriculum related to sexuality education (70% and 76% respectively) but both were most commonly rated as only “somewhat useful” (55% and 32% respectively).
- Teachers’ perceptions were evenly split between “somewhat effective” and “very effective” regarding the four objectives of the AC:HPE: increasing knowledge and understanding; exploring and clarifying feelings, values, and attitudes; developing and strengthening skills; and promoting and sustaining risk-reducing behaviour.

5.4.2 Sexuality Education Training Received

Respondents were asked about their training related to sexuality education both before and after the release of the AC:HPE (Table 5.14 below). If respondents indicated they had completed a specific sexuality education training, they were asked to rate the usefulness of that training. Training types related to sexuality education with the highest number of respondents were their pre-service training institution (45%) and PD prior to the release of the AC:HPE (46%). The majority of those who had received these training types rated them as “extremely useful” (57% and 61% respectively). Only 30% of respondents indicated that they had received any PD training in sexuality education after the release of the AC:HPE in September 2015 and even fewer (14%) indicated that they had received specific training related to the AC:HPE.

Table 5.14. Training Received

Response	Total	
	%	<i>n</i>
Pre-service training (<i>n</i> = 179)	44.7	80
Extremely useful	56.6	43
Very useful	23.7	18
Moderately useful	14.5	11
Slightly useful	5.3	4
Not at all useful	–	–
Professional development training <i>before</i> the release of the AC:HPE (<i>n</i> = 175)	46.3	81
Extremely useful	61.1	44
Very useful	25.0	18
Moderately useful	11.1	8
Slightly useful	2.9	2
Not at all useful	–	–
Professional development training <i>after</i> the release of the AC:HPE (<i>n</i> = 169)	29.6	50
Extremely useful	61.7	29
Very useful	27.7	13
Moderately useful	4.3	2
Slightly useful	4.3	2
Not at all useful	2.1	1
Specific training related to the AC:HPE (<i>n</i> = 168)	13.7	23
Extremely useful	10	47.6
Very useful	4	19.0
Moderately useful	6	28.6

Response	Total	
	%	<i>n</i>
Slightly useful	–	–
Not at all useful	1	4.8

Note. Due to multiple response options, row percentages may not add up to 100%.

Chi-square tests examined teachers who **did not** receive training by their main subject area (see Table 5.15 below). HPE teachers were least likely to have received any of the four training types compared to the other subject areas (all $p \leq 0.05$). Arts and Technologies teachers, on the other hand, were much more likely to have received all four training types compared to the other subject areas.

Table 5.15. No Training Received by Main Subject Area

Main subject area	No pre-service training		No professional development pre-AC:HPE		No professional development post-AC:HPE		No AC:HPE training	
	<i>n</i> (%)	<i>p</i>	<i>n</i> (%)	<i>p</i>	<i>n</i> (%)	<i>p</i>	<i>n</i> (%)	<i>p</i>
English	22 (22.5)	0.238	20 (21.5)	0.535	28 (23.9)	0.089	32 (22.5)	0.128
HPE	46 (46.9)	0.009	45 (48.4)	0.050	57 (48.7)	0.007	71 (50)	0.004
Maths	27 (27.6)	0.134	27 (29)	0.083	36 (30.8)	0.002	38 (26.8)	0.061
Science	29 (29.6)	0.074	29 (31.2)	0.042	36 (30.8)	0.027	39 (27.5)	0.307
Humanities and Social Sciences	29 (29.6)	0.242	29 (31.2)	0.104	35 (29.9)	0.124	39 (27.5)	0.565
Arts	17 (17.4)	0.727	18 (19.4)	0.343	21 (18)	0.802	26 (18.3)	0.538
Technologies	10 (10.2)	0.991	10 (10.8)	0.894	14 (12)	0.472	15 (10.6)	0.723

5.4.3 National and State Curricula

Most participants had read the parts of the national or state curriculum related to sexuality education (70% and 76% respectively) but both were most commonly rated as only “somewhat useful” (55% and 32% respectively) (see Table 5.16 below). Teachers were asked to rate the effectiveness of sexuality education today in relation to the four AC:HPE objectives: increasing knowledge and understanding; exploring and clarifying feelings, values, and attitudes; developing and strengthening skills; and promoting and sustaining risk-reducing behaviour (see Table 5.17 below). Responses were on a five-point rating scale from “not at all effective” to “very effective”. Teachers were evenly split between “somewhat effective” and “very effective” in their perceived effectiveness of sexuality education on all four objectives.

Table 5.16. Responses to “How Useful Was the National/Your State’s Curriculum for Your Sexuality Education Teaching?”

Response	Total	
	%	<i>n</i>
<i>Australian Curriculum: Health and Physical Education (n = 210)</i>	70.0	147
Extremely useful	2.9	4
Very useful	13.7	19
Neither/nor	21.6	30
Somewhat useful	54.7	76
Not at all useful	7.2	10
<i>State Curriculum: Health and Physical Education (n = 202)</i>	76.2	154
Extremely useful	5.2	8
Very useful	22.9	35

Response	Total	
	%	<i>n</i>
Neither/nor	11.7	28
Somewhat useful	32.2	77
Not at all useful	2.1	5

Table 5.17. Responses to “In Your Opinion, How Effective is Today’s Sexuality Education Since the Release of the *Australian Curriculum* with Regard to the Objectives Listed Below?”

	Not at all effective		Hardly effective		Somewhat effective		Very effective		Extremely effective	
	%	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>
Increasing knowledge and understanding (<i>n</i> = 94)	–	–	5.3	5	44.7	42	43.6	41	6.4	6
Exploring and clarifying feelings, values, and attitudes (<i>n</i> = 92)	–	–	5.4	5	40.2	37	46.7	43	7.6	7
Developing and strengthening skills (<i>n</i> = 91)	–	–	6.6	6	44.0	40	42.9	39	6.6	6
Promoting and sustaining risk-reducing behaviour (<i>n</i> = 89)	–	–	9.0	8	40.4	36	41.6	37	9.0	8

5.5 Delivery of Sexuality Education: What, When, How, and How Much?

5.5.1 Key Findings

- The majority of teachers in this survey taught under 20 hours of sexuality education per year (69%).
- All sexuality education topics addressed in the survey were more likely to be taught than not, except for the topic of transphobia. Themes less often taught included teen parenthood, intersex people, abortion, sex acts other than intercourse, and sexual pleasure.
- Most topics are taught between Years 7 and 10; the emphasis in Years 7–8 is puberty and peer pressure, while the emphasis in Years 9–10 is on sexual or decision-making information.
- Most respondents had taught sexuality education in a classroom-based format (89%) and in an interactive manner (66%) that encouraged questions and discussion.
- The resources most used to teach sexuality education were their state’s curriculum in HPE, the AC:HPE, and their state’s curriculum additional package.

