

Religious charities

The National Secular Society welcomes the charitable work done by people of all faiths and none. Much of the work of religious charities, such as helping the poor, is secular in nature and worthy of support.

But there are religious organisations that exploit the privileged status of religion in charity law to conduct activities that do not fulfil a genuine public benefit - or worse, cause harm to society.

What's the problem?

Registered charities must serve a purpose recognised as "charitable". The law lists 13 "[charitable purposes](#)," one of which is "the advancement of religion".

Charities must also demonstrate that they provide a genuine public benefit. But guidelines are vague on what constitutes a public benefit, particular in relation to religious activities. There is still an assumption in the charity system that religion is inherently beneficial, despite the fact that some religious activities can cause harm.

The inclusion of the advancement of religion within charitable purposes gives religion a privileged position in the charity sector. It enables religious organisations to acquire all the benefits of charitable status, including tax relief, gift aid and public respectability, without the same burden to demonstrate a public benefit as a secular charity. This includes organisations that do little more than producing material to promote their particular religion or holding lectures about their religion.

It also includes religious organisations that cause harm to society. This includes charities that facilitate [religious genital cutting](#), support the [non-stun slaughter](#) industry, and promote extremism, hatred and intolerance of other people. Some charities even use religion as a cover for illegal activities such as fraud and the abuse of young and vulnerable people.

The NSS believes all charities should be held to equally high standards, regardless of whether or not they're religious. That's why we campaign for "the advancement of religion" to be removed from the list of charitable purposes, and for religious organisations to be held to the same equality and human rights laws as all other groups.

Read more about the problem of religion and charity law in our report, [For the public benefit: The case for removing 'the advancement of religion' as a charitable purpose](#).

What are we doing?

- We regularly challenge religious charities where their activities cause harm, or fail to demonstrate a public benefit.
- Launching our campaign to remove "the advancement of religion" as a charitable status, we released [a report in March 2019](#) setting out the case for this change in charity law.

What you can do:

Charities shouldn't escape scrutiny because of their religion or belief ethos. Are you concerned that a particular religious charity is failing to provide a public benefit, or causing harm to yourself or your community? Please let us know, or seek advice from the [Charity Commission](#) (England & Wales), [OSCR](#) (Scotland), or the [Charity Commission Northern Ireland](#).

Take action

Tell your MP it's time for "the advancement of religion" to be removed as a charitable purpose. Enter your postcode below to find your MP and send a letter to them.

Enter Postcode: _____

[Find my MP](#)

[Charities shouldn't escape scrutiny because of their religion or belief ethos. I support the NSS campaign to hold religious charities to account.](#)

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More information

- [For the public benefit? The case for removing 'the advancement of religion' as a charitable purpose](#)

[Read More](#)

- [Protect secular public services](#)

Government outsourcing to and funding of religious charities raises concerns for secular public services.

[Read More](#)

- [NSS Letter to Charities Minister](#) (PDF, 341 Kb)

- [Operation Christmas Child: FAQ](#)

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