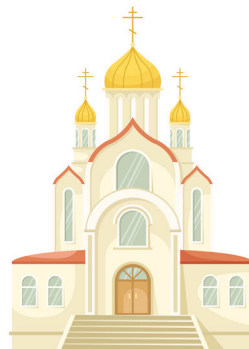
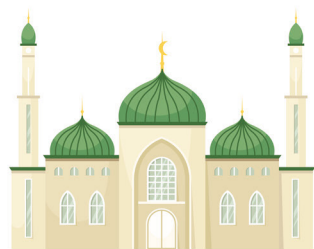
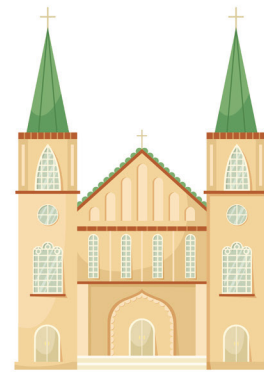
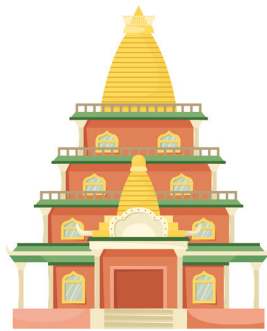
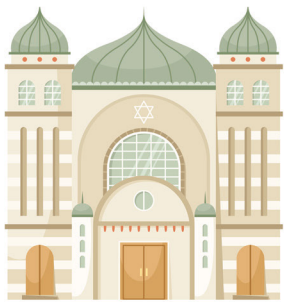


FAITH AND BELIEF ENGAGEMENT STRATEGY



Purpose

To strengthen communication, engagement and collaboration between Scottish Government and Scotland's diverse faith and belief communities.

Vision

- Scotland is a peaceful, resilient and inclusive society for people of all faiths, religious identities and spiritual beliefs.
- Regular and constructive engagement takes place between faith and belief communities and government, building relationships based on trust and respect.
- The diversity of Scotland's faith and belief communities is recognised and included in policy development.
- There is space for respectful discussion about beliefs and the essential right of every person to freedom of thought, conscience and religion is upheld.
- Faith and belief communities are active partners with Scottish Government in meeting emerging societal challenges and working together for the common good.

Definitions

In this document we use the following terms:

Faith and belief communities refers to communities centred around a shared religious or philosophical world-view, usually comprising metaphysical beliefs, ethical frameworks and acts of worship or celebration of life events.

Religion or belief is the protected characteristic of "religion or belief" as defined in the Equality Act 2010.

Interfaith refers to activity that has as its central purpose, dialogue and relations between those of different faiths and beliefs.

Multi-faith refers to the involvement of several faith and belief organisations e.g. a multi-faith foodbank may involve different faith groups. It may lead to good interfaith relations but that is not its primary purpose.

Engagement refers to all forms of contact, communication and collaboration between two or more parties, with an approach of active participation.

Principles of Engagement

These principles will underpin Scottish Government's engagement with faith and belief communities in Scotland.

Recognising Diversity

- The Scottish Government recognises and respects the wide diversity of tradition and practices among faith and belief communities, different denominations and groups.
- It is understood that faith and belief communities have a wide array of interests, some of which will be shared with others, whilst others will be particular to an individual community.
- The Scottish Government will aim to engage with as wide a group of communities as practicable, and on a proportionate and equitable basis.
- Our approach to engagement should take account of the scale and capacity of different faith and belief organisations, and aim to be inclusive for minority groups and those with fewer resources.

Effective Communication

- Communications between Scottish Government and faith and belief communities should be clear and should allow sufficient time for responses to be collated when requested.
- Communication should happen at an early stage in both routine policy development and in emergency situations.
- The responsibility for effective communication rests with both Scottish Government and faith and belief communities: engagement is a two way process.
- Mutual understanding between faith and belief communities and Scottish Government is key to building trust.

Respecting Disagreement

- Faith and belief communities and Scottish Government are in their own fields autonomous and independent of one another.
- It is expected that disagreement and challenge will occur and this is a healthy aspect of any working relationship.
- The autonomy of faith and belief communities and Scottish Government, and disagreement on some issues, does not exclude co-operation in other areas.

