



This briefing for practitioners is intended to explore the aims and purposes of Religious Observance (RO) within Curriculum for Excellence but can also be used to inform partners, learners, and their parents and carers, about RO.

CfE Briefing ¹⁶

Curriculum for Excellence: Religious Observance (Time for Reflection)

Curriculum for Excellence (CfE) is taking a fresh approach to what, how and where children and young people learn. It aims to raise standards, improve knowledge and develop skills for learning, life and work. It seeks to improve achievement for all and reduce inequity in educational outcomes by helping every individual to be successful, confident, and to contribute effectively, including as responsible citizens. At the heart of RO in CfE is this aspiration to develop every learner as an individual. This means helping them to grow and develop their own sense of themselves, to be confident in expressing their own beliefs and values, and to develop an understanding of and empathy towards others. This briefing, then, provides background information about the role of RO and explores how it is developing across educational establishments as part of CfE.

1. What is the policy framework for RO in CfE?

In 2005, the Scottish Government set up a review group to define and exemplify RO. The review group defined RO as: *community acts which aim to promote the spiritual development of all members of the school community and express and celebrate the shared values of the school community.* The aims of RO are clearly based on that definition: *to promote the spiritual development of all members of the school community; to express and celebrate the shared values of the school community.* RO is relevant and meaningful for the whole school community. It contributes to children and young people's learning and personal development particularly well when it is engaging and creative. The RO review group defined "spiritual development" as something which:

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includes being helped to recognise, reflect upon and develop a deeper understanding of the value and worth of each individual which comes from one's dignity as a person.

This approach to RO recognises that schools are communities of learners often from different cultural and social backgrounds with a wide range of beliefs. It recognises that individual, personal development is founded on respect for oneself and for everyone else. In practice, this means that RO:

- provides opportunities for the school community to express and celebrate values which are considered common human values;
- gives the school community time to reflect upon a variety of traditions and viewpoints as well as other stimuli such as literature, art and music; and
- provides opportunities for the community to reflect upon values, beliefs, commitments and hopes which are implicit in being human.

Many non-denominational schools refer to RO as *Time for Reflection*. This helps to describe the type of experience that the learner can have through engaging with issues and events as part of RO. RO takes different forms and educational establishments are well placed to take account of their own particular contexts when planning RO. This includes making local decisions about whether the term "Time for Reflection" is suitable or not or perhaps, for example in denominational schools, the term "worship" may be considered more appropriate. In all cases RO has an important part to play in children and young people's development. It also helps the whole school community to reflect upon and develop a deeper understanding of

the worth and contribution of each individual. As such, RO contributes directly to the intended outcomes of CfE.



2. How do children and young people benefit from RO?

RO makes a contribution to the ethos and life of the school because it can influence how children and young people develop values and behaviours. The context for learning can be particularly effective when RO is planned through appropriate experiences and outcomes. For example, RO can help learners to develop respect for others and understand their beliefs and values (RME 0-07a – 4-07a; RERC 0-21a – 4-21a, RERC 3-25a). It can also assist learners in developing increased awareness and understanding of their own beliefs and values, as well as reflecting upon how to put their own beliefs and values into action in positive ways (RME 1-08a – 4-08a, RERC 1-24a – 4-24a). RO helps learners to reflect upon "ultimate questions" (RME 3-09a, RERC 1-23a -4-23a) and in considering and reflecting upon topical social and moral issues (RME 1-09a, 1-09c, 3-09c). It can also provide children and young people with an opportunity to learn about and from the beliefs of others (RME 2-01c, 2-04c, 3-01b, 3-04b, RERC 3-25a, 4-25a, b). It can engage children and young people actively in reflecting upon spiritual, social, moral and philosophical issues through, for example, drama or other activities

(EXA 0-01a – 4-01a, EXA 0-13a – 2-13a). This active approach can also address mental, emotional and social aspects of Health and wellbeing (HWB 0-01a – 4-01a, 0-09a – 4-09a, 0-13a – 4-13a).

Other attributes and skills can be promoted through RO. For example, skills such as reflection and evaluation benefit from relevant experiences across the curriculum. Learners can develop an "appreciation of aesthetic and cultural values, identities and ideas" (Expressive Arts Principles and Practice), or indeed "establish a pattern of health and wellbeing which will be sustained into adult life" (Health and Wellbeing Principles and Practice). RO can help children and young people to develop their "understanding of what is special, vibrant and valuable about [their] and other cultures" (Literacy and English Experiences and Outcomes). It can help them to "develop a curiosity and understanding of their environment and their place in the living, material and physical world" (Sciences Principles and Practice) as well as "develop their understanding of their own values, beliefs and cultures and those of others" and so "broaden their understanding of the world" (Social Studies Principles and Practice).