5.5.2 Hours Spent Teaching Sexuality Education

Teachers were asked to indicate the number of hours they spent teaching sexuality education every year. The majority of teachers in this survey taught under 20 hours of sexuality education per year (69%) (see Table 5.18 below). Chi-squares further examined associations between the total number of hours spent teaching sexuality education and teachers’ main subject areas (see Table 5.19 below). The highest number of respondents who spent 10 or more hours teaching sexuality education were HPE teachers ($p = 0.014$).

Respondents who spent less than 10 hours teaching sexuality education were spread across other disciplines.

Table 5.18. Responses to “On Average, What Is the Total Number of Hours You Spend Teaching Sexuality Education Each School Year?”

Response	%	<i>n</i>
0	–	–
1–4	14.7	23
5–9	18.6	29
10–14	21.8	34
15–19	14.1	22
20–24	6.4	10
25–29	1.3	2
30 or more	23.1	36
Total	100.0	156

Table 5.19. Total Number of Hours of Sexuality Education Taught per School Year by Main Subject Area

Main subject area	1–9 hours		10–19 hours		≥20 hours		<i>p</i>
	%	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	
English	57.5	19	36.4	12	6.1	2	≤0.001
HPE	23.8	21	39.8	35	36.4	32	0.014
Maths	50.0	19	42.1	16	7.9	3	0.001
Science	45.0	18	42.5	17	12.5	5	0.013

Main subject area	1–9 hours		10–19 hours		≥20 hours		<i>p</i>
	%	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	
Humanities and Social Sciences	52.4	22	31.0	13	16.6	7	0.005
Arts	53.6	15	35.7	10	10.7	3	0.013
Technologies	41.2	7	58.8	10	–	–	0.011

5.5.3 Sexuality Education Topics

A core question of the survey asked teachers which topics they taught in sexuality education and also at which year level these topics were taught. Thirty-four topics were listed and were broken down in to six categories: Biology, Contraception/Birth Control, Decision-making/Information Sources, LGBTIQ Topics, Relationships/Sexual Partners, and Sexual Activity. Table 5.20–Table 5.25 below show what topics were taught and when.

Year Levels

The majority of sexuality education occurs in Years 7–10. In Foundation to Year 4, a small number of respondents indicated they taught a limited number of topics including: puberty, reproduction, communication with parents about sexuality, peer pressure, and how to find trustworthy information. All topics were taught by at least a small number of respondents by Years 5–6: approximately 30% of respondents indicated they taught puberty and reproduction; up to 36% taught about issues related to information-seeking and decision-making, such as peer pressure or communicating with parents; up to 14% taught about issues relating to sexual or gender diversity; up to 29% about issues relating to relationships and sexual partners including body image; and a smaller number, up to 9%, taught about sexual activity.

Sexuality education was most commonly taught in Years 7–10. In Years 7–8 the major focus of sexuality education was puberty and reproduction. Well over half the respondents indicated they taught about puberty (64%) and reproduction (54%). Similarly, more than 50% of respondents indicated they taught Year 7–8 students many topics relating to sexual relationships or sexual decision-making including: peer pressure (65%), body image (60%), relationships and feelings (61%), impact of communication technology on sexuality (56%), sexting (51%), and sexism (50%). Fewer respondents reported that they taught Year 7–8 students topics related to gender and sexual diversity or sexual activity including: safe sex (45%), same-sex attraction (43%), sexual orientation (43%), sex acts other than intercourse (23%), or sexual pleasure (26%).

For students in Years 9–10, teachers were less likely to report teaching about puberty or reproduction, but much more likely to report that they taught topics relating to sexual activity or safe sex including: birth control (60%), effects of alcohol on sexual decision-making (62%), how to find trustworthy information (64%), safe sex (62%), avoiding unwanted sex (60%), STIs (60%), and communication with sexual partners (60%). Topics less likely to be covered were: abortion (45%), intersex issues (43%), and transphobia (39%).

Teachers were much less likely to report teaching sexuality education to students in Years 11–12. The topics most likely to be taught to students in Years 11–12 were: the effect of alcohol on sexual decision-making (42%) and the impact of communication technology on sexuality (38%).

Topics Taught

Teachers in this survey covered the biological topics of puberty, reproduction, and STIs at slightly different stages between Years 7 and 10. Puberty was covered mostly in Years 7–8, STIs in Years 9–10, and reproduction split almost evenly between Years 7–8 and 9–10. Most topics within Contraception/Birth Control were covered in Years 9–10, but nearly

half of teachers in this sample did not cover abortion in any Year level. Decision-making/Information Sources topics were covered between Years 7 and 10 with most topics being taught later more so than earlier. One exception is “peer pressure” which decreased in coverage from Years 7–8 to Years 9–10.

LGBTIQ Topics were mostly taught in Years 9–10 with less of a focus on intersex persons and transphobia. In fact, half of teachers in this survey did not cover either of these topics in any year level. Most of the Relationship/Sexual Partners topics were taught relatively equally between Years 7 and 10 with the exception of “communication and negotiation skills with a sexual partner,” which was taught more in Years 9–10. Topics within the Sexual Activity category were mostly taught in Years 9–10 with “teen parenthood” and “pleasures of sexual behaviour or activity” being the least covered topics in this year range and “safe sex” and “avoiding unwanted or unplanned sex” being the most covered topics. Half of teachers in this sample did not cover “teen parenthood” in any year level.

Topics Not Taught

Respondents were given the option to select “none” if they did not teach a topic to their students at all. Topics with the highest percentages of “none” selections were transphobia (50%), teen parenthood (46%), intersex persons (43%), abortion (40%), sex acts other than intercourse (39%), and pleasures of sexual behaviour or activity (38%). The general topic areas of “LGBTIQ Topics” and “Sexual Activity” had the highest numbers of topics avoided. Conversely, topics with the lowest percentages of “none” selections were relationships and feelings (7%), puberty (9%), how and where to find trustworthy information on sexuality issues (10%), peer pressure (10%), body image (10%), reproduction (13%), and the impact of communication technology on sexuality and relationships (14%).

