

Evaluation of the WISER Programme in Schools

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Funder: Sexual Health West

Background

WISER is the West of Ireland Sexuality Education Resource and is one of the services offered by Sexual Health West. The aim is to promote and support positive sexual health awareness and development without prejudice or discrimination.

Aim and Objectives

The aim of the Wiser study is to provide guidance to the WISER team on the current operation of the initiative and to provide guidance on future directions. The objectives are a) to collate and review existing feedback from school students and b) to review the current operation of WISER against existing best practice in sexuality education.

Design/Methods

Data from participating students between 2017 and 2021 were supplied by WISER in a range of formats. These were standardised and transferred into a single dataset, for quantitative analysis. A rapid scoping exercise was undertaken to identify standards and guidelines for sexuality education relevant to schools. Thirty documents were identified, procured and reviewed.

The UNFPA Operational Guidance for Comprehensive Sexuality Education: A focus on Human Rights and Gender (2014) and the Standards for Sexuality Education in Europe (WHO, 2010), were found to be most applicable to the situation in Ireland and the evaluation of the WISER programme. We also reviewed the SPHE/RSE curricula available for Primary schools and for Junior and Senior cycles at post-primary level on the *curriculumonline* portal of the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment. This additional step helped to inform the data collection guides to determine if, and to what extent, the supporting materials and documentation used by WISER were consonant with national and international recommendations.

Findings

The feedback from 2,437 students aged 12-18 years indicated high levels of satisfaction and improved understanding of sexual health following school interventions, which was greater among younger students and girls. Inconsistencies in the feedback requested from students across years prevented indepth analysis.

WISER clearly conforms with many dimensions of international best practice in areas such as team development and management, working with schools, content and delivery of programme, resources and youth engagement. Further attention needs to be paid to future staff training and

succession planning, evaluation approaches and future strategic developments to support teachers and schools to deliver sexuality education.