



Review of regional Schooling Resource Standard loadings

Submission to the National School Resourcing Board

November 2020

Introduction

The Queensland Catholic Education Commission (QCEC) provides this submission to inform the National School Resourcing Board's review of regional Schooling Resource Standard Loadings.

QCEC is the peak strategic body with state-wide responsibilities for Catholic education in Queensland. This submission is provided on behalf of the five Diocesan Catholic school authorities and 17 Religious Institutes and other incorporated bodies which, between them, operate a total of 307 Catholic schools that educate more than 149,000 students in Queensland.

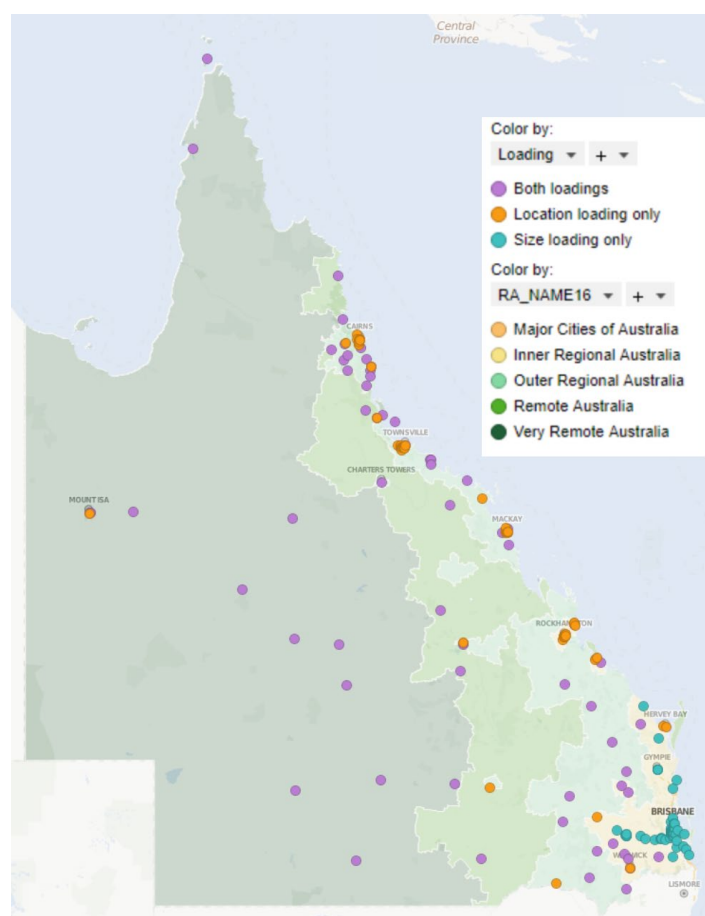
Executive Summary

In Queensland, more than half of all Catholic schools receive a size and/or location loading. Given the distribution of Queensland's population, there are many small schools in regional and remote locations. These schools face particularly high operating costs, including to attract and retain staff, offer professional development, access specialist facilities and maintain buildings. QCEC notes that the size loading currently received by very small schools in regional and remote areas does not adequately cover these additional costs and advises that all diocesan Catholic School Authorities have to cross-subsidise these schools to ensure appropriate services are being provided and schools and students in small rural towns are not being disadvantaged by the current funding arrangements. Boarding schools in regional and remote areas face extra operating costs to day schools in those areas as staffing costs are higher and more supplies need to be transported in. Regional and remote schools offering boarding to Indigenous students face further costs as a result of providing specific services to accommodate their students' needs. To address the complexity of the intersection between size and location loading, QCEC strongly recommends the investigation of new options for assisting small schools in regional towns beyond the current ARIA+ and size methodologies. This could include adding a multiplier to the size loading components of the location loading calculation or increasing the allocation for very small and small schools by a set amount of funding (indexed each year with the SRS). In relation to new and emerging factors affecting the cost of education in regional and remote areas, QCEC notes the risk that COVID-19 or similar future pandemics may have enduring impacts.

Catholic schools in Queensland

More than half of Queensland's population lives outside the greater metropolitan area of Brisbane—a large proportion compared with the rest of highly urbanised Australia. Queensland's Catholic schools are therefore very dispersed to ensure all Queensland children have the opportunity to obtain a Catholic education.

In total 185 Queensland Catholic schools receive size and/or location loadings. Fifty-nine schools, mainly in the South East corner of Queensland benefit from a size loading and fifty-five schools, predominately along the coast, receive location loadings. The seventy-one schools receiving both size and location loadings are scattered all across the state, from Stanthorpe in the South to Mount Isa in the West and Thursday Island in the North. In Queensland, there are 28 Catholic schools with fewer than 100 students; the smallest one is in Winton and has 10 students.



