

Student Snapshot Report

Student feedback on relationships and sexual health education in 2019

August 2021



Foreword


In South Australian high schools relationships and sexual health education is primarily delivered through the SHINE SA Focus Schools Program which is mapped to the *Australian Curriculum: Health and Physical Education* and the *South Australian Department for Education's Keeping Safe: Child Protection Curriculum*.

The Focus Schools Program is available to all Department for Education schools in South Australia that have a secondary year's component (Years 7 – 10). The South Australian Department for Education states that 'our public education system is changing. Year 7 public school students will be taught in high school from term 1, 2022'. In 2019, some Year 7 public school students moved into a high school setting. Responses from seventy Year 7 students have been included in this report for the first time.

In 2019, there were 130 government schools involved with the program.

SHINE SA and individual school sites sign a formal Focus School Agreement, which commits their students being invited to participate in an annual student feedback survey. The student feedback survey is completed online via Survey Monkey or in hard copy with the data being manually entered into Survey Monkey later. In 2019, 3,430 students from 53 Focus Schools responded.

This 2019 Student Snapshot Report summarises data collected from students from Years 7 to 10 participating in the SHINE SA Focus Schools Program during 2019. It highlights possible opportunities for improved relationships and sexual health education practice. The report provides a snapshot of the questions from the full survey and discusses the main survey findings.



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Key findings

- 3,430 students from 53 Focus Schools submitted a survey.
- The majority of respondents were Year 8 students (2% Year 7; 42% Year 8; 33% Year 9; 23% Year 10).
- 7% of respondents attended 1–5 relationships and sexual health (R&SH) lessons, 17% attended 6–10 lessons, 46% attended 11–15 lessons and 30% attended 16 or more lessons.
- **84% of respondents rated the safety and support of the class environment as Good or Excellent.**
- 81% of respondents rated the course overall as Good or Excellent.
- **93% of respondents believed the course will be useful to them now or in the future.**
- 81% of respondents believed the course was often or always respectful and inclusive of same sex attraction.
- 84% of respondents believed the course was often or always respectful and inclusive of different values and beliefs.
- 30% of respondents had spoken with their family about a R&SH lesson or topic since starting the program.
- Parent/carer rated highest (63%) with regard to where young people would go for further information, followed by Friend (46%), Internet (38%), Health service (37%), Teacher (33%) and School counsellor (19%).
- **The five most useful topics indicated, in descending order, were:**
 - **Relationships (45%)**
 - **Safer Sex (41%)**
 - **STIs (38%)**
 - **All of it (36%)**
 - **Condom Use (34%)**
- 31% indicated that no change was needed to improve the course, 15% wanted more in-depth information, 14% better class behaviour and 12% more lessons.

