

Religious Education in Catholic Schools Curriculum Background and Evidence Paper

August 2026

Executive Summary

Overview

This paper provides an evidence base to support curriculum improvement for Religious Education- Roman Catholic (RERC) 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 RERC. It will inform the collaborative work of the Curriculum Improvement Cycle (CIC) for RERC.

Key Messages

- RERC occupies a unique position within Curriculum for Excellence as a core element of Catholic school identity, grounded in both legislation and Church teaching.
- The evidence highlights the central role of Scottish Catholic Education Service (SCES) in enabling effective partnership between the Bishops, the Scottish Government, Education Scotland, local authorities and inspection bodies.
- As curriculum frameworks evolve, there is a need to ensure that RE continues to be understood as education in faith, rooted in Catholic theology and tradition.
- The evidence reinforces the importance of specialist formation, theological understanding and professional learning for those delivering RE.
- RERC and Religious Observance operate together as part of the lived faith experience of Catholic schools.

Next Steps

- Consideration should be given to ensuring that future curriculum developments continue to recognise and respect this distinctive status and the role of the Scottish Catholic Education Service (SCES) in safeguarding it on behalf of the Bishops.
 - Consideration should be given to how national guidance and curriculum language continue to reflect this confessional character, supported by SCES.
 - Consideration should be given to how this integrated model of RE and RO continues to be clearly understood within national guidance and inspection processes, with SCES supporting clarity and consistency.
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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 the curriculum.

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), Qualifications Scotland 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. Additional sources of evidence include contributions from the Scottish Catholic Education Service (SCES), St Andrews Foundation for Catholic Teacher Education at the University of Glasgow, and key Catholic Church documents that shape educational policy and practice.

1.3 Scope of the review

This evidence paper explores the Religious Education Roman Catholic (RE) curriculum in its entirety across the 5–18 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 RE curricular area as outlined within Scotland's Curriculum for Excellence. 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.

The Catholic Church is the largest non-governmental provider of education in the world. It educates over 62 million children in over 231,000 schools and institutions. Every Catholic school is a centre of Integral Human Development and according to the Congregation for Catholic Education (1977, para. 34), “Christ is the foundation of the whole educational enterprise in a Catholic school. Church documents shape the mission and ethos of Catholic schools across the globe, and in Scotland. Following the Second Vatican Council (1962–1965), key Church documents such as *Gravissimum Educationis* (1965), *The Catholic School* (1977), and *The Religious Dimension of Education in a Catholic School* (1988) emphasized the school as centres of holistic formation of the individual—spiritually, intellectually, morally, and socially. These documents also affirmed the foundational role of parents as the first and primary educators of their children, with Catholic schools serving as partners who support and extend the educational and faith formation that begins in the home. Church documents define Catholic schools as places where there is an integration of faith with culture, ensuring that education is not only academically rigorous but also prepares pupils to be part of and contribute to a pluralistic society. In Scotland, where Catholic education has a distinct historical and social context, these teachings reaffirm the Catholic Church’s commitment to providing education that nurtures faith with personal and social responsibility. In Catholic schools, Church teaching shapes curriculum development, pastoral care, and the formation of staff. Catholic schools in Scotland continue to exist as faith-based inclusive communities that promote dignity, social justice, and the common good within a pluralistic society.

RE is one of the eight curriculum areas of Scotland’s Curriculum for Excellence (CfE). RE is a core aspect of the curriculum. As with other curriculum areas, the aims, intended learning experiences, and assessment standards for RERC are detailed in a set of Principles and Practice, Experience and Outcomes and Benchmarks documents.

The position of religious education in denominational schools is set out in statute. In Catholic schools, the Catholic Education Commission has responsibility for the faith content of the curriculum on behalf of the Bishops’ Conference of Scotland. The Scottish Government is working in partnership with the Catholic Education Commission in the development of guidance for Catholic schools in keeping with the values, purposes and principles of Curriculum for Excellence.

Religious education in Catholic schools takes place within the context of the wider Catholic faith community, in partnership with home and parish. It is an integral part of the Catholic school, which is itself a community of faith. It is designed to assist children and young people to be increasingly able to make an informed and mature response to God in faith and to nurture that faith. It offers opportunities for both evangelisation – proclaiming the Gospel message to all – and catechesis – the deepening of existing faith commitments among believers.

(Learning and Teaching Scotland, 2009)

The Scottish Catholic Education Service (SCES) states that *This Is Our Faith*, the syllabus for Catholic religious education in Scotland, governs the teaching of religious education in Scotland's Catholic schools. This is the first religious education syllabus to be originated wholly in Scotland and designed to meet the needs of young people. It was published in November 2011 by the Scottish Catholic Education Service on behalf of the Catholic Bishops of Scotland.

This is Our Faith is designed to inform teachers' understanding of:

- the nature of the Catholic school,
- the purpose of religious education,
- the role of the teacher,
- the theological organisers for teaching RE, known as the 'Strands of Faith'
- the 'core learning' which details the content and learning experiences that young people should have access to across their school life.

There are eight "Strands of Faith": Mystery of God, In the Image of God, Revealed Truth of God, Son of God, Signs of God, Word of God, Hours of God, Reign of God. These organisers provide the structure for the RE curriculum over the five levels of *CfE* and into the Senior Phase. The standards for assessment in RE 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 all eight strands of faith.

Core RE continues into the senior phase, from S4 to S6. This ensures that faith development progresses across learners' experience throughout their secondary education. To support this, Catholic schools are required to provide 2.5 hours of religious education each week in primary and 2 hours each week in secondary, embedding faith formation as a consistent and integral part of school life.

In 2015 SCES published *This is Our Faith Senior Phase (S4-S6)*. Core RE in Senior Phase builds on earlier stages by deepening learners' understanding of Catholic theology, moral teaching, and the life of the Church, while encouraging them to reflect critically and responsibly on faith in the context of modern society. The Senior Phase framework supports teachers in planning learning that engages learners as they thoughtfully consider ethical questions, recognise their own beliefs, and nurture a living, personal relationship with God that shapes how they relate to others and contribute to the common good.

In senior phase, Qualifications Scotland schools present learners for a number of Qualifications Scotland awards using evidence of learning from Senior Phase core RE. For example, the Qualifications Scotland Award in Religion, Belief and Values (RBV); Leadership; and units from

Scottish Studies at Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework (SCQF) levels 3, 4, 5 and 6 can be achieved through core RE learning.

QS Qualifications Scotland courses in Religious, Moral and Philosophical Studies (RMPS) are available at National 3, National 4, National 5, Higher and Advanced Higher levels. National 5, Higher and Advanced Higher courses are assessed by externally set and marked assessments. National 3 and 4 courses and Qualifications Scotland Awards are internally assessed, unit-based courses. The units that make up National 3 and 4 courses and standalone units at National 5 and Higher can be taken individually by learners.