Preliminary data from the Australian Government's 2020 Non-Government Schools Census indicates that Queensland Catholic schools attracting a size and/or location loading employ 7,300 staff and educate 61,650 students. Over eight per cent of students in these schools identify as Indigenous and for nearly five per cent of students English is not their first language. Around 18 per cent of students are identified under NCCD.

This submission focuses on the questions raised by the National School Resourcing Board in its [Issues Paper](#) and responses were informed by Catholic School Authorities from across Queensland.

Question 1

What are the elements specific to school location that increase the cost of delivering education in these settings?

The main cost of delivering education in regional and remote settings is associated with the attraction and retention of staff. This includes the provision of accommodation and associated maintenance and refurbishment costs and additional allowances under Enterprise Agreement provisions. Furthermore, leadership succession planning costs, including implementation of programs that grow leaders internally for rural and remote schools, and salary and associated accommodation costs for relief staff add to the cost of delivering education in regional and remote settings. In fact, in very remote locations staffing numbers need to be proportionally higher as it is very difficult to source relief staff at short notice and for short assignments.

The table below provides a comparison of how staffing costs can differ between metropolitan and remote locations. The example is based on Teacher Proficient 8 and the highest possible iteration of the allowance.

	Cairns	Thursday Island
Total salary incl. allowances	\$79,262	\$97,052
Total oncosts*	\$47,327	\$62,787
Other non-salary costs		
- remote relocation costs		\$3,000
- remote travel allowance		\$4,200
- staff housing (employer contribution)		\$58,968
Total	\$126,589	\$226,007

*Oncosts include super, workcover, long service leave and annual leave

Professional development costs are also higher in regional and remote areas, especially where external experts are delivering training (travel and accommodation costs) or where resources need to be supplied (transport costs). Similarly, additional costs arise where centrally located Catholic education staff need to travel to regional and remote locations to support school communities. These costs include accommodation, travel, vehicle fleet and provision of staff FTE to cover time away. While today's technology allows for many services to be delivered remotely, it is important to acknowledge that it is not always possible to do so and that school location can add significantly to the cost of delivering these services.

Regional and remote schools also face higher facility maintenance and capital refurbishment costs as freight and transport costs of material for capital improvements are higher in regional and remote areas. These costs are amplified where asbestos removal is required.

Curriculum delivery requiring access to specialist facilities, services and resources also adds to the cost of delivering education in regional and remote locations through higher transport and freight costs. With regional and remote locations continuing to face connectivity issues, these schools also tend to have to rely more on physical resources than schools with access to high bandwidth internet. Similarly, the provision of allied health services, whether delivered in-person or via telehealth, incurs extra costs for schools that are outside the metropolitan area. The specialist care and support required to ensure high levels of student wellbeing and mitigating the risk of mental illness are also more difficult and costly to access as and when required in regional and remote areas.

Question 2

Are there additional elements associated with school size for smaller schools in regional and remote settings that increase the cost of delivering education over the costs for small schools in city areas?

All schools (irrespective of size) require minimum facilities to operate and offer the curriculum. Small schools therefore have relatively higher fixed costs than larger schools as recognised in the current size loading. However, for many small schools in regional and remote locations, the current size loading is inadequate and does not reflect the additional costs faced by those schools as outlined in Question 1.

The most significant additional cost element for small schools in regional and remote settings vis-à-vis small schools in city areas is the minimum staffing provision and base level of services required to address the range and diversity of needs within the different classroom groups and year levels. In Queensland, some Dioceses have a minimum staffing provision of principal and two (2) teachers in addition to support staff and school officers regardless of the school size. This ratio helps ensure a safe workplace and also compensates for the lack of availability of relief staff in regional and remote settings.

Question 3

Is the dollar value of the current school location and school size loadings appropriate to meet the additional costs specific to school location and school size?

As stated in the Issues Paper (page 9), the size loadings for small and medium schools in regional and remote locations are the same as the size loadings for similar schools in metropolitan areas. Only very small regional and remote schools attract a higher size loading than similar sized schools in metropolitan areas.

QCEC agrees that the size loading for metropolitan schools is appropriate for the cost of their service delivery but that similar sized schools in rural and remote locations face higher costs due to their location (as outlined above).

QCEC believes that the size loading currently received by schools with fewer than 100 enrolments in regional and remote locations does not adequately cover the additional costs faced by these schools. Currently, all diocesan Catholic School Authorities have to cross-subsidise these schools to ensure appropriate services are being provided and schools and students in small rural towns are not being disadvantaged by the current funding arrangements.

