

A Manifesto for *Marriage* in Sex Education

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Introduction

The ambition of the overwhelming majority of parents is that their children will grow up, get a good job, and settle down to have a family of their own.

Many parents worry about the sexual pressures on young people today. They are concerned about their children making bad decisions in relationships. What parent of a teenage girl has not worried about their daughter getting pregnant?

Parents feel very strongly about these issues. They want schools to support their family values.

Sex education, if it is done badly, has the potential to provoke a great deal of parental concern. This has been seen recently in the debates over the repeal of Section 28.

Probably even Scottish Ministers accept that many mistakes were made in the way the Executive went about repeal. Now the

Executive is launching a major re-vamp of sex education.

The textbooks that the Executive has chosen to recommend are very disappointing.

Of all the things that could have been chosen, the Executive has selected some of the most controversial English sex education resources currently available. Many parents will be shocked at what teachers are expected to teach under the Executive's scheme.

As the Executive prepares to launch its statutory guidance on sex education in April 2001, we are launching our manifesto for marriage.

We set out five positive principles for sex education which we would like to see adopted by all Scottish schools. We believe the vast majority of Scottish parents would agree with them.



Give parents a real voice

The Executive promised that schools would consult with parents, yet their draft guidance for sex education makes this optional for schools.

Schools must be required to involve parents at every stage. In such a sensitive area as sex education parents surely have a right to this, and in particular to view sex education materials before they are used with their children.

Schools and education authorities should be accountable. Their sex education policies should be made public.

It is insensitive sex education which leads parents to want to withdraw their children. If this happens, then it is the parent's right to withdraw. This right should not be infringed by schools putting pressure on parents to back down.

The overwhelming majority of parents were completely unaware of the Executive's own consultation on sex education in the Autumn of 2000. Keeping parents out of sex education needs to change. It is time to give parents a real voice.



Keep schools & parents in control

Teachers understand their pupils. Sex education in most Scottish schools is not extreme. Let's keep it that way.

The problems often come from outside the school: outside groups which take lessons in schools, over-zealous health board officials or politically correct education authorities.

It is essential that teachers and parents retain control over sex education. There should be clear procedures to ensure this.

Parents are worried that there are many outside groups which use inappropriate materials and are hostile to family values. The Executive's new national programme for sex education called "Healthy Respect" includes organisations which promote very explicit sex education. The Executive should think again. Sex education will not be helped by making it more explicit and imposing political correctness.

Schools and parents should be left in control.



Teach marriage as the surest foundation for raising children

It is time for the Executive to upgrade the importance of marriage in its plans for sex education.

The only word that the Executive don't want to use in sex education is marriage. Their proposed guidance for sex education relegates marriage to an appendix.

