



**ASSOCIATED**  
**CHRISTIAN SCHOOLS**

*life through Christian education*

**Submission to House of Representatives Economics Committee Inquiry into the Australian  
Charities and Not-for-profits Commission**

**FEEDBACK FROM MEMBER SCHOOLS**

**Associated Christian Schools**

**Organisational Principles**

1. Associated Christian Schools value the diversity of Australian faith based schools, with respect to governance, diversity of faith, and independence, and the right of parents in their choice of school for the education of their children.
2. Associated Christian Schools support faith based schools continuing to be autonomous and independent, in their understanding of the instruction provided by schools and the ability to teach within their own educational and faith based interpretation, while being fully accountable with requirements to state and federal governments.
3. Associated Christian Schools support the ability of faith based schools to be innovative in their practices towards demonstrable improvements in student learning.

Senate Standing Committees on Economics  
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## **Introduction**

Associated Christian Schools (ACS) comprises twenty-nine member schools, with approximately 20,223 students enrolled. Nineteen of the twenty-nine member schools are located in regional or remote areas of the state of Queensland. Each member school is separately incorporated as “not-for-profit” companies limited by guarantee, and governed by a board of directors elected by independent means. Member schools of Associated Christian Schools have a diverse student profile, which is reflected in both the geolocation of the schools and its share of students with higher educational needs, which includes disadvantaged, indigenous, students with disabilities and students with a second language, special assistance. The students who are enrolled in our member schools reflect this diversity, through their enrolment policies.

ACS acknowledges the support by the Federal Government of its members. We also value the opportunity to make this response, on behalf of Associated Christian Schools, to the Senate Standing Committees on Economics in relation to the Australian Charities and Not-for-Profits Commission (ACNC).

## **General Comments**

In the relatively short time that the Australian Charities and Not-for-Profits Commission has been established, our members have valued the work that the Commission has undertaken. The core of Australian communities is in charities and the broader not-for-profit sector. The not-for-profit sector employs approximately one million Australians, making a major economic contribution to the nation’s productivity. Members of Associated Christian Schools make a unique contribution to the educational future of our nation. Those who are involved, as part of our organisation’s membership, provide support through educational, social, spiritual and international programs as well as supporting the aged or unwell, in addition to the thousands of volunteers in our school communities.

The not-for-profit sector has been seeking an independent regulator for several years that understands the way in which charities operate, which was an initiative that was supported by the Productivity Commission. Feedback from our members indicates that the ACNC has achieved an

outstanding job in responding to the needs of the charities sector, other stakeholders and their communities.

The launch of the Australian Charities and Not-for-profits Commission in 2012 was a major step forward in creating a regulatory framework that works for the not-for-profit sector rather than against it. In less than two years of operation the ACNC has established strong relationships and credibility by establishing the first public national register of charities, and responding to requests for information from charities and the broader community, as well as initiating the process of centralising all charity reporting.

One of the major compliance and accountability challenges that face our members is the reporting and red tape measures imposed by governments and other organisations. The establishment of the Australian Charities and Not-for profits commission was a positive step forward in initiating the simplification of compliance and red tape, and a mechanism for removing the ATO from the determination of charitable status. Feedback from members considers that the plan by the Australian Government shutdown the ACNC and return the key role of determining charitable status to the Australia Taxation Office will increase red tape and compliance. In addition, services by our members to their communities will be reduced because of the need to divert resources towards administration within their organisations.

## **Summary**

Associated Christian Schools strongly recommends the Australian Government to consider the comments and suggestions expressed in this response. In particular, Associated Christian Schools strongly urges the Australian Government to maintain the work of the ACNC, for the benefit of our members, as an important part of the not-for-profit sector and the many communities they serve.

**Associated Christian Schools  
April 2014**