The Pope Benedict XVI Caritas Award encourages young people to continue their faith journey with purpose and generosity. It recognises those who are already active and committed within their homes, schools, parishes and dioceses, while also inviting others to respond to God’s call of love in their own lives. The award celebrates the ways in which young people witness to their faith and make God’s love visible within their communities. For learners, participation in the Caritas Award provides a double dividend, supporting both faith formation and the opportunity to achieve the Religion, Belief and Values Award through recognised learning and values-based action.

1.4 Related national policies

1.4.1 RERC and the Law

Denominational schools in Scotland operate within the state education system and have a unique legal status. This commenced with the Education (Scotland) Act 1918, which integrated Denominational schools into the public system while retaining their distinct religious character. Prior to this Act, Denominational schools were managed, maintained and funded by the Denomination itself.

Based on the most up-to-date figures from the Scottish Government in 2026, there are 360 schools within the sector, comprising 302 primary schools, 54 secondary schools and 2 Additional Support Needs (ASN) schools, alongside 1 independent schools. The SCES annual data collection shows that these schools educate a total of around 120,576 learners across Scotland, including 65,770 learners in primary schools, 52,646 in secondary schools, 160 pupils in ASN provision, and approximately 1,000 pupils attending independent schools. This data provides a clear and accurate picture of the scale, reach and significance of the sector within Scottish education in 2026.

Number of publicly funded schools [note 1] in Scotland by religious denomination, as of April 2022		
Denomination	No. of schools	Per cent of total

Non-denominational	2,090	84.92%
Roman Catholic	360	14.63%
Inter-denominational	7	0.28%
Episcopalian	3	0.12%
Jewish	1	0.04%
Total	2,461	100%
Note 1: Including both Local Authority and Grant Aided schools		
Source: https://www.gov.scot/publications/school-contact-details/		

Catholic Denominational Schools

The Education (Scotland) Act 1918 secured the right of Roman Catholic schools to determine and manage religious instruction and observance within the curriculum. This position remains recognised by the Scottish Government, which states that the faith aspects of the curriculum, including Religious Education and Religious Observance, are determined by the Scottish Catholic Education Service (SCES) acting on behalf of the Bishops' Conference of Scotland (Scottish Government, 2014, para. 2.16).

This Act protects the Religious Character of Catholic schools, enabling them to deliver the curriculum which is aligned with their faith tradition while being maintained, managed and conducted by local authorities in the interests of the Catholic Church.

Furthermore, the Catholic Church, as the relevant denominational authority, has specific legal rights in relation to such schools. For example, teachers appointed to any post within a denominational school must be approved by the Church or denominational body responsible for the school. Under the *Education (Scotland) Act 1980*, education authorities are required to ensure that, prior to appointment, any teacher in a denominational school “*be approved as regards religious belief and character by representatives of the church or denominational body*” (*Education [Scotland] Act 1980*, s. 21).

The Catholic Teachers' Certificate (CTC) is recognised nationally as the appropriate accreditation for those delivering Religious Education in Roman Catholic schools in Scotland. In the *Curriculum for Excellence: Religious and Moral Education* letter, the Scottish Government makes clear its expectation that those teaching Religious Education in Catholic schools are appropriately qualified, stating that “*Scottish Ministers expect that those teaching Religious Education in Roman*

Catholic schools will have a professional qualification appropriate to the subject, including the Catholic Teachers' Certificate" (Scottish Government, 2011.)

This expectation underlines the distinct confessional nature of Religious Education in Roman Catholic schools and affirms the importance of theological understanding, professional formation and ecclesial commitment in those entrusted with its delivery.

Catholic schools are an integral part of the provision for education in Scotland, with learners of all faiths and none attending and choosing Catholic schools. Legislation ensures that their distinctive role and religious character remain fully protected within Scotland's education system.

This is further illustrated by The Charter for Catholic Schools in Scotland (SCES 2004) which outlines the core mission of the school as a community of faith and learning dedicated to service for the common good and the pursuit of excellence. Central to this mandate is an explicitly stated commitment to holistic formation and an inclusive school culture that respects the dignity and individual needs of each young person.

Legislation extends to Religious Education and Religious Observance. Section 8 of the Education (Scotland) Act 1980 states that local authorities cannot discontinue the teaching of Religious Instruction or Religious Observance, unless a resolution by the council to that effect has been approved by a majority of those voting in a local referendum. Section 21 goes on to protect the time allocated to Religious Education in Denominational Schools.

1.4.2 RERC and Early Level Contexts

Early years settings in Scotland are non-denominational, so no direct religious education is taught.

1.4.3 Religious Observance in Catholic Schools

The Education (Scotland) Act 1980 imposes a statutory duty on local authorities to provide "Religious Observance" (RO) in Scottish schools. This was defined in a national R.O. Review Group report published in 2004 as comprising: *"community acts which aim to promote the spiritual development of all members of the school's community and express and celebrate the shared values of the school community"*.

In a letter of guidance issued by the Scottish Government in February 2011, it is acknowledged that Catholic schools take a distinctive approach to the provision of Religious Observance:

Scottish Government Ministers welcome the tradition that, in Roman Catholic denominational schools, Catholic Liturgy will largely shape the nature and frequency of religious observance activities in the classroom and in the wider school community. So, at times, children and young people will be invited to participate in, and sometimes to lead, prayer and reflection in classrooms and at assemblies. At other times, to honour

occasions or feasts, chaplains will lead school communities in the celebration of Mass and other forms of liturgical celebration.

This is further illustrated in *SCES Guidance on Religious Observance (2017)*

Catholic schools follow the customs and practices of the Church in order to nourish the spirituality and faith of learners and staff. Our Catholic tradition is enriched by ancient rites, prayers and devotions which help young people to become aware of, and show reverence to, the sacred presence of the living God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Guided by this tradition, we celebrate various seasons and special feast days to honour God, Mary his mother and the Saints.

Religious observance is woven into the daily life of the school community. Learners are regularly invited to pray with their teachers in classrooms, assemblies, and during liturgical services. Every classroom displays a Crucifix, and many learning spaces include a dedicated sacred area featuring a Bible and symbols that reflect the seasons of the Church's liturgical year, such as Advent, Christmas, Lent, Easter, and Pentecost. Prayer is further enriched by religious services held throughout the year, including the distribution of ashes on Ash Wednesday and special assemblies during Advent and Lent. The school community also celebrates significant Feast Days and Holy Days of Obligation with Mass, led by the school chaplain either on-site or in local parish churches. At key points in their school journey, learners have opportunities to deepen their faith through retreats and pilgrimages to places of particular importance within the Catholic tradition.