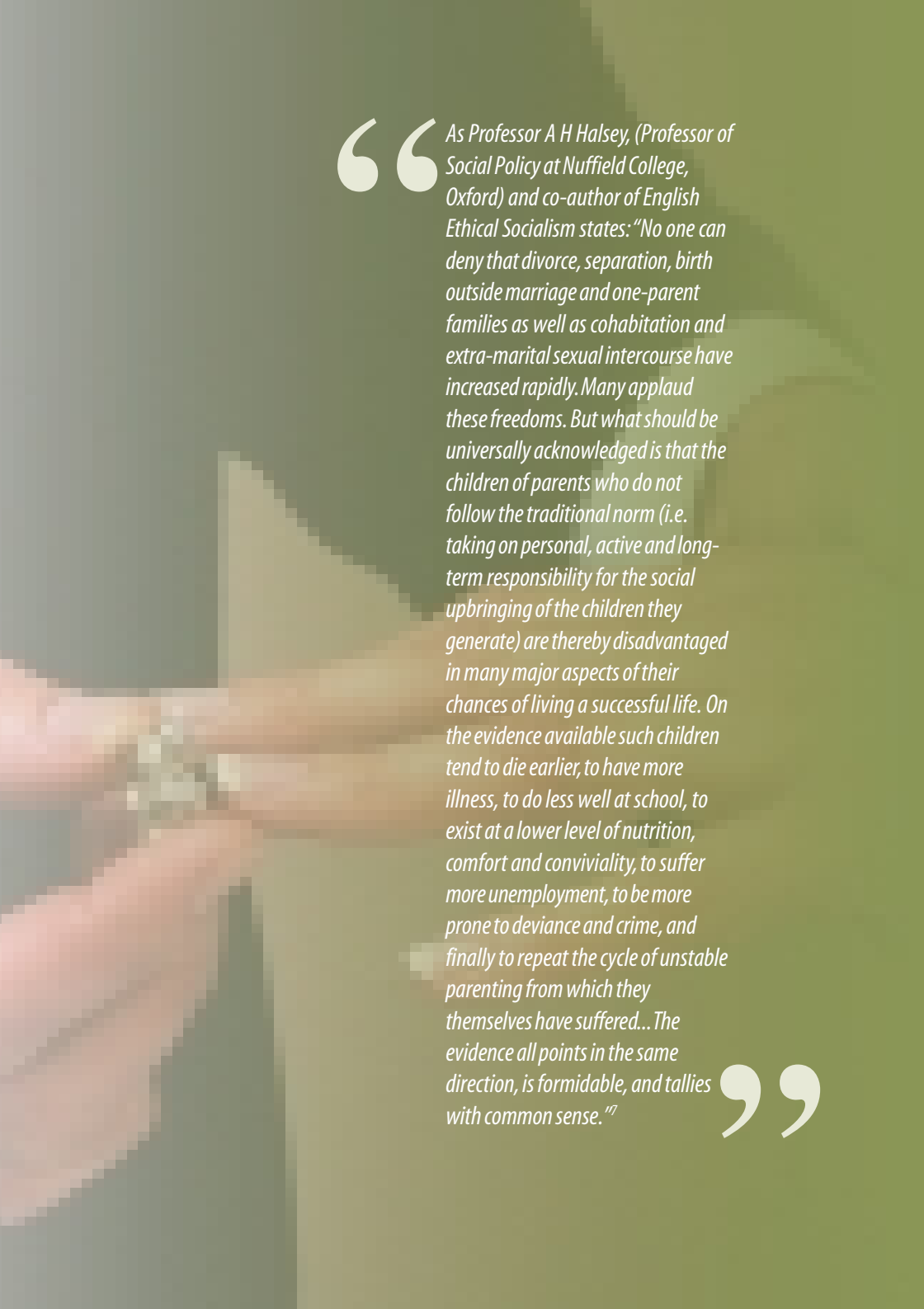
Marriage is the norm in Scotland. Almost 70%¹ of Scottish children live with two married parents. Most marriages still last for life. Most young people want to grow up to get married themselves. It is right to hold out this ideal to children.

The Westminster Government has stated that marriage is "the surest foundation for raising children"². The evidence clearly supports this. Young people should be told the truth about marriage.

Some of those involved with sex education appear to resent this. The Grampian Health Board states that: "Resources which advocate monogamy/marriage as a solution to HIV should be avoided at all cost!"³ Yet monogamy is precisely what the World Health Organisation has said is a sure way to prevent the spread of HIV.⁴ Equally worrying is a leading teachers' guide for sex education from Strathclyde University which suggests that marriage should be introduced at Secondary 3 (13/14 year olds).⁵

Sex education should support family values and not undermine the home.

When it comes to sex, Scots still support family values. According to the largest national study, 85% of Scottish men view adultery as wrong and 70% view homosexual sex as wrong.⁶



“As Professor A H Halsey, (Professor of Social Policy at Nuffield College, Oxford) and co-author of *English Ethical Socialism* states: “No one can deny that divorce, separation, birth outside marriage and one-parent families as well as cohabitation and extra-marital sexual intercourse have increased rapidly. Many applaud these freedoms. But what should be universally acknowledged is that the children of parents who do not follow the traditional norm (i.e. taking on personal, active and long-term responsibility for the social upbringing of the children they generate) are thereby disadvantaged in many major aspects of their chances of living a successful life. On the evidence available such children tend to die earlier, to have more illness, to do less well at school, to exist at a lower level of nutrition, comfort and conviviality, to suffer more unemployment, to be more prone to deviance and crime, and finally to repeat the cycle of unstable parenting from which they themselves have suffered... The evidence all points in the same direction, is formidable, and tallies with common sense.”

”

Teach children that sex is for adults

Most school children who receive sex education are below the legal age of consent. Schools should not encourage children to become sexually active, especially when they would be committing a criminal offence if they did so.

Sex is special. It involves a degree of commitment and intimacy which is entirely wrong for children to engage in. It may also result in damaging sexually transmitted diseases, or in pregnancy. Children cannot cope with these things. They should be taught what the real risks are.

The Executive's approach appears to assume that most pupils are sexually active, when in fact only a minority are. This leads to sex education for the one-night stand. Sex education should not take place in a moral vacuum where children are taught that anything goes. They should be taught how to say 'no' to

sex and taught the benefits of waiting. In the USA, this approach, known as abstinence education, has seen the rates of teenage sexual activity fall dramatically.

