



Official Response

Subject: National Discussion on Scottish Education
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Prepared on behalf of: The Faith Impact Forum

1. What kind of education will be needed by children and young people in Scotland in the future?

We believe that people are to be valued not only for what they can do, or what they can produce, but for who they are, because they are created in the image of God.

We believe that God is not only rational but is also loving and feels with and for creation. We therefore must understand ourselves as rational beings whose senses and emotions are essential to an appreciation of what it means to be a person.

Within education this understanding of who we are must be seen as just as important, if not more important, than intellectual development. It is important to be valued for who we are and what we may become.

Our rationality can never be separated from that other part of us which the Bible calls our heart. All our human capacities are part of God's gift and education should be directed to the complete nurture, development, sustaining and enjoyment of them.

That is why education must be concerned with the whole person – intellectual, emotional, moral, spiritual, physical, cultural and social.

Often parents, when asked what they want for their children, will answer that they want them to do well. But doing well does not only mean that they should succeed in terms of passing examinations and gaining qualifications. Doing well is about well-being and wholeness. It is about success in relationships and knowing the source of true happiness.

It should also mean that young people will be helped to develop important qualities such as fairness, respect for others and a sense of responsibility. Such qualities will help them to become well-adjusted young people, able to make sense of an increasingly complex world, and make positive contributions to its development.

Family and Community

Our vision of education is rooted in the wider appreciation of what it means to be a human being within God's creation. Our relationships to one another and to the environment are of fundamental importance. Education is not just about the whole person as an individual; it is also about that person in community and in relationship with others. The basis of our understanding of true justice and love is:

- Treating others with dignity, respect and honesty,
- showing real care, compassion and concern,
- serving and supporting others with our gifts.

If education is to be a beacon of hope in the world, it should educate children for responsible, active global citizenship, and it should do this through valuing inter-cultural and inter-faith dialogue and partnership. Encouraging participation in community affairs and political events can foster a culture in which people take citizenship responsibilities seriously.

Qualities such as co-operation and interdependence are essential in our society of diverse people and cultures. The promotion of understanding, tolerance, respect and empathy among people of diverse backgrounds should be a hallmark of our national education system. Hope in a better world can only be developed through the nurturing of community in ways which:

- Form a culture of justice;
- develop the ethos of a school to give life in its fullness;
- establish and foster a community spirit;
- develop loving and supportive relationships;
- demonstrate the inclusivity of society;
- address the human need to be at peace (understood as, not just the absence of war, but the presence of love).

We believe that schools will become more effective places of learning when what happens outside the classroom is linked more closely to what happens within it. Education especially needs to serve the marginalised and the underprivileged. The great human need of our time is for justice in society. Within education this is not merely a legal concept, or one based on a kind of superficial fairness. It should produce a deep desire to treat each person with dignity and respect, and to encourage all to build a better world.

We welcome efforts to encourage families towards greater involvement in their children's school education but we believe that, to make this process work, some need to be empowered. Families themselves want to learn how best to encourage children in their learning and also how to support young people through the particular challenges of adolescence and beyond school education. In an age when family structures are much less uniform than before, provision should be made by various agencies to assist parents and carers to acquire the skills required.

We welcome the recognition that the potential of all children can best be realised where there is a multi-agency approach to education. It is our belief that if full attention is to be paid to addressing the child's social, emotional, developmental and health (including mental health) needs, the different services involved in schools will have to develop trust and co-operation.

We recognise the value of providing more 'joined-up' working through the creation of integrated services across local Councils, but would caution against the assumption that restructuring of service management will, of itself, be effective. Many school communities have long-established links with local Christian communities, evident in the effective contribution of local religious leaders to the provision of religious observance/time for reflection in schools. We see the strengthening of these links being vital to the development of a nurturing community.

Values in Education

Traditional points of anchorage to which our shared values had been tied (e.g. family, church, community, political affiliation) have changed. This lack of 'rootedness' can make it difficult for people to find meaning in their lives and may leave them feeling alienated and lacking in identity. The social cohesion required to build a just, caring and civil society can only exist when:

- we promote a clear understanding of values and moral principles;
- we develop our young people in character as well as intellect;
- we educate wisdom as well as in knowledge.