While Religious Education is guided by specific Church teaching and curriculum requirements, it is inseparable from the school's Religious Observance practices. The two operate in a deeply interconnected way: Together RE and RO provide learners with the theological knowledge, language, and understanding of the Catholic faith, while enabling them to encounter, experience, and live out that faith in a tangible and communal way. This intrinsic relationship ensures that learners do not simply learn about Catholic beliefs in theory but also see them embodied in prayer, liturgy, sacramental life, and the rhythms of the Church year. Together, RE and RO form a unified experience of Catholic formation, supporting learners to grow spiritually, deepen their relationship with God, and develop the beliefs, values, and actions that reflect a wholehearted response to God's invitation to faith.

The Scottish Government considers that RO complements other aspects of pupil learning and makes an important contribution to pupil development. Parents . The Scottish Government (2011) also recognises that:

Where a parent chooses a denominational school for their child's education, they choose to opt in to the school's ethos and practice which is imbued with religious faith and

religious observance. In denominational schools, it is therefore more difficult to extricate a pupil from all experiences which are influenced by the school's faith character.

Experiences and Outcomes (Es and Os) below highlight the intrinsic link between RE and RO, with learning deeply connected to learners' observance.

3rd Level- RERC 3-14a

I recognise the importance of personal and communal prayer in the growth of people's relationship with God. I know a number of traditional Catholic prayers, and I have developed an understanding of the meaning of these prayers. I have participated in different approaches to, and experiences of, prayer. I can describe how prayer is important part of the liturgical and devotional life of the Church. I have reflected on how all of these are different ways of worshipping God.

3rd Level – RERC 3-05a I know that Jesus is truly divine and truly human, and I can acknowledge Him as our Saviour who brings the New Covenant

2nd Level – RERC 2-23a I know that God has given me the freedom to make choices about the way I live my life. I have reflected on how the decisions of my conscience affect my relationship with God and others.

1.4.4 Conduct of Relationships, Sexual health & Parenthood Education in Schools

In February 2026 the Scottish Government published statutory guidance on the [*Delivery of relationships, Sexual Health and Parenthood Education in Schools*](#).

This guidance which applies to all schools managed by local authorities sets out the Scottish government's expectations in relation to the manner in which such education is conducted in local authorities.

The statutory guidance states that "The current position by which faith aspects of the curriculum in Catholic schools are determined by the Scottish Catholic Education Service acting on behalf of the Bishops' Conference of Scotland are maintained and are unaffected by this guidance." (para 2.16).

Catholic schools in Scotland are enabled by the Scottish Government and required by the Church to follow church guidance provided via the Scottish Catholic Education Service (SCES) to give witness to the Catholic faith and to uphold the tradition of the Catholic faith.

The Scottish Catholic Education Service explains within this tradition, Catholic schools approach education about sexual health and relationships in a holistic and integrated way. It is not limited to learning about biological development or the emotional changes that influence behaviour. Across the full range of experiences provided in Catholic schools, teachers help children and young people come to understand themselves as God's children, recognising the beauty and dignity of their bodies, their gender and their sexuality as gifts from God. They learn about the

importance of caring for their health, forming relationships that are respectful, responsible and loving, and understanding moral truth. They are also supported in appreciating their capacity to become parents and to share in God's creative love. In this context, young people come to understand why the Catholic Church teaches that marriage between a man and a woman is the ideal setting for sexual intimacy and self-giving love.

Primary learners are taught through a progressive programme entitled "God's Loving Plan". Secondary learners are taught through a progressive programme entitled "Called to Love." Teaching about these issues cannot be separated from teaching about the fullness of life - physical, emotional, intellectual, and spiritual - which God intends for us in which we experience in and through love, in our relationship with God and with each other. In Catholic schools, learning about how life begins, about our hopes and aspirations, about our relationship with others and about our ultimate destiny are all predicated on our belief in Jesus Christ and our values which are grounded in the gospel.

1.4.5 United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (Incorporation) (Scotland) Act 2024

The United Nations Right of the Child was adopted by the UN General Assembly on November 20, 1989, and was ratified by the Holy See in April 1990. This was ratified by the UK 16th December 1991.

The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (Incorporation) (Scotland) Act 2024 makes the rights set out in the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child part of Scots law. The Act strengthens legal protection for children by allowing courts to review whether public bodies have respected children's rights, providing remedies where breaches occur, and requiring Scottish Ministers to promote awareness and understanding of children's rights through a statutory children's rights scheme. Overall, the Act aims to embed children's rights into everyday public decision-making in Scotland, ensuring they are respected, protected, and fulfilled in law and practice

Catholic schools place the dignity and wellbeing of the child at the centre of education, in line with core Church teaching that every child is created in the image and likeness of God. Catholic Social Teaching emphasises the inherent dignity of the human person, the common good, and the preferential option for the poor and vulnerable. These are distinctive from, yet reflect, the UNCRC principles of protection, provision, and participation. Through pastoral care, inclusive practices, and safeguarding policies, Catholic schools work to ensure that children are respected, listened to, and supported, particularly those who are vulnerable or marginalised.

In addition, Catholic education promotes children's rights through a holistic approach that nurtures spiritual, moral, emotional, and intellectual development. Church documents such as *Gaudium et Spes*, (1965) affirm the rights of children to education, care, and moral guidance, while the

Catechism of the Catholic Church (1992) stresses the responsibility of communities and institutions to protect children and help them flourish. Catholic schools encourage pupil voice, participation, and responsibility within a compassionate community. Catholic schools not only comply with this Act but actively live out its values by forming young people who understand their rights, respect the rights of others, and are called to act justly in society.

Data from UNICEF shows more than 2/3 of Scottish Catholic schools have committed to the Rights Respecting Schools Award accreditation process. The Rights Respecting Schools Award places children's rights at the heart of school policy and practice, enabling leaders and teachers to strengthen pupil's sense of belonging and voice, and to create an environment for great learning. In addition, Catholic diocesan RE offices offers a suite of professional learning that explores children's rights, through the lens of the Catholic faith,

1.4.6 Equality Act

The Equality Act 2010 establishes a general prohibition on discrimination on the grounds of religion or belief, including the absence of religion or belief. However, the Act also provides specific and lawful exceptions for schools with a religious character. These provisions recognise the distinctive nature of denominational education and permit such schools to apply religious criteria in certain defined circumstances. In practice, this enables faith schools to give priority to learners of their own faith where schools are oversubscribed, to make employment decisions that are consistent with their religious ethos, and to deliver a curriculum that reflects and sustains their faith tradition. These exceptions provide an essential legal framework within which Religious Education can be authentically delivered in accordance with the school's religious character.

