

Submission to Review of Regional Schooling Resource Standard Loadings



About Queensland Independent Schools

Community confidence in the independent schooling sector remains strong with some 129,000 students enrolled in 220 independent schools across Queensland. These schools educate approximately 15 percent of the state's total school-age population and about 20 percent of all secondary students.

The strength of the independent schooling sector lies in the rich mix of education choices and opportunities Queensland independent schools provide families from all backgrounds. Independent schools are as diverse as the students and parents who make up their close-knit communities. Of Queensland's 220 independent schools: 196 educate students with disability; 104 cater for students for whom English is a second language or dialect; 204 enrol Indigenous students; 82 offer international education programs; 33 provide boarding services; and 25 cater specifically for students who have disengaged from mainstream education.

Common to all independent schools is their commitment to strong student outcomes, high standards of behaviour, and the welfare and wellbeing of students.

Over the past 10 years enrolments at Queensland independent schools have increased by 18 percent. This growth is a clear indication that parents value an independent education and are prepared to invest their after-tax incomes in their child's schooling.

Independent Schools Queensland (ISQ) is the peak body for Queensland's independent schooling sector. ISQ represents the interests of its member schools, fosters choice in education and protects the autonomy of independent schools. ISQ is a not-for-profit organisation and membership to ISQ is voluntary.

ISQ is a member of Independent Schools Australia (ISA) and supports the submission by ISA to the National School Resourcing Board's (the NSRB) *Review of Regional Schooling Resource Standard Loadings*.

Submission

Context

Independent Schools Queensland (ISQ) welcomes the opportunity to make a submission to the National School Resource Board's (the NSRB) *Review of Regional Schooling Resource Standard Loadings*.

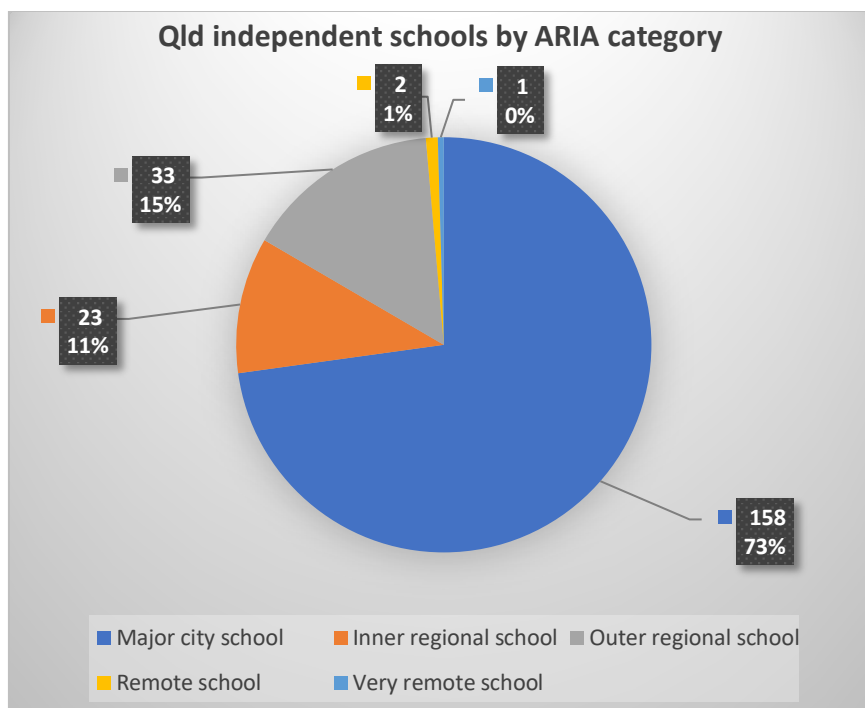
ISQ supports Commonwealth schools funding being needs-based, transparent and equitable so students with the same need in the same sector (i.e. non-government) attract the same level of support from the Commonwealth, and the use of loadings to allocate additional funding to support students experiencing educational disadvantage arising from school size and location.

ISQ notes that, in this review, the Board will consider funding provided to regional and remote schools and make recommendations relating to the current settings for the school-based loadings related to location and school size, and the data informing these loadings.

The terms of reference for the review explicitly exclude consideration of the capacity to contribute (CtC) arrangements for non-government schools. Nevertheless, many regional independent schools in Queensland are facing significant funding reductions in the near future, specifically resulting from the introduction of the Direct Measure of Income (DMI) approach to CtC.

Regional, Rural and Remote (RRR) communities

The independent sector in Queensland has 27% of its schools located outside major cities (see Display below), representing some 15% of the sector's enrolments (FTE), or nearly 19,000 students across regional, rural, and remote (RRR) communities.



