

Dear Commissioners,

I currently teach SRE in the local primary school that my children attend. Religious charities like Scripture Union support the work we do as Scripture Teachers by providing resources and fantastic visiting shows. I have utilised Scripture Union videos, songs and live shows in my 7 years teaching SRE.

Scripture Union NSW also runs lunchtime groups in Government Schools, benefiting 2,000 students weekly.

I am highly concerned by the draft report and reforms to the DGR system. Removing DGR status from churches and religious charities like Scripture Union NSW will significantly impact the health and wellbeing of current and future students engaged in Special Religious Education (SRE) and lunchtime groups.

Australia is one of the most multicultural nations on earth, and over 60% of Australians identify with a religion. Yet, your report seems to suggest religion is of no community-wide benefit. Research shows that religious education in schools is one of the best ways to promote social cohesion. In my SRE classes I have seen both religious and non-religious parents choose to place their children in SRE.

The SRE teachers in Australia represent our nation's largest weekly group of volunteers. In a report where, on the one hand, you are articulating the government's goal to double philanthropic giving (financial and volunteering) by 2030, on the other hand, you are removing privileges and help from faith communities that represent a huge proportion of the people who will help you, and are helping you right now, achieve that goal. This is not a wise decision.

On top of that, school building funds are to have their DGR status removed. Faith-based education is Australia's fastest-growing education sector – which tells us that this is what our communities want and are actively using. So why make it harder for this to happen and be successful?

In short, you are penalising both the fastest-growing education sector – predominantly privately funded by citizens – and putting undue pressure on the largest weekly group of volunteers in Australia, risking a lower level of social cohesion.

As the report is currently a draft, I ask that you consider my feedback and maintain DGR status for churches and religious charities, recognising the significant role that these organisations provide for people of faith and the Australian society.