Table 5.20. Biology Topics Taught by Year

Topics for Biology	F– Year 4	Years 5–6	Years 7–8	Years 9–10	Years 11–12	None
	<i>n</i> (%)	<i>n</i> (%)	<i>n</i> (%)	<i>n</i> (%)	<i>n</i> (%)	<i>n</i> (%)
Puberty (<i>n</i> = 144)	12 (8.4)	45 (31.3)	92 (63.9)	38 (26.4)	16 (11.1)	14 (9.0)
Reproduction (<i>n</i> = 142)	11 (7.7)	77 (33.0)	77 (54.2)	68 (47.9)	31 (21.8)	18 (12.7)
STIs (<i>n</i> = 142)	–	8 (5.6)	56 (39.4)	85 (59.9)	45 (31.7)	33 (23.2)

Table 5.21. Contraception/Birth Control Topics Taught by Year

Topics for Contraception/ Birth Control	F– Year 4	Years 5–6	Years 7–8	Years 9–10	Years 11–12	None
	<i>n</i> (%)	<i>n</i> (%)	<i>n</i> (%)	<i>n</i> (%)	<i>n</i> (%)	<i>n</i> (%)
Abortion (<i>n</i> = 139)	–	5 (3.6)	27 (19.4)	63 (45.3)	46 (33.9)	56 (40.3)
Abstinence (<i>n</i> = 144)	–	13 (9.0)	57 (39.6)	79 (54.9)	42 (29.2)	47 (32.6)
Birth control (<i>n</i> = 144)	–	10 (6.9)	58 (40.3)	86 (59.7)	45 (31.3)	35 (24.3)
Emergency contraception (<i>n</i> = 141)	–	5 (3.5)	44 (31.2)	77 (54.6)	39 (27.6)	47 (33.3)

Table 5.22. Decision-making/Information Sources Topics Taught by Year

Topics for Decision- making/Information Sources	F–	Years	Years	Years	Years	None
	Year 4	5–6	7–8	9–10	11–12	
	<i>n</i> (%)	<i>n</i> (%)	<i>n</i> (%)	<i>n</i> (%)	<i>n</i> (%)	<i>n</i> (%)
Communication with parents about sexuality decisions/issues (<i>n</i> = 144)	11 (7.7)	30 (20.8)	64 (44.4)	70 (48.6)	39 (27.1)	34 (23.6)
Effects of alcohol or drug use on sexual decision-making (<i>n</i> = 144)	1 (0.7)	14 (9.7)	59 (41.0)	89 (61.8)	60 (41.7)	30 (20.8)
How and where to find trustworthy information on sexuality issues (<i>n</i> = 145)	9 (6.2)	32 (22.1)	74 (51.0)	92 (63.4)	52 (35.9)	14 (9.7)
Impact of communication technology on sexuality and relationships (<i>n</i> = 145)	6 (4.2)	27 (18.6)	81 (55.9)	89 (61.4)	54 (37.3)	20 (13.8)
Impact of media on sexuality and identity (<i>n</i> = 145)	6 (4.1)	26 (17.9)	75 (51.7)	87 (60.0)	50 (34.5)	24 (16.6)
Peer pressure (<i>n</i> = 145)	22 (15.2)	37 (25.5)	94 (64.8)	82 (56.6)	48 (33.1)	14 (9.7)
Sexual decision-making (<i>n</i> = 144)	4 (2.8)	19 (13.2)	64 (44.4)	88 (61.1)	54 (37.5)	30 (20.8)

Table 5.23. LGBTIQ Topics Taught by Year

Topics for LGBTIQ Topics	F– Year 4	Years 5–6	Years 7–8	Years 9–10	Years 11–12	None
	<i>n</i> (%)	<i>n</i> (%)	<i>n</i> (%)	<i>n</i> (%)	<i>n</i> (%)	<i>n</i> (%)
Gender diversity (<i>n</i> = 134)	4 (2.9)	19 (14.2)	49 (36.6)	67 (50.0)	40 (29.8)	32 (23.9)
Homophobia (<i>n</i> = 124)	1 (0.8)	13 (10.5)	53 (42.7)	63 (50.8)	33 (26.6)	41 (33.1)
Intersex persons (<i>n</i> = 120)	3 (2.4)	11 (9.2)	37 (30.8)	51 (42.5)	33 (27.5)	51 (42.5)
Same-sex attraction (<i>n</i> = 126)	4 (3.2)	16 (12.7)	54 (42.9)	67 (53.2)	40 (31.8)	36 (28.6)
Sexual orientation (<i>n</i> = 124)	–	11 (8.9)	53 (42.7)	66 (53.2)	37 (29.8)	39 (31.5)
Transphobia (<i>n</i> = 117)	1 (0.9)	6 (5.1)	38 (32.5)	45 (38.5)	24 (20.5)	59 (50.4)

Table 5.24. Relationships/Sexual Partners Topics Taught by Year

Topics for Relationships/Sexual Partners	F–	Years	Years	Years	Years	
	Year 4	5–6	7–8	9–10	11–12	None
	<i>n</i> (%)	<i>n</i> (%)	<i>n</i> (%)	<i>n</i> (%)	<i>n</i> (%)	<i>n</i> (%)
Body image (<i>n</i> = 136)	15 (11.1)	39 (28.7)	81 (59.6)	71 (52.2)	43 (31.6)	13 (9.6)
Communication and negotiation skills with a sexual partner (<i>n</i> = 134)	–	15 (11.2)	47 (35.1)	81 (60.4)	44 (32.8)	34 (25.4)
Gender roles (<i>n</i> = 132)	19 (14.3)	23 (17.4)	64 (48.5)	66 (50.0)	35 (26.5)	30 (22.7)
Relationships and feelings (<i>n</i> = 135)	34 (25.2)	36 (26.7)	82 (60.7)	75 (55.6)	44 (32.6)	9 (6.7)
Sexism (<i>n</i> = 128)	13 (10.1)	22 (17.2)	65 (50.8)	66 (51.6)	39 (30.5)	28 (21.9)
Sexting (<i>n</i> = 135)	2 (1.4)	13 (9.6)	70 (51.9)	76 (56.3)	47 (34.8)	31 (23.0)
Sexual abuse (<i>n</i> = 132)	27 (20.4)	24 (18.2)	56 (42.4)	75 (56.8)	47 (35.6)	24 (18.2)

