



Consultation Workshop: Religious Observance

September 2025

Overview

What was the purpose of the workshop?

As part of the Children (Withdrawal from Religious Education and Amendment of UNCRC Compatibility Duty) (Scotland) Bill's progress through Parliament, the Scottish Government wanted to engage with young people to support the development of guidance for young people, parents, and schools, as well as advise Ministers while the Bill progresses through Parliament.

Method

What did the workshop involve?

- Meetings and follow-up work to plan the workshop with Members of the Scottish Youth Parliament.
- The delivery of a 1h 15 min in-person workshop with a group of MSYPs to discuss and share views on the agreed topic through a series of youth-led activities.
- This report summarises the discussions from the workshop.

What was the process of developing the workshop?

SYP staff worked with a MSYP - Daniel - to develop plans for the workshop in consultation with the Scottish Government team. Daniel participated in the first workshop on religious observance in schools and thus had an existing background knowledge.

The SYP staff met first with the Scottish Government team to discuss a general overview of the workshop, the aims and intended outcomes and gather information for the partnering MSYPs to feedback on. Daniel was supported by SYP staff to develop and consider:

- The session plan
- The accessibility of the session's presentation
- Overall youth-friendliness of the session



The draft session plan was shared with Scottish Government in advance of the workshop with opportunity for comments and edits. A copy of the full session plan is enclosed in this summary report.

Findings

Activity: Right to Withdraw

All participants were split into three small groups (around 5-6 people per group). Each group was provided with one question to discuss and given flipchart and pens to write down any ideas discussed during the activity. Each group was joined by a member of the Scottish Government team.

The discussions focused on the following questions:

- *Should parents have a right to withdraw children from RO? Why/why not?*

Young people agreed parents should take their views into account when deciding whether to withdraw them from RO and there should be agreement between parents/child/young person before withdrawing. If the child decides they would like to take part in RO, they shouldn't then be forced to opt out.

Some MSYPs felt RO was important for all pupils if was inclusive of all religions or covered other issues such as morality/ethics. This is due to wanting all young people to have a basic understanding of all religions. Another opinion shared was that withdrawal should only happen after basic level (example given was S3) of understanding.

- *Should parents have a right to withdraw children from RE? Why/why not?*

Young people agreed that, above all, receiving a fair and inclusive education is the top priority, and this includes learning about all faiths and religions. However, some MSYPs alluded to the fact that most schools in Scotland don't teach pupils about other religious beliefs besides Christianity, and that in some Catholic schools, Christianity is presented as 'the right' belief system to follow. They also recognised that objecting to RO can be scary; therefore, support is needed.

- *Should young people have an independent right to withdraw from RO/RE? Why/why not?*

MSYPs suggested that the young person should be old enough to be able to make this decision, particularly from RO where they felt opt out should be an option for young people at any age. However, one group commented that, if parents have the right to withdraw their child from RO/RE, young people should be granted the same right.



- *If young people had the independent right to withdraw, what age should they gain that right? Should it be for both RO and RE, or only one?*

One group focused on the difference between RO and RE, insisting that RE is more essential as it educates pupils on the subject. RO, on the contrary, was seen as more devotional. If that is the case, the group agreed that young people shouldn't partake in any religious rituals if they don't subscribe to that belief system. Other groups highlighted that, if young people are given the right to withdraw at all, it should be from both RO and RE.

Activity: Young People's Meaningful Participation

Both MSYPs and the Scottish Government team talked about how to include young people in a meaningful way during the withdrawal process. To help them think about this topic, they used the Lundy Model of Participation, which is based on Article 12 of the UNCRC. Keeping this model in mind, they considered the following questions:

- What's the best way for schools to hear from the young people themselves?
- What role should parents play?
- What role should the school play?
- What would make you feel listened to and respected in that process?

All participants agreed that young people should raise their concerns about RO/RE with a trusted teacher. They should be given the opportunity to speak out either in person or in writing, depending on what they're most comfortable with.

Afterwards, participants wrote a **Young People's Charter** with three principles schools should follow when handling withdrawal requests.

Young People's Charter on Withdrawal from Religious Observance and Education

Early Involvement and Meaningful Choice

- Young people must be included from the very beginning of any withdrawal process.
- Their views should be listened to carefully and given equal weight to those of parents/carers.
- Schools should make sure that pupils understand their rights and the options available to them, so they can make an informed choice.
- Decisions should never be made for a young person without their active involvement.



Supportive and Safe Guidance

- Withdrawal decisions should be made in a supportive environment, where young people can speak openly to a trusted teacher or staff member.
- Parents and carers should play a positive role in supporting their child's choice but not override their wishes.
- Schools should ensure that pupils feel safe when raising concerns.
- Clear, accessible information should be available to help young people and their families understand the process.

Inclusive and Fair Education

- Lessons should not prioritise or present one belief system as the 'right' one.
- Young people should have opportunities to shape or contribute to lesson content.
- All pupils, regardless of faith or belief, should feel valued and respected in the classroom.

Further Information

If you require further information about the content of this report, please contact Emily Beever, Head of Policy and Public Affairs at emily.b@syp.org.uk.