It is essential that the curriculum reflects what we value as a nation and what we seek for our young people. It is our view that young people should be helped to understand and to commit to certain moral values if they are to lead lives of worth. They need help to understand the core values which societies have upheld since classical times. This is recognised in the Curriculum for Excellence which describes one of the purposes of education as being ‘to make our young people aware of the values on which Scottish society is based.’ Helpfully, it goes on to specify the values engraved on the Mace in the Scottish Parliament – Wisdom, Justice, Compassion, Integrity – as defining values for democracy in Scotland. We anticipate, then, that schools will be expected to teach these values explicitly. In order to do so, however, teachers will require significant support to find ways to make them accessible and intelligible to young people. Values should lie at the heart of a school’s vision of itself as a community. They should inform the school’s key policies in learning and teaching, in curriculum, in support for pupils and in management and leadership. The values which are shared within the school community should be articulated by its leaders and lived by its members. It is important that school communities agree on core values which they can share, reflecting the school’s identity and traditions, its vision for education and for life.

Curriculum

We believe that the curriculum should fully reflect and value the diversity of both Scottish indigenous cultures and Scottish multi-ethnic cultures. The curriculum must provide young people with a sound foundation on which to base moral and ethical decisions and behaviours which respect the dignity of themselves and others and the nature of the interdependent world in which we live.

We believe that there is a need for a broad and a balanced curriculum; one which provides the foundations of knowledge about the world and equips young people with the skills which will be necessary to negotiate a safe, happy and fulfilling path through life.

Often we hear it being voiced that the place of religion and of values in education is dangerous and ‘fundamentalist’. There have been demands for a ‘religion-free’ state education with the claim this would be neutral. However, this is not neutral but a narrow secular view of education. The curriculum is not simply the delivery of a series of facts; it reflects developmental, pedagogical, social, economic, aesthetic, spiritual, moral and other considerations. What educates is the way experiences, knowledge and skills are organised and sequenced in order to encourage individuals to be active, co-operative, committed and partners in the learning process.

People cannot separate their world-view from their faith. Such a curriculum needs to take account of: A child’s individual needs, culture and background; the many social and emotional problems associated with the prevalence of prejudice and intolerance; and other problems such as, poverty and addiction – and the pressures of social media. It should also acknowledge the important context of the child’s home in which family have a vital role as the first and foremost educators. While it should equip young people with skills for the workplaces of tomorrow, it must also develop the life skills vital in a society which will be strongly dominated by technology and the challenges to the understanding and exploration of the concepts of marriage, family and community will be significant.

It is important that young people are equipped with the skills necessary to recognise the significant moral and ethical issues that impact on their lives, so that, as people of conscience, they can reflect on these issues and make informed and responsible decisions. These significant issues do not emerge merely in Religious and Moral Education, nor in programmes of Relationship, Sexual Health and Parenthood Education, but across the curriculum and in the school ethos. This is recognised in the aspirations of the Curriculum for Excellence to develop young people as not only successful, but confident, responsible and effective. It is clear to us that Religious and Moral Education is one area of the curriculum which can provide vital experiences and outcomes for all children.

Indeed, we would argue that its role in the curriculum is all the more significant at a time of increasingly diverse attitudes towards religious belief and practice across the world. For, where many

young people are not being introduced to religious beliefs and practices and philosophical enquiry at home, where else will they be challenged to consider the ‘great’ questions, about the origins of life and human destiny? How else will they be enabled to consider the Christian traditions of the Scottish nation and the enrichment brought to our society by people of the other great faith traditions? For these reasons, we value the continuing statutory guidance on the provision of religious and moral education and religious observance/time for reflection.

One further general point we wish to make is to stress the importance of creativity in both primary and secondary curriculums. Education should be about the development of all aspects of a person’s life and understanding of the world, and it is not always possible to measure outcomes around attainment when thinking about the fully-rounded individual. A culture which is less concerned with ‘ticking boxes’ and more on the needs of individuals and communities would be welcome.

2. How do we make that a reality?

In our stakeholder conversations that helped to prepare this response the following ideas were suggested:

- embrace technology
- high-quality teaching workforce
- teachers motivated – and required to do less administration
- cultivate culture which has an interest in the whole child
- better guidance and support around the role of a school chaplain
- families and community invited to work together on societal problems e.g. social media abuse

3. How can every child and young person’s individual needs be supported and addressed in the future?

In our stakeholder conversations that helped to prepare this response the following ideas were suggested:

- stronger emphasis on vocational education
- build relationships between churches and guidance teachers in schools; develop a role or chaplains/youth workers to be involved and to help with advice on pastoral care.