2 National data sets

2.1 Qualifications Scotland attainment and presentation data

Qualifications Scotland courses provide the only national data on attainment in the curriculum area. The National 5 and Higher RMPS attainment rates in denominational schools for the 2022, 2023 and 2025 diets are detailed in the tables below. It should be noted that examination arrangements for 2022 and 2023 were different to those for 2024 and 2025 due to the changes made during the Covid-19 pandemic. Therefore, any patterns or trends should be considered carefully. Numbers for the 2025 diet were collated prior to appeal decisions.

Grade breakdowns are not provided where there are fewer than five entries. All analysis is therefore based only on the available attainment data for each year and sector, and patterns should be interpreted with appropriate caution given these limitations.

2022								
	Entries	A	B	C	A-C %	D	A-D	No Award
N5	172	87	36	19	80	10	89	8
Higher	568	177	151	114	76	70	90	51

2023								
	Entries	A	B	C	A-C	D	A-D%	No Award
N5	177	83	29	19	64	18	76	22
Higher	641	113	149	155	68	102	83	119

2024								
	Entries	A	B	C	A-C %	D	A-D%	No Award
N5	244	121	24	32	67	19	75	39
Higher	610	208	134	103	74	79	87	78

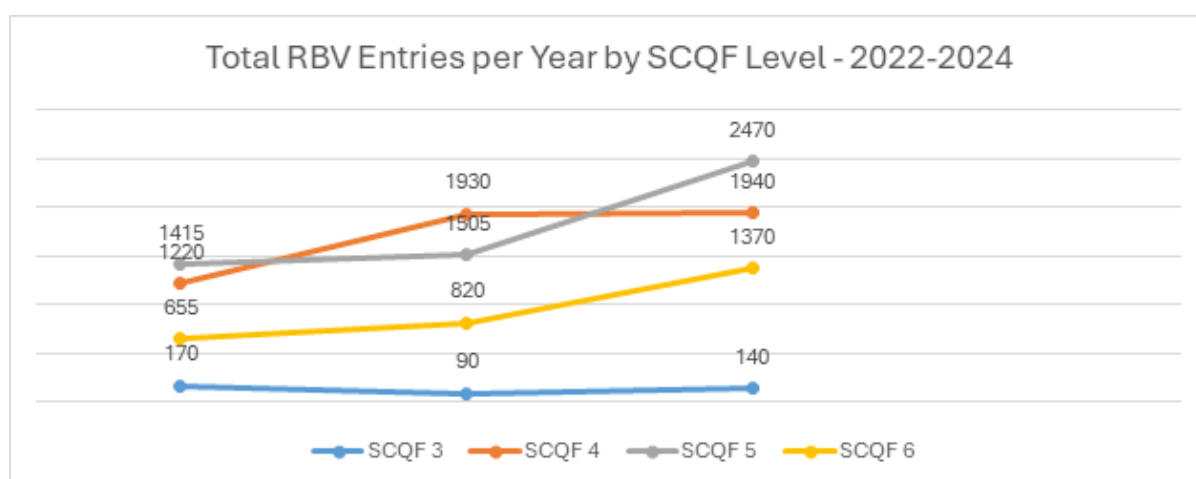
2025								
	Entries	A	B	C	A-C %	D	A-D%	No Award
N5	244	121	24	332	67	19	75	39
Higher	610	208	134	103	74	79	87	78

2.2 Other Related Awards

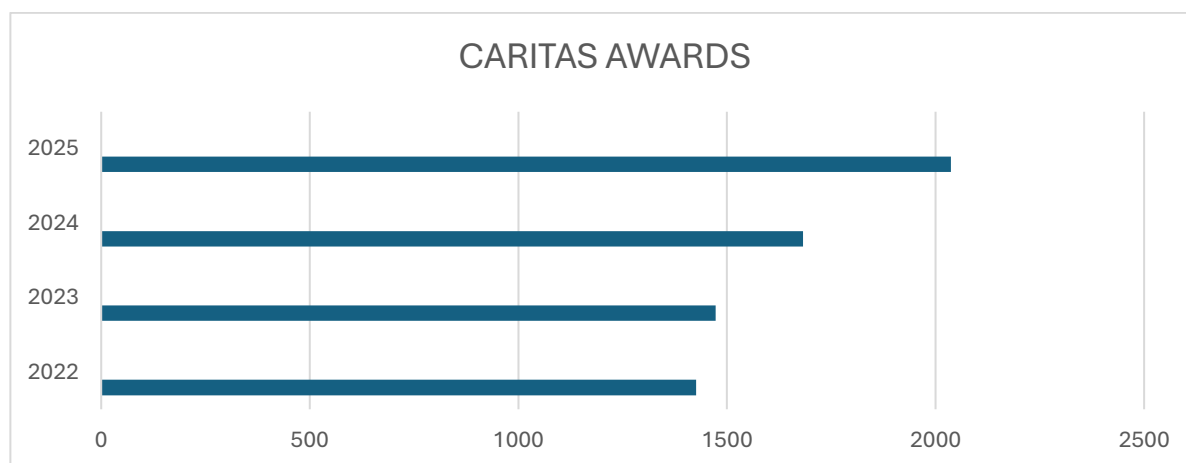
The Religion, Belief and Values (RBV) Award is an Qualification Scotland-accredited qualification Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework (SCQF Levels 3–6) designed to recognise young people’s learning about religious, moral, and philosophical issues and their ability to reflect on their own beliefs and values in action.

It is one of the most flexible awards available in the senior phase and aligns extremely well with both RERC and RMPS.

Qualifications Scotland RBV awards are not graded. However, Qualification Scotland 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.



The Caritas award has proven to be highly successful, with participation increasing steadily each year. In 2022, 1,426 senior secondary learners achieved the award, rising to 1,473 in 2023, 1,682 in 2024, and reaching 2,037 in 2025. The consistent growth in numbers highlights the strong commitment of learners to the programme and demonstrates the significant impact Caritas has had on their spiritual development and engagement with service.

