

Religious and Moral Education Curriculum Background and Evidence Paper

May 2026

Executive Summary

Overview

This paper provides an evidenced base to support curriculum improvement for Religious and Moral Education (RME) in Scotland, drawing on a range of published Scottish and international sources. The paper aims to support the identification of areas of strength and areas for improvement within the existing Curriculum for Excellence technical framework for RME. It will inform the collaborative work of the Curriculum Improvement Cycle (CIC) for RME.

Key Messages

- The extent of RME provision in primary and secondary schools is variable.
- There is a need to ensure that the purpose, technical framework and associated guidance for RME are understood by all stakeholders to ensure that the extent and quality of provision offers children and young people the best learning experiences and outcomes.
- National qualifications in Religious, Moral and Philosophical Studies (RMPS) and Awards, such as the Religion, Belief and Values Award, are popular and offer learners meaningful progression routes from the Broad General Education (BG) phase.
- RME makes a substantial contribution to learners' skills and capacities and offers valuable opportunities to enhance their understanding of people, cultures and contemporary concerns that will support them when they progress to further and higher education and the world of work.
- The RME curriculum in Scotland should continue to be informed by international developments that have already supported a focus on intercultural understanding in a pluralistic society.
- Ongoing efforts to support the curriculum through career-long professional learning focused on subject knowledge and research on assessment and pedagogy would enhance curricular provision.

Next Steps

This paper provides an important grounding from which to progress the work of the CIC. Teacher, practitioner and stakeholder groups involved in the RME CIC will pay close attention to this paper, with a view to developing an improved technical framework for RME that support practitioners and teachers and enables children and young people to achieve and flourish.

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1. Introduction

1.1 Purpose

This paper offers a snapshot of the current educational landscape, drawing on a diverse range of research and evidence to outline prevailing trends, challenges, and successes across learning contexts. It serves as a foundation for ongoing curriculum development, offering insights into the policy environment, learner experience, and professional perspectives. By incorporating both qualitative and quantitative data, it creates space for reflection and informed discussion. While not all available studies are included, those selected reflect the breadth of work currently shaping thinking in this area. The insights outlined here are intended to support Curriculum Improvement Cycle (CIC) stakeholder groups as they consider key issues and navigate the next steps in the evolution of Scotland's Curriculum for Excellence.

1.2 Sources of evidence

A comprehensive body of research was developed through a collaborative effort involving representatives from Education Scotland's Curriculum, Learning, Teaching and Assessment (CLTA) team, the Data, Performance and Research (DPR) Team, Scottish Government Analytical Services and the Scottish Government Library Support Service. This collaboration brought together a wide range of expertise to support the identification, evaluation, and organisation of relevant literature. The sources drawn upon include, but are not limited to, peer-reviewed academic papers, His Majesty's Inspectorate of Education publications (HMIE), Scottish Qualifications Authority (SQA) and Achievement of Curriculum for Excellence Level (ACEL) data analysis, surveys, government data sets, research produced by national agencies, Scottish Government reports, and international publications from organisations such as the OECD and the United Nations. Additionally, the perspectives of children and young people are represented through the work of bodies such as the Scottish Youth Parliament and the Children and Young People's Commissioner Scotland.

1.3 Scope of the review

This evidence paper explores the Religious and Moral Education (RME) curriculum in its entirety across the 3–18 learner journey, considering breadth and depth of provision, progression, and learner outcomes from early level through to the senior phase. This paper focuses on the RME curricular area as outlined within Scotland's Curriculum for Excellence. This paper does not consider Religious Observance (RO), also known as Time for Reflection, which is a distinct activity from RME. RO is a whole-school activity, the responsibility for which lies with leadership teams in individual schools. Moreover, a separate evidence paper will consider Religious Education in Roman Catholic Schools (RERC). Additionally, where international evidence or research is engaged with the term 'Religious Education' (RE) will be used to refer to the subject more generally. The paper aims to support a holistic understanding of the current curricular landscape, highlighting key themes and emerging patterns that will inform ongoing discussion and decision-making throughout the Curriculum Improvement Cycle.

RME is one of the eight curriculum areas of Scotland's Curriculum for Excellence. From the outset of the development of Curriculum for Excellence, RME was identified as a core aspect of the curriculum. As with other curriculum areas, the aims, intended learning experiences, and

assessment standards for RME are detailed in a set of *Principles and Practice*, *Experience and Outcomes* and *Benchmarks* documents.

The *Principles and Practice* paper outlines that RME is an ‘essential part of every child or young person’s educational experience’ (Education Scotland, 2009a, p.1). It clarifies that RME is to be understood as a curriculum area where learners learn about and from religion, morality, and values in a non-confessional, inclusive way and which is responsive to local, national and international contexts.

Religious and moral education enables children and young people to explore the world’s major religions and views which are independent of religious belief and to consider the challenges posed by these beliefs and values. It supports them in developing and reflecting upon their values and their capacity for moral judgement. Through developing awareness and appreciation of the value of each individual in a diverse society, religious and moral education engenders responsible attitudes to other people. This awareness and appreciation will assist in counteracting prejudice and intolerance as children and young people consider issues such as sectarianism and discrimination more broadly (ibid).

There are three curriculum organisers: ‘Christianity’, ‘World religions selected for study’, and the ‘Development of beliefs and values’. The ‘Development of beliefs and values’ organiser was designed to permeate the other two rather than be a standalone organiser. These organisers provide the structure for the RME curriculum over the five levels of Curriculum for Excellence. The standards for assessment in RME are detailed in the *Benchmarks*. These differentiate the levels via thinking skills and the expected breadth and depth of evidence required to demonstrate learners’ progress and attainment. The *Benchmarks* support teachers in covering a selection of knowledge by guiding them to ensure that learners engage with religious, moral and values-based issues from ‘Christianity, at least one World Religion, and at least one belief group independent of religion’ across the three organisers for each level (Education Scotland, 2017).

It is a national expectation that RME is delivered in the senior phase (S4-S6). However, beyond Level 4 Experience and Outcomes, there is no national guidance for Senior Phase RME. The senior phase does offer learners opportunities to undertake Scottish Qualification Authority (SQA) courses and awards to gain qualifications. However, these are distinct from the expectations regarding RME. SQA courses in Religious, Moral and Philosophical Studies (RMPS) are available at National 3, National 4, National 5, Higher and Advanced Higher levels. Further, an SQA Award is available at Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework (SCQF) levels 3, 4, 5 and 6 in Religion, Belief and Values (RBV). National 5, Higher and Advanced Higher courses are assessed by externally set and marked assessments. National 3 and 4 courses and SQA Awards are internally assessed, unit-based courses. The units that make up National 3 and 4 courses and standalone units at National 5, Higher and Advanced Higher can be taken individually by learners. Some schools incorporate opportunities for learners in RME to achieve the outcomes of units and sometimes the entirety of unit-based courses and, increasingly, the RBV awards through learning in RME (SQA, 2024c).

1.4 Related national policies

1.4.1 RME, the Law and National Guidance

The Education (Scotland) 1980 Act sets out a *de facto* statutory expectation that ‘instruction in religion’, which current Scottish Government guidance has interpreted as meaning RME for non-denominational schools, must be provided in schools. The duty rests with the education authority to ensure provision of RME in each school under its management. Should there be any proposal to end RME provision in any local authority, a local referendum is required. To date, no such referenda have taken place.

The Education (Scotland) 1980 Act also contained provisions for parents to be able to withdraw their children from RME. With the incorporation of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) into Scots law, legislation surrounding the right to withdraw is currently being reviewed and, at the time of drafting this paper, the Scottish Parliament is considering the *Children (Withdrawal from Religious Education and Amendment to UNCRC Compatibility Duty) (Scotland) Bill* to amend the Education (Scotland) Act 1980 in relation to the current parental opt-outs from RO and RME.

In addition to the expectation that RME in non-denominational schools ‘is a statutory core subject for all pupils attending primary and secondary education, including those in S5 and S6’, Scottish Government (2011) guidance also draws attention to three other points for schools and local authorities regarding RME provision. First, RME differs from RMPS courses. RMPS should not replace RME; instead, Fourth Level *Experiences and Outcomes* should inform the planning of learning and teaching for S5 and S6. Second, specialist RME teachers should be deployed in the secondary context. Finally, it should be delivered not only through interdisciplinary learning but as a distinct curriculum area.

