

**Submission to the Task Force on Review of School Curriculum of the
Education Bureau**

**Key issues and recommendations raised by participants of
the Roundtable on Reforming Sexuality Education in Hong Kong**

**Co-organised by the Equal Opportunities Commission &
Lee Hysan Foundation**

Introduction

Young people have the right to education and well-being. Proper sexuality education at school helps young people to develop positive values, knowledge and skills to make respectful and healthy choices about relationship and sex, which in turn, contributes to what the Equal Opportunities Commission (EOC) has been advocating for—a sexual harassment free, inclusive and gender-equal society.

In Hong Kong, sex education is not an independent subject on its own. The Education Bureau (EDB) adopted an integrated approach to implement sex education since the curriculum reform in 2001 and reinforced in the revised Moral and Civic Education Curriculum Framework which was updated in 2008. The “Guidelines on Sex Education in Schools” published in 1997 is no longer an instructional curriculum document for schools. Such school-oriented sex education is guided by minimal Government’s intervention. In other words, the Government does not know how sex education is implemented in different schools and how effective the job is done.

In the Report of “*Break the Silence: Territory-Wide Study on Sexual Harassment of University Students in Hong Kong*”¹ released in January 2019, the EOC recommended a thorough reform of sex education in Hong Kong. The Study found that nearly one-fourth (23%) of university students were sexually harassed within 12 months before the survey and one of the root causes of sexual harassment is misconceptions about sex and relationship which have taken shape in teenage years.

¹ <http://www.eoc.org.hk/SHUniReport>

In this connection, the EOC co-organised the “Roundtable on Reforming Sexuality Education in Hong Kong” with the Lee Hysan Foundation on 6 May 2019. About 50 stakeholders from Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs), primary and secondary schools and school sponsoring bodies participated in a lively discussion on the current curriculum for sex education and its implementation in schools, with a view to making recommendations to the EDB for reform.

It was agreed that the opinions expressed at the Roundtable would be compiled into a submission to the EDB. The participants of the Roundtable have identified four major challenges encountered in the implementation of sexuality education, namely:

1. Insufficient knowledge of sexuality education and awareness of gender equality among teachers and social workers;
2. Insufficient and scattered teaching materials;
3. A lack of motivation for schools to conduct sexuality education and misunderstanding about sexuality education; and
4. A lack of structured and updated guidelines for implementation of sexuality education.

Responding to the key issues identified, the participants also made recommendations in the following four directions:

- Recommendation 1: Build capacity of teachers, social workers and parents;
- Recommendation 2: Enhance and structuralise teaching materials;
- Recommendation 3: Provide structuralised curriculum, recommended lesson hours and funding for sexuality education coordinator; and
- Recommendation 4: Reactivate and update the 1997 Guidelines on Sex Education in Schools.

Key issues identified and recommendations proposed by Roundtable participants

1. Insufficient knowledge of sexuality education and awareness of gender equality among teachers and social workers

- Participants shared that most social workers and teachers have not received proper training in gender and sexuality education before they work in schools. Most of them studied academic subjects that are not directly related to gender and sexuality education. Therefore, when they are entrusted to teach sex education in schools, they are not equipped with the knowledge and skills required for that purpose.
- Currently, the EDB provides some professional development programmes, including 10-hour programmes or 3-hour workshops/seminars for teachers on promoting sex education or related issues. However, the number of places available are very limited.

Recommendation 1: Build capacity of teachers, social workers and parents

1(A): On the job training should be provided to teachers who are assigned to teach sexuality education in schools.

1(B): The EDB should provide funding for hiring replacement teachers, in order to encourage schools to allow more teachers to take up longer hours of training on gender and sexuality.

1(C): Awareness training should be provided to all teaching staff to engage the whole school in sexuality education.

1(D): The curriculum for Bachelor of Education and Bachelor of Social Work should include subjects related to gender or sexuality education in General Education domain, in order to familiarise pre-service teachers and pre-service social workers with issues related to gender, sexual harassment and sexuality education for their future teaching or counselling profession.

1(E): Learning programmes and resources should be made available to parents for them to learn about the subject themselves and to teach their children on gender, sexuality and sexual harassment.

