

Using Visiting Speakers in the RME class

These materials explore the use of visiting speakers in the classroom to support high quality learning and teaching in Religious and Moral Education (RME). They can be used by practitioners in any RME context and are designed to facilitate learning about and from RME, as well as stimulate discussion among practitioners about the use of visiting speakers within learning and teaching in RME.

Visiting speakers have an important role to play in bringing beliefs, values, traditions and viewpoints to life for learners.

Why use visiting speakers?

In the [assessing progress and achievement in RME](#) paper, the significant aspects of learning in RME refer, among other things, to:

- understanding the religious and cultural diversity of Scotland and across the world through learning about Christianity and World Religions and other stances for living
- investigating religious beliefs, values, issues, traditions and practices through a range of primary and secondary sources
- encountering religious diversity through contact with people of faith
- appreciating the importance of respect for the beliefs, values and traditions of others and being able to demonstrate this

In [The 3-18 RME Curriculum Area Impact Review Report](#) it was noted that a strength of RME nationally is that:

- In the majority of schools, children and young people's learning is active and engaging. Many teachers use a range of teaching and learning approaches effectively to motivate learners.

Visiting speakers have an important role to play in bringing beliefs, values, traditions and viewpoints to life for learners. By engaging in dialogue with a person of commitment (to religious or other belief principles) learners are provided with insight into a tradition, its beliefs and how these are put into action in the lives of its adherents.

Using visiting speakers provides a powerful model of respecting differences as well as stimulating interfaith and philosophical dialogue

Involving visiting speakers allows learners to understand the role beliefs can play both in their community and in wider society. Supporting learners in engaging with a range of visiting speakers provides learners with lived examples of diversity. Using visiting speakers in a discussion forum can reinforce this awareness of diversity and provides a powerful model of respecting differences as well as stimulating interfaith and philosophical dialogue.

Visiting speakers allow an entry point for various experiences and outcomes at all levels in each of the three RME lines of development (Beliefs; Values and Issues; Practices and Traditions) as well as within national qualifications in RMPS. In addition visiting speakers can promote discussion about citizenship and diversity, and can stimulate, for example, discussions, creative writing and philosophical enquiry.

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[Source](#)

For example:

Discussion

- What do you believe and why?
- How did your beliefs develop?
- How have your beliefs changed throughout your life?
- How do your beliefs affect your actions?
- Do you think your beliefs will ever change?
- How do you know if your beliefs are 'true'?

Creative Writing

- Write a newspaper or magazine item about the speaker you have heard today. What did you hear and what did you think about what you heard? What questions did you ask and what questions would you have liked to ask? What difference has meeting this person made to your beliefs?

Philosophical Enquiry

- Where do beliefs come from?
- How do we judge if a belief is true or not?
- Is a belief more important than an action?
- What should we do when people's beliefs are in conflict?

Using visiting speakers can stimulate inter disciplinary learning (IDL) as they provide a springboard, for example, to discussions and activities about history, culture and geography.

For example:

History

- How did your religion/belief system begin and develop?
- How does the modern version of your religion/belief system differ from the past?

Geography

- Where in the world are others who believe the same as you?
- Is your religion/belief system linked to any one place in the world?

Culture

- What does it mean to be a follower of your religion/belief system in modern Scotland?
- How do your beliefs link to you identity?



How should visiting speakers be used?

In effective RME learners should be learning *about* and *from* religion and beliefs. Learners should be encouraged to listen to, question and evaluate the views of visiting speakers. Questions can be asked about the visiting speaker's beliefs, practices and moral views, and, while enquiring, this must always be carried out with sensitivity and respect.

When preparing for the visit of visiting speakers, practitioners should provide time for learners to create questions and lines of enquiry and research the religion or belief group the speaker represents.

Facilitating a discussion panel of visiting speakers is a powerful demonstration of diversity. This can be particularly effective in the context of whole school events, though care should be taken to avoid setting up 'sides' in any such events.