Encouraging Collaboration

- Collaboration and shared action between Scottish Government and faith and belief communities in the service of Scotland, is welcomed.
- However, such collaboration does not compromise the role of faith and belief communities in offering robust and respectful critique of Scottish Government policies.
- Faith and belief communities provide a wealth of services across Scottish society, which should be recognised as welcome support whilst not placing an expectancy of service provision upon these communities.

Understanding Representation

- Interfaith organisations have a vital role in sharing expertise on religious diversity in Scotland, interfaith relations and dialogue, and community cohesion.
- They cannot, and are not expected to speak on behalf of individual faith and belief communities.
- The Scottish Government recognises that faith is personal as well as collective, and that there will be divergence of views within faith and belief communities.
- Different faiths and associated organisations have different structures. Whilst some hierarchical structures and representative bodies allow for an authoritative view, others can only offer a more general consensus based on democratic principles.
- Faith and belief leaders cannot necessarily speak for the whole membership and it is important to understand the nature of their representation.
- Intersectional issues in representation, for example, in relation to gender, age, sexual orientation etc., will be given due consideration and inclusion of marginal voices will be encouraged.

Aims and outcomes

Our engagement strategy aims to allow Scottish Government to:

1. Gain a more accurate picture of faith and belief across Scotland.

The Scottish Government has a more detailed picture of faith and belief in Scotland and uses this to inform policy development. The Scottish Government's own collection and analysis of data on faith and belief is improved, and helps to inform our future approach to faith and belief communities.

2. Develop improved external engagement with faith and belief groups.

Scottish Government's engagement with faith and belief communities is widened such that the diverse voices of Scotland's faith and belief communities are heard. There is fair and proportionate representation for faith and belief communities in Scottish Government engagement.

3. Develop internal engagement on faith and belief in Scottish Government.

Religious literacy across Scottish Government is improved, with Scottish Government officials and Ministers having a more nuanced and detailed understanding of the diverse faith and belief communities in Scotland.

4. Review funding for faith and belief groups.

A review of Scottish Government funding to faith and belief organisations helps to identify overlap, gaps and potential for new funding. Faith and belief communities are better signposted towards relevant funding opportunities and future funds are designed with clearer understanding around the eligibility of faith and belief organisations.

5. Develop its interfaith and multi-faith approach to community cohesion.

Interfaith work across Scotland continues to promote meaningful interactions and dialogue between different faith and belief groups, supporting safe and resilient communities. Multi-faith collaboration is more widespread in the delivery of community projects. The faith and belief representatives group is a vehicle for interfaith relations and promotion of multi-faith projects at a strategic level.

6. Improve the EQIA process in assessing impacts for faith and belief communities in Scotland.

The impact of proposed new or revised policies or practices on faith and belief communities is given due regard in the EQIA process addressing protected characteristics, including that of religion or belief, contributing to better outcomes. Faith and belief is embedded within Scottish Government's work to mainstream equality and there is earlier participation for faith and belief communities in contributing to policy development. Dialogue takes place with faith and belief communities about the range of other protected characteristics alongside religion or belief.

External Engagement Plan

External engagement activities will include:

- Regular e-mail updates to stakeholders from the Faith and Belief team
- Bilateral meetings between Scottish Government and representative organisations
- Ministerial and official visits to communities and events
- Meetings of the Faith and Belief Representatives Group
- An annual faith and belief conference hosted by Scottish Government
- An annual Ministerial roundtable with faith and belief representatives
- Regular messaging to communities marking key faith and belief festivals

The following table sets out expectations around frequency, level and type of engagement between Scottish Government and faith and belief communities. The overall plan for external engagement will be reviewed annually and updated as appropriate.

Type of engagement and purpose	Recommended Attendees	Frequency
<p>Ministerial Roundtable with faith and belief communities</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To allow faith and belief communities to discuss concerns, issues and progress on shared priorities with the Minister. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Portfolio Minister (currently Minister for Equalities, Migration and Refugees) • Faith and belief representatives • Additional attendees depending on agenda items e.g. young people from faith and belief communities. • Faith and Belief policy team 	<p>Annually¹</p>

¹ To be arranged with due regard to calendar of religious festivals.