Christian teaching is that sex is for marriage. You may or may not agree but you do not have to be a Christian to believe that sex is for adults, not for children.

When it comes to deciding how to teach about sex in schools, we must be prepared to look at what works.

Current rates of teen promiscuity, pregnancy, abortion and STDs are serious matters. All are agreed on that.

The evidence is that the current philosophy of ever more explicit sex education at ever younger ages clearly does not work.

Whenever there are calls for more sex education, the claim is made that it will reduce teenage pregnancy abortion and STDs. The fact is that in the UK, over the last 25 years sex education has increased while levels of teenage pregnancy have been fairly constant. In the fifteen years to 1998, abortions amongst 16 – 19 year old girls in Scotland have actually increased by 58%.⁸ The Executive states that in Scotland in the last 5 years alone diagnoses of one STD, chlamydia, have risen by 75 per cent.⁹

The age of consent is fixed at 16. The law says that sex is for adults, not children. But the Executive has adopted a 'harm reduction' approach which tells under age school children how to have sex more safely.

A thoughtful editorial in The Herald made another suggestion:

'Although sex education guidelines for children and young people place emphasis on the value of stable family life (including the responsibilities of parenthood and marriage) there is perhaps a case for the importance of self-respect, **encouraging youngsters to say no to sex**, being stressed.'¹⁰

Schools should promote sexual abstinence. They should teach young people to say no to sex. The Executive should take a look at abstinence approaches which are working well in the United States (See Appendix).

Protect children's innocence

It's time for modesty in sex education. Parents fear that certain approaches to sex education take away children's innocence. Children do not have to be presented with a smorgasbord of sexual activities in order to be prepared for adulthood. They need to be taught modesty, morality and self-restraint.

The Prime Minister and Wendy Alexander promised there would be no gay sex lessons in Scottish schools. But some of the Executive's key advisers provide websites which show gay erotica or produce materials which would offend many parents. Many people are concerned about why such groups are involved in the Executive's 'Healthy Respect' programme.

Pornography has no place in sex education. Groups which peddle it should be kept out of schools.

Just because some materials are produced by a Health Board is no reason to believe they are suitable for schools. In England and Wales schools have been given new legal powers to ban inappropriate National Health Service materials from their classrooms. The law requires school governors to consider whether NHS materials are appropriate. No such duty is placed on schools in Scotland. Many headteachers are under the mistaken belief that they should use any materials supplied by health boards.



Appendix: The success of abstinence education

The change of approach in the USA began in earnest in the late 1980s with programmes such as *Project Reality* in Chicago which presented to young people positive reasons for abstaining from sex.¹¹

So popular have abstinence programmes become that in 1996 President Clinton signed into law the 1996 Welfare Reform Act which legally defined ‘abstinence education’ as a programme which “has as its exclusive purpose, teaching the social, psychological, and health gains to be realized by abstaining from sexual activity” and “teaches abstinence from sexual activity outside marriage as the expected standard for all school age children”. The Act allocated at least £34 million a year to support abstinence education.¹²

Additional funding from state sources takes the total up to at least £65 million a year. Funding for

safer-sex programmes is now less than a third of this amount.¹³

The US government’s “National Strategy to Prevent Teen Pregnancy” is the responsibility of the Department of Health and Human Services. Under the Clinton administration the official policy was that “Abstinence and personal responsibility must be the primary messages of prevention programs.”¹⁴

The popularity of abstinence programmes has already reached the point where, in sex education, some 23% of secondary school teachers in the USA only teach abstinence education.¹⁵ There are many other teachers who teach “abstinence plus” which promotes sex as being intended for marriage, but also covers contraception.

The US teen pregnancy rate has been falling steadily since 1991. In

August 2000, the US Government announced that birth rates for teenage girls continued to decline, dropping to 49.6 per 1,000 girls aged 15-19 per year. This is the lowest rate since recording began sixty years ago.¹⁶

The 1999-2000 Annual Report of the National Strategy to Prevent Teen Pregnancy, reported: "Trends throughout the 1990s have shown a steady reduction in teen birth rates that is now significant for all 50 states. Rates have declined for all adolescent age groups, for all racial and ethnic groups, and for both first and second births to teens. Clearly we are reaping the benefits of this Administration's strong commitment to our National Strategy and renewed efforts by states, localities, private organizations, parents, and youth."¹⁷

Abstinence-based sex education has not just reduced the teenage illegitimacy rate. Between 1991 and 1999 the prevalence of sexual experience among adolescents decreased by 8%.¹⁸

A 1999 report from the Consortium of State Physicians Resource Councils found:

"The evidence points to sexual abstinence, not increased contraceptive use, as the primary reason for the decline in teen pregnancy and birth rates throughout the 1990s. It appears possible that programs aimed at producing abstinent behaviour have been more successful than programs aimed at increasing safer-sex practices in reducing unintended births to adolescents.

