

ALRC Survey Help Sheet

Please note...

- You are not required to answer every question;
- This help sheet is not intended to be used as a cut-and-paste resource for answering the questions. It is only meant to assist you in the process.

Q: What types of religious educational institutions have you been involved with?

Part of this question provides a list of denominational and faith categories. You can also simply describe your school/institution as 'Christian'.

Q: Why did you choose to be involved with a religious educational institution (if applicable)?

Whether you are a parent, student or staff member, there are many reasons for choosing a religious institution. If the outworking of Christian values, character or beliefs is important to you, please ensure you include this. For instance, an important reason why many parents choose a Christian school is because they reflect the values or beliefs the parents hold, or the values, character or attributes parents want instilled in their children. For teachers, the opportunity to teach according to your faith may be what is important. For non-teaching staff, it may be the opportunity to live out your faith in your work. You may want to include being able to model, or share, your faith to students and families in your workplace.

Q: What do you see as the good things about religious educational institutions that you have been involved with?

Those associated with Christian schools and higher education institutions often identify the emphasis on values, the healthy relationships that are formed, amongst what is a caring culture and environment, as well as the positive lifestyle examples given by staff.

Q: Do you see the creation of a 'community of faith' within a religious educational institution as important?

This is a very important question. Having the opportunity to create a community of faith underpins everything that a Christian school or Institution is there to do. One of the important roles that Christian school staff have is to exemplify an authentic Christian faith community; as followers of Christ, living in service to God and His people. This should be reflected in the lessons, relationships and actions of staff. If a Christian school or institution is not free to create an authentic community of faith, then it is not able to be an authentic Christian school or institution.

Q: Have you experienced or witnessed what you consider to be discrimination on the grounds of sex, sexual orientation, gender identity, marital or relationship status, or pregnancy at the religious educational institution/s you have been involved with?

Again, a very important question. If religious schools/educational facilities have a code of behaviour that has been agreed to upon enrolment or employment, it is not discrimination to expect adherence to that standard. In saying that, a Christian organisation/environment should be the safest, most loving and kind place in which to learn. There are complexities and nuances of dealing with people lovingly and caringly who no longer hold to the beliefs of the school on gender and sexuality that a simple answer to a question such as this cannot cover. We are not suggesting that religious educational facilities can't allow any adherence to other beliefs, but the concern of a question such as this is that special treatment is being sought to interfere with the school/institution's religious beliefs.

Q: What do you think about reforms to change the law so that religious educational institutions would not be allowed to discriminate against students on the grounds of sexual orientation, gender identity, marital or relationship status, or pregnancy?

This is a moot question. It is not an issue as it doesn't happen. The aim of conservative Christian educational institutions is not to exclude students who identify as gay. Those who say it is appear to be deliberately misinterpreting the facts, which in turn is serving to marginalise people of faith. Expelling students solely on the basis of their sexuality is not something Christian schools do. In fact, it is more likely for students to be expelled for bullying a gay student.

Q: What do you think about reforms to change the law so that religious educational institutions would not be allowed to discriminate against staff on the grounds of sex, sexual orientation, gender identity, marital or relationship status or pregnancy?

For a Christian school/institution to operate authentically, their faith and beliefs must be allowed to be reflected in the lessons as well as the behaviour of the school/institution. This includes beliefs concerning gender and sexuality. Traditional, orthodox, historical Christian beliefs in these areas have been held and respected for centuries and they continue to be held by millions of Christians and people of other faiths here in Australia, and indeed globally. It is not discrimination for a Christian organisation to expect Christian staff to reflect the Biblical standards they agreed to uphold on employment in their conduct across a range of areas, including their sexual activity. Whilst students and parents in the school community may not be expected to live to the same standards, it is not discriminatory or unreasonable, for the health of the overall community, that they be expected to conduct themselves in a respectful manner towards the school and its beliefs, and not seek to undermine them. These are reasonable expectations and requirements of those who seek to serve, or enrol, in a Christian school or educational institution. We urge the ALRC to recommend that religious education institutions reserve the right to be able to choose staff who will uphold the Christian ethos of its school/educational institution.

Q: In relation to the employment of staff and selection of contractors...

what do you think religious educational institutions should be permitted to take into account in preferencing members of the same religion?

In order to be an effective, authentic, example of a Christian faith community, it is important for Christian school/institutions to be allowed to require staffing roles within the community be filled by followers of Christ who will teach and model a Christian life. Authenticity requires consistency, in contrast to a staff member making an effort to live one way while at school when they live a very different way outside school in other contexts. Religious schools/institutions are not looking to employ good actors but genuine Christians. In order to do this, the school/institution needs to be able to take into account external conduct of staff members in the same way that a political party or charity would.

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Suggested reforms should not remove the ability for Religious educational institutions to operate consistently with its beliefs.

Are there some factors that institutions should be permitted to take into account for particular employee/contractor roles, but not for other employee/contractor roles?

Religious educational institutions are established with a clear faith perspective. One of the major reasons that staff/parents choose to be involved in such a school/institution is because of their ability to respond pastorally and caringly in a manner consistent with the school's beliefs.

Christian schools/educational institutions should not be subject to any reforms that would have the impact of making it more difficult for the school to operate as a 'community of faith'.

It is also important to note that, when similar questions were considered by an independent Expert Panel in 2018, the panel, after extensive consultations, recommended that the existing exemptions largely be retained. The only reforms they recommended was that schools should have a publicly available policy to ensure staff and parents were aware of the position of the school.