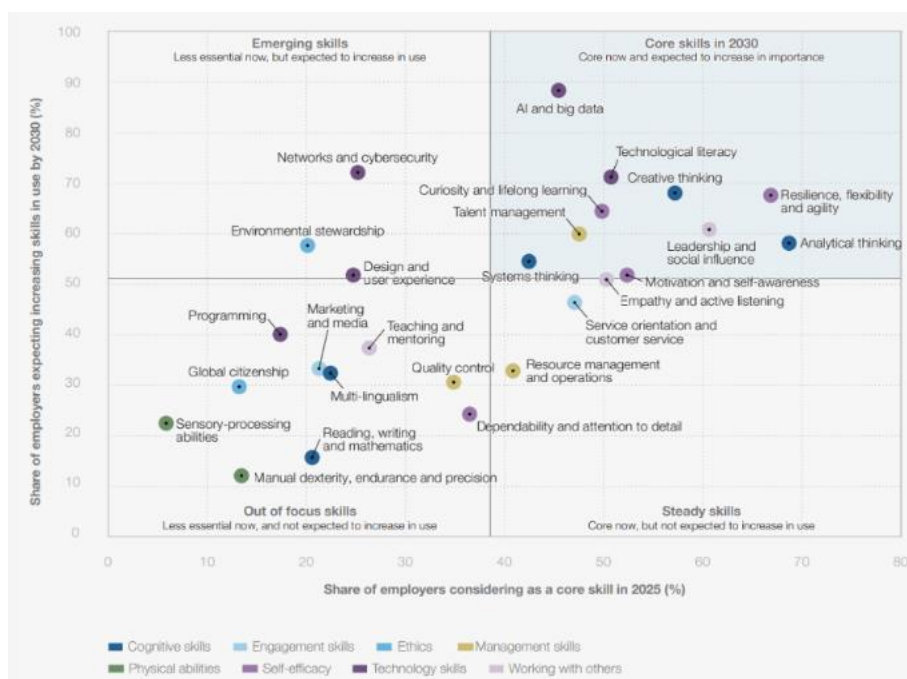
2.3 Labour market information

In Catholic schools, learning is integrated with faith and values, encouraging learners to see their education as a pathway to personal fulfilment and social responsibility rather than simply a route to economic success. Catholic education aspires to form well-rounded individuals who can contribute positively to the common good of society while living out their faith in everyday life. It also helps young people discern their unique God-given vocation — the particular way they are called to use their gifts in service of others and for the good of the world. Current labour market intelligence highlights that learners will need to navigate a dynamic, complex and rapidly changing society, and RERC plays a vital role in equipping children and young people to do so with wisdom, integrity and a strong sense of purpose.

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 RERC 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. RERC 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](#))

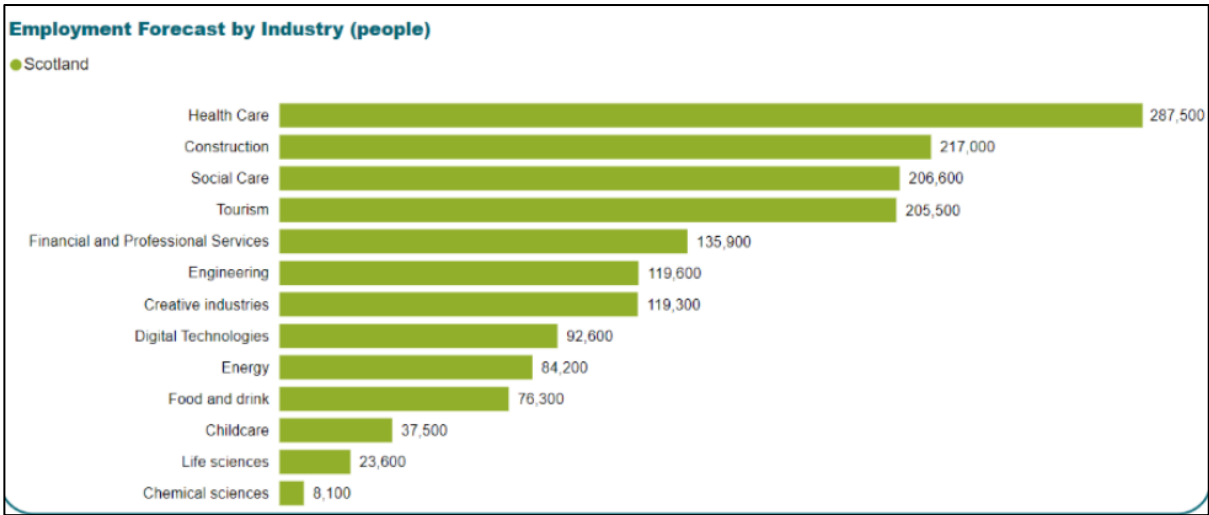
The *Future Trends for Scotland* (Scottish Government, 2025) report outlines 3 key trends for Scotland's labour market and skills

- 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.

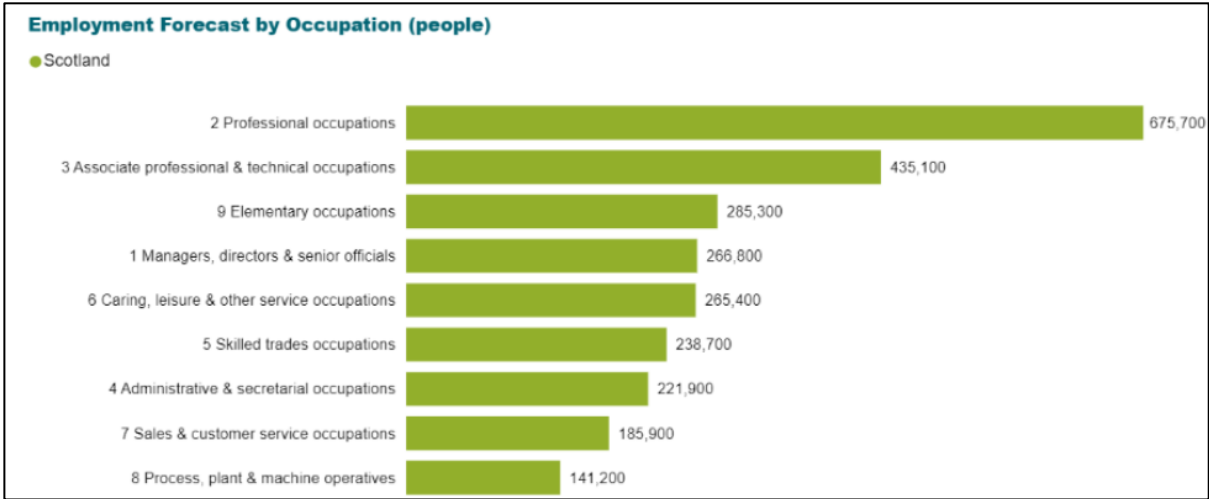
Coupled with this, Skills Development Scotland (SDS) provide detailed labour market information using a consistent evidence base to inform future investment in skills, built up from existing datasets and forecasts. They work with key partners and stakeholders in the production of

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](#).



