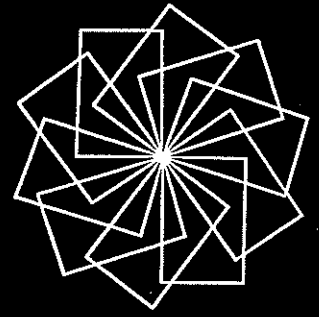


# Directions

## IN EDUCATION



AUSTRALIAN COUNCIL FOR EDUCATIONAL ADMINISTRATION

### SEXUALITY & EDUCATION Abortion & Contraception

IN A RECENT paper on Australian women's reproductive health, Professor Roger Short, from the Obstetrics and Gynaecology Department at the University of Melbourne, says that sex education, along with the provision of contraceptives, should be mandatory in all schools.

Based on 1995-1996 data, the annual rate of legal abortions in Australia is the second highest in the developed world. At 22.2 abortions per 1,000 women aged between 15 and 44, Australia is only just behind the United States, where the rate is 22.9. The Netherlands, at only 6.5 abortions per 1,000 women, has the least number of abortions per capita. *'Not only do the Dutch have the world's lowest abortion rate', says Professor Short, 'but they also have the lowest teenage live birth rate of only 4 per 1,000 women. This has been achieved by having excellent adolescent sex education programs in all schools, with ready access to condoms and oral contraceptives'.*

In his foreword to 'Teenage Pregnancy', British Prime Minister Tony Blair says that, *'teenage mothers are less likely to finish their education, less likely to find a good job, and more likely to end up both as single parents and bringing up their children in poverty'*. In recognition of the seriousness of the problem, the Blair Government has allocated sixty million pounds over three years to help reduce the rate of teenage pregnancy.

Professor Short believes it is high time that Australia, like Britain, followed the leadership shown by the Netherlands. *'Only then', he says, 'can we expect our abortion rate to decline to a more acceptable level'*. Short argues that the oral

contraceptive pill should be available off prescription. *'The idea is neither new, nor revolutionary; it is just plain public health common sense', he says. 'Not only does the pill provide excellent protection against pregnancy without interfering with the spontaneity of love-making, but if taken on a continuing basis, it can halve a woman's susceptibility to two distressingly common and potentially fatal reproductive cancers, those of the ovary and the uterus'.*

Most Australian schools have yet to come to terms with the on-campus provision of condom vending machines. In calling for sex education programs to be mandatory and for oral contraceptives to be freely available in vending machines, Professor Short is perhaps providing governments and schools with a glimpse into the future.

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