Table 5.25. Sexual Activity Topics Taught by Year

Topics for Sexual Activity	F–	Years	Years	Years	Years	None
	Year 4	5–6	7–8	9–10	11–12	
	<i>n</i> (%)	<i>n</i> (%)	<i>n</i> (%)	<i>n</i> (%)	<i>n</i> (%)	<i>n</i> (%)
Avoiding unwanted or unplanned sex (<i>n</i> = 137)	3 (2.1)	11 (8.0)	51 (37.2)	83 (60.6)	45 (32.8)	37 (27.0)
Emotional issues or consequences of being sexually active (<i>n</i> = 138)	1 (0.7)	12 (8.7)	54 (39.1)	81 (58.7)	43 (31.1)	39 (28.3)
Pleasures of sexual behaviour or activity (<i>n</i> = 133)	1 (0.8)	9 (6.8)	34 (25.6)	65 (48.9)	37 (27.8)	51 (38.3)
Safe sex (<i>n</i> = 137)	–	11 (8.0)	61 (44.5)	85 (62.0)	46 (33.5)	33 (24.1)
Sex acts other than intercourse (<i>n</i> = 132)	3 (2.4)	9 (6.8)	37 (28.0)	66 (50.0)	35 (26.5)	52 (39.4)
Sex and ethics (<i>n</i> = 137)	7 (5.2)	8 (5.8)	40 (29.2)	73 (53.3)	42 (30.6)	49 (35.8)
Teen parenthood (<i>n</i> = 130)	–	5 (3.8)	31 (23.8)	59 (45.4)	35 (27.0)	60 (46.2)

Note. The figures present the percentage of teachers that chose a response option. Due to multiple response options, percentages do not add up to 100%.

Teachers were also asked if they or their school had added or removed any sexuality education topics since the release of the AC:HPE. Very few respondents indicated that they or their school had done so. Only 16 (12%) of teachers said that they had personally added topics, such as sexting, pornography, consent, gender and sexual diversity, and healthy or respectful relationships, and 13 (10%) said that they had personally removed topics, such as topics that conflicted with the religious teachings of the school, puberty, STIs, sexual pleasure, and sexual acts other than intercourse. Again, very few respondents

(8, 10%) indicated that their school had added topics, such as sexting, pornography, gender and sexual diversity, and healthy and respectful relationships, and only 7 (9%) indicated that their school had removed topics, such as gender and sexual diversity and any other material that conflicts with religious teachings. When asked if there was any information that is not included in their sexuality education curriculum that they feel students should know, a third said yes (41, 30%). Topics they thought should be included were gender and sexual diversity, digital or cyber safety, naming body parts, puberty, contraception, safe sex, sexual health services, pleasure and masturbation, media, healthy and respectful relationships, pornography, and body image.

5.5.4 Methods and Resources Applied in Teaching

Most respondents had taught sexuality education in a classroom-based format (89%) and in an interactive manner (66%) that encouraged questions and discussion (see Table 5.26 below). The least common formats were church-based, in a hall, or after hours.

Furthermore, sexuality education lessons were seldom attended by parents, video-based, or a one-off special session. The resources most used were their state’s curriculum in HPE, the AC:HPE, and their state’s curriculum additional package (see Table 5.27 below).

Table 5.26. Responses to “When You Taught Sexuality Education, Was It ...”

Response	Total	
	%	<i>n</i>
Classroom-based (<i>n</i> = 166)	88.6	147
Interactive (e.g., people could ask questions or discuss) (<i>n</i> = 166)	65.7	109
A multi-session (<i>n</i> = 166)	48.8	81

Response	Total	
	%	<i>n</i>
Knowledge-based (<i>n</i> = 166)	38.6	64
Part of a whole-school approach (<i>n</i> = 166)	27.1	45
Skills-based (<i>n</i> = 166)	21.7	36
A one-off special session (<i>n</i> = 166)	12.7	21
Video-based (<i>n</i> = 166)	10.8	18
Attended by parents (<i>n</i> = 166)	8.4	14
After hours (<i>n</i> = 166)	5.4	9
Other (<i>n</i> = 166)	4.8	8
In a hall (<i>n</i> = 166)	4.2	7
Church-based (<i>n</i> = 166)	2.4	4

Note. Due to multiple response options, percentages do not add up to 100%.

Table 5.27. Responses to “What Teaching Resources Did/Do You Use for Your Teaching of Sexuality Education?”

Response	Total	
	%	<i>n</i>
State Curriculum: Health and Physical Education (<i>n</i> = 208)	55.3	115
<i>Australian Curriculum: Health and Physical Education</i> (<i>n</i> = 214)	50.0	107
State curriculum additional package (<i>n</i> = 208)	45.2	94
Family Planning materials (<i>n</i> = 208)	34.1	71
Websites (<i>n</i> = 208)	29.3	61
Other (<i>n</i> = 208)	26.9	56
DVDs (<i>n</i> = 208)	16.8	35

Response	Total	
	%	<i>n</i>
Talking Sexual Health (<i>n</i> = 208)	16.3	34
Interactive whiteboard resources (<i>n</i> = 208)	6.7	14
CD-ROMs (<i>n</i> = 208)	2.9	6

Note. Due to multiple response options, percentages do not add up to 100%.

5.6 Teacher’s Views and Opinions on Sexuality Education

5.6.1 Key Findings

- Teachers strongly agree that all students are entitled to sexuality education (81%) and that teaching about feelings and relationships gives students a good foundation to manage their own sexual health and safety (81%).
- Most teachers strongly agree that information about birth control and safe sex should be given whether young people are sexually active or not (76%).
- 72% of teachers agree with the inclusion of sexuality education in both the national curriculum and more specifically in the national curriculum in HPE.
- About two thirds of teachers indicated that they were extremely comfortable with the sexuality curriculum they teach (60%).
- Teachers were extremely comfortable teaching students about reproduction (74%) followed by sexual health (71%) and relationships (65%). Teachers were least comfortable teaching students about sexuality and gender diversity (46%).