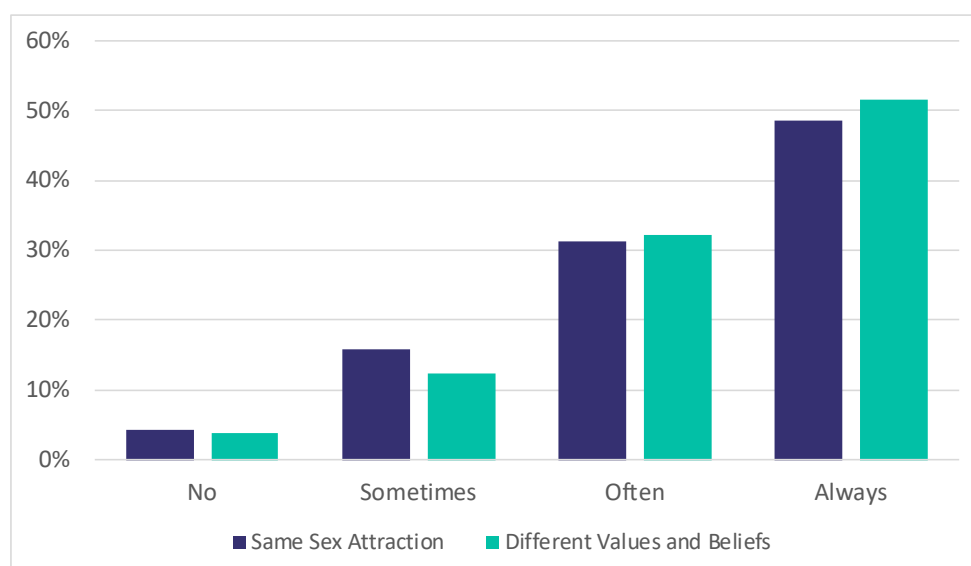
Students' rating of the course

Figure 1: Students rating of the course and the class environment (2019)



Was the course respectful and inclusive of same sex attraction and different values and beliefs?

Figure 2: Student views on whether the course was respectful and inclusive (2019)



Student responses to 'Was the course respectful and inclusive of same sex attraction and different values and beliefs?':

'It talked about how it's OK to be yourself and be you/do you.'

'We had group norms to follow and shouldn't be judging anyway.'

'We can always share our opinions in this safe environment.'

'It was clear an effort was made by the teacher to keep discussions open while also being kind to others.'

'The teacher would always give information about how other people may feel about a certain topic, which was neat.'

'The course has never shamed same-sex attraction or the LGBTQIA+ community but I feel as if the course should talk more thoroughly about that because even if I understand that this is a normal thing, I do not think other people did and still holds at least some prejudice, even if it's not visible.'

'At the beginning of the course when the topic of Relationships was being introduced, different kinds of couples including same-sex couples were included. In the middle of the SHINE course when it came to the topic of accepting differences and gender diversity, we uncovered as a class the problems that same-sex attracted peoples face and how we can become more accommodative to them.'

'The lessons were respectful and inclusive of same-sex attraction. It was included as a normal sexuality.'

'My teacher wasn't purposely excluding anyone, yet it was extremely heteronormative at several points.'

'The teacher was reasonably respectful about same-sex attraction however, there was only one lesson spent on it and that was just saying it was okay to be a LGBTQ+ person. It didn't go into any other topics that would have been necessary for a person like that to know. However, the teacher didn't show any prejudice against the topic.'

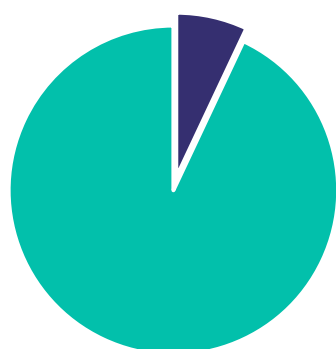
'The course was inclusive and respectful of same-sex attraction most of the time and we learnt to be more respectful and see other people's point of view.'

'Between no and sometimes, it was mentioned and heterosexual relationships were never explicit when learning the content. It was certainly respectful and inclusive, I feel more information on same-sex attraction was needed. Probably in regards to safe sex when a condom can't be used (woman-woman relationship?) and stuff like that.'

'The teacher seemed a little uncomfortable talking about it. Sometimes they forgot to include same-sex attraction when talking about relationships and consent.'

'It was talked about but often the examples were M/F (& discussion).'

Will the course be useful to you now or in the future in terms of your relationships and sexual health?



■ No ■ Yes

No – 7%

“Because my parents already educated me before but it was still good to recap.”

“I don’t ever plan on having sexual relationships.”

“I already knew most of this information previously, and found we didn’t go particularly in depth into some topics – skimming the surface.”

“Because my family already has morals and has taught me from a young age not to do a lot of that stuff and I respect that, although not everyone gets taught this so it is definitely helpful for a lot of other people!”

Yes – 93%

“Because everyone will be in a relationship at some point in their lives and it is important to know what to do in a relationship. Everyone needs to know about sexual health and how to be safe.”

“It gave us the information needed to grow up safe and happy in future relation-ships, sexual or not.”

“It may help know in my future relationships to know what a girl is going through and be understanding and help them go through the process.”

“So I can teach this to my kids when I am older and so I know what to do in case something happens.”