Also, the sector includes boarding schools, Indigenous community schools and distance education schools serving young people from many families in RRR communities.

There is broad acknowledgement and acceptance that regional, rural, and remote (RRR) schools face cost pressures and other challenges not shared by schools closer to large urban and metropolitan centres.

Mostly recently, the 2018 *Independent Review into Regional, Rural and Remote Education* by Emeritus Professor John Halsey (the Halsey Review) and the Federal Parliament [House of Representatives Standing Committee on Employment, Education and Training](#)'s current inquiry into the education of students in remote and complex environments, have highlighted the priority to address key issues in service delivery and in students' educational opportunities and outcomes.

The additional costs of service delivery to RRR communities are well researched, accepted and applied in many public funding policy arrangements, including, for example, in the Commonwealth Grants Commission's long-standing work on state and territory "service disabilities".

Dispersed RRR communities are burdened by much higher costs of service, due to freight (of goods) and travel (of personnel) costs, labour market challenges leading to higher salaries to attract staff, and higher prices of scarce supplies. These communities will also generally have fewer choices of goods and services due to lack of strong local market competition. A dollar in the bush does not stretch as far as it does in the city.

There is also broad acceptance that regional, rural, and remote (RRR) communities face more frequent and severe challenges due to 'extreme' events such as droughts, floods, public health crises, etc.

As schools become increasingly digitally focussed and connected, access to affordable and effective internet services has become critical for schools in RRR contexts. Access to ICT is an issue for schools, students, and families throughout RRR areas of Australia. The level of teacher expertise and access to appropriate ICT also presents a challenge to the delivery of education (Halsey, J. 2018).

Independent schools typically have few systemic supports to draw upon for delivery of high-quality schooling services – exacerbated by factors of remoteness and accessibility for schools outside the major urban centres. Further, schools in RRR contexts are local 'community hubs' of support for their communities and especially during challenging times of natural disasters.

Application of ARIA+

The location loading is intended to give schools in RRR areas additional funding commensurate with their additional costs of service delivery. The ARIA+ measure seeks to indicate the relative levels of service disability associated with variations of distance from major service centres.

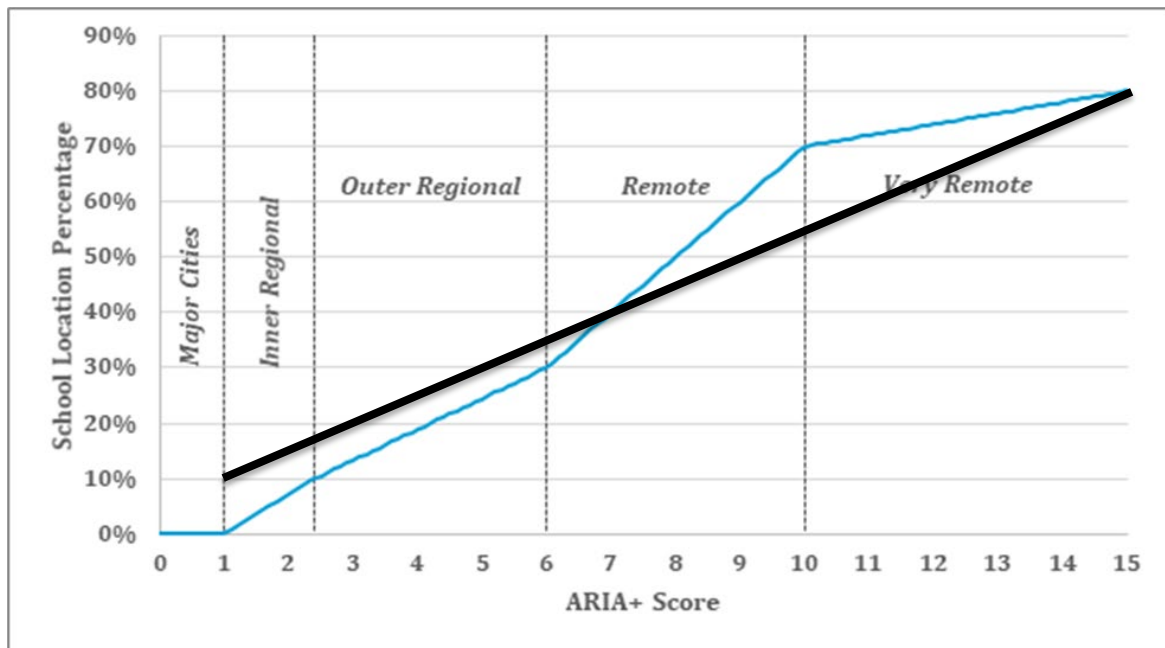
The rationale for the parameters of loadings applied to the ARIA+ categories is opaque. The funding scale begins from ARIA+ value of >1 i.e. from the Inner Regional category through to Very Remote (see Table 1. below).