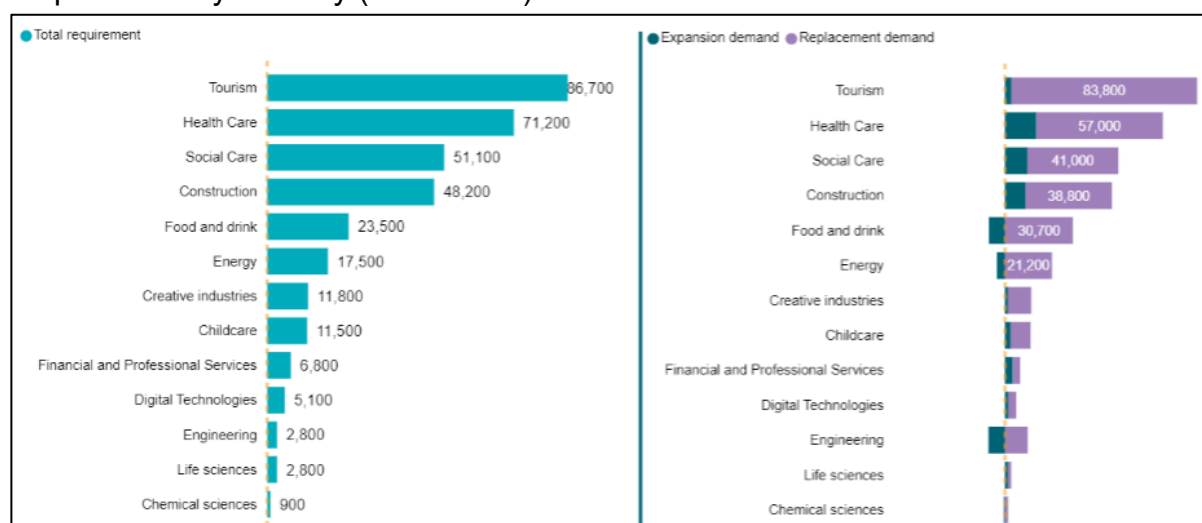
Graph 4: Bar chart showing the future employment forecast by industry for Scotland in 2034 ([SDS, 2025a](#))



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.

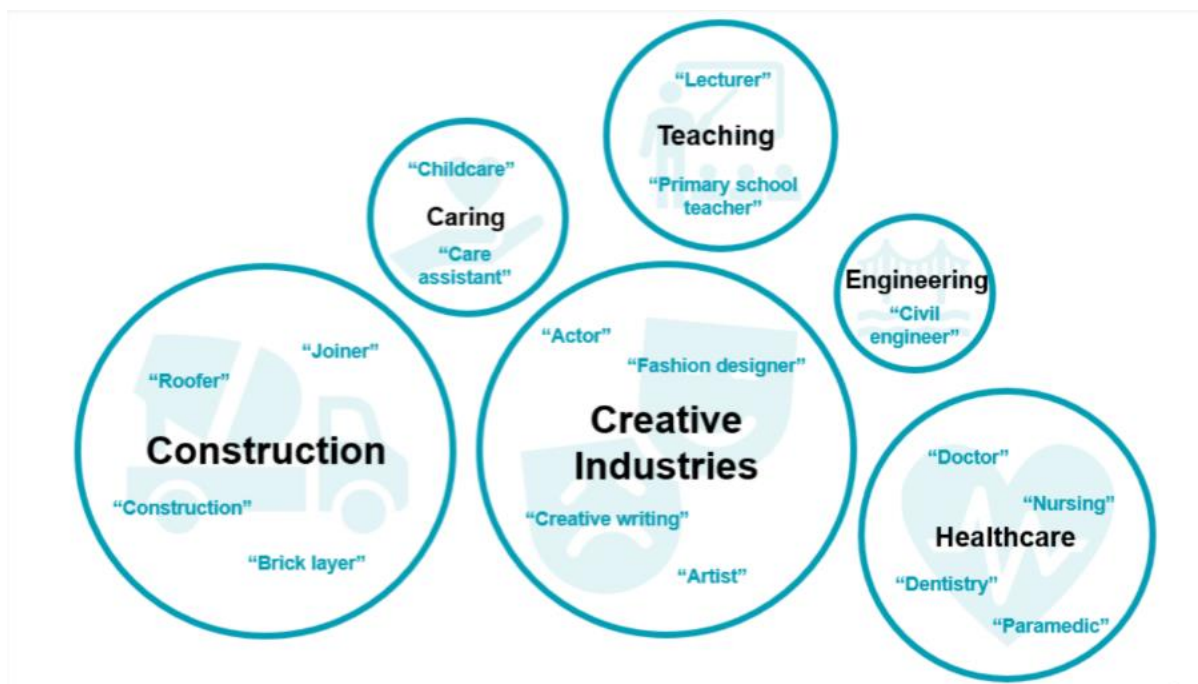
Total requirement by industry (2027-2034):



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 <i>(Top 5, % selected)</i>			
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 <i>(Top 5, % selected)</i>			
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.

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 Tik Tok 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.

2.4 National statistics

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

2.5 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 RERC provision could be a positive next step for supporting RERC provision.

3 International reports and comparative studies

3.1 International reports

Message of His Holiness Pope Francis on the Global Compact on Education, Vatican, 2020

The Global Compact on Education is a worldwide initiative launched by Pope Francis (formally in 2020) calling for a renewed commitment to education as a shared, humanising, and transformative endeavour. It responds to what the Pope described as a “*broken educational pact*” between families, schools, institutions, and society.

For Catholic schools, the Global Compact provides a theological and educational framework that:

- Affirms Catholic education as central to integral formation, not an optional add-on
- Supports dialogue-based, reflective, and inclusive approaches to RE
- Encourages engagement with contemporary social, ethical, and ecological issues
- Reinforces the mission of Catholic education as serving both faith development and the common good.

Global Catholic Education Report 2023 – Transforming Education and Making Education Transformative

The Global Catholic Education Report 2023: Transforming Education and Making Education Transformative highlights the significant global contribution of Catholic education, which serves tens of millions of learners across diverse cultural and socio-economic contexts. The report situates Catholic education within the wider global education crisis, characterised by persistent inequality, declining learning outcomes, and the compounded impacts of poverty, conflict and climate change. While acknowledging regional variation in enrolment trends and governance arrangements, it affirms that Catholic schools represent one of the largest non-state education networks worldwide, with a strong presence in communities experiencing vulnerability and marginalisation. In many countries, including Scotland, Catholic schools operate as state-funded schools within the public education system, reflecting a partnership between Church and state. Within this framework, parents exercise a legitimate and protected choice regarding the type of school their child attends, including the option to choose a denominational or non-denominational school. Catholic education is therefore presented as part of a pluralist education system in which public provision, parental choice and religious identity coexist in support of educational equity, inclusion and the common good.

Ofsted Religious Education Subject Report (*Deep and meaningful?*, 2024)

The Ofsted Religious Education Subject Report (*Deep and meaningful?*, 2024) acknowledges that Catholic schools are a significant and distinctive provider of Religious Education in England, operating within a clearly defined theological and educational framework. While Catholic schools are not inspected for RE under Ofsted's subject framework, the report recognises that Catholic RE is systematically planned, well-resourced, and given protected curriculum time, contributing to consistently strong outcomes, including above-average GCSE attainment.

