

# FIRED UP STILETTOS.

The Hon Erica Stanford  
RE: Relationship and Sexuality Education framework

5 May 2025

Tēnā koe Minister Stanford:

Fired Up Stilettos is an organisation dedicated to improving working conditions for all adult entertainers in New Zealand. After reading the December 2024 report on Relationship and Sexuality Education (RSE) by the Education Review Office (ERO) and the Ministry of Education's draft for an updated RSE framework, we are writing to emphasise the importance of comprehensive, evidence-based RSE in all New Zealand schools and offer our recommendations for how this could be achieved.

Sex workers have a uniquely intimate perspective that makes it easy for us to identify which adults in society received quality RSE when they were young, and who did not. Those of us who have been working for awhile all report similar observations: fellow workers who are new to the industry need to be explicitly taught that they are in charge of their own bodies and get to say no to anyone, for any reason, because sex work is the first time many of these new workers have truly encountered this apparently radical concept. Similarly, when schools neglect to teach young people critical information that they need to be healthy adults, we workers get stuck giving our adult clients a crash course in basic hygiene, sexual health, and the nature of conditional consent all while trying to just do our jobs. And sometimes it's tragically too late: the misogyny, homophobia, and transphobia that young people absorb online, in school, at home, or at church can turn them into adults who enact violence upon the most vulnerable workers in our industry.

Performing sex work does *not* mean we are automatically at greater risk of sexual assault. Living in a society that does not teach the importance of consent and bodily autonomy for *everyone* as a core part of our educational system is what does that. Every member of Fired Up Stilettos knows this all too well.

When Fired Up Stilettos was invited to speak at Parliament in March 2023, one of our members described her experience of prosecuting an assault done to her by a client when she was working at a Dunedin strip club. She wanted him prosecuted for sexual assault, but the Crown prosecutor—although he believed her and understood she was the victim of a crime—advised her to take a plea bargain where they would skip a trial and go straight to sentencing, where the perpetrator would plead guilty to indecent assault instead. The Crown said they were concerned that, despite the evidence to support her case, a jury of her peers would take one look at her line of work and think, “Hmm, is this really a crime? She's just a stripper.”

The Crown was certainly right to be worried. The perpetrator's defence attorney even said, “There is a degree of consent to touching in that environment,” as though the hypothetical possibility of agreeing to some kinds of touching meant his client was justified in thinking he could touch her any way he wanted, regardless of whether she said no.

RSE curriculum that does not integrate sexual violence prevention and consent education for all young people produces adults who go on to violate people they encounter (both in their marriages and when they come see us on the weekends), defence lawyers who apply their misunderstanding of consent as a weapon for their clients, and Crown prosecutors who recognise injustice but accept that society doesn't care to rectify it for the 'wrong' kind of woman.

New Zealand has the opportunity to do better.

To achieve this, Fired Up Stilettos would like to offer the following recommendations:

- RSE should stay compulsory for Years 1 to 10, and become compulsory for Years 11 to 13.
- All consent and healthy relationship education should be taught earlier, so the content currently reserved for Years 11 to 13 is taught at Year 10 or earlier. This is so students who leave school early are not deprived of this critical education.
- The RSE curriculum should continue to normalise a diversity of sexual orientations and gender identities because this helps young people grow into adults who are kind and respectful to everyone—rather than just to people who look and think like them.
- The curriculum should reflect the fact that hate-mongers who target minority groups create online content for the “manosphere” which intentionally seeks to indoctrinate young boys before they have even begun puberty—an evidence-based curriculum designed for contemporary problems should help young people reject this indoctrination before it has the chance to begin festering.
- In line with what is standard in other parts of the world, parents should be *informed* of what RSE is being taught in schools, rather than allowing an open consultation every two years, which as the ERO report notes, has historically attracted violent intervention from outside groups who aren't even part of the schools' community.
- The ability for parents and whānau to withdraw their children from RSE lessons should be removed. Young people are not the possessions of their parents; they are *people* who will one day be adults in our society. Because it is not an option for adults to simply exempt themselves from society itself, it should not be an option for anyone to be exempted from learning how to be a safe, responsible, and healthy member of that society.

Fired Up Stilettos is fighting for a world free from exploitation. Universal, comprehensive, evidence-based RSE will help produce the kinds of adults in society that will make our objective that much easier.

Ngā mihi,



Bianca Beebe  
FUS Chair



Cleo Harper  
FUS Treasurer



Skylar Leigh  
FUS Secretary