“It would be useful because I am gaining knowledge as a young woman about having power in a relationship, positive and negative relationships between lovers and all kinds of social groups, the knowledge about different methods of contraception and birth control, gender stereotypes about how both men and women are portrayed in society and how it affects both of them and most importantly the people who you trust and where to go for help.”

“I now know who to ask and how to get help, and if there’s something wrong in a relationship.”

“I believe knowing about contraception and safer sex is helpful. Also communication skills and how to be assertive rather than passive or aggressive was good advice.”

“Because in the future the changes will happen to me and if I didn’t know what was happening I would be confused and worried.”

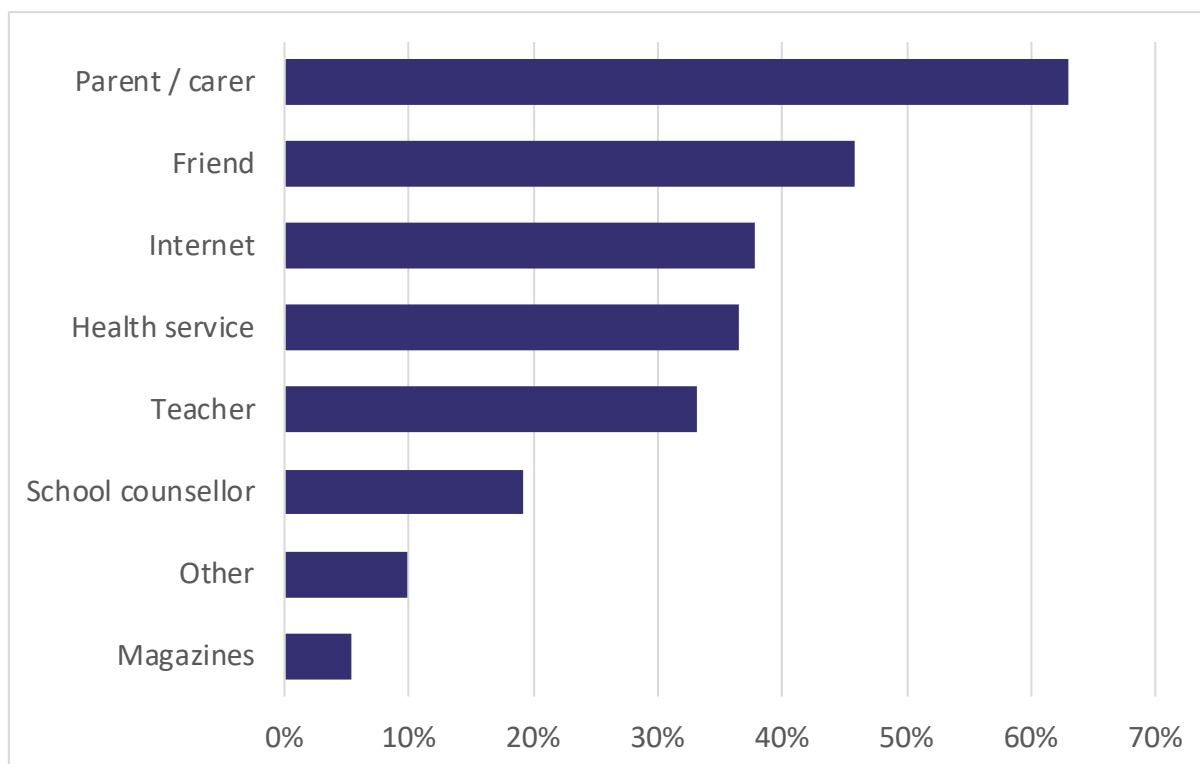
“It’s important to understand what sort of relationship you’re in and if it is safe or not. It is also important to know about your body to keep track of your health and why certain things happen.”

“How to be respectful. How to tell if consent is fully given.”

“It teaches people how to treat someone in a relationship, where to go for help and that you never have to do something that you’re not comfortable doing.”

Who would you speak to/where would you go to find out more about relationships and sexual health?