QCEC recommends strongly that the NSRB explores the merits of a two-tiered approach for the size loading – with different loadings for regional/remote schools and metropolitan schools – to better reflect the additional costs small regional schools face in comparison to their metropolitan counterparts. It may also be an opportune time to review the enrolment bands for defining the size of schools, in particular for very small schools.

Question 4

Are there elements specific to school location which have particular resourcing implications for certain types of schools in regional and remote areas, such as boarding schools and small non-systemic schools? What are the elements?

Boarding schools play an important part in the education of students in regional and remote locations but Australian Government recurrent funding for schools only covers in-school costs and does not extend to supporting the provision of boarding. Most boarding schools, irrespective of location, experience cost pressures due to the 24 hour care and support required for boarding students and the additional specialist support required, particularly to ensure the wellbeing and mental health of the students.

It is important to emphasise that due to the additional costs faced by schools in regional and remote areas (as outlined in Question 1 above), boarding is relatively more expensive in regional and remote locations than in metropolitan areas. As noted previously, staff attraction and retention are more difficult in regional and remote areas and are particularly a problem for boarding schools where extra staff are required to offer boarding services. Higher delivery charges, including for essential items (e.g. food) also add to the costs of operating these schools.

Schools offering boarding to Indigenous students in regional and remote locations in Queensland are subject to particularly complex staffing and associated cost structures. The provision of behaviour management, risk management and compliance and additional guidance and pastoral care services substantially increase the costs of these schools. Additionally, building the cultural competency of staff in boarding schools with a higher percentage of indigenous boarding students is vital but has resource implications for school authorities.

Question 5

Is ARIA+ the most appropriate basis for classifying locations and applying to the school location loading? Should another measure be considered?

The intersection between school size and location loadings is highly complex and Queensland Catholic School Authorities are concerned that the ARIA+ model may not provide a sufficiently responsive and granular system for classifying locations of schools. As noted above, small schools in regional areas face significantly higher operating costs than their metropolitan counterparts and the current funding model does not sufficiently address this issue. School authorities therefore have to cross-subsidise these schools to ensure children in regional Queensland have the same opportunities to receive a Catholic education as children in more heavily populated areas.

QCEC urges the NSRB to investigate options for assisting small schools in regional towns and ensure that the funding provides equitable outcomes for all students, regardless of location. This could include adding a multiplier to the size loading component of the location loading calculation or increasing the allocation for very small and small schools by a set amount of funding (indexed each year with the SRS).

Question 6

Are there new or emerging factors that should be taken into consideration when looking at the cost of education in regional and remote areas and/or small schools?

In light of the global pandemic, schools across Australia continue to face many uncertainties. For Catholic schools in regional and remote Queensland, COVID-19 is expected to continue to have significant impacts on travel costs in 2021 and beyond. However, given the uncertainties around government support for regional carriers, including QantasLink and Regional Express Airlines (REX), it is difficult to quantify these costs. COVID's longer-term impacts on construction and maintenance costs are also unknown but are expected to be ongoing.

COVID-19 has been the catalyst to rapidly change the Australian Government's policy position on telehealth services by expanding the list of Medicare-subsidised telehealth services. While telehealth is greatly improving access to health services, including allied health services, poor connectivity continues to be an issue for many regional and remote areas. Regional and remote schools may also be limited by the ability to access resources and services to effectively offer wraparound services to students and their families.

As mentioned above, staff attraction and retention continue to be challenging for regional and remote schools and Catholic School Authorities need to continually review and revise incentives to ensure they can continue to attract and retain good quality staff. It remains to be seen how COVID-19 affects attitudes to work in regional and remote locations.

Conclusion

In summary, QCEC notes that national statistics, such as NAPLAN, PISA and TIMSS, show that the performance of students in regional and remote locations has lagged behind urban students for decades (Halsey Report, 2018). Whilst much is being done to ensure these students have access to high quality education and make successful transitions to further study, training and employment, current resourcing levels do not reflect the actual costs associated with delivering the programs and educational experiences required to address this disadvantage. This review provides the opportunity to appropriately address what has been a long-standing issue of concern.

QCEC appreciates the opportunity to inform the Review of Regional Schooling Resource Standard loadings by providing responses to the focus questions in the Issues Paper. If you require further information or have any questions about this submission please contact Beatrix Brice, Principal Policy Adviser on beatrib@qcec.catholic.edu.au or (07) 3316 5856.

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