- Participants revealed that some teachers are not willing to teach sex education for fear of being challenged by teenager students and parents as they have not been properly trained to do so.
- Participants agreed that on top of teachers who are responsible for teaching sex education, other teachers' awareness on the subject has to be enhanced too, the reason being that the interaction between teachers and students may reveal the former's attitude and values on sexuality and gender issues. A participant gave the example that some male teachers held myths about male authority, which might enforce gender stereotypes for their students. Therefore, the whole school has to be engaged for sexuality education to be successfully implemented.
- Parents' support is crucial to successful implementation of sex education. Some participants opined that there should be programmes and resources for parents to learn about the subject and to teach their children on gender and sexuality, and online programmes will better cater for the needs of working parents.

2. Insufficient and scattered teaching materials

- Participants shared the view that the lack of teaching materials for sex education posed difficulties for teaching. Although the EDB has commissioned NGOs to produce some teaching materials and other NGOs have made similar materials, there is neither central co-ordination of these materials nor guidance as to the age groups to which those materials apply.

Recommendation 2: Enhance and structuralise teaching materials

2(A): More teaching materials should be provided to facilitate teaching.

2(B): A centralized webpage should be created which collects teaching materials and resources for sexuality education made available by the Government and NGOs. The materials should be categorized into different topics and the age groups to which the materials are targeted to facilitate structured learning.

3. A lack of motivation for schools to conduct sexuality education and misunderstanding about sexuality education

- Some participants pointed out that many schools conduct sex education, but both the scope and the depth of the subjects covered by schools diversified.
- Most participants from the education sector believe that so far as sex education is not a compulsory subject that will be examined in public examination, schools will not spend much time and effort in conducting sexuality education.
- Some participants pointed out that school principals may pay more attention to sexuality education if some of its elements are examined under the subject of liberal studies.
- Participants shared that some schools may ask social workers or NGOs to conduct sex education for students when things have gone wrong at school, such as, a sexual harassment incident occurred. Even then, only certain forms or classes of students rather than the whole school will be taught.
- Some schools and parents worried that sex education will lead to more premarital sex

Recommendation 3: Provide structuralised curriculum, recommended lesson hours and funding for sexuality education coordinator

3(A): Some participants believe a structuralised sexuality education curriculum is required so that each school covers more or less the same elements under sexuality education.

3(B): Some participants suggest setting recommended lesson hours for sexuality education.

3(C): Participants suggest the EDB to fund a post of coordinator for sexuality education in schools, similar to Special Educational Needs Coordinator (SENCO), to assist the school principals or vice-principals in planning and, coordinating and implementing sexuality education. They believe the establishment of such a post will create space for teaching sexuality education, encourage teachers to receive more training on sex education and build up a critical mass of teachers to work for the common purpose.

3(D): Participants believe that the EDB should provide more funding to schools to encourage them to allow more teachers to join training about sex education.

among students, even though empirical studies found the contrary. Scholarly research has also shown that sexuality education does not increase rates of sexual activity among teenagers and does increase knowledge about sexual behaviour and its consequences.

- A participant pointed out that the lack of research on implementation of sex education in Hong Kong makes it difficult for teachers to persuade school management to teach sex education.

4. A lack of structured and updated guidelines for implementation of sexuality education

- The 1997 Guidelines on Sex Education in Schools is no longer an instructional curriculum document for schools. It is now regarded as a historical document by the EDB and is no longer available on the EDB website. However, many participants of the Roundtable appreciated the 1997 Guidelines. They shared the view that the Guidelines are visionary and useful for teachers as the Guidelines provided detailed guidance on each key element covered at each stage of sex education.
- Participants suggest that sexuality education should also cater for the needs of students with special educational needs, and ethnic minorities students, and students with different sexual orientations and gender identities.

Recommendation 4: Reactivate and update the 1997 Guidelines on Sex Education in Schools

4(A): Many participants suggest that the 1997 Guidelines on Sex Education in Schools should be reactivated not only as reference, but also be enforced by teachers.

4(B): Participants suggest that the Guidelines on Sex Education in Schools should include elements about sexual minorities, and cater for the needs of students with special educational needs, and ethnic minorities students.

Supporting organisations (in alphabetical order):

- 1. AIDS Concern**
- 2. Association Concerning Sexual Violence Against Women**
- 3. Caritas Youth and Community Service**
- 4. End Child Sexual Abuse Foundation**
- 5. Hong Kong Professional Teachers' Union**
- 6. Lee Hysan Foundation**
- 7. Sticky Rice Love Online Sexual Health Platform**
- 8. The Family Planning Association of Hong Kong**
- 9. The Hong Kong Federation of Youth Groups School Social Work Unit**