Figure 3: Student views on where they would go to find out more (2019)



Have you talked about any of the topics with your carers/family?



■ No ■ Yes

No – 70%

"There is no particular reason why I haven't talked about it with my family I just haven't."

"I always forget to talk to my parents plus I think they will find it boring."

"Sex is an awkward thing to talk about with anyone. Although the course encourages you to talk to family members I don't feel comfortable or at that stage to do that yet."

"Haven't had the time."

"I don't have parents."

"There isn't a good reason to. Internet and books behold my answers."

"With my parents, one of them is not interested, the other is quick to make wrong assumptions and will end up giving me a long lecture."

"It's embarrassing."

"My family are quite conservative!"

"I didn't talk to my parents about this because my mum had been overseas and my dad has been busy with work".

"My family doesn't like talking about these kind of things. They aren't very open with this."

"I guess I just feel nervous about it. I only live with my dad and it would be kind of awkward talking to him about it."

"Because I don't know the correct terminology in Vietnamese to explain to them what I have learnt in my lessons (as they have difficulty understanding English well)."

Yes – 30%

"Teacher did not know some things so it was funny and I told my mum."

"I talked about endometriosis and how it may likely happen to someone I know."

"I've talked to my older sister about this stuff so I can get a better understanding of it all."

"I've brought it up as a "how was your day" "aw pretty good", kind of conversation. Just not really in-depth."

"I talk to my mum and friends as they are supportive and it is good to talk with people about this topic."

"I talked to my mother about the sex bananas, I said "will never look at a banana the same way"."

"Told them all the funny parts."

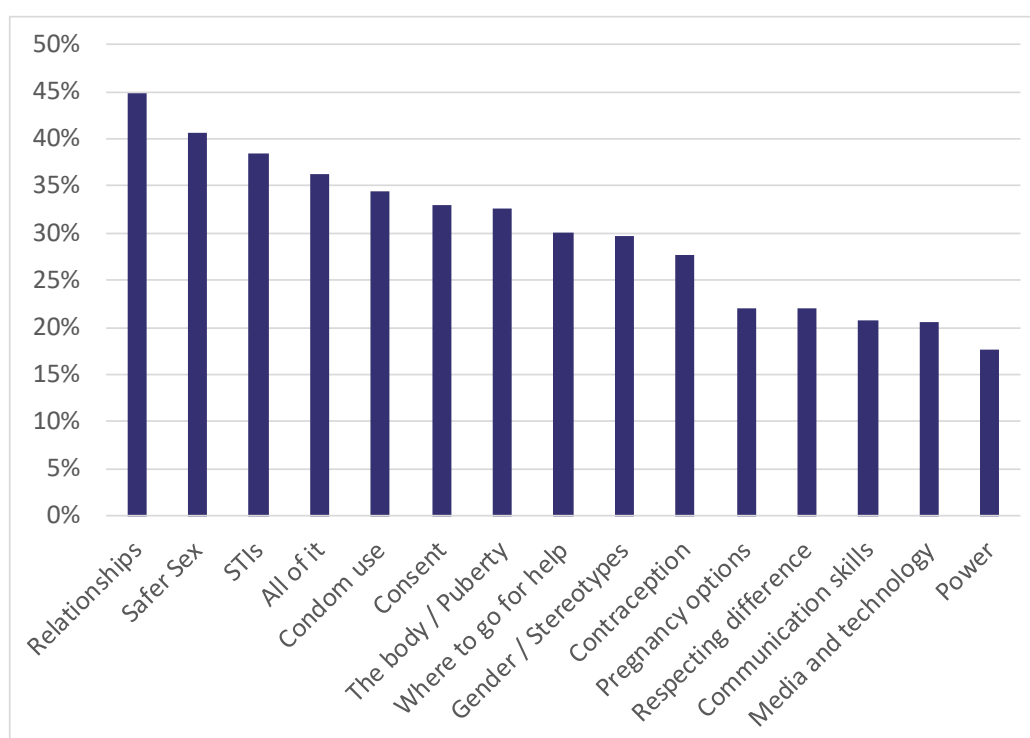
"I have asked mum plenty of questions and she has always helped me and told me things that I might see soon or later."