Type of engagement and purpose	Recommended Attendees	Frequency
<p>Faith and Belief Representatives Group</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> To address a range of policy issues in relation to agreed priorities. To help monitor and review this faith & belief engagement strategy. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Standing members of the group² Additional representatives on an ad-hoc basis, dependent on subject expertise and interest Faith and Belief policy team Other policy officials dependent on agenda. 	<p>Every two months</p> <p>+ additional meetings on urgent issues if required</p>
<p>Ministerial participation at regular national or leadership events</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> To demonstrate support for faith and belief communities To develop Ministers' knowledge and understanding of faith and belief communities 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> First Minister or Portfolio Minister³ depending on the type, profile and scale of the event. 	<p>By invitation – usually annually</p>
<p>Faith and Belief Conference hosted by SG</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> To examine wider issues around faith and belief in relation to government and Scottish society. To promote opportunities for collaboration, discussion, and networking. To allow for an in-depth focus on specific themes and intersectionality. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Faith and belief stakeholders from a range of communities and organisations Faith and Belief policy team and policy officials with an interest Academics working in this field First Minister and/or relevant Portfolio Ministers 	<p>Annually</p>

² Group membership is by invitation to ensure diverse and balanced representation, and will be reviewed on an annual basis.

³ All Ministerial engagements are dependent on Ministerial availability, and early notice of invitations is strongly encouraged.

Type of engagement and purpose	Recommended Attendees	Frequency
<p>Bilateral meetings with faith and belief organisations</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To discuss in depth the particular issues and concerns of a specific faith and belief group, organisation or denomination. • To maintain relationships and develop a more nuanced Scottish Government understanding of different faiths, denominations and beliefs. • To ensure there are appropriate channels into government for those in national leadership positions and to cement working relationships. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Those in senior clerical positions or leaders of national organisations. • Key representatives from faith and belief organisations • Faith and Belief policy team • Other policy teams as relevant • First Minister and/or relevant Portfolio Ministers 	<p>With officials – at least annually.</p> <p>With Ministers as and when required.</p>
<p>Scottish Government official and ministerial visits to places of worship and participation in community events</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To build good relations with faith and belief communities • To expand contacts within faith and belief communities • To gain greater practical understanding about faith and belief communities, projects and practices. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Minister for Equalities, Migration and Refugees or other relevant Portfolio Minister • Faith and Belief officials to attend events such as AGMs or some festival celebrations. 	<p>By invitation and dependent on availability</p>

Internal Engagement

We recognise the need for improved knowledge, awareness and understanding of faith and belief across Scottish Government as a whole. Part of the role of the Faith and Belief Policy Team is to undertake internal engagement, raising the profile of faith and belief in policy, and helping to develop an increased knowledge base amongst colleagues in all areas of Scottish Government.

This will enable faith and belief aspects of equality to be mainstreamed across government in the external policy development process. A strengthened EQIA process will also help faith and belief partners to understand and give due consideration to the balance with other protected characteristics, and the mainstreaming of all equalities through Scottish Government policy.

Embedding this knowledge and understanding will also support greater inclusion of faith and belief communities in working with Scottish Government to help deliver on shared priorities. For example, helping to alleviate the impacts of social isolation and loneliness or of poverty within communities in Scotland.

A range of internal engagement activities and actions will be carried out including but not limited to:

- An internal communications plan focussed on faith and belief in policy across Scottish Government.
- Regular engagement between the faith and belief team with other policy teams across Scottish Government, on issues pertaining to faith and belief communities.
- Support for direct engagement between faith and belief stakeholders and relevant Scottish Government policy teams.
- Support for improved consideration of faith and belief input and alignment with other strategies, including the Hate Crime Strategy, Mainstreaming Equalities Strategy and the Equalities Evidence Strategy.
- Engagement with teams who are developing new funding opportunities for third sector organisations, to support faith and belief inclusion.
- Improved guidance and support for Scottish Government officials in assessing the impact of proposed new or revised policies or practices, on those with the protected characteristic of religion or belief, as part of the EQIA process.
- Supporting a faith and belief presence in the Scottish Government corporate Diversity and Inclusion calendar of events.

Review

This strategy will remain in place until 2026 and will be reviewed on an annual basis, in collaboration with stakeholders. Any required amendments will be published on our website. An evaluation of the strategy will take place after 2026.



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