5.6.2 Teachers’ Opinions on Sexuality Education

Teachers were asked to indicate their level of agreement with 12 statements on a five-point rating scale on the following four topics: importance of sexuality education; impact

of sexuality education on student sexuality; responsibility for sexuality education; and general attitudes towards sexuality (see Table 5.28 below). The distribution of responses for most statements were skewed to the extreme points on the scale—“strongly disagree” and “strongly agree.”

Importance of Sexuality Education

Most teachers strongly agree that “all students are entitled to school-based sexuality education” (81%) and that “information about birth control and safe sex should be given whether young people are sexually active or not” (76%). Many strongly disagree that “abstinence should be taught as the only option for preventing pregnancy and sexually transmissible infections” (69%), and nearly two thirds (62%) strongly disagree that “sexual orientation and same-sex issues should *not* be included in sexuality education at school.”

Impact of Sexuality Education on Student Sexuality

The majority of teachers strongly agree that “teaching about feelings and relationships gives students a good foundation to manage their own sexual health and safety” (81%). However, slightly over half of teachers strongly disagree that “providing information about birth control and safe sex encourages young people to have sex” (57%) and that “sexually abstinent students who are taught about contraceptives are more likely to become sexually active” (61%).

Responsibility for Sexuality Education

Most teachers agree that “sexuality education is a shared responsibility of parents and schools” (76%). Similarly, 77% did not agree that “sexuality education was the [sole] responsibility of parents and should not be taught at schools at all.”

General Attitudes Towards Sexuality

Three quarters of participants strongly disagree that “homosexuality is always wrong” (76%) and two thirds of teachers strongly disagree that abortion is always wrong (67%). However, only half of teachers (55%) strongly agree that sex before marriage is always acceptable.

Table 5.28. Teachers’ Personal Opinions

Opinion	Strongly disagree	Somewhat disagree	Neither/ nor	Somewhat agree	Strongly agree
	<i>n</i> (%)	<i>n</i> (%)	<i>n</i> (%)	<i>n</i> (%)	<i>n</i> (%)
Importance of sexuality education					
All students are entitled to school-based sexuality education (<i>n</i> = 181)	4 (2.2)	5 (2.8)	5 (2.8)	20 (11.0)	147 (81.2)
Information about birth control and safe sex should be given whether young people are sexually active or not (<i>n</i> = 181)	6 (3.3)	5 (2.8)	5 (2.8)	27 (14.9)	138 (76.2)
Abstinence should be taught as the only option for preventing pregnancy and sexually transmissible infections (<i>n</i> = 180)	124 (68.9)	19 (10.6)	14 (7.8)	12 (6.7)	11 (6.1)
Sexual orientation and same-sex issues should not be included in sexuality education at school (<i>n</i> = 181)	112 (61.9)	25 (13.8)	17 (9.4)	12 (6.6)	15 (8.3)

Opinion	Strongly disagree	Somewhat disagree	Neither/nor	Somewhat agree	Strongly agree
	<i>n</i> (%)	<i>n</i> (%)	<i>n</i> (%)	<i>n</i> (%)	<i>n</i> (%)
Impact of sexuality education on student sexuality					
Providing information about birth control and safe sex encourages young people to have sex (<i>n</i> = 181)	103 (56.9)	31 (17.1)	23 (12.7)	8 (4.4)	16 (8.8)
Sexually abstinent students who are taught about contraceptives are more likely to become sexually active (<i>n</i> = 181)	111 (61.3)	42 (23.2)	17 (9.4)	7 (3.9)	4 (2.2)
Teaching about feelings and relationships gives students a good foundation to manage their own sexual health and safety (<i>n</i> = 181)	3 (1.7)	4 (2.2)	4 (2.2)	24 (13.3)	146 (80.7)
Responsibility for sexuality education					
Sexuality education is the responsibility of parents and should not be taught at schools at all (<i>n</i> = 181)	101 (55.8)	36 (19.9)	18 (9.9)	17 (9.4)	9 (5.0)
Sexuality education is a shared responsibility of parents and schools (<i>n</i> = 181)	6 (3.3)	6 (3.3)	6 (3.3)	25 (13.8)	138 (76.2)
General attitudes towards sexuality					
Sex before marriage is acceptable (<i>n</i> = 180)	10 (5.6)	5 (2.8)	35 (19.4)	31 (17.2)	99 (55.0)

Opinion	Strongly disagree	Somewhat disagree	Neither/nor	Somewhat agree	Strongly agree
	<i>n</i> (%)	<i>n</i> (%)	<i>n</i> (%)	<i>n</i> (%)	<i>n</i> (%)
Homosexuality is always wrong (<i>n</i> = 181)	137 (75.7)	12 (6.6)	20 (11.0)	3 (2.2)	8 (4.4)
Abortion is always wrong (<i>n</i> = 181)	121 (66.9)	23 (12.7)	20 (11.0)	8 (4.4)	9 (5.0)

5.6.3 Teachers' Opinions on the Format of Sexuality Education

The survey asked teachers for their opinion on how they think sexuality education should be integrated in the school curriculum (see Table 5.29 below). Respondents could choose multiple response options if applicable. Most (72%) agreed with the inclusion of sexuality education in both the national curriculum and more specifically in the national curriculum in HPE. The idea of teaching sexuality education in some other subjects was less favoured, with only 20% of all teachers choosing this option. However, about half of all teachers in the survey supported cross-curricular activities (56%). Only 12% of teachers believed sexuality education should be voluntary and only 2% thought it should not be taught in school at all.

Table 5.29. Responses to “Do You Think Sexuality Education Should ...?”

Response	Yes (%)	Yes (<i>n</i>)
Be part of the national curriculum (<i>n</i> = 174)	72.4	126
Be mandated in the health and physical education curriculum (<i>n</i> = 174)	72.4	126
Be taught in a cross-curricular manner where possible (<i>n</i> = 174)	55.7	97
Be taught in some other subjects (<i>n</i> = 174)	19.5	34

Response	Yes (%)	Yes (<i>n</i>)
Be voluntary for students (<i>n</i> = 174)	11.5	20
Not be taught in school (<i>n</i> = 174)	2.3	4

Note. Due to multiple response options, percentages do not add up to 100%.