"I usually talk about these topics to my mother and my mother only, only when direly necessary, for example, maybe when I have my first period. This is because I find these types of topics uncomfortable and unsuitable for any normal conversations."

"We had to ask our parents about what their sexual health lessons in school and their opinion on it. This lead to other conversations about the topic."

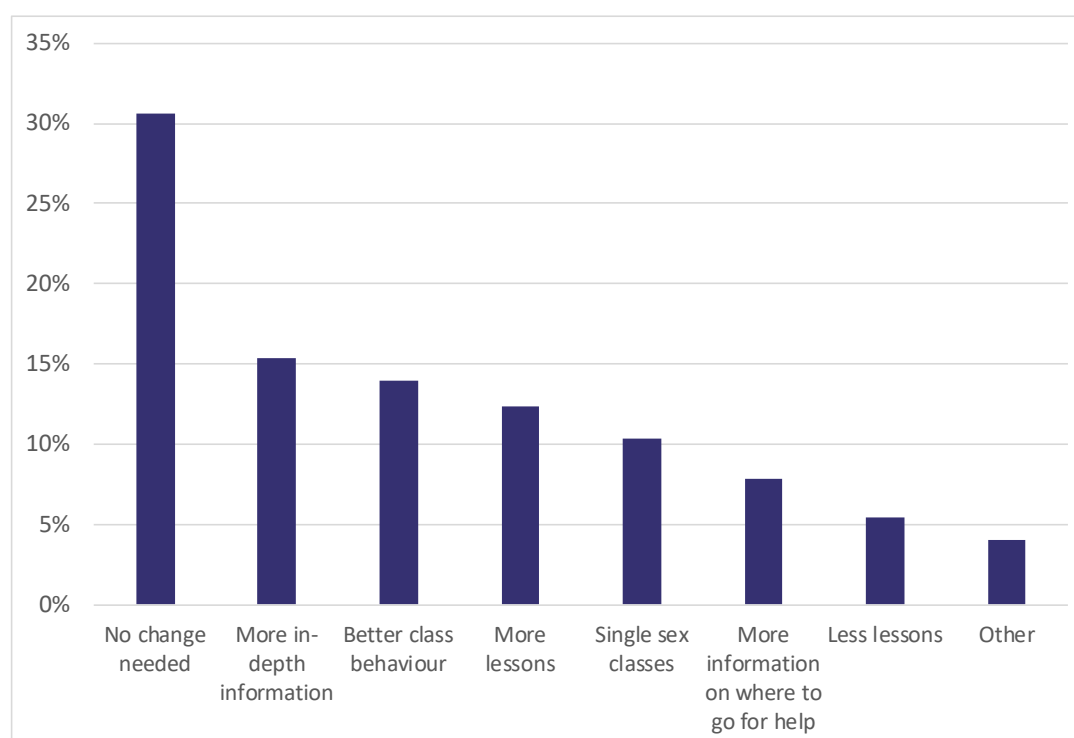
What were the most useful topics in the course?

Figure 4: Student views on what were the most useful topics (2019)



What changes would you make to improve the course?

Figure 5: Student suggestions for improvements (2019)



Student responses to 'What changes would you make to improve the course?':

"More information about abortion and same sex relationships."

"More hands-on stuff."

"How to talk to people/how to build up self-confidence, how to deal with break ups and rejections."

"Nothing was wrong with your curriculum, it's just how my teacher covered it."

"Go more in depth and have more videos."

"I think there need to be more lessons like a double lesson every week."

"Better class behaviour, no calling out."

"For better class behaviour, the students have to be told or reminded to see sex education as a normal subject that is giving life skills or life knowledge for use in the future not something that is a form of torture. If they see sex education from this perspective then they can be more mature and attentive in class."

"The boys in my class were incredibly immature and that made it quite uncomfortable at times."