1.4.2 RME and Early Level Contexts

RME is a curricular entitlement for learners in early learning and childcare (ELC) settings, such as nurseries. As outlined in *Building the Curriculum 3: A Framework for Learning and Teaching*, Curriculum for Excellence includes an entitlement for all children and young people from ‘pre-school to the end of S3’ to experience a broad general education that includes experiences and outcomes across all curriculum areas (Scottish Government, 2008, p. 14).

Realising the Ambition: Being Me provides the national practice guidance for ELC contexts (Education Scotland, 2020). It outlines the developmental needs of children from birth to Primary 1 (Education Scotland focus is from age 3 onwards) and emphasises the importance of nurturing relationships, play-based learning, and responsive pedagogy. The guidance supports continuity across transitions and highlights the foundational role of early learning in shaping lifelong wellbeing and educational outcomes.

2. National data sets

2.1 SQA attainment and presentation data

SQA courses provide the only national data on attainment in the curriculum area. The National 5, Higher and Advanced Higher RMPS attainment rates for the exam diets covering 2019 – 2024 are detailed in the tables below. It should be noted that examination arrangements for 2020-2023 were different to those for 2024 due to the changes made during the Covid-19 pandemic. Therefore, any patterns or trends should be considered carefully.

The tables also detail the entry numbers for each qualification. There has been a steady increase in the numbers entered for National 5; however, the Higher and Advanced Higher numbers have varied more noticeably. Of the 2400 learners awarded a National 5 RMPS in 2023, 35% continued to Higher in 2024, which places RMPS National 5 to Higher progression rates just slightly below the average rate compared with other subjects (SQA, 2024a).

80 out of the 6230 learners who completed National 4 RMPS in 2023 continued to National 5 RMPS in 2024. Of the 5840 learners who achieved National 4 RMPS in 2022, 70 continued to National 5 RMPS in 2023. Compared to other SQA courses, many learners are undertaking a National 4 RMPS course and not progressing to National 5 (SQA, 2024b). In addition, 12.5% of National 5 RMPS entries were double entered for National 4 RMPS as well, the fourth highest subject area to do so. This may be explained by schools accrediting learning in RME to maximise attainment opportunities.

Table 1: National 5 RMPS Attainment Overview, 2019-2024

SQA Attainment Statistics	Entries	A-D	A-C	A	B	C	D	No Award
2024	2493	83.4 %	72.4%	41.9%	16.3%	14.2%	11.0%	16.6%
2023	2395	88.2%	76.5%	44.9%	16.0%	15.6%	11.7%	11.8%
2022	2350	87.5%	73.5%	39.1%	19.6%	14.8%	14.0%	12.5%
2021	2419	95.0%	86.8%	51.6%	17.5%	17.7%	8.2%	5.0%
2020	2327	97.3%	90.2%	42.0%	23.7%	24.5%	7.1%	2.7%
2019	2419	81.9%	68.6%	34.5%	17.2%	16.9%	13.3%	18.1%

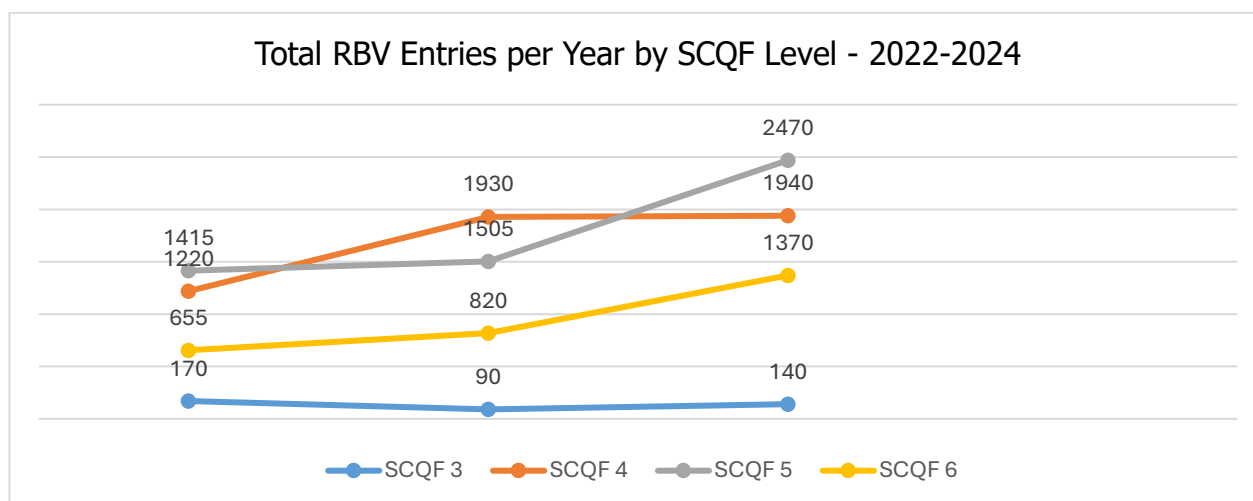
Table 2: Higher RMPS Attainment Overview, 2019-2024

SQA Attainment Statistics	Entries	A-D	A-C	A	B	C	D	No Award
2024	3492	87.3%	75.5%	40.7%	19.6%	15.2%	11.8%	12.7%
2023	3889	84.5%	68.4%	22.7%	23.0%	22.6%	16.1%	15.5%
2022	3540	86.6%	69.9%	25.6%	22.6%	21.7%	16.7%	13.4%
2021	3873	95.2%	90.1%	56.2%	20.2%	13.7%	5.0%	4.8%
2020	3531	97.2%	91.0%	44.0%	27.2%	19.9%	6.2%	2.8%
2019	3598	83.3%	69.5%	29.0%	21.7%	18.8%	13.8%	16.7%

Table 3: Advanced Higher RMPS Attainment Overview, 2019-2024

SQA Attainment Statistics	Entries	A-D	A-C	A	B	C	D	No Award
2024	253	96.8%	91.3%	57.3%	19.8%	14.2%	5.5%	3.2%
2023	212	91%	81.1%	46.2%	18.9%	16%	9.9%	9.0%
2022	250	92.8%	80.7%	34.9%	29.4%	16.4%	12.1%	7.2%
2021	237	98.7%	97.0%	65.4%	19.0%	12.7%	1.7%	1.3%
2020	180	99.9%	96.7%	53.9%	29.4%	13.3%	3.3%	0.1%
2019	175	85.7%	77.7%	33.1%	24.6%	20.0%	8.0%	14.3%

SQA RBV awards are not graded. However, SQA data does capture the number of entries for the award by SCQF level. This data highlights three main trends with this award. First, there is an overall upward trend for the numbers entered for the RBV award. Second, within the overall upward trend of presentation rates, SCQF Level 5 and 6 have seen the largest increase.



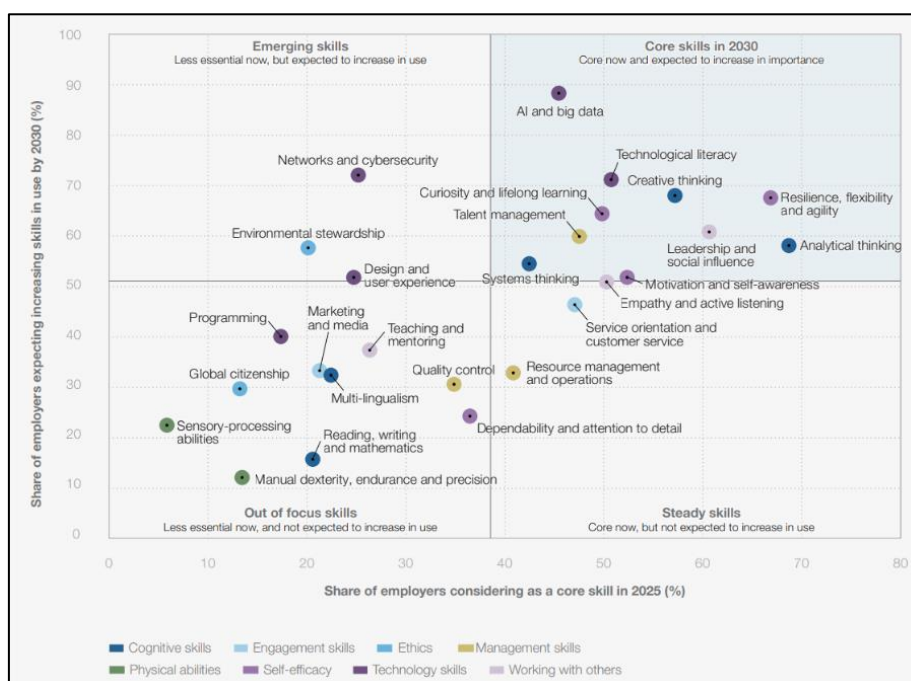
Third, while there is a general upward trend in presentation numbers, the uptake pattern is inconsistent across the local authorities. In some local authorities, learners have never been presented for the RBV Award between 2022 and 2024, or only a small number have been presented at one level. In others, there is a trend of increased presentation at all levels.