RO can also help learners to develop higher order skills including, for example, analysis and evaluation. RO can give learners confidence in making their own minds up about important issues and help them to express their own views reasonably and securely. Effective RO can allow learners to address issues of equality, for example by developing respect for the beliefs and values of others as well as by developing empathy with a wide variety of perspectives. So, in effective RO, children and young people learn about the beliefs and

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values of those around them and through reflection, consider their own beliefs and values; these skills are central to their development as citizens in our modern, pluralistic society.

3. What are the features of effective learning through RO?

RO can be an engaging, challenging and reflective experience that enables children and young people to explore, evaluate and reflect on a range of views to help form their own. This happens in many stimulating and often thought-provoking contexts that are sensitive to and respectful of everyone's right to their own beliefs and values. Some of the kinds of contexts and learning experiences that promote this effective learning are described here.

Discussions help children and young people learn about the beliefs and values of others as well as learning from them. Discussions enable creative thinking between young people, helping them to develop a clearer understanding of how a person's life is influenced by the beliefs and values they hold. They also offer opportunities for reflection on views which may be very different to the child or young person's own views, and to develop important skills such as listening attentively and respecting the rights of others to hold views which are different to their own.

Personal research enables learners to delve into different perspectives which can lead to a deepening of their own understanding and awareness of emerging viewpoints. In evaluating and responding to the challenges which stem from RO experiences, children and young people might gather data about supporting or conflicting viewpoints and explore many sources of information to deepen their own

understanding, perhaps following an RO experience they've had. This helps learners to be active in RO.



Partnerships often involve interactions between visitors and children and young people that expose the learners to the real-life experiences of people whose lives may be very different to their own. This can provide an authentic experience for children and young people that enables them to come into contact with a wide range of viewpoints and perspectives – religious and otherwise. Such interactions go to the heart of meaningful education in that they involve meaningful dialogue between people, and the development of a sense of our shared human identity.

Personal reflection is about having the space to step back from daily business for a time. It creates the environment to take stock of situations that really matter, and for learners to consider their own developing role in the world in which they live. This process of stepping back is appropriate and helpful for all children and young people, no matter what their own beliefs and values are.

Outdoor learning can be an important context for learning. Many religious places, sites of cultural significance and other out-of-school locations lend themselves well to supporting children and young people in developing their own beliefs, values, attitudes and attributes. Engaging with and reflecting upon

the natural world allows learners to consider their place in it, as well as their responsibilities towards it. It can also prompt discussion about important “ultimate questions”.

Overall then, effective RO is active, engaging, challenging and thought provoking. It supports children and young people in the development of their own set of beliefs and values, and it allows them the opportunity for deeper reflection about the beliefs and values of others. This enables each and every individual to gain a sense of his or her own place in the world.

4. Do all children and young people need to take part in RO?

All educational establishments and local authorities are expected to have policies that describe their approach to RO. School handbooks should describe the provision of RO and also explain arrangements for those who wish to exercise the parental right to withdraw a child or young person from RO. To support parents in making decisions about RO, schools are expected to set a clear rationale for the approach taken and to involve parents and children and young people in decisions about the RO programme. All schools are required to make suitable arrangements so that children or young people who are withdrawn from RO can benefit from alternative relevant activities. For example, where appropriate, schools will work with parents to agree a programme that enables learners to further their understanding of their own family beliefs, values and traditions. Parents may, and often do, provide some additional study material that enables these learners to use RO time to engage in some personal development and reflection in line with the beliefs and values of the family. Exercising the right to withdraw should never involve a child

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or young person feeling excluded – nor should parents feel under any pressure to avoid exercising their right to withdraw. This can be achieved by sensitive handling and clear communication.

5. How can community partners support RO?

A wide range of community partners often support school staff to plan and implement RO. This can include members of faith communities, belief groups and other partners such as youth workers and local charity workers. It is important for schools to ensure that such community partners are diverse and varied – representing a range of beliefs and viewpoints.