"More talk about LGBTQIA+."

"There needs to be a more specific focus at least in the safe sex topic on gay and lesbian sex. Also, have less hetero-normative things in the communication topics."

General feedback from students

"It was nice, thank you for helping us learn about this topic and spreading awareness to young teens."

"Overall, since this was my last sex education class, I am grateful to you for teaching me this course and I will still go on your website to learn more and educate myself. One day I will visit one of your centres for a test."

"Thank-you for giving us the opportunity to learn about this topic."

"I really enjoyed this class and I can't wait till I can take it again next year and learn even more."

"The classes were interesting but they were to short only one class a week."

"I thought it would be awkward and strange but the teacher made it fun and made me feel safe in the class room talking about all of it."

"I think the course is perfect, just need a better class environment."

"I really enjoyed going to SHINE SA."

"The respectfulness in the lessons were better than I expected, such as: speaking in third person, people have rights to pass, we respect people's answers/questions/comments."

"I just want to say thanks to who ever made this survey because it has given people a voice and it will hopefully help others with their needs for the things that they would want to learn."

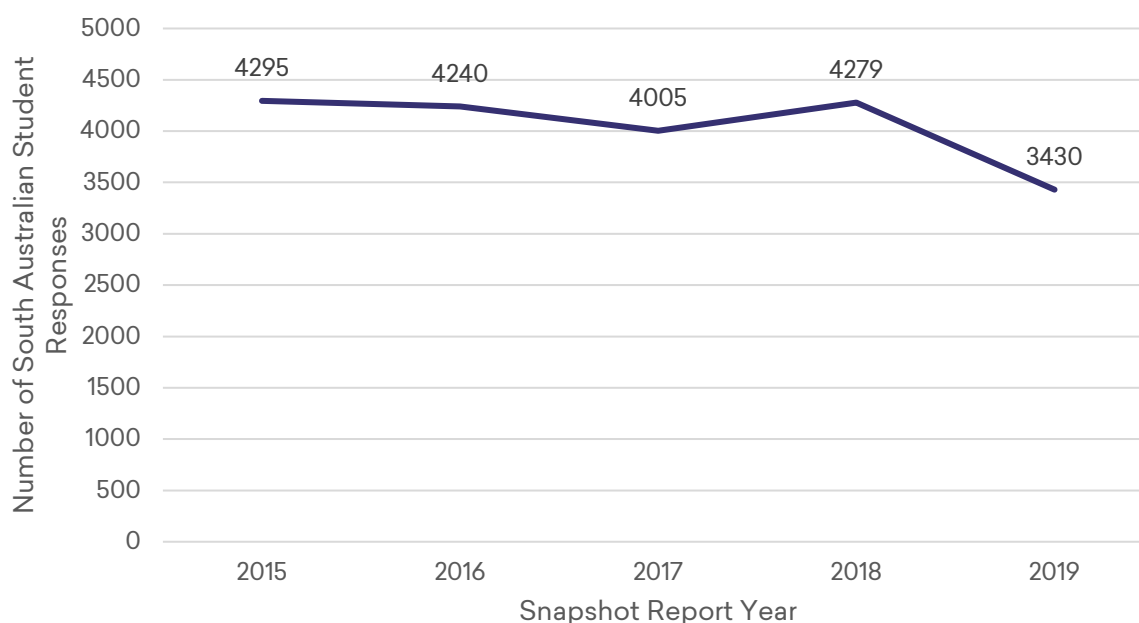
"No but I don't like doing this and I would rather play sport."

"I felt very straight. Same sex attraction was literally never brought up, felt inclusive - Certified Lesbian."

Discussion

In 2019, all Focus Schools were encouraged to participate in the student survey. This amounted to 3,430 South Australian student responses from 53 SHINE SA Focus Schools throughout the year. The number of student survey responses received declined in 2019 (**Figure 6**).