5.6.4 Comfort Teaching Sexuality Education

One question in the survey was included to help determine teachers' comfort teaching sexuality education topics. Teachers were asked to indicate their level of comfort on a five-point rating scale (see Table 5.30 below). About two thirds of teachers indicated that they were extremely comfortable with the sexuality curriculum they teach (60%). In terms of specific topic areas, most teachers were extremely comfortable teaching students about reproduction (74%) followed by sexual health (71%) and relationships (65%). Teachers were least comfortable teaching students about sexuality and gender diversity (46%).

Table 5.30. Responses to “How Comfortable Are You With ...?”

Response	Extremely uncomfortable	Somewhat uncomfortable	Neither/nor	Somewhat comfortable	Extremely comfortable	Mean Score (1–5)
	<i>n</i> (%)	<i>n</i> (%)	<i>n</i> (%)	<i>n</i> (%)	<i>n</i> (%)	
Teaching students about reproduction (<i>n</i> = 158)	1 (0.6)	5 (3.2)	7 (4.4)	28 (17.7)	117 (74.1)	4.6
Teaching students about sexual health (<i>n</i> = 158)	3 (1.9)	5 (3.2)	9 (5.7)	29 (18.4)	112 (70.9)	4.5
Teaching students relationship education (<i>n</i> = 158)	3 (1.9)	4 (2.5)	8 (5.1)	41 (25.9)	102 (64.6)	4.5
The sexuality education curriculum you teach (<i>n</i> = 159)	5 (3.1)	10 (6.3)	12 (7.5)	37 (23.3)	95 (59.7)	4.3
Teaching students about sexuality and gender diversity (<i>n</i> = 158)	9 (5.7)	14 (8.9)	12 (7.6)	50 (31.6)	73 (46.2)	4.0

5.7 Teacher Supports

5.7.1 Key Findings

- Most teachers feel supported by their school administration (72%) and by parents (67%) in teaching sexuality education that meets student's needs. However, even with this support, many teachers indicated that they were careful about what they taught in sexuality education due to possible adverse community reactions (63%).
- Areas with a lot of influence on sexuality education were the state curriculum, school policy, faculty/curriculum area, students, and teachers' own feelings of confidence and competence.
- Schools require that teachers take different cultural and ethnic background into account (81%) and that sexual diversity is accounted for (80%) when teaching sexuality education.
- Items listed as extremely useful were specific websites, specific resources, and PD training; students were listed as very useful.

5.7.2 Teaching Climate

To investigate teachers' personal situations of teaching sexuality education in schools, survey respondents were given seven statements and asked to indicate their level of agreement with each statement on a five-point rating scale (see Table 5.31 below).

Support

In general, most teachers feel supported by their school administration (72% somewhat or strongly agree) and by parents (67% somewhat or strongly agree) in teaching sexuality education that meets student's needs. However, only half of teachers feel that they had access to the right training to provide sexuality education (57% somewhat or strongly agree).

Cultural Context

Even with support from their school and their students’ parents, many teachers indicate that they were careful about what they taught in sexuality education due to possible adverse community reactions (63% somewhat or strongly agree). However, negative media coverage seems to have somewhat less impact on teachers’ coverage of sexuality education.

Classroom Context

Most teachers (64%) believe that students feel comfortable talking with their teacher about sexuality. Only half of teachers agree that there was sufficient time to teach the amount of sexuality education needed (50% somewhat or strongly agree).

Table 5.31. Responses to “Thinking of the Current School in which You Teach, Please State to Which Degree You Agree or Disagree Regarding Your Personal Situation and Experience”

Response	Strongly disagree	Somewhat disagree	Neither/ nor	Somewhat agree	Strongly agree
	<i>n (%)</i>	<i>n (%)</i>	<i>n (%)</i>	<i>n (%)</i>	<i>n (%)</i>
Support					
I had the full support of my school administration to meet the sexuality education needs of my students (<i>n</i> = 164)	11 (6.7)	15 (9.1)	20 (12.2)	42 (25.6)	76 (46.3)
Parents generally supported my efforts to meet the sexuality education needs of my students (<i>n</i> = 164)	10 (6.1)	5 (3.0)	39 (23.8)	64 (39.0)	46 (28.0)

Response	Strongly disagree	Somewhat disagree	Neither/ nor	Somewhat agree	Strongly agree
	<i>n</i> (%)	<i>n</i> (%)	<i>n</i> (%)	<i>n</i> (%)	<i>n</i> (%)
I had access to the right training to provide the sexuality education needed (<i>n</i> = 165)	21 (12.7)	32 (19.4)	19 (11.5)	42 (25.5)	51 (30.9)
Cultural context					
I was careful what sexuality topics I teach because of possible adverse community reaction (<i>n</i> = 164)	22 (13.4)	22 (13.4)	17 (10.4)	71 (43.3)	32 (19.5)
Negative media coverage of sexuality education has limited what I teach (<i>n</i> = 164)	31 (18.9)	36 (22.0)	37 (22.6)	37 (22.6)	23 (14.0)
Classroom context					
Students didn't feel comfortable talking with their teacher about sexuality (<i>n</i> = 164)	37 (22.6)	67 (40.9)	25 (15.2)	32 (19.5)	3 (1.8)
There was sufficient time for teaching the amount of sexuality education needed (<i>n</i> = 164)	17 (10.4)	36 (22.0)	29 (17.7)	43 (26.2)	39 (23.8)

Another question in the survey was included to help determine teachers' comfort with various supports in teaching sexuality education. Teachers were asked to indicate their level of comfort on a five-point rating scale (see Table 5.32 below). Half or more of all teachers were extremely or somewhat comfortable with the various supports in teaching sexuality education. They were most comfortable with school support and policies related to sexuality education while somewhat less comfortable with parent/community supports and training available.

Table 5.32. Responses to “How Comfortable Are You With ...?”