Schools recognise the important and varied contributions that community partners and other community leaders can make to the life of the school. Effective educational establishments act professionally in this respect, ensuring that relationships with partners are negotiated and agreed. They ensure that everyone concerned is fully informed about the content and aims of any RO activities planned and executed by partners. They also ensure that such activities are guided by educational principles and apply normal safeguarding protocols when working with visiting speakers.

School assemblies are varied and diverse. Whole school assemblies can be very positive occasions, particularly when they recognise and celebrate achievement. They can be used very effectively to share information and expectations with children, young people and staff. Effective provision ensures that a clear distinction is made between assemblies arranged for the purpose of RO and assemblies arranged for other purposes such as, for example, celebrating success. Members of the

school community, including children, young people and their parents sometimes wish to contribute to RO within the school, and staff can ensure that this happens in an appropriate way.



6. RO in Roman Catholic schools

The distinctive RO approach in Roman Catholic denominational schools was recognised in a letter of guidance issued by the Scottish Government in February 2011.

Roman Catholic schools follow the customs and practices of the Roman Catholic Church in order to nourish spirituality and faith. Traditional prayers, devotions and services are used to help young people to become aware of, and show reverence to God. Pupils are invited to pray at times in classrooms and assemblies, and in liturgical services. Usually a classroom will display a Crucifix on the wall; in some classrooms and other areas of the school, a sacred space will feature signs, symbols and objects connected with Roman Catholicism. Prayer is complemented by religious services conducted to mark special occasions. To mark special Feast Days and Holy Days of Obligation, Holy Mass will be celebrated by the school chaplain, with the school community, in school buildings or in local parishes. Some pupils, at certain stages, may be able to participate in retreats and pilgrimages to places of

special religious significance. While Religious Education is governed by separate Church guidance, it is complemented by RO practices and, together, these experiences help pupils to develop their understanding of the Catholic faith and experience opportunities for spiritual growth and commit to beliefs, values and actions in a positive response to God's invitation to faith. Chaplains and other members of the Diocese play an integral part in the life of the school and will support learning and spiritual development as well as religious assemblies and services of worship.

7. How do we take forward RO in CfE?

As practitioners look to make increasingly effective use of RO to promote the intended outcomes of CfE, it may be helpful to consider the following questions.

- How well do learners and their parents/carers understand the purposes of RO?
- How well does everyone concerned understand the relationship between learning, RO and CfE?
- To what extent are learners and their parents/carers confident that RO in their school is fully inclusive of their own beliefs and values, while respecting the beliefs and values of the school community?
- How well does RO contribute to the development of the whole person at different stages of learning?
- How wide and varied are the viewpoints and beliefs explored through RO in your establishment?
- How effectively are children and young people themselves involved in the planning of RO?

How effectively are children and young people themselves involved in the planning of Religious Observance?

- Where RO involves community partners, what mechanisms are in place for schools to engage in dialogue with community partners about the aims and format of RO? You might like to look at: www.journeytoexcellence.org.uk/partnership/improvementguides/theschoolinitscommunity.asp
- In what ways can RO support and challenge children and young people in the development of their own beliefs and values?
- To what extent are children and young people aware of the skills and attributes which can be developed through RO?
- How far are children, young people and their parents/carers encouraged to engage in dialogue about the aims and format of RO?
- How inclusive is RO in your establishment?
- How well does RO contribute to an understanding of diversity and equality in Scotland?
- How far can RO be used to promote active learning? www.journeytoexcellence.org.uk/learningandteaching/improvementguide/promotionofactivelearning.asp

Links to Exemplification of Practice in RO

Supporting faith formation through RME in St Andrew's Primary School – <http://www.journeytoexcellence.org.uk/videos/faithformation.asp>

Supporting children's learning through meditation and prayer in St Andrew's Primary School – <http://www.journeytoexcellence.org.uk/videos/meditationandprayer.asp>

Using a labyrinth to explore spirituality in RME and RO – <http://www.journeytoexcellence.org.uk/videos/labyrinth.asp>

Links to resources for RO

<http://www.educationscotland.gov.uk/thecurriculum/howdoyoubuildyourcurriculum/curriculumplanning/creatingaplan/religiousobservance/assemblyresources/index.asp>

<http://www.educationscotland.gov.uk/thecurriculum/howdoyoubuildyourcurriculum/curriculumplanning/creatingaplan/religiousobservance/keydocuments/index.asp>

RO in Roman Catholic Schools: <http://www.sces.uk.com/>

Link to support available from Humanist Society of Scotland: www.humanism-scotland.org.uk/content/education