Figure 6: SHINE SA Student Survey Respondents (2019)

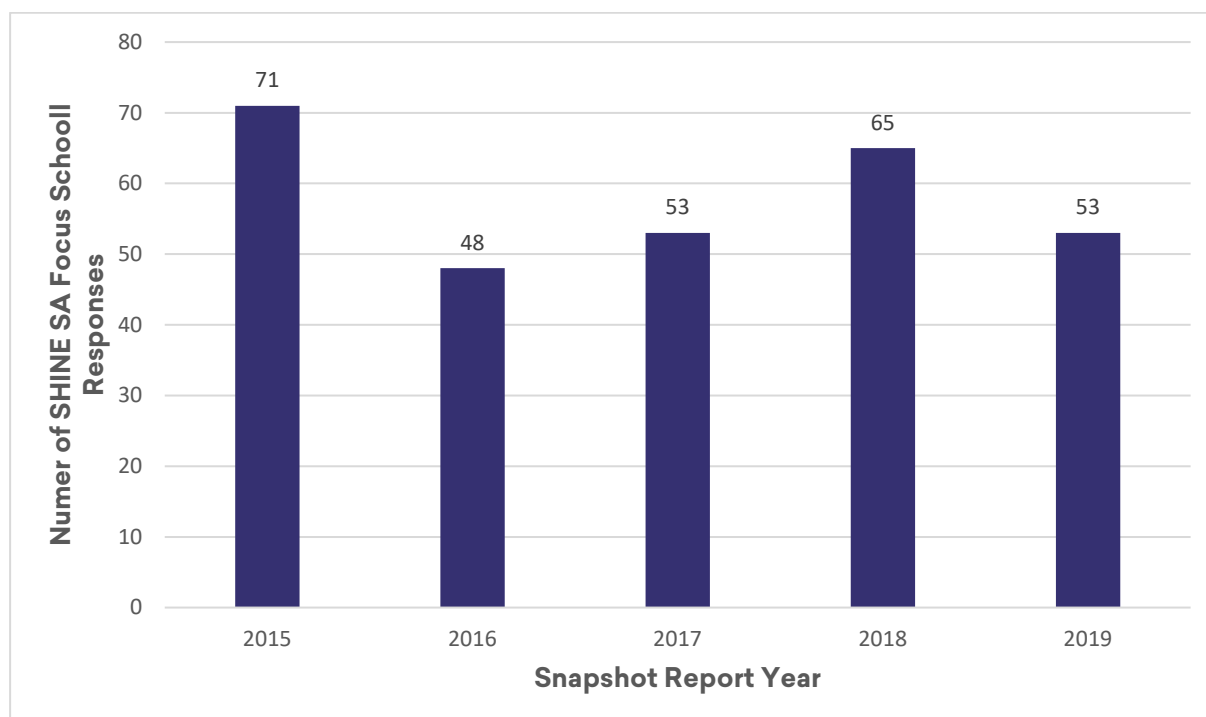


The collection of student survey responses can be challenging and may depend on factors including:

- The SHINE SA Schools Coordinator allocated to a specific site – including the level of ongoing relationship the Schools Coordinator has formed with a specific site/Key Contact.
- School staff – staffing changes (particularly a change to the Key Contact).
- Day to day challenges in a school – e.g. timetabling changes, last minute changes to lessons and the overcrowded curriculum.
- IT challenges – e.g. access to computers/laptops.
- Incomplete surveys – some students received a single page hardcopy survey (instead of it being double sided).
- Untrained staff teaching SHINE SA's R&SH Program – a lack of understanding and importance of the Student Survey.

In line with this result, student responses received were from a reduced number of SHINE SA Focus Schools (**Figure 7**).

Figure 7: SHINE SA Focus Schools - Student Survey Respondents (2019)



All SHINE SA Focus Schools who provided student feedback received a dedicated individual school report reflecting their results. The Schools Coordinator unpacks this report annually in the Annual Curriculum Update session. The report provides greater insight into how the program is being taught at the specific school site and may highlight areas for improvement for school staff.