Table 1. Location loading			
	ARIA index value (lower limit)	Loading	Slope
Major city school	0.0	0.00	0.0000
Inner regional school	1.0	0.00	0.0714
Outer regional school	2.4	0.10	0.0556
Remote school	6.0	0.30	0.1000
Very remote school	10.0	0.70	0.0200
Maximum	15.0	0.80	

These parameters should be revisited and reassessed for relevance and appropriateness. The policy rationale for each of the settings should be tested and justified, including the various loadings and

slopes. Are the funding relativities appropriate between each of the location categories e.g. urban v. inner / outer regional v. remote?

Of particular interest is whether the settings for inner and outer regional locations are appropriate? For example, the loading for inner regional locations could begin at 10% (for >1) and the slope be a straight line through to 80% at ARIA+ 15 (i.e. upper Very Remote)? See chart below.



Furthermore, the data set underpinning the current settings is now a decade old i.e. based on 2011 census data. How have demographic changes in service centres, over the past decade, impacted on ARIA+ values for locations? Research is required to update the ARIA+ values and to reassess whether this measure is 'fit for purpose'.

Isolated students

The independent school sector is the largest provider of boarding school services, thereby providing RRR communities with a choice of schooling.

Isolated families have few choices of schooling and many face either home-schooling or sending their children away to boarding schools.

Currently, the location loading applies to schools within the defined ARIA+ localities. Consideration should be given to including a loading for students from isolated RRR communities in order to grant additional resources for boarding schools that enrol these students.

Relevance of school size

The application of school size to the calculation of location loading needs to be assessed for relevance, and the policy drivers made much clearer. What relationship is there between school size and location that warrants including both factors in the calculations of each of the loadings?

While schools are generally smaller in RRR contexts, so are the RRR communities that they serve. If ARIA+ is accepted as fit-for-purpose to load resources for location-related disadvantages, then size is already addressed by ARIA+.

The school size factor relates to a further disadvantage (i.e. to the effects of 'economies of scale') and is rightly the focus for a separate resource loading for small schools. The policy analysis required

here should consider what the differences are between small and larger schools in the same RRR locations, rather than similarly small size in major cities.

DMI - out of scope?

As indicated above, many regional Queensland schools are facing reduced funding due to the adoption of the DMI – replacing SES - to discount Commonwealth government funding. The TOR for this current review exclude consideration of the DMI. Nevertheless the ‘capacity to contribute’ of RRR communities cannot be ignored in this policy discussion. These communities do not have the same purchasing power as their city cousins – for all the reasons noted above, a dollar in the bush does not stretch as far as it does in the city. A regionality factor should be developed and applied to the DMI to account for this difference in ‘capacity to contribute’ by RRR communities.

Conclusion

Schools in RRR communities require substantial additional funding resources to be able to provide a comparable level of education service to that of major city schools.

Current policy settings for the location and size loadings need to be reconsidered and changed to address the disadvantages faced by regional schools and their communities.

Recommendations

- Current funding parameters based on ARIA+ may not adequately address the relative needs of regional schools (inner and outer) vis-à-vis major city schools and remote schools. These parameters should be reassessed to ensure regional schools are not further disadvantaged.
- ARIA+ data set is out of date and needs to be updated and reassessed for fitness-for-purpose.
- Isolated students from RRR communities have few choices of schooling and should be included in the location loading, such as those who choose to board away from home.
- While the DMI policy is a separate policy, ‘service disabilities’ mean that the incomes of RRR communities don’t have the same CtC of communities in major cities. Regionality should be included in the DMI to address this concern.

ISQ has and will continue to advocate for fair, accurate, certain, and transparent funding arrangements for independent schools to ensure an independent education remains affordable and in reach of all Queensland families and their children, including those in RRR communities.

ISQ is pleased to have this opportunity to make a submission to the National School Resourcing Board and would welcome further consultation with the Board regarding these matters.

6 November 2020

References

Halsey, J (2018) *Independent Review into Regional Rural and Remote Education—Final Report*, Commonwealth of Australia, accessed 22 September 2020, <https://docs.education.gov.au/node/50281>

National School Resourcing Board (2020) *Review of the regional Schooling Resource Standard loadings: Issues Paper*, Commonwealth of Australia, accessed 22 September 2020, <https://docs.education.gov.au/node/55076>