Response	Extremely uncomfortable	Somewhat uncomfortable	Neither/ nor	Somewhat comfortable	Extremely comfortable	Mean Score (1–5)
	<i>n</i> (%)	<i>n</i> (%)	<i>n</i> (%)	<i>n</i> (%)	<i>n</i> (%)	
The school support for your teaching of sexuality education (<i>n</i> = 158)	4 (2.5)	13 (8.2)	22 (13.9)	43 (27.2)	76 (48.1)	4.1
The school policy on sexuality education (<i>n</i> = 158)	1 (0.6)	13 (8.2)	27 (17.1)	46 (29.1)	71 (44.9)	4.1
The parents/ community support for your teaching of sexuality education (<i>n</i> = 158)	5 (3.2)	11 (7.0)	30 (19.0)	63 (39.9)	49 (31.0)	3.9
The resources available for the teaching of sexuality education (<i>n</i> = 159)	10 (6.3)	16 (10.1)	26 (16.4)	47 (29.6)	60 (37.7)	3.8
The external support network available to you (<i>n</i> = 158)	12 (7.6)	18 (11.4)	32 (20.3)	47 (29.7)	49 (31.0)	3.7
Training available to you for the teaching of sexuality education (<i>n</i> = 159)	13 (8.2)	22 (13.8)	44 (27.7)	33 (20.8)	47 (29.6)	3.5

5.7.3 Influence on Sexuality Education Topics Taught

Teachers were asked what had an influence on determining the sexuality education topics that were taught at their school. Thirteen factors were listed and teachers were asked to rate the degree of influence for each factor (see Table 5.33 below). Areas with a lot of influence on sexuality education were students, faculty/curriculum area, teachers' own feelings of confidence and competence, their school policy, and the state curriculum. Areas with some level of influence on sexuality education were the available curriculum and other resources or teaching material; cultural or religious values of the community; the national curriculum; available training, workshops, or ongoing support; parents; teachers' own feelings of confidence and competence; the media; and teachers' personal values and beliefs. The least influencing factor was higher authorities.

Table 5.33. Responses to “In Your Opinion, How Much Influence Has the Following Had on Determining the Sexuality Education Topics That You Teach?”

Response					Mean score
	No influence at all	A little influence	Some influence	A lot of influence	(1–4)
	<i>n</i> (%)	<i>n</i> (%)	<i>n</i> (%)	<i>n</i> (%)	
Students (<i>n</i> = 155)	7 (4.5)	25 (16.1)	46 (29.7)	77 (49.7)	3.3
Faculty/curriculum area (<i>n</i> = 151)	16 (10.6)	19 (12.6)	43 (28.5)	73 (48.3)	3.2
Available curriculum and other resources/teaching material (<i>n</i> = 153)	5 (3.3)	13 (8.5)	76 (49.7)	59 (38.6)	3.2
School policy (<i>n</i> = 153)	15 (9.8)	24 (15.7)	53 (34.6)	61 (39.9)	3.1
Your own feelings of confidence and competence (<i>n</i> = 152)	14 (9.2)	16 (10.5)	57 (37.5)	65 (42.8)	3.1
State Curriculum (<i>n</i> = 153)	26 (17.0)	18 (11.8)	49 (32.0)	60 (39.2)	2.9
National Curriculum (<i>n</i> = 154)	28 (18.2)	21 (13.6)	61 (39.6)	44 (28.6)	2.8
Available training, workshops, ongoing support (<i>n</i> = 152)	23 (15.1)	30 (19.7)	60 (39.5)	39 (25.7)	2.8

Response					Mean score
	No influence at all	A little influence	Some influence	A lot of influence	(1–4)
	<i>n</i> (%)	<i>n</i> (%)	<i>n</i> (%)	<i>n</i> (%)	
Cultural/religious values of the community (<i>n</i> = 155)	21 (13.5)	45 (29.0)	65 (41.9)	24 (15.5)	2.6
Your personal values and beliefs (<i>n</i> = 155)	30 (19.4)	43 (27.7)	55 (35.5)	27 (17.4)	2.5
Parents (<i>n</i> = 155)	36 (23.2)	48 (31.0)	60 (38.7)	11 (7.1)	2.3
Media (<i>n</i> = 153)	36 (23.5)	45 (29.4)	56 (36.6)	16 (10.5)	2.3
Higher authorities (e.g., Federal Government, State Government, Diocesan Office, regional office, etc.) (<i>n</i> = 149)	54 (36.2)	32 (21.5)	42 (28.2)	21 (14.1)	2.2

5.7.4 School Policies

The AC guidelines are complemented by state and territory guidelines, and these build the foundation for schools to provide effective sexuality education. Even though sexuality education is pervasive in Australia, individual schools are expected to decide on the content and depth of its program delivery. Therefore, a degree of inconsistency in the delivery of sexuality education is expected. In order to better understand the current school requirements for sexuality education in Australia, the survey included some questions about teachers' schools' policies (see Table 5.34 below).

A positive finding is that schools require that teachers take different cultural and ethnic background into account (81%) and that sexual diversity is accounted for (80%) when teaching sexuality education. Parents seemed to have some influence on the teaching of sexuality education with 61% of schools requiring that teachers notify or inform parents about the topics covered or that teachers give parents the opportunity to review sexuality education curriculum content. However, only half of schools required that teachers inform parents that they have the option of removing their child from sexuality education classes. Furthermore, fewer than half of schools required a whole-school approach to sexuality education. However, it is important to note that a "whole-school approach" was not defined in the survey and may have been interpreted in different ways (e.g., its mention in school policy, consultations with other departments, bringing in nurses or counsellors for sexuality education, a sexual health week, or a truly integrated whole-school approach that addresses sexuality education in some form in all or almost all subjects and services).

Table 5.34. Responses to “Does Your School Require that ... ?”

Response	Yes		No	
	%	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>
There is a whole-school approach to sexuality education (<i>n</i> = 149)	44.3	66	55.7	83
You notify/inform parents about the topics that will be covered in sexuality education (<i>n</i> = 162)	61.7	100	38.3	62
You inform parents that they have the option of removing their child from sexuality education classes (<i>n</i> = 152)	48.0	73	52.0	79
You give parents the opportunity to review curriculum content (<i>n</i> = 147)	61.2	90	38.8	57
Different cultural and ethical backgrounds are taken into account (<i>n</i> = 156)	80.8	126	19.2	30
Sexual diversity is accounted for (<i>n</i> = 157)	79.6	125	20.4	32

5.8 Recommendations

Findings from this study help paint a picture of sexuality education in Australia since the release of the AC:HPE. Results indicate that the national curriculum only has a moderate level of influence on teachers’ delivery of sexuality education. Most respondents indicated that they did not receive training on the AC:HPE in particular, and this is evident from the topics they stated covering in classes. The topics most frequently taught are central to sexuality education, but are not the focus of the AC:HPE while topics emphasised in the AC:HPE, such as LGBTIQ Topics or communication skills with a partner (Ezer, Jones, Fisher, & Power, 2019), are those least taught by respondents in this study. Sexuality and gender diversity topics were also the topics that teachers in this study were least comfortable teaching, yet they are consistently requested by secondary students

(Ezer et al., 2020). There is therefore a discrepancy in the content of the AC:HPE/what students want to be taught and the content that is delivered in classrooms.