SHINE SA's Schools Education and Support (SES) Team will continue to work with educators to ensure that a higher number of South Australian students from as many Focus Schools as possible provide feedback about the program. This feedback is critical to the success of the program as it assists the SES Team to adjust the program to ensure that it remains relevant for young South Australians.

The SHINE SA Years 7–10 curriculum comprises of 15, fifty-minute lessons in each year level. Encouragingly, the large majority of students surveyed responded that they had received either 11 – 15 R&SH lessons (46%) or 16 or more R&SH lessons (30%) in their programs. This indicates that the majority of South Australian students are receiving a comprehensive and fully implemented R&SH program suggesting a high quality and that all R&SH topics and learning areas were covered.¹

It is beyond the scope of this survey to determine which lessons/topics were omitted. In this reporting period there were no noticeable differences in the number of student responses by Year Level. Responses from 70 Year 7 students have been included in this report for the first time.

The majority of students indicated that the classroom environment was safe, supportive and inclusive of diversity and rated the course good or excellent. These results reflect well on the skills of the teachers delivering the curriculum and continue to highlight the importance of school-based educators engaging in regular professional development sessions to increase confidence and capacity.²³

Slightly more students indicated that they had spoken with their family about a R&SH topic or school program (3% increase compared to 2018 responses). In line with results from previous years, the majority of students had not discussed R&SH topics at home with many commenting that this was not something they felt comfortable with or there was no necessity as they received all the information they needed from their school lessons. Parents/carers still continue to rate as the highest source of further information for R&SH.

Overwhelmingly 93% of students endorsed the relevance of the curriculum to their lives and one third indicated that they would not make any changes to the course. A number of students, however, indicated that they would like more in-depth information and more lessons. Comments regarding classroom behaviour and the gender make-up of the class provides interesting information for individual schools and teachers to consider.

Student's feedback continues to reinforce international research which highlights the need for teachers to provide a curriculum that is inclusive and respectful of sexual and gender diversity. Teachers need to ensure a safe and supportive environment for students and feel confident to challenge any transphobia and homophobia just as they would racism or sexism.⁴ With an increasing number of South Australian students reporting to be same sex attracted or gender diverse, it is critical that teachers continue to engage in ongoing professional development in R&SH education.⁵ Furthermore, greater uptake and attendance at specialised training and professional development sessions with all educators may also assist with the reduction of homophobic and transphobic bullying. Ongoing individualised support to schools requesting assistance with issues including how to navigate the Department for Education's policy and procedures on gender diversity, providing guidance and assistance to develop support plans for individual transgender students and strategies for supporting LGBTIQ student action groups is also critical.

Overall, the results of the 2019 student survey were positive and indicated that the SHINE SA Years 7–10 curriculum was well delivered by teachers and met the needs of young people in South Australia.

References

- ¹ UNESCO 2018, *International technical guidance on sexuality education: An evidence informed approach*, 2nd revised edition, UNESCO, France, <<https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000260770>>.
- ² Family Planning Alliance Australia 2016, *Relationships and Sexuality Education in Schools Position Statement*, Family Planning Alliance Australia, viewed 10 March 2020, <www.familyplanningallianceaustralia.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2017/04/FPAA-Schools-Education_Position-Statement_001_v2c.pdf>.
- ³ UNESCO 2018, *International technical guidance on sexuality education: An evidence informed approach*, 2nd revised edition, UNESCO, France, <<https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000260770>>.
- ⁴ UNESCO 2018, *International technical guidance on sexuality education: An evidence informed approach*, 2nd revised edition, UNESCO, France, <<https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000260770>>.
- ⁵ Fisher, C, Waling, A, Kerr, L, Bellamy, R, Ezer, P, Mikolajczak, G, Brown, G, Carman, M & Lucke, J 2019, *The 6th National Survey of Secondary Students and Sexual Health 2018*, La Trobe University, viewed 16 February 2020, <<http://teenhealth.org.au/resources/Reports/SSASH%202018%20National%20Report%20-%20V10%20-%20web.pdf>>.

Receiving SHINE SA Relationships & Sexual