2.2 Labour market information

RME offers learners knowledge and skills that are fundamental to success across learning, life and work. Current labour market intelligence highlights that learners will need to navigate a dynamic, complex and changing society and RME can support children and young people to do so.

The Scottish Government's (2025) *Future Trends for Scotland 2024-2025* report demonstrates that increasing cultural diversity, migration and technological change will be key developments that children and young people will have to increasingly navigate. The religious literacy, capacity for moral decision-making and the interpersonal skills developed in and through RME can provide learners with excellent foundations for careers in a changing Scotland. Skills Development Scotland's (2025) *Young People's Career Ambitions (YPCA)* report for 2024 highlights that, for example, many children and young people aim for careers in public services and creative industries. In such industries understanding and being able to engage with people from a range of religious and cultural background will be vital for future success. Furthermore, predicted growth industries, such as health, social care and technology, will demand that children and young people are not only competent in their roles but also evermore able to make sound moral decisions and work with a diverse range of individuals and communities. RME is well-positioned to support children and young people to meet these demands of future workplaces.

On a global level, the World Economic Forum (2025) *Future of Jobs Report* outlines the share of employers who consider various skills to be core skills in 2025 and share of employers expecting skills to increase in importance by 2030. Networks and cybersecurity as well as environmental stewardship are listed among the top 10 skills expected to significantly increase in use by 2030, yet they are not currently considered core skills for most organisations.



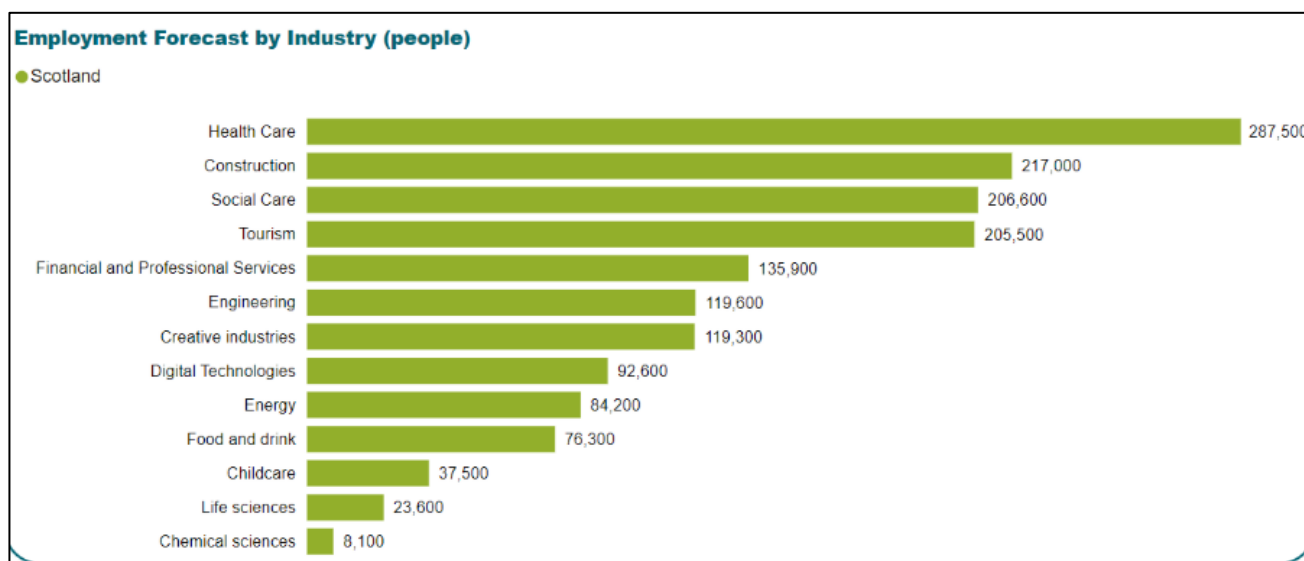
(View on Tableau Public: [Future of jobs - core skills 30 | Tableau Public](#))

The *Future Trends for Scotland* (Scottish Government, 2025) report outlines 3 key trends for Scotland's labour market and skills:

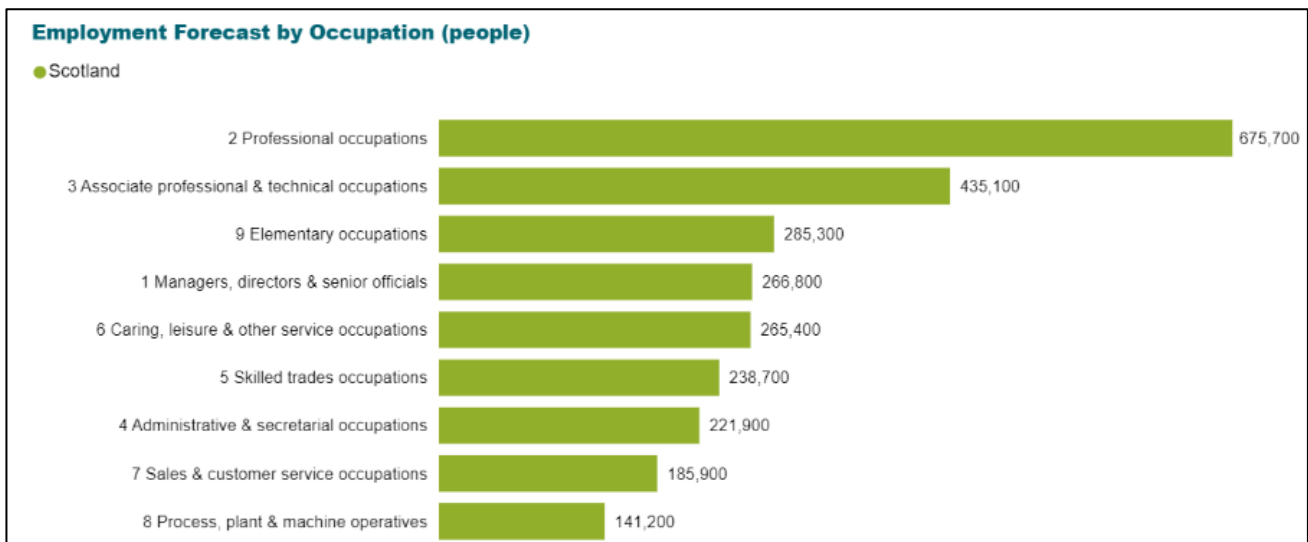
- Scotland's working-age population is growing, however ageing and ill-health create uncertainty for the future labour market
- Automation and decarbonisation are expected to change the labour market, displacing and creating jobs
- The focus on lifelong learning and skills will grow in future

Coupled with this, Skills Development Scotland (SDS) provide detailed labour market information using a consistent evidence base to inform future investment in skills, built up from existing datasets and forecasts. They work with key partners and stakeholders in the production of Regional Skills Assessments (RSA) to ensure an inclusive approach to their development, dissemination and utilisation. RSAs are published annually, covering all Regional Outcome Agreement areas, City and Growth Deal Regions and rural Scotland. The RSAs offer detailed information on regional labour markets across the country. The data included in these publications, including Oxford Economics forecast data, is the most up-to-date available at the time of writing.

The following graphs show a 10-year labour market forecast from November 2024 for Scotland as a whole. They were taken from the [SDS Skills Planning Data Matrix](#).