It is possible of course that, given the lack of sexuality education topics included and emphasised in the AC:HPE (Ezer et al., 2019), teachers are supplementing the national curriculum with other sexuality education topics. The broad nature of the AC:HPE and/or a general lack of awareness of it may have teachers looking to other sexuality education resources. However, the topics that are being supplemented and delivered in classrooms are ones that are considered “safe” (e.g., peer pressure) compared to topics that are considered more controversial and could cause more backlash (e.g., abortion, sex acts other than intercourse or pleasure), which are avoided.

A further differentiation between the AC:HPE and the delivery of sexuality education in classrooms is the indication that a skills-based format of sexuality education is only used by 22% of teachers in this sample, whereas skills-based learning is at the heart of the AC:HPE (Ezer et al., 2019). One of the recommendations in the *1st National Survey of Australian Teachers of Sexuality Education* was the development of national standards in sexuality education (Smith et al., 2011). While it might appear that this recommendation was met with the AC:HPE, the curriculum is more of a guiding document than a true set of standards to which schools and teachers are held accountable. In order to achieve better implementation of the sexuality education within the AC:HPE, teachers need to be trained to deliver this material. **Recommendation 1: Provision of AC:HPE training to ensure its implementation in classrooms.**

Teachers appear to provide the best sexuality education they can, given various external and internal constraints. Respondents in the sample indicated that the biggest influences on their delivery of sexuality education is their curriculum area (i.e., HPE) and their students, followed by their own feelings of confidence and competence (see Table 5.33 above). Most teachers indicated that their schools require that sexual diversity is

accounted for when teaching sexuality education and most teachers agreed that sexual orientation and same-sex issues should be included in sexuality education, yet they were least comfortable teaching students about sexuality and gender diversity. Furthermore, the general topic area of “LGBTIQ Topics” had the highest numbers of topics avoided.

Sexuality education training is most commonly received during pre-service training and is lacking within PD. Given that gender sexual diversity is included in the AC:HPE (Ezer et al., 2019), much more work is needed to train teachers to become more comfortable delivering such material. **Recommendation 2: Provision of more comprehensive PD training that increases teachers’ comfort teaching gender and sexual diversity and topics related to sexual behaviours themselves.**

The most striking and unexpected finding is that teachers from any subject area could be teaching sexuality education. This is a finding that is inconsistent with both previous research, which indicated that the majority of sexuality educators taught HPE (Smith et al., 2011), and with the AC, which only includes material on sexuality education in the HPE curriculum (Ezer et al., 2019). Oddly, HPE teachers in this study received less training than teachers who would not be expected to deliver sexuality education, such as Arts and Technologies teachers, who were much more likely to have received all four training types compared to teachers of other subject areas. This may be an indication of an assumption that HPE teachers know how to deliver sexuality education and that other teachers need additional training. Furthermore, while HPE teachers were less likely to have had training in sexuality education delivery, they were more likely to spend time delivering sexuality education material in class. This may be due to overlaps with other areas of health (i.e., “the effect of alcohol on sexual decision-making” or “the impact of communication technology on sexuality”) that teachers of other subjects may not have as much knowledge of. The move towards non-HPE teachers delivering sexuality education could be an impetus for implementing a whole-school approach to sexuality education

(Ollis, 2014). **Recommendation 3: Given that any subject teacher could be teaching sexuality education, all teachers need to be trained and supported to do so, and there is a need for more explicit training even for those most likely to be teaching it.**

Most Australian sexuality educators are young women, which is consistent with previous findings (Smith et al., 2011). However, the young age of teachers in this sample is not reflective of the average age of Australian teachers, which is 42 years old (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, 2019). In fact, Australia is considered to have “a considerably ageing teaching workforce” (Freeman, O'Malley, & Everleigh, 2014, p. 14). The gender of teachers in this sample is reflective of the predominance of female teachers in Australia (62%) (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, 2019), which has remained relatively constant since 2008 (Freeman et al., 2014). While gender is not associated with an overall willingness to teach sexuality education, it impacts whether and how specific gender-related topics are taught to students (e.g., wet dreams or menstruation) (Cohen, Byers, & Sears, 2012). Furthermore, a lack of male teacher involvement in sexuality education may contribute to a gender imbalanced role modelling for students (Hilton, 2001; McNamara, Geary, & Jourdan, 2011). **Recommendation 4: Increase the number of male teachers in sexuality education.**

5.9 Conclusions

The provision of a national sexuality education curriculum in Australia through the AC:HPE marks a significant shift in Australian education. Where once state curricula and state training policies led the sexuality education field, now the highest curriculum provisions at the national level need to be complimented by appropriate national sexuality education training. Statements clearly endorsing and promoting quality teacher training

provisions and topic coverage requirements would better enable the work of Australian teachers.

Australian teacher education and the government itself need to rethink the preparation of teachers for sexuality education work, acknowledging that any teacher could be required to deliver sexuality education—particularly new teachers—and duly providing appropriate preparation. In this study, teachers mostly took a progressive stance on sex before marriage, homosexuality, and abortion. However, they worried about backlash in teaching on a range of topics, which are newly addressed in the AC:HPE. They also appeared to be insufficiently trained to complete the task with confidence and support.

While the onus has traditionally been on Australian states and territories to provide RSE, attempts at centralised control of education at the federal level through the introduction of the AC:HPE are impacting and changing education at the state and territory level. This confusing set of accountabilities between federal, state, and independent entities makes equitable applications of any interventions complicated and difficult. The Federal Government therefore needs to make a stronger public statement, at the national level, on the required teaching of such topics in line with Australia's curriculum provisions if teachers are to feel safe to address them in schools and if teacher educators and PD are to be appropriate covering them. Such statements could enable the rollout of the recommendations made in this report over time.

5.10 References

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