4. What is one thing that needs to stay and why?

As we set out in our answer to Q1, the ‘whole person’ approach to education is needed, one which *must provide young people with a sound foundation on which to base moral and ethical decisions and behaviours which respect the dignity of themselves and others and the nature of the interdependent world in which we live... It is important that young people are equipped with the skills necessary to recognise the significant moral and ethical issues that impact on their lives, so that, as people of conscience, they can reflect on these issues and make informed and responsible decisions.*

5. What are the most important priorities for a future Scottish education system?

We have outlined our key priorities in our answer to question 1.

In addition, there must also be a particular focus in relation to poverty, specifically narrowing the attainment gap and making sure school budgets are protected and enhanced. Related to this is a wider concern about testing or assessment in primary schools, and where results are made public leading to the production of league tables. This element of competition between primary schools, where there are ‘winners’ and ‘failures’ is contrary to the type of education system we should be striving for in Scotland.

6. How can we ensure that everyone involved in education in Scotland has a say in future decisions and actions?

In our answer to Q1 we discussed the importance of family and community. The only supplementary comment to this we would make is the significant impact of the work of the Church of Scotland representatives on local authority education committees in being a bridge between local councils and schools, and the wider voluntary community offering support – such as through school chaplaincy and support for delivery of parts of the curriculum (especially religious and moral education and religious observance/time for reflection).

7. How can children and young people be cared for and supported in the future? (i.e. physical and mental wellbeing)?

In our pastoral support role in communities, with families and individuals, and in school chaplaincy, we have direct and relevant daily experience with children and young people. Our work in Priority Area parishes (those with SIMD highest levels of deprivation) is a reflection on our particular concern to walk alongside those struggling against poverty. It is therefore important that schools, local authorities, Scottish Government and the voluntary sector have the chance to co-operate and share ideas, and to take a holistic approach to wellbeing. This is not simply about developing strategies and systems, but to always have in mind the interest in the whole child. Here the role of the Church of Scotland representative on local authority education committees can continue to play an important civic and relational role, linking the voluntary sector with pastoral support, and a way to relate to official channels for the wellbeing of all children.

A particular issue we want to highlight is that wellbeing needs to also include the *spiritual* dimension, alongside ‘physical’ and ‘mental’; indeed, this is already recognised in RSHP education resources, as well as in the NHS. This may include providing opportunities to experience a sense of awe and wonder, to be able to recognise and understand patterns and order in the world, to reflect healthily on relationships, values and to be able to consider ultimate questions about meaning, value and purpose in life. For the children who are involved in the life of the Church of Scotland, to be able to express and develop – and have respected and supported – their spiritual wellbeing in education is important (as we expect it to be for members of other churches, faith traditions and for humanists).

8. How can the right of every child and young person to have opportunities to develop their full potential be achieved in future?

The development, codification and implementation of human rights is a matter for the Scottish and UK Parliaments and Governments. We note that there is still to be resolved the issue of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (Incorporation) (Scotland) Bill, that the UK Government’s Bill of Rights Bill is awaiting a Second Reading in the House of Commons, and that there are long anticipated plans for the Scottish Government to introduce a new Human Rights (Scotland) Bill. We are broadly in favour of the Scottish Governments approach to support and develop human rights, and we have opposed the UK Government’s proposals to reform the Human Rights Act.

9. How can children and young people be helped to learn about our changing world, so they feel able to positively contribute?

There is a growing concern among school chaplains and other church workers and volunteers about the anxieties young people experience in relation to social media. Responding and reacting to this needs to be the job of everyone involved in their lives. How can the Church support parents, families, school staff and young people to cope?

10. Do you have any other comments that you would like to provide about a vision for the future of Scottish Education?

The four capacities at the centre of Curriculum for Excellence may need to be reviewed and refreshed – or even replaced or added to. In a world where confidence and trust in politicians and public institutions has been eroded, what is entailed in the capacity to be a ‘responsible citizen’? There are also questions around issues to do with inequality, mental health, diversity and the environment that need to be part of the conversation about values and purpose in Scottish education.

As part of our stakeholder conversations that led to this response, we heard three additional concerns:

- the institutions leading this national discussion are those who potentially have a vested interest in the status quo. How are new people, new ideas and a new culture going to be developed when inevitably the future involvement of statutory bodies is going to continue?
- how is the impact of change going to be measured – how will we know if this discussion leads to success?
- is there too much of a current focus on attainment, which is diminishing aspects which support the development of creativity. How can this be ensured?