Douglas Kirby, a noted sex education researcher, was prophetic in 1991 when he noted that "it may actually be easier to delay the onset of intercourse than to increase contraceptive practice."¹⁹

Hillary Rodham Clinton, despite her liberal credentials, preaches the abstinence message:

"After many years of working with and listening to American adolescents, I don't believe they are ready for sex or its potential consequences – parenthood,

abortion, sexually transmitted diseases – and I think we need to do everything in our power to discourage sexual activity and encourage abstinence.”²⁰

Here in the UK, researchers have begun to consider the importance of developing school sex education programmes that will lead to a decrease in sexual activity.²¹ Delaying first sexual intercourse and reducing sexual activity is now considered a worthwhile thing to do.

Clearly it is possible for young people to embrace an abstinence message, even if they have been sexually active in the past. The BMJ has recently reprinted one of the major US reference books on contraception that endorses abstinence in the following way:

“Secondary abstinence, or celibacy, is the choice of many sexually experienced adolescents and adults. It is not an extremist position in the age of viral sexually transmitted infections.”²²

Comparing approaches – sex and smoking

The Executive’s approach to sex education is in stark contrast to its approach to smoking. The Executive wants youngsters to stop. The White Paper on Health has targets to reduce smoking by 12-15 year olds from 14% to 11% by 2010.²³

Whilst cigarettes are very unhealthy and prolonged use results in many serious and often fatal illnesses, no one would ever argue that such consequences could follow from a single act of smoking. However, a single act of sexual intercourse can result in a young person contracting a serious, even fatal, disease.

The strong impression is given smokers can be helped to overcome addictions, but that teenagers can not be expected to control their sexual desires.

Figures from The Health Education Board for Scotland²⁴ suggest that

in 1998 one third of 15 year olds will have had sex, up from one quarter in 1990. Between 1990 and 1994 the number of sexually experienced 15 year olds rose from 26% to 37%.²⁵

Scottish Health Ministers want to cut the teenage pregnancy rate. Surely it is time to encourage young people to say no to underage sex, just as we encourage them to say no to smoking?

Case Studies

Tennessee

Of the ten largest counties in Tennessee, research indicates that teenage pregnancies in the three that taught 'abstinence-only' in schools declined between 14 and 38 percent from 1991 to 1996. By comparison, the four counties that taught safer-sex education (or had no county-wide sex education) experienced a maximum decline of only 7 percent.²⁶

Washington D.C.

An abstinence programme called Best Friends was instituted in inner-city Washington D.C. schools in 1987. A doctoral dissertation evaluation of this programme found that by graduation from high school (age 18) only 22% of Best Friends girls reported having sexual intercourse.²⁷ In comparison, 76% of Washington D.C. high school girls were sexually active overall.²⁸

None of the safer-sex education programmes have been able to record an appreciable, consistent drop in teen pregnancy rates, regardless of how intensively they have been implemented and studied in a specific school system.²⁹