In its response, the Catholic Education Service (CES) emphasises that Catholic Religious Education is central to the mission of Catholic schools and integral to the holistic formation of learners. The CES highlights that Catholic RE combines academic rigour with faith formation, is supported by specialist teacher training, and is inspected through a dedicated denominational process. The response affirms that Catholic schools are well placed to deliver deep, coherent, and meaningful RE that prepares learners for life in a religiously diverse society while remaining faithful to the Church's educational mission.

COMECE (2024) *Religious Education in the European Schools – A Unique and Essential Contribution.*

The COMECE (the *Commission of the Bishops' Conferences of the European Community*) position Paper (2024) highlights that Religious Education in Catholic schools is a distinctive and essential element of their educational mission. Catholic RE is framed as central to students' moral, spiritual, and cultural formation, providing them with a deep understanding of Europe's Christian heritage while fostering ethical awareness and social responsibility. The paper highlights that Catholic schools are uniquely placed to integrate faith formation with academic learning, ensuring that RE contributes meaningfully to the holistic development of learners.

The paper also stresses the role of Catholic schools in promoting social unity and dialogue within increasingly diverse European societies. By delivering RE that is faithful to Church teachings yet open to engagement with other beliefs, Catholic schools equip students with critical thinking, ethical discernment, and the capacity to navigate contemporary social challenges. This positions Catholic education as both a guardian of tradition and a proactive contributor to the common good, reinforcing its distinctive contribution to European education.

3.2 Comparative Studies

In RERC we do not have international comparative assessments to include in this section.

4 Education Scotland evidence

4.1 HMIE 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 RERC.

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

This section draws on HMIE inspection reports, examining the current landscape of Religious Education provision. The analysis provides an evidence-based understanding of how RE is delivered in the classroom and the impact this has across the whole school.

For the primary school sector, 95 reports were available for scrutiny.

- Less than 20% of the reports made direct reference to statutory requirements for Religious Education suggesting a need for consistent reporting and recording of the legal requirements concerning RERC across the education system.
- Of the reports that did mention RERC provision, *This is Our Faith* was praised as a clear, coherent and progressive learning pathway.

Almost all the reports (93%) made mention of the Catholic ethos that was evident in the school. Most notably in the following comments:

- Schools celebrate cultural diversity and promote respect for others' beliefs and backgrounds.
- Children learn about world religions, protected characteristics, and global citizenship
- Work on equalities is evident through assemblies, events, pupil groups and curriculum choices
- UNCRC and children's rights are increasingly embedded in daily practice
- Children contribute meaningfully to community life and charitable initiatives
- Opportunities such as the Pope Francis Faith Award, Mini Vinnies and parish events promote service, compassion and leadership

- Environmental and sustainability projects, including Laudato Si' initiatives, develop children as responsible stewards of creation
- Senior leaders promote gospel values and nurture a strong Catholic identity
- Staff take on leadership roles linked to faith development and inclusion.
- Children are offered numerous faith leadership opportunities, strengthening their sense of belonging and responsibility
- Consultation with children, families and parishioners' shapes school values and school improvement priorities
- Gospel values consistently underpin school life
- School vision, values and aims are aligned with Catholic teaching and the Charter for Catholic Schools
- Children and staff model the Gospel values in daily interactions
- Children are well supported in sacramental preparation
- Ethos is warm, inclusive and rooted in Catholic identity
- Staff model gospel values in their interactions, setting a tone of compassion and respect
- Strong, productive relationships exist between the school and local parish
- Children regularly engage in parish-based activities and church services
- Priests work closely with staff to support faith development and observance
- Community and parish partnerships enrich children's spiritual and social experiences

In the secondary sector, 21 reports were available at the time of the review.

- Most of the reports found that the statutory requirement for Religious Education was being met.
- In most schools, RERC is planned progressively through "This is Our Faith" across stages and builds good understanding of Catholic Christianity.
- It is regularly noted that '*This is Our Faith*' programme provides young people with opportunities to develop their faith through their learning, prayer and action.

Beyond Religious Education, there are some notable comments pertaining to Catholic ethos and school identity:

- Young people benefit from high-quality relationships, based on the strong Catholic ethos, nurturing culture and high expectations across the school community
- Young people contribute positively to the caring ethos of the school, and their participation and achievement reinforce gospel values
- The school's gospel values are evidenced in the behaviour and attitudes of all members of the school community

- Young people undertake the Caritas award which provides them with leadership opportunities to further develop their faith through engagement with their community and the wider life of the school
- Gospel values strongly influence the school ethos and consequently the very positive learning experiences of almost all young people

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

- Most children and young people think that Religious Education supports them well in their own faith development.
- Children and young people are increasing their understanding of the importance of prayer and reflection. Most children at the primary stages are developing well their knowledge and understanding of Catholicism.
- Schools have a clear progression framework for RERC through *This Is Our Faith*.
- Religious Education is often central to the life and work of the school as a community. Consequently, children and young people often demonstrate strong awareness of social justice and the need to serve others.
- Almost all schools deliver an appropriate broad general education and senior phase entitlements for Religious Education.
- Young people in the senior phase have responded very well to the very successful introduction of the Caritas Award

At the time, the Education Scotland report noted the following areas for development:

- Improvements to RERC in the senior phase are at an early stage in most schools.
- Young people from S4 to S6 require better planned opportunities to deepen their knowledge and understanding of the Roman Catholic faith, Christianity more widely and of other world religions.
- In many schools, there is scope to further strengthen partnership working with parents and the parish community to extend learning and achievement.

4.2 Curriculum improvement cycle pilot reviews

RERC 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 RERC curriculum area come from a range of institutions, organisations and groups. These include the Catholic Headteachers' Association for Primary Schools (CHAPS), the Catholic Headteachers' Association for Secondary Schools (CHAS), the National Association of Roman Catholic Religious Education Advisers (NARCREA), and the St Andrew's Foundation at the University of Glasgow. These stakeholders engage in a range of professional, advisory and formational activities that connect to RERC; however, they do not generally publish reports focused specifically on the technical curriculum framework for RERC.

The Roman Catholic Bishops of Scotland remain the denominational authority in whose interests' Catholic schools are conducted, with statutory responsibility for the religious character of these schools. They exercise this responsibility principally through the Scottish Catholic Education Service (SCES), which acts on their behalf. Through SCES, the Bishops work in partnership with local authorities, Education Scotland, HM Inspectors of Education, Initial Teacher Education providers, award and accreditation bodies, and a wider range of Catholic partners to support, safeguard and develop RERC. This collaborative approach ensures that RERC remains faithful to the teaching of the Catholic Church while being coherently aligned with national educational policy, professional standards and quality assurance processes in Scotland.