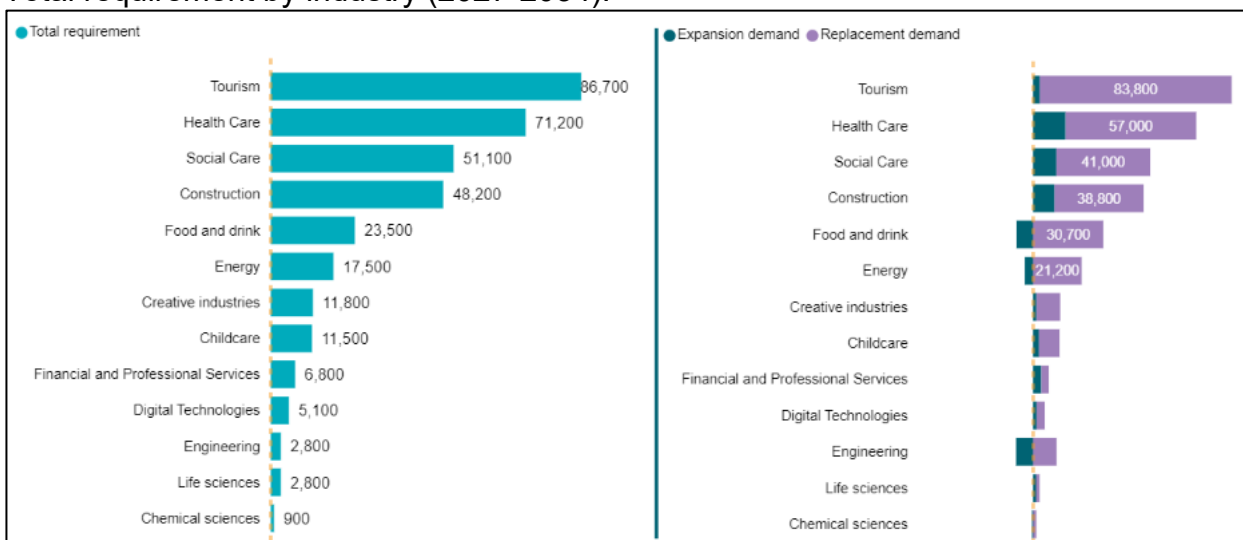
Graph 4: Bar chart showing the future employment forecast by industry for Scotland in 2034 ([SDS, 2025a](#))



Graph 5: Bar chart show the future employment forecast by occupation for Scotland in 2034 ([SDS, 2025a](#))

This has implications for the range of pathways at different SCQF levels needed to allow learners to achieve the right level of qualifications for the jobs available. Further work may be required to raise awareness about pathways with schools, settings, learners and parents and families.

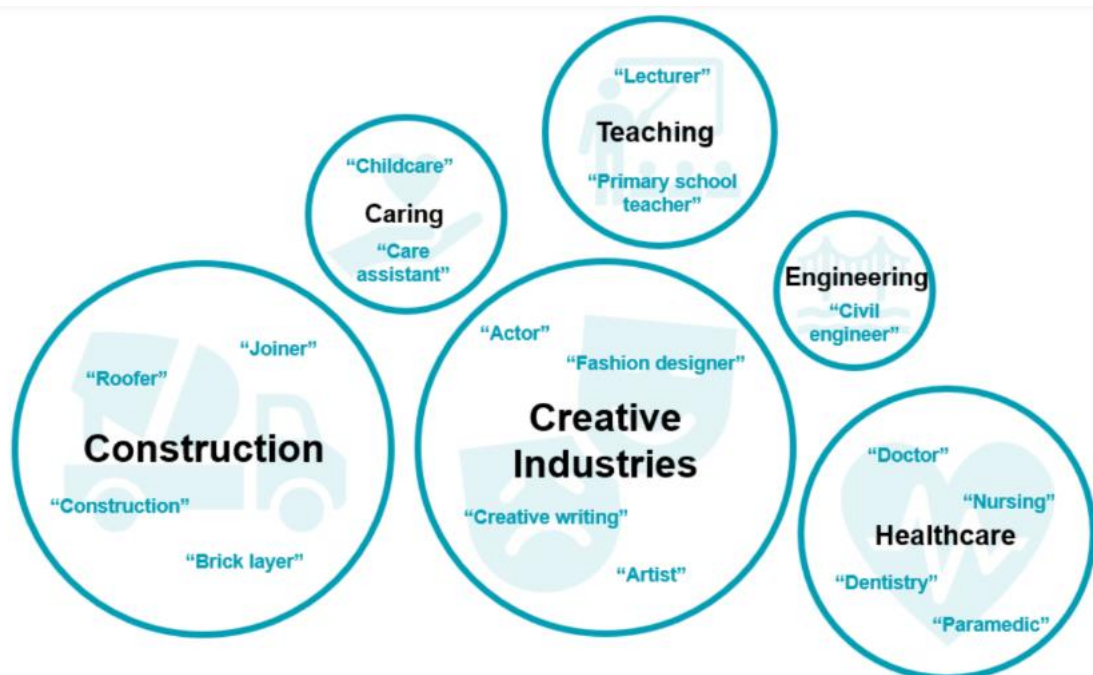
Total requirement by industry (2027-2034):



Graph 6: Bar chart show the total requirement by industry for Scotland in 2027-2034 ([SDS, 2025a](#)) (see glossary for definition of the terms: total requirement, expansion demand, replacement demand)

Despite healthcare being forecast to be the largest employing industry in 2034, the actual number of jobs needed to be filled is forecast to be greatest in tourism. The above graph on the right shows how much an industry is forecast to expand or reduce in requirement, as well as the likely replacement requirement (i.e. how many more people will be required due to people leaving the workforce). The graph on the left-hand side shows the total requirement. These numbers are different from the overall employment forecast as these graphs only show additional requirements and not those who will remain working in these industries. Health care, social care and construction show the greatest expansion demand, with food and drink, energy and engineering showing a negative expansion i.e. a reduction in requirements.


The *Young People’s Career Ambitions* report (SDS, 2025b) collects views from school leavers on a range of areas. In this report over 3000 participants engaged. One of the questions asked was: “Thinking about the future, what is your ideal job/career?”. The following infographic shows a thematic analysis of their responses. The larger the circle, the more the job/career area was mentioned.




Thematic analysis of young people’s responses to the question: “Thinking about the future, what is your ideal job/career?” (n=1,629) taken from [Young People’s Career Ambitions](#) (SDS 2025b)

Whilst there are some similarities to the labour market information, the largest area of interest to young people is creative industries, for which the requirement is less than half of that of healthcare (the top forecast industry in the labour market information). It can be said therefore that there is a mismatch in terms of what young people are interested in and what jobs will be available for them.


A [supporting infographic to the report](#) (SDS 2025c) shows that the preferred industry depends on a range of characteristics. For example, the following infographic shows the difference between males and females:

 Top Industries (Top 5, % selected)			
Female		Male	
Medicine and health	21%	Engineering	28%
Caring	17%	Construction	23%
Creative Industries	16%	Digital, computing, and IT	15%
Teaching / education	15%	Sport	12%
Media	11%	Media	10%


There are also differences in terms of ethnicity however the report has low sample numbers for this and does not disaggregate by ethnicity (only offering the categories 'white' and 'minority ethnic').

 Top Industries (Top 5, % selected)			
Minority Ethnic		White	
Medicine and health	23%	Engineering	16%
Digital, computing, and IT	17%	Construction	14%
Media	16%	Creative Industries	13%
Engineering	13%	Medicine and health	12%
Creative Industries	12%	Teaching / education	12%


It also shows that there are marked differences in young people who are LGBT:

 Top Industries (Top 5, % selected)			
LGBT		Non-LGBT	
Creative Industries	29%	Engineering	18%
Media	20%	Construction	15%
Digital, computing, and IT	14%	Medicine and health	13%
Caring	14%	Teaching / education	11%
Medicine and health	14%	Sport	11%

There is also a significant difference in industries selected for those from the most deprived areas (SIMD 1) compared to those from the least deprived areas (SIMD 5):


 Top Industries (Top 5, % selected)			
SIMD 1		SIMD 5	
Engineering	15%	Medicine and health	18%
Construction	14%	Engineering	16%
Caring	14%	Creative Industries	14%
Medicine and health	11%	Teaching / education	12%
Creative Industries	11%	Media	11%

Care experienced children compared to non-care experienced children also show differences in their preferred industries:

 **Top Industries** (Top 5, % selected)

CE		Not CE	
Construction	20%	Engineering	16%
Caring	12%	Creative Industries	14%
Hospitality	12%	Medicine and health	13%
Armed forces, policing or security	10%	Construction	12%
Engineering	10%	Teaching / education	11%

Lastly, learners with disabilities and those without also shows different preferences:

 **Top Industries** (Top 5, % selected)

Disabled		Non-disabled	
Creative Industries	21%	Engineering	18%
Medicine and health	16%	Construction	15%
Caring	15%	Medicine and health	12%
Teaching / education	14%	Digital, computing, and IT	11%
Media	13%	Teaching / education	11%

The report also shows there are small differences in who each of the above groups listed as key influencers on their career with the majority listing parents and carers as their top influencers (except care experienced learners who listed careers advisors). The next most commonly listed influencers were career advisors followed by other family members. Teachers also featured.

