

9 February 2024

Philanthropy Inquiry
Productivity Commission
GPO Box 1428
Canberra City ACT 2601

Dear Commissioners,

Re: Productivity Commission Review of Philanthropy

Thank you for the opportunity to provide written feedback to the Productivity Commission (Commission) on the recommendations contained in the draft 'Future Foundations for Giving' report (Draft Report).

1. Background

Quiz Worx is a charity that teaches the Bible to kids through performing live puppet shows in schools, churches and communities around Australia, with a particular focus on government schools.

For more than 20 years we have been partnering with teachers of Special Religious Education (NSW) and Religious Instruction (Qld) to engage kids with the Bible and provide opportunities for students to explore the Christian faith.

Over this time, we have performed thousands of shows and have prioritised resources to enable multiple yearly tours to regional locations, including an annual Outback tour which takes us to remote government schools in outback New South Wales and Queensland. In 2023, approximately 70,000 government school students received religious education through a Quiz Worx performance.

Quiz Worx is primarily funded through donations. The broad support of our donor-base allows us to visit schools of all sizes, without regard to a school's ability to pay for the performance. Of the 479 government schools we visited in New South Wales and Queensland in 2023, approximately half were in regional communities.

2. Submission

Our submission addresses the draft recommendation 6.1 in relation to the exclusion of religious education activities.

Reasons in the Draft Report for the exclusion of religious education activities from DGR status

The draft report contains a number of findings focused on certain charitable activities which should not be eligible for deductible gift recipient (DGR) status to ensure that eligible donations are refocused towards activities with the greatest net community-wide benefits. Specifically, we understand the Commission advances the following reasons for not maintaining DGR status for religious education:

1. There is a material risk of a nexus between donors to religious organisations as well as education activities, and beneficiaries.
2. The removal of DGR status would maintain consistency with the approach for the advancing religion subtype and avoid causing integrity problems.

The experience of Quiz Worx reveals little risk of private benefit to donors

As described above, Quiz Worx undertakes activities under the relevant DGR endorsement category in schools throughout New South Wales, Queensland, the Northern Territory and the Australian Capital Territory. Quiz Worx's performances play a vital role in supporting religious education in government schools across diverse regions, ensuring that students from all backgrounds have access to educational and entertaining content.

Quiz Worx provides a community-wide benefit to primary-aged children who may not otherwise have access to religious education. Religious education contributes to the NSW Department of Education's wellbeing framework, which highlights 'spiritual wellbeing' as one of the five pillars of student wellbeing. Special Religious Education is the most prevalent support for student spiritual wellbeing in NSW schools, and this is one of the main contexts in which Quiz Worx operates.

A recent Australian study by Prof Zehavit Gross, UNESCO Chair in Education for Human Values, Tolerance and Peace, Bar-Ilan University Israel and Prof Emerita Suzanne Rutland OAM, University of Sydney has found that Religious Instruction in Queensland provides the following key benefits:

- offers important psychological benefits to students' mental health and wellbeing;
- strengthens the multi-cultural fabric of Australian schools;
- introduces an effective values education that empowers student decision making, fosters student action, and encourages student responsibility;
- creates safe places for students to explore deeper questions of faith and belief.

As with NSW, Quiz Worx operates in Queensland to support and partner with Religious Instruction.

The generosity of a broad donor-base enables Quiz Worx to reach schools with limited resources, promoting equity in access to religious education initiatives. This generosity allows Quiz Worx to provide affordable and free performances in schools, and has allowed us to visit schools that currently don't have enough SRE/RI volunteer teachers to provide regular religious education. Accordingly, Quiz Worx considers there to be little, if any, risk of DGR donations resulting in a private benefit to its donors.

Draft Recommendation 6.1 risks exacerbating integrity problems

We note that the Commission has not recommended that the 'public fund for ethics education in government schools' endorsement category be excluded for DGR status. Given it was introduced in 2013 as a secular alternative to the religious education in government schools category, we consider that, rather than avoiding integrity problems with respect to the advancing religion subtype, draft recommendation 6.1 would exacerbate integrity problems by excluding religious education from DGR status while maintaining its secular alternative.

If the religious education in government schools endorsement category was excluded from DGR status, then the rationale for the 'public fund for ethics education in government schools' endorsement category would no longer exist. Accordingly, in lieu of draft recommendation 6.1, Quiz Worx considers that the more suitable approach is to maintain the inclusion of both endorsement categories for DGR status.

Implications of Draft Recommendation 6.1

If the relevant DGR endorsement category was to be removed as per draft recommendation 6.1, the ability of Quiz Worx to achieve its purpose would be severely hindered. The receipt of deductible gifts facilitates the ability of Quiz Worx to visit remote and regional communities each year, with minimal (if any) cost to these communities. Removal of this category for DGR status would greatly reduce the financial support received by Quiz Worx and, therefore, our ability to conduct our activities, including the provision of religious education in government schools.

3. Conclusion

In summary, draft recommendation 6.1, has significant implications for the provision of religious education and should be reconsidered. We respectfully ask the Commission to consider the issues and recommendations raised in this submission when producing its final report.

We would welcome the opportunity to discuss the matters raised in this letter further, or answer any questions that you may have.

Yours Sincerely,

Nicholas Koeck
General Manager