Where it is difficult to arrange visiting speakers practitioners can use electronic resources to find out about people of commitment. There is a range of electronic resources and tools that can facilitate either a real time discussion with a speaker, or video clips of them discussing their views.

Visiting speakers can also be used to support [progression in RME](#), with a range of different approaches, questions and lines of enquiry being used in relation to the learners' point in the Broad General Education.

For example:

Early

- How is this woman dressed and why?
- Do you wear any 'special' clothes?

First

- This woman is a Hindu. Where did Hinduism begin?
- Hindus carry out Puja. What happens during Puja?

Second

- The woman is offering food to the gods. Why?
- A puja lamp symbolises the importance of light. Why is light important?

Third

- In Hinduism all gods are part of Brahman. What does this mean?
- In Hinduism a variety of animals are sacred. Which animals and how does this led to them being treated by Hindus?

Fourth

- In Hinduism there are many stories. Do Hindus believe that these stories are literally true?
- Some people think that Hindus 'worship statues' is this true?



[Source](#)

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The views, beliefs, values and practices of visiting speakers can enable learners to make comparisons with their own beliefs, values and practices. Visiting speakers may offer opportunities for learners to

feel supported in the development of their own beliefs and values. Similarly, visiting speakers can challenge learners' beliefs and values, through coming into direct contact with people of commitment.

Practitioners should have a clear understanding of the speaker's place within their own belief group and how far they authentically represent that belief group. A pre-meeting between any visiting speaker and the practitioner responsible is crucial to understanding the role and purpose of the speaker's contribution to learning

Sourcing visiting speakers is usually straightforward, through direct contact – ensuring that diversity of belief and practice is represented in any programme of visiting speakers. Many organisations such as [Interfaith Scotland](#) may be able to provide contact details for visiting speakers from world religions, similarly, organisations such as the [Humanist Society of Scotland](#) can also provide speakers. Speakers from Christian perspectives may be sourced centrally through Christian organisations and churches.

Further support for CLPL in RME can be found in Education Scotland's [Route Map through CLPL in RME/RERC](#).

What are some of the sensitive issues relating to using visiting speakers?

Practitioners should always satisfy themselves that they have an understanding of the perspective which any visiting speaker represents, and should discuss the content of presentations beforehand

Some things to consider:

- Classes are generally composed of learners from a range of backgrounds. It is important to take this into account and avoid any language that suggests common viewpoints between learners and the visiting speaker.
- Learner interactions with visiting speakers should build on prior learning. *Throughout Curriculum for Excellence*, learners should have been coming into contact with religious beliefs, practices and traditions, and people of commitment since the beginning of their learning journey.
- Practitioners should always satisfy themselves that they have an understanding of the perspective which any visiting speaker represents, and should discuss the content of presentations beforehand.
- It should be clear to visiting speakers that classrooms include a diverse range of learners. Visiting speakers should therefore be able to express their beliefs, but this should be in an atmosphere of honest and open discussion, taking account of the age and stage of learners.
- For practical and ethical reasons, schools should have clear policies about the vetting of any visiting speaker in line with standard child protection practices
- Similarly, for practical and ethical reasons, visiting speakers should always be accompanied by staff for the duration of their visit.

Professional Learning Resources

<http://www.educationscotland.gov.uk/testimony/index.asp>; has video clips which can be used in lieu of a visiting speaker

<http://interfaithscotland.org> – Scottish interfaith council has information about faith communities and contact details

<http://www.humanism-scotland.org.uk> – Humanist Society for Scotland.

Professional Dialogue Prompts

- Which speakers would you be likely to use and why?
- How can you ensure that speakers are representative of their religion/belief group?
- How can you ensure meaningful dialogue between speakers and learners?
- What safeguards do you have in place to ensure that speakers are treated with respect?
- What are your establishment's policies on the use of visiting speakers, and what safeguards should be in place?
- How can you support the speaker?
- What guidance should you offer the speaker?
- What must be agreed with the speaker before their presentation/discussion?
- What limitations might there be on the speaker's activities, and how will you communicate these before the speaker meets with learners?
- How will you keep parents informed about any use of visiting speakers?