5.2 Subject Associations

Each Catholic diocese convenes meetings for Principal Teachers of RE in Catholic secondary schools and for RE coordinators in primary schools. The Scottish Teachers Association for Religious and Moral Education (STARME) was established in 2022 and is the main subject association for RME practitioners.

5.3 Professional Associations

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 RERC 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 RERC. The views and ideas shared therefore should be an important consideration for RERC during the Curriculum Improvement Cycle.

The Scottish Catholic Education Services (SCES) conducted a survey in 2025 to ascertain the views of over 300 secondary pupil's attitudes towards Religious Education and Religious Observance. The views are synthesized below:

- Learners enjoy learning about diverse beliefs, discussing moral issues, and expressing opinions in respectful environments.
- Inclusion comes from teachers who respect differing views and make all learners feel valued.
- Learners appreciate teachers who encourage open dialogue and make lessons feel safe for sharing beliefs.
- Whole-school events that focus on shared values and community spirit are seen as meaningful and inclusive.
- Learners value opportunities to shape RE/RO through surveys, class discussions, and leadership roles.
- Learners look forward to lessons when they feel interesting, inclusive, and discussion based.

It was also noted that:

- Learners would like more interactive, creative, and collaborative RE/RO activities (e.g., debates, art, projects).

5.4.1 The National Discussion

In the *All Learners in Scotland Matter: The National Discussion on Education* (Scottish Government, 2023) report, learners expressed that issues of climate change and global warming were of importance to them. 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

The research base for Religious Education in Catholic Schools is limited particularly with regard to the Scottish context. Magisterial documents on education often contain references to religious education but the only document dedicated to religious education is from Circular Letter to the Presidents of Bishops' Conferences on Religious Education in Schools (2009). It was issued to reaffirm and clarify Catholic teaching on religious education in schools, in response to growing tendencies in some states to:

- marginalise religious education,
- replace confessional religious education with neutral or comparative models,
- weaken parental rights and the Catholic identity of schools.

Other relevant and notable research has been included below:

Franchi, L. (2018). RE and Catholic education: A Scottish perspective. In S. Whittle (Ed.), *Researching Catholic education: Contemporary perspectives*

In *RE and Catholic Education: A Scottish Perspective*, Franchi highlights the central role of Religious Education in defining the identity and mission of Catholic schools in Scotland. He explains that RE is a cornerstone of Catholic schooling, providing a structured space for theological learning and faith formation. The chapter details how the Scottish Catholic Education Service, in partnership with Education Scotland, has developed frameworks to ensure that RE is both theologically robust and pedagogically effective, supporting the holistic formation of learners. Franchi emphasizes that Catholic RE extends beyond factual knowledge, fostering students' moral, spiritual, and intellectual growth in alignment with the Church's educational mission.

Franchi also examines contemporary curriculum guidance, such as the *This is Our Faith* syllabus and accompanying *Principles and Practices*, which provide coherent structure and benchmarks for teaching RE in Catholic schools. These frameworks ensure that RE is systematic, coherent, and contextually relevant, linking classroom learning to wider faith formation and the lived experience of Catholic life. The chapter concludes that Scottish Catholic schools offer a distinctive model of Religious Education in which academic rigor, spiritual development, and the transmission of Catholic values are integrated to form learners who are both knowledgeable and morally grounded.

Franchi, L. (2013). Catechesis and religious education: A case study from Scotland. *Religious Education*, 108(5), 467–481.

In *Catechesis and Religious Education: A Case Study from Scotland*, Leonardo Franchi explores how Catholic schools in Scotland integrate catechesis with Religious Education (RE) to form both the intellect and the faith of students. The chapter highlights the 2011 syllabus *This is Our Faith*,

which provides a structured framework that combines academic rigor with the Church's catechetical mission. Franchi emphasizes that Catholic RE is intentionally designed to go beyond knowledge acquisition, fostering students' spiritual, moral, and intellectual development within the context of the Catholic tradition. By aligning pedagogical strategies with faith formation, Catholic schools ensure that RE remains central to the school's identity and mission.

Franchi also illustrates how Catholic schools adapt national curricular frameworks to maintain a theologically grounded and values-based approach. The Scottish example demonstrates that Catholic RE is a holistic process, where doctrinal understanding, ethical reflection, and personal faith formation are interconnected. This model allows Catholic schools to provide a distinctive form of education in which learners are equipped not only with knowledge about the faith but also with the capacity to engage thoughtfully and ethically with contemporary society, fulfilling both academic and catechetical objectives.

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 future 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 RE in the context of the Curriculum Improvement Cycle.

- RE occupies a unique position within Curriculum for Excellence as a core element of Catholic school identity, grounded in both legislation and Church teaching. Consideration should be given to ensuring that future curriculum developments continue to recognise and respect this distinctive status and the role of the Scottish Catholic Education Service (SCES) in safeguarding it on behalf of the Bishops.
- The evidence highlights the central role of SCES in enabling effective partnership between the Bishops, the Scottish Government, Education Scotland, local authorities and inspection bodies. Consideration may be given to how this partnership role is further strengthened and made visible within national curriculum improvement processes.
- As curriculum frameworks evolve, there is a need to ensure that RERC continues to be understood as education *in faith*, rooted in Catholic theology and tradition. Consideration should be given to how national guidance and curriculum language continue to reflect this confessional character, supported by SCES.
- Evidence demonstrates strong foundations through *This Is Our Faith*. Consideration may be given to how SCES and partners continue to support coherence, progression and appropriate depth across the learner journey, particularly at points of transition and within the senior phase.
- Senior phase RE plays a vital formative role, even where learning is non-certificated. Consideration should be given to how its purpose and expectations are clearly articulated, supported and protected, with SCES continuing to provide guidance that complements national qualifications and awards.
- The complementary relationship between RE, RMPS qualifications, the Religion, Belief and Values Award and the Caritas Award is a clear strength. Consideration may be given to how SCES-supported awards and pathways are further recognised as adding value to learners' spiritual, moral and personal development.
- The evidence reinforces the importance of specialist formation, theological understanding and professional learning for those delivering RERC. Consideration may be given to how SCES, in partnership with universities and national agencies, continues to support teacher formation, workforce sustainability and professional confidence.
- RE and Religious Observance operate together as part of the lived faith experience of Catholic schools. Consideration should be given to how this integrated model continues to be clearly understood within national guidance and inspection processes, with SCES supporting clarity and consistency.
- Learner feedback indicates that RE is most impactful when it is relevant, dialogical and rooted in lived experience. Consideration may be given to how SCES-supported approaches continue to enable learner voice while remaining faithful to Catholic teaching.

- The paper highlights limitations in national data specific to RE. Consideration may be given to how SCES, working with partners, can support the development of proportionate and meaningful evidence that captures the distinctive purposes and outcomes of RERC without reducing it to narrow measures.

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.

10 Reference List

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