Finally, the factors influencing their chosen industry also vary by characteristic with most fluctuating between their ‘interests and hobbies’ and ‘the need to earn money’. ‘Qualifications achieved’ also featured highly and ‘education/training’ to a lesser extent. Interestingly, 35% of young people cited social media as an influence with TikTok ranking the highest followed by Instagram and YouTube.

These differences highlight the importance of career education that works for and is inclusive of *all* learners, and that makes use of labour market information to help them to make informed choices. The curriculum improvement cycle should consider this when reviewing the content and structure of each curricular area and particularly in reference to skills.

2.3 National statistics

No national overview data provides insights into the extent or quality of RME provision in schools. No regular attainment data about RME has been gathered. Unlike literacy and numeracy, no national standardised assessments or teacher judgement surveys provide a national overview of learner progress.

2.4 Other data sets

The Scottish Schools Information Dashboard tool (Education Scotland, Online), updated by information from the 'Establishments Collection' processes, does not detail a school's compliance with the statutory requirements for RME provision. However, similarly to how it is currently done for Physical Education (PE), developing this tool to capture school self-reports on RME provision could be a positive next step for supporting RME provision.

3. International reports and comparative studies

3.1 International reports

3.1.1 The Toledo Guiding Principles

The *Toledo Guiding Principles on Teaching about Religions and Beliefs in Public Schools* developed by the Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR, 2007) remain a key international source to support countries in developing the curriculum area across Europe. While the *Toledo Guiding Principles* are not a curriculum in themselves, they place an emphasis on religious diversity, the role of religion in public life and developing intercultural understanding.

Here, as indicated in Education Scotland's (2014: 8) most recent national report into RME, the priorities of the *Toledo Guiding Principles* can be identified in the existing technical framework for RME and as such there are 'tremendous opportunities to equip the children and young people of school to out the values of wisdom, compassion, justice and integrity in a modern democratic Scottish society'.

As the Curriculum Improvement Cycle moves forward, the *Toledo Guiding Principles* offer direction on points that could be useful concerning an evolved technical framework for RME.

- The guidelines assert that 'Teaching about religions and beliefs should be sensitive, balanced, inclusive, non-doctrinal, impartial, and based on human rights principles relating to freedom of religion or belief' (ODIHR, 40). With the incorporation of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) into Scots law since July 2024, considering how RME is delivered in step with a rights-focused approach will be significant. Moreover, ensuring clarity around what RME is and how it is intended to be taught matters to ensure parents/carers, children and young people, schools and their wider communities avoid misunderstandings.
- The guidelines highlight the challenges of prescription in RME curricula. They state that it is important to make sure that curricular content is 'based on reason, is bias-free, up to date, and does not over-simplify complex issues' and that it should 'be comprehensive and pay particular attention to key historical and contemporary developments pertaining to issues of religion and belief' (ibid., p. 41). In particular, the guidelines recognise the challenge of developing a curriculum that is 'impartial and inclusive' and suggests that historical importance, the local community, media attention, the need to address misconceptions and the possible future dynamics of engagement with religion are helpful considerations for choosing what to include regarding religion and belief (ibid., p. 42).

3.1.2 Council of Europe

In response to global trends, the Council of Europe (2008) has engaged in a range of deliberations that engage with questions about how Religious Education might support religious and cultural cohesion, understanding and co-existence. Most directly relevant to RME are the suggestions for policy and practice emerging from Council of Europe recommendations in Jackson's (2014) *Signposts- Policy and Practice for Teaching about Religions and Non-Religious World Views in Intercultural Education* report. While the emphasis is on intercultural education, concerns with content relevant to the RME curriculum are evident. Here, the following points are important to consider:

- Pursuing new priorities within the RME curriculum, such as intercultural education, will demand relevant and effective initial teacher education and ongoing professional learning for practitioners to develop the required 'competence' to achieve the stated aims (ibid., p. 46).
- Integrating what the Council of Europe labels 'non-religious convictions' is an important step for intercultural education, but it is important to recognise that terminology can be challenging to ensure an inclusive approach. Terms such as 'worldviews' are noted as possibilities but the need to differentiate between 'organised world views and personal world views' was noted (ibid., p. 75).
- A focus on a human rights-based approach is important and this should include all involved ensuring no discrimination, being familiar with human rights legislation, respecting rights regarding religion and education and respect for the ways people express religion through symbols and dress.
- Curriculum and learning that invites engagement and dialogue between learners and schools and their communities and faith and belief communities, including non-religious groups, is to be encouraged 'as a means to learning, to help to develop a culture of living together despite differences, and to link local issues and concerns with global ones' (ibid., p. 96).

3.1.3 The Religious Education and Diversity Project

Funded by the European Commission the Religious Education and Diversity (READY) Project ran for three years until 2018. It involved study visits, exchanges and workshops between researchers and teacher educators from Germany, England, Austria, Scotland and Sweden. The project resulted in several outputs and in the READY project report, some key messages were communicated that are relevant to developments concerning RME (Schreiner, 2018). In particular:

- Given the variable understandings of what religious education is, what its aims are and how it should be delivered, it is important that curriculum developments are as clear as possible about the intentions for the subject. This matters as the aims can and do shape the choices teachers make regarding pedagogy.
- There is a need to be critical of how religions, beliefs and other aspects of the subject are categorised as this can lead to division, separation, marginalisation and exclusion in terms of curriculum content.
- There is significant scope for more shared working between different countries in relation to the subject area, there are shared challenges and opportunities across jurisdictions that could enhance professional learning.
- Wider structures, including (initial) teacher education, the time allocation for the subject in schools, its perceived status and how the subject is evaluated and inspected are important influences of the quality and extent of provision.

3.2 International comparative assessments

Scotland performed well in PISA's 'global competence' module. This focused on 15-year-olds' capacity 'to examine local, global and intercultural issues, to understand and appreciate the perspectives and world views of others, to engage in open, appropriate and effective interactions with people from different cultures, and to act for collective well-being and sustainable development' (OECD, 2021: 25). While there will be multiple contributing factors behind Scotland securing its place as the fourth top-performing country, the focus of this module connects directly to the RME curriculum and suggests that RME is contributing to important aspects of children and young peoples' skills and competences.

3.3 Other relevant reports and reviews

Curriculum changes have impacted Religious Education in many different countries in recent years. Most notably, there have been substantial developments in both the English and Welsh curricula for Religious Education.

3.3.1 England

The developments in England have stemmed from discussions around the Commission on Religious Education's (2018) report *Religion and Worldviews: The Way Forward*. Established by the Religious Education Council for England and Wales, the commission's report paved the way forward for a shift in emphasis in Religious Education that takes forward the best of the World Religion paradigm and heads towards an emphasis on worldviews. This recognises both individual and institutional worldviews as 'a philosophy of life or an approach to life' that can include 'how a person understands the nature of reality and their own place in the world' has (ibid., p. 4). Such developments have seen a re-titling of the subject to Religion and Worldviews in many contexts. However, it should be noted that the diversity of provision, curricular arrangements and the role of locally agreed syllabi in England mean that such developments are ongoing (Pett, 2024).

3.3.2 Wales

The Curriculum for Wales (CfW), in step with Curriculum for Excellence, is a national curriculum reform project. CfW has rebranded Religious Education, as Religion, Value and Ethics (RVE) and it is situated within the Humanities 'Area of Learning and Experience'. Developments in Wales are at an early stage of implementation and locally agreed syllabi remain a feature of the RVE curriculum. However, the use of 'Statements of What Matter' and the overarching 'Four Purposes' of CfW reflect similar curriculum design ambitions to the Big Ideas approach for the evolved technical framework for Curriculum for Excellence RME (Welsh Government, Online). Therefore, with consideration of different local arrangements, continuing to engage with CfW could provide important points of comparisons for developing curriculum guidance and understanding professional learning needs in future phase of the CIC.