- ¹ Table extracted by the Central Research Unit, The Scottish Executive from the *Scottish Household Survey*, 1999
- ² *Supporting Families - A Consultation Document*, Home Office, 1998, page 4, para 8
- ³ *HIV & Sexual Health*, Grampian Health Promotions, Grampian Health Board, undated, Page 55
- ⁴ "You are safest of all if you do not have sexual intercourse. You are also safe if you in a stable relationship where both you and your partner are free of HIV and neither of you has other sexual partners." *How does HIV effect (sic) me?* Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS, www.unaids.org/hivaidinfo/faq/effect.html as at 13 March 2001
- ⁵ *Personal Relationships and Developing Sexuality: Book 3 Curricular Framework*, University of Strathclyde, Faculty of Education 1994, page 44
- ⁶ Johnson A et al *Sexual Attitudes and Lifestyles*, Blackwell Scientific, 1994, pages 471, 475
- ⁷ Halsey A H Quoted in Dennis N & Erdos G *Families without Fatherhood*, IEA, 1993, page xii
- ⁸ *Teenage Pregnancy in Scotland – A Fifteen Year Review 1983-1997*, July 1998, Information and Statistics Division, Common Services Agency, Scottish Health Service, p10; and *Teenage Pregnancy in Scotland 1989-1998*, June 1999, Information and Statistics Division, Common Services Agency, Scottish Health Service, p7.
- ⁹ Press Release: SE2920/2000, *Deacon launches 'Healthy Respect' - £3 million project to work to improve teenage sexual health*, 13 November 2000
- ¹⁰ *The Herald*, 14 November 2000
- ¹¹ Sexual Health Update, Winter 1998, Volume 6, Number 3, Medical Institute for Sexual Health, page 2
- ¹² The 1996 Welfare Reform Act, section 912 which amends Title V of the Social Security Act, Section 510 (b) (2) (A) and (B). This can be viewed at <http://www.projectreality.org/law.html> as at 14 March 2001. See also *A National Strategy to Prevent Teen Pregnancy Annual Report 1999-2000*, Department of Health and Human Services, can be viewed at <http://www.aspe.hhs.gov/hsp/teemp/ann-rpt00/> as at 17 January 2001
- ¹³ *The Daily Telegraph* 29 December 2000
- ¹⁴ *A National Strategy to Prevent Teen Pregnancy Annual Report 1999-2000*, Department of Health and Human Services, can be viewed at <http://www.aspe.hhs.gov/hsp/teemp/ann-rpt00/> as at 12 March 2001
- ¹⁵ *The Daily Telegraph*, 29 December 2000
- ¹⁶ Loc cit and see Press Release *New CDC Birth Report Shows Teen Birth Rates Continue to Drop* 8 August 2000, National Centre for Health Statistics, U.S. Department for Health and Human Services. Available at <http://www.cdc.gov/nchs/releases/00news/newbirth.htm> as at 4 December 2000
- ¹⁷ *A National Strategy to Prevent Teen Pregnancy Annual Report 1999-2000*, Department of Health and Human Services, can be viewed at <http://www.aspe.hhs.gov/hsp/teemp/ann-rpt00/> as at 12 March 2001
- ¹⁸ MacKay AP, et al, *Adolescent Health Chartbook*, Health, United States, 2000. National Center for Health Statistics, 2000, p74
- ¹⁹ Jones, J M et al, *The Declines in Adolescent Pregnancy, Birth and Abortion Rates in the 1990s: What Factors Are Responsible?* A special report commissioned by The Consortium of State Physicians Resource Councils, 7 January 1999, page 8
- ²⁰ Clinton, H R *It Takes a Village*, Simon and Schuster, 1996, page 161
- ²¹ Mellanby A R et al, *School sex education: an experimental programme with educational and medical benefit*, *BMJ* 1995; 311:414-417 (12 August)
- ²² 'Abstinence and the Range of Sexual Expression', Kowal, D in *Contraceptive Technology* Ed. Hatcher R A et al, *BMJ*, Seventeenth Revised Edition, page 297

- ²³ See Scottish Executive Press Release SE 1605/1999 and *Towards a Healthier Scotland - A White Paper on Health*, The Scottish Office, February 1999, Chapter 4
- ²⁴ *Teenage Sexuality in Scotland*, HEBS Research Centre, Health Education Board for Scotland, 2000. Available from <http://www.hebs.scot.nhs.uk> as at 6 December 2000
- ²⁵ See Press Release *Love is all around* 1 December 1997 Health Education Board for Scotland available from www.hebs.scot.nhs.uk/news/loveall.htm as at 6 December 2000
- ²⁶ Aseeltine, G 'Research on Teen Pregnancies,' Behavioural Sciences Research Associates, 1998, quoted in *The Declines in Adolescent Pregnancy, Birth and Abortion Rates in the 1990s: What factors are responsible?* Jones J M et al, The Consortium of State Physicians Resource Councils, January 1999, page 7
- ²⁷ Rowberry, D R (1995) *An Evaluation of the Washington DC, Best Friends Program*, Unpublished doctoral dissertation, University of Colorado, Boulder, quoted in *Sexual Health Update*, Winter 1998, Volume 6, Number 3, Medical Institute for Sexual Health
- ²⁸ Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (1996, September 27). Youth Risk Behaviour Surveillance – United States, 1995. *Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report* 45(SS-4), 1-83, quoted in *Sexual Health Update*, Winter 1998, Volume 6, Number 3, Medical Institute for Sexual Health
- ²⁹ UNAIDS (1997, October) Impact of HIV and Sexual Health Education on the Sexual Behaviour of Young People: A Review Update, quoted in *Sexual Health Update*, Winter 1998, Volume 6, Number 3, Medical Institute for Sexual Health

The HERALD

*Commenting on the Executive's proposals for sex education The Herald said:
"...there is perhaps a case for the importance of self-respect,
encouraging youngsters to say no to sex..."*

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