4. Education Scotland evidence

4.1 HMI evidence and reports

The national inspectorate undertakes a range of scrutiny activities from inspections of individual schools to regional and national thematic reviews of aspects of curriculum, learning, teaching and leadership. This section will first consider the evidence from individual school inspections, before considering two national reports relevant to RME. Care Inspectorate reports have not been included at this stage due to the ongoing development of a new joint inspection programme. This plan introduces a refreshed approach to multi-agency scrutiny and improvement support, which is still in progress. Once the updated framework and findings are fully implemented and published, they will provide a more comprehensive basis for inclusion in future curriculum evidence papers.

4.1.1 School Inspection Documentation

A study of school inspection evidence covering the period for August 2016 to August 2020 highlighted several important findings for RME in secondary schools (Scholes, 2023 & 2022). Based on the inspection documentation from fifty-four secondary schools, it was noted that:

- A significant number of schools were not meeting the policy requirements regarding provision of RME. Reports noted that where there was a lack of provision it was usually in the senior phase.
- There is evidence of a lack of detailed understanding regarding RME across the education system that possibly contributes to limited provision and a need for more careful monitoring of the curriculum.

To bring the discussion of inspection evidence up to date a sample of secondary and primary school inspection documentation was examined from school year 2024 to 2025. Of the school inspection documentation available for non-denominational secondary schools, twenty-four reports included at least one comment on RME.

- Most comments concerning RME relate to the of RME provision. In many schools there was only partial provision, often only covering S1 to S3.
- Two inspection reports note concerns with staffing RME and how the lack of staff impacts on the curriculum offer.
- There is attention paid to the opportunities for children and young people to learn about religious diversity, equality and multi-faith issues in and through RME in small number of comments.

Ninety-two of the one-hundred and ninety-two primary schools inspected between August 2024, and June 2025 received a comment relating to RME.

- Most comments on RME relate to whether there is provision of RME in schools and some offer comment on the extent and focus of the provision, with comments noting the coverage of a range of religions.
- In step with the secondary comments, there is attention paid to the opportunities for children and young people to learn about religious diversity, equality and multi-faith issues in and through RME in many of the reports.
- Some reports note the involvement of local religious leaders and/or groups in RME in the primary context. Some reports do not distinguish clearly between RO and RME.

4.1.2 National Reports

The inspectorate's work extends beyond inspecting individual schools to scrutiny activities of thematic issues across Scotland's education system. While RME has not featured explicitly in many of these reports, two recent areas of focus have included points relevant to RME.

Evaluation of Curriculum Design in Scotland: A Thematic Report from His Majesty's Inspectors of Education (2024).

- School leaders and staff must navigate a range of guidance to develop their curricula and would appreciate that future guidance is clear about its status and role (i.e. legislation, policy expectation, or discussion papers). Moving forward, settings, schools and staff should be supported by focused subject-specific guidance on curriculum design. This is particularly relevant to RME, given the need to currently take cognisance of the statutory arrangements, government guidance notes and curriculum documentation.
- Some schools are not providing children and young people with opportunities to experience all their entitlements and progression across the Broad General Education phase and appropriate personalisation and options in the senior phase. The report found that this is often the result of school leaders having to balance resources, timetabling and staffing.
- There is some evidence to suggest that national priority areas, such as attainment in literacy and numeracy, have led to schools and staff not prioritising curriculum design and improvements across other curricular areas in some schools and settings.
- It was briefly noted that schools work with partners to successfully enhance learning in areas of the curriculum such as RME and continuing to explore such opportunities can support the development of the four capacities.

Successful Approaches to Learning Outdoors (2022).

- There is ongoing evidence to suggest that learning outdoors is a positive feature of RME provision in some schools. Building on positive developments in the subject, supported by relevant guidance and exemplification (Education Scotland, 2017).

4.2 Education Scotland reports and evidence

The most detailed Education Scotland report on RME is the *Religious and Moral Education 3-18* report, published in 2014. The Education Scotland (2014: 3) drew out that the following main strengths for RME:

- Scotland has a strong internationally recognised values-based framework for learning and teaching in Religious and Moral Education.
- Most children and young people value their learning and enjoy their lessons.
- The majority of children and young people contribute confidently to classroom discussion and debates about local, national and international religious and moral issues.
- In the majority of schools, children and young people's learning is active and engaging. Many teachers use a range of teaching and learning approaches effectively to motivate learners.
- Children and young people often have good opportunities to develop literacy, numeracy and health and wellbeing through Religious and Moral Education.
- Increasingly, effective learning takes place outdoors or with partners in the wider community.
- Schools are using an increasing range of awards to accredit achievement in Religious and Moral Education.
- There is continued growth in the number of young people in the senior phase studying national qualifications courses in Religious, Moral and Philosophical Studies (RMPS).
- Children and young people increasingly engage in learning about religions and beliefs relevant to their local community as schools continue to de-clutter the curriculum.
- Children in pre-school often engage in learning which encourages them to share beliefs and family traditions

At the time, the Education Scotland (2014: 4) report noted the following areas for development:

- Not all children and young people experience high-quality teaching and learning. There is scope in many schools for children and young people to engage in more active, independent and collaborative learning.
- Children and young people need more learning that supports them to develop higher order thinking skills.
- Too often, children and young people are not clear enough about the purposes of their learning and how to improve their achievements.
- The development of information and communications technology (ICT) skills is not consistently a well-planned aspect of learning in Religious and Moral education.

- In most schools, arrangements for assessment and moderation of Religious and Moral Education are at an early stage of development.
- Parents require more information about how they can support learning in RME.
- There is much scope for local authorities to improve arrangements for quality assuring RME to bring about sustained improvements. The current variation in levels of support for this subject area are leading to inequity within the quality of delivery and in the amount of time given to the subject across Scotland.
- There are insufficient opportunities for subject specific career long professional learning for teachers of RME.
- In a significant number of schools, children and young people need more opportunities to develop their own beliefs and values through learning about a range of religions and other beliefs.
- Staff's planning using the experiences and outcomes of Curriculum for Excellence is not consistently well enough planned to ensure children and young people have a sound grasp of the significant aspects of learning within RME.
- Young people's learning from S1 to S3 often lacks sufficient depth and challenge to ensure young people develop the knowledge and skills embedded within the third and fourth level experiences and outcomes.
- Across Scotland, there are very few examples of effective planning for progression from P7 to S1.
- In most secondary schools, young people are not receiving their entitlement to Religious and Moral Education in the senior phase. Only a few schools have appropriate arrangements in place for S5 and S6. Increasingly young people in S4 do not have enough experiences of RME.

In addition to the above report, Education Scotland (2024) published *Numeracy in Religious and Moral Education*. This document provides exemplification of effective approaches to numeracy through learning in RME.

4.3 Curriculum improvement cycle pilot reviews

RME was not part of the pilot reviews for the curriculum improvement cycle. The key findings for the pilot reviews relevant to all curriculum areas can be found in Education Scotland's (2024) [*Background and a Case for Change: Findings from the Pilot Curriculum Reviews 2023/24.*](#)

5. Stakeholder reports and reviews

5.1 Key stakeholder reports

Stakeholders in the RME curriculum area come from a range of institutions, organisations, and groups. This includes faith and belief groups from across Scotland. Stakeholders engage in a range of activities and campaigns that can connect to RME but do not publish reports focusing specifically on the technical framework for RME.

5.2 Subject Associations

The Scottish Teachers Association for Religious and Moral Education (STARME) was established in 2022 and is the main subject association for RME practitioners. STARME's aims are to make representation to national bodies; provide for the exchange of views on all topics related to RME; identify teachers' developmental needs and endeavour to support them; act in a consultative and innovative capacity on all matters relating to the curriculum area; disseminate information on matters relating to schools and local authorities and pursue any other activities which further any of the above aims.

To date, STARME have not published any extended reports on the RME curriculum, but they have produced responses to the consultations on the right to withdraw and have reported on the early impact of their initial 'Festival of Learning' professional learning event (STARME, 2024). Such work is undertaken based on regular consultation with its membership and has seen STARME develop a range of professional learning opportunities, including 'regional teach-meets' and sharing resources. They had a further 'Festival of Learning' event in 2025.

5.3 Professional Associations

The Royal Society of Edinburgh's Learned Societies Group on Scottish STEM Education (2024) has published *Moral Support: Using the Curriculum to Foster Ethical Literacy in Scottish Learners*. This report makes a call for developing ethical literacy in the context of Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM) education. The report briefly draws attention to but does not fully develop the possibilities for RME to be a core feature of interdisciplinary and cross-curricular learning with respect to ethical literacy. As previous work has demonstrated RME can contribute meaningfully to interdisciplinary learning contexts involving STEM (McKinney et al. 2014).

While further specific curriculum-focused evidence from professional associations and teacher unions is not available for inclusion in this section, it is important to acknowledge that organisations such as the Educational Institute of Scotland (EIS), the Association of Headteachers and Deputies in Scotland (AHDS), National Association of Schoolmasters Union of Women Teachers (NASUWT), and the Scottish Secondary Teachers' Association (SSTA) regularly publish a wide range of materials. These include national surveys and reports and targeted resources on a range of matters. While these publications contribute meaningfully to professional learning, they do not directly address the RME curriculum in terms of curriculum structure, content, or learner experiences.

5.4 Children and Young Peoples' Perspectives

Many of the topics emphasised by children and young people in recent national reports that have captured their views are of direct relevance to RME. The views and ideas shared therefore should be an important consideration for RME during the Curriculum Improvement Cycle.

5.4.1 The National Discussion

In the *All Learners in Scotland Matter: The National Discussion on Education* report, learners expressed that issues of climate change and global warming were of importance to them (Scottish Government, 2023). There was a great deal of passion from the children and young people involved about saving the planet, climate change, and upholding their rights. There were also fears and anxieties, from them, about living in a world that is dramatically changing and evolving.

In response to these observations, it was noted that many of those responding to the National Discussion and 'particularly learners themselves, were keen to suggest new subjects or a new prioritisation for certain disciplines', including more 'Religious and Moral Education' (Scottish Government, 2023: 61).

5.4.2 Horizon Scanning Report

The Scottish Government's (2025) Horizon Scanning project engaged children and young people via a series of workshops. They looked at trends in topics like jobs, health, climate and politics, and discussed what these could mean for Scotland. At the workshops young people discussed five big topics:

- Climate and Environment – Young people urge Scotland to lead on nature protection and green job creation, calling for solutions that address the root causes of climate change and warning that inaction will disproportionately harm vulnerable communities.
- Economy and Jobs – They want a fair economy with affordable living costs, a just tax system, and broader access to green industries and emerging technology roles, balancing both concern over current inequalities and hope for future opportunities.
- Politics and Government – They want inclusive, transparent decision-making and strong public services (healthcare, education, transport), while fearing their voices are ignored, misinformation spreads online, and global crises could destabilize Scotland.
- Society and Communities – They envision an equitable, respectful society with education tied to real-life skills, faster progress on gender equality, and a healthier balance between online and offline engagement to foster collaboration rather than conflict.
- Health and Habits – They call for enhanced NHS and school-based mental health support with reduced stigma, improved vaping and drug education, and recognition of digital life's impact on sleep, social connection, and loneliness.

5.4.3 CYP Commissioner Report

The Children and Young People's Commissioner Scotland's (2025) report states that the Curriculum Improvement Cycle must learn from the insights of children and young people, including those who are furthest from enjoying their rights, to build curriculum experiences and opportunities which fulfil children's rights. These insights include:

- They want to have skills and knowledge that is relevant to the world they live in via a varied curriculum
- They would like to experience more active and outdoor learning
- They would like to have greater access to art and drama and more sports clubs
- They also want to learn about their rights, have opportunities for play and rest, as well as time to reflect and study during the school day
- They want choices about what they study and be able to follow their interests and develop a pathway of their own
- They want to learn practical skills for life

From this work, curriculum design and implementation must deliver education that develops every child's personality, talents and mental and physical abilities to their fullest potential including personalisation and support for those that need it.

6. Academic research

Research on Religious Education as a school subject is a flourishing, evolving and, at times, contested field. International scholarship has explored a range of topics relevant to the Scottish context. However, academic research explicitly focused on RME curriculum, provision and practice in Scottish schools is more limited. This section builds on the literature based on data from Scotland or items directly concerned with Scottish RME. It details five key messages relevant to RME in the context of CIC from the research and provides a commentary to support each point.

A Rapid Research Review has also been undertaken by Education Scotland's Data, Performance and Research team and will be published in parallel with this paper to complement its findings and evidence base.

We must remain consistent and clear about what RME is in Curriculum for Excellence and support all to understand how the technical and statutory frameworks underpin school provision.

Efforts have been made in more recent scholarship to describe the technical and statutory framework for RME accurately. Such work has mapped the curriculum guidance, the relevant legislation and the associated government guidance for RME in detail (Scholes, 2022; Robinson and Franchi, 2018; Nixon, 2013 and 2018). These efforts highlight a continuing insistence on being clear about what we mean when referring to RME in the context of Curriculum for Excellence and the CIC to develop a shared understanding across all relevant groups. This point is given further significance when it is recognised that much published research has consistently pointed to persistent challenges regarding the extent to which school provision does not fulfil statutory obligations (Scholes, 2025a, 2022 and 2020; McKinney and McCluskey, 2017; Matemba, 2015).

In the secondary context, research has identified the need for schools and practitioners to be clear about where opportunities for RME are planned and offered to children and young people and how these are distinct from or related to qualifications. In primary schools, there is a need to ensure that school leaders decouple RME from RO and use the language of the current technical framework to plan the RME curriculum (Scholes, 2025a and 2022). Local authority colleagues and HM Inspectors should also ensure they are conversant with the curricular and legal expectations for RME to enable them to support and challenge schools appropriately (Scholes, 2022; Matemba, 2014 and 2013).

A revised technical framework should support schools and practitioners in delivering a locally responsive and globally aware RME that is equitable across the system.

International research has long paid attention to the knowledge and content that make up Religious Education in curricula (Franck & Thalén, 2023). Scholarship focused on these areas for RME has concentrated on several main topics that demonstrate, on the one hand, how practitioners develop RME locally within the openness of the current technical framework. On the other hand, the variety of RME content, as evidenced in these discussions, can lead to some children and young people experiencing a lack of intellectual rigour, breadth and depth in their learning (Scholes, 2020; Matemba, 2015).

This tension between effective approaches to selecting content that meets learners' needs *in situ* and the issue of ensuring appropriate breadth and depth in learning most often surfaces in

discussions about interdisciplinary learning (IDL). Broadly, where IDL is done well, in the sense that relevant curriculum areas are involved in exploring a shared area of learning, RME curricula guidance can be enacted well. However, in other places, the inclusion of RME in IDL is tokenistic or lacks sophistication. Or, more problematically, IDL claims to cover aspects of the RME curriculum that it does not (Wilson et al. 2024; Scholes, 2022; Robertson et al. 2017; Matemba 2014; McKinney et al. 2014; Education Scotland, 2014).

There is an important debate in the literature surrounding the role that different disciplines may have concerning how knowledge and content are prioritised in RME. On the one hand, some scholars have strongly advocated for Philosophy as the key subject base for RME because of its strong disciplinary identity, useful methodological framings and non-confessional nature. However, others have drawn out a concern that such a shift leaves the study of religions at risk of both being downgraded and the benefits of studying religion denied to children and young people (Robinson and Franchi, 2018). Yet, still, some have also drawn out a concern that the RME curriculum guidance privileges Christianity over religious traditions from across the globe. This concern has also been furthered with a focus on decolonising RME (Matemba 2024; Nixon 2013).

Ultimately, an emphasis on any one direction in practice shapes the experience offered to learners in one context in ways that other learners might not encounter. Therefore, an evolved technical framework must support schools and practitioners in developing a shared understanding of RME to ensure an equitable offering across the country.

We must ensure that the aims of and approaches to RME are carefully articulated and communicated to ensure that all interested groups can value the curriculum area positively.

Academics have repeatedly highlighted the need to clarify and then competently communicate what RME is, what it involves learners understanding, knowing and doing and how it differs from other aspects of schooling, such as RO or qualifications. Research has highlighted that various groups can hold negative attitudes towards RME, which can see it either misunderstood or maligned, or both (Scholes, 2025b and 2020; Nixon, 2018; Matemba, 2015).

In secondary schools, this dynamic has been argued to be at play in situations where school leaders deploy non-specialists to teach RME. In such situations, it has been argued that school leaders are devaluing the subject expertise required for RME and denying RME its position as one of the eight curriculum areas of Curriculum for Excellence. Moreover, it can instil negative attitudes towards RME from colleagues disinterested in delivering it, uninspired pupils, and potentially even from parents and carers who carry unfavourable caricatures of RME due to their (mis)remembering of the subject from their own experience (Scholes, 2020; Nixon, 2018; McKinney and McCluskey, 2017). Similar concerns have been raised in primaries where the 'McCrone' teacher is left responsible for RME (Matemba, 2024).

The subject-knowledge demands of the curriculum area demand an appropriate balance between prescription and teacher professional judgement and ongoing professional learning opportunities.

Some research has highlighted that one of the significant challenges for high-quality RME is the breadth of subject knowledge and pedagogical capital required by practitioners. Professional learning and support for RME is variable across local authorities and practitioners tend to have to

rely on professional subject associations. To address this, there are calls for an improved professional learning offer to support practitioners (Scholes, 2025b).

Some research has identified the challenges that primary teachers have in this area. Typically, primary teachers will be graduates with a background in education or in a discipline that is not directly related to RME. Practitioners, therefore, have concerns about their subject knowledge and, as a result, lack the confidence to engage with RME (Clanachan & Matemba, 2015). In addition, some evidence suggests that some school leaders in the primary sector may also need further professional learning on RME and its role in their school's curriculum (Scholes, 2025a). As noted in the broader CIC discussions, this may indicate the need to consider carefully the level of prescription in an evolved technical framework for RME to ensure that it 'supports curricular areas, sectors and levels by offering more-or-less prescription or autonomy as best befits' RME (Education Scotland, 2024a, p. 13).

Pedagogy and assessment are under-researched aspects of RME in Scottish schools, and enhancing research in this area is vital to supporting the enactment of a revised technical framework.

There are far fewer studies focusing on classroom practice, pupil learning and assessment in Scotland, and work on these aspects should continue to develop as a priority to support and enhance curriculum making and to monitor and evaluate a revised technical framework (Cameron & Cassidy, 2022; Grant & Matemba, 2013).

Further, there is a need to consider how beginning teachers acquire and develop their pedagogy and assessment practice and how initial teacher education (ITE) programmes support this effectively (McKinney, 2023).

7. Future trends

Given that one of the aims of the Curriculum Improvement Cycle is to co-create a future-oriented curriculum, the trends in this section, whilst not certain, offer some insights for consideration. Some of the challenges facing the world, common to many forward-looking reports and analyses include:

- Rising global conflict (PWC, 2024; Scottish Government, 2025; OECD, 2025a)
- Climate change, biodiversity loss and reduced food security (Patton et al., 2016; Royal Society of Edinburgh, 2024; PWC, 2024; Scottish Government, 2025; OECD 2025a&b)
- Rise in mental health concerns and obesity (especially in young people) (Patton et al., 2016; OECD, 2025a; PWC, 2024; Scottish Government, 2025)
- Ageing populations (Scottish Government, 2025; PWC, 2024)
- Technological disruption and polarisation via increased use of AI and emerging technologies (Royal Society of Edinburgh, 2024; PWC, 2024; Scottish Government, 2025; OECD 2025a)
- Widening inequalities (including concentration of wealth, social instability and health inequalities) (Patton et al., 2016; PWC, 2024; Scottish Government 2025; OECD, 2020; OECD 2025a)
- Rising costs of living (World Economic Foundation, 2025)

It is also important to note that trends identified are likely to affect children and young people differently, or disproportionately, compared with impacts for older generations. This is, in part, because children and young people have to live with the outcomes of identified trends for longer, and the long-term future has particular importance for those who are youngest now (Scottish Government, 2025). They are increasingly exposed to conflict, displacement, environmental degradation, and unregulated commercial exploitation, especially in digital and food environments as well as being the first generation to grow up under the 'shadow of climate change' (Patton et al., 2016).

Young people may also experience societal transformations differently from older generations because they are often at the leading edge of change or technology adoption. The trends will also have differential impacts for different equalities groups. Intersecting inequalities and disadvantage may reduce resilience or the ability of both households and communities to adapt to future challenges, or to take advantage of future opportunities. In many cases the trends have the potential to drive and deepen inequalities still further (Scottish Government, 2025).

Despite these challenges, there are also opportunities for a future-oriented curriculum:

- Curriculum flexibility and personalisation - a modern curriculum that is fit for purpose, meets individual aspirations and delivers a just society that meets climate goals and achieves strong economic future (OECD, 2020; Royal Society of Edinburgh, 2024)
- Learner agency and co-agency – ownership of their learning and being able to navigate uncertainty (OECD, 2020; Patton et al., 2016)

- Empowerment - Education is positioned as a key driver for enabling individuals and communities to understand environmental challenges and take informed, responsible action (OECD, 2025b)
- Bodies and minds - the need for socio-emotional learning, digital wellbeing, and health literacy across all age groups (OECD 2025a; Patton et al., 2016)
- Transformative competencies - go beyond subject knowledge to include attitudes, ethics, and values allowing learners to create new value, reconcile tensions and dilemmas, and take responsibility (OECD, 2020).
- Skills such as AI and big data; analytical thinking; creative thinking; resilience, flexibility and agility; and technological literacy are not only considered critical now but are also projected to become even more important (World Economic Forum, 2025; OECD, 2020) as well as green skills (OECD, 2025b).
- Continued relevance of human-centric skills amid rapid technological advances - leadership and social influence, curiosity and lifelong learning, systems thinking, talent management, and motivation and self-awareness considered important for this (World Economic Forum, 2025).
- Equity and Inclusion - Curriculum design must address widening inequalities (for example via intercultural understanding) and ensure access to meaningful learning for all, regardless of background or circumstance (OECD, 2020; OECD, 2025a).
- Broader Educational Goals- Education should promote individual and collective wellbeing, sustainability, and social cohesion—not just academic achievement or economic productivity. Therefore, encouraging society to value all educational pathways and destinations (OECD, 2020; Royal Society of Edinburgh, 2024)

These trends reflect a global shift toward education systems that are necessarily more adaptive, inclusive, and future-oriented - principles that align closely with Scotland's Curriculum Improvement Cycle. They encourage co-creation and learner agency as well as reflecting the lived realities of learners, while preparing them for emerging challenges.

8. Points to Consider

This section considers the above evidence, insights and perspectives holistically and articulates points for consideration for RME in non-denominational schools, in the context of the Curriculum Improvement Cycle.

The evidence reviewed highlights several considerations for the future of RME within Scotland's Curriculum for Excellence.

Given the variable nature of the extent of RME provision, there is a clear need for guidance and robust monitoring of the curriculum area to ensure learners receive their full entitlement to RME.

A shared understanding of the purpose of the technical framework and legal requirements for RME is essential. Stakeholders - including teachers, practitioners, school leaders, local authority staff, inspectors, parents/carers and communities - must be confident in the legal and curricular expectations to avoid confusion between RME, Religious Observance, and qualifications such as RMPS. Strengthening this clarity will help retain RME as one of the eight curriculum areas within Curriculum for Excellence. Subsequently, the evolved technical framework will support teachers and practitioners to offer children and young people the best learning experiences and outcomes.

National qualifications in Religious, Moral and Philosophical Studies (RMPS) and the Awards, such as the Religion, Beliefs and Values Award remain popular, offering meaningful progression routes for senior phase learners. It is important that provision at all stages observes statutory requirements regarding RME and appropriately integrates opportunities for accreditation.

RME can contribute significantly to learners' skills and capacities, fostering intercultural understanding, ethical literacy, and critical thinking. Such competencies are vital for navigating an increasingly diverse and complex society. These skills align closely with future labour market demands and global trends, including technological disruption, climate change, and widening inequalities. The knowledge and skills developed in RME can support learners when they progress to further and higher education and the world of work.

International developments reinforce the importance of a pluralistic and inclusive curriculum that addresses both religious and non-religious worldviews. Scotland's evolved technical framework should draw on these insights to promote equity and intercultural dialogue.

Finally, professional learning is pivotal to support the enactment of new technical framework. Variability in teacher confidence and subject knowledge, potentially particularly apposite in primary settings, calls for sustained investment in career-long professional learning and research-informed practice. Enhanced support for pedagogy and assessment will strengthen quality and consistency across the system.

9. Declaration

The content of this document was written by the author, exercising full professional judgement. Education Scotland approved AI tools were used to support review, clarity, and quality assurance. Education Scotland staff retain full responsibility and have reviewed and approved all content

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