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Mr Michael Chaney AO
Chair, National School Resourcing Board
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Dear Chair

Thankyou for the opportunity to formalise the Tasmanian Department of Education's (DoE) feedback in relation to the *Review of Regional Schooling Resource Standards Loadings* (The Review) and the opportunity that was provided to meet with Board Members on 18 November 2020.

As a system, we are committed to making a positive difference for our children and young people. We have based our approach on evidence and data and a deep understanding of the unique characteristics of our system – and our unique challenges.

We are servicing the most decentralised population in Australia, with approximately 56 per cent of residents living outside the greater Hobart area. The State, as a whole, currently meets the classification of regional, rural or remote, and three out of ten students are living in rural (or outer regional) and remote areas. In Tasmania, there is also a higher proportion of children in the government education sector compared with the rest of Australia, reflecting our families' capacity to pay.

In terms of the broader environment, a range of physical barriers exist in the Tasmanian landscape. While we are a relatively small land mass, the state is difficult to navigate due to our rugged landscape and changeable weather patterns.

Tasmania's topography and economic and industrial past has affected settlement patterns, which has an obvious impact on the cost of providing government services, particularly in terms of regionality and remoteness and their impacts on access, participation and engagement in learning, and the supports that need to be put in place for our learners and staff as a result.

The Review's Issues Paper poses several questions for consideration. With DoE's context in mind, there are some fundamental concepts which are relevant to the majority of the questions posed.

Understanding the variety and depth of challenges that affect Tasmania's educational outcomes is essential when considering policies aimed at addressing resourcing implications for certain types of schools. Two of the key areas in which there are barriers to ensuring equity in access, participation and engagement in education for all our learners are technology and transport.

The primary information and communications technology (ICT) issue for rural and remote Tasmanian schools is access to bandwidth. What we found through the response to COVID-19 was that schools and the system had to support both hardware access and internet access. To that end, DoE provided schools with 650 internet dongles and loaned approximately 6,400 devices to students without access to a device at home.

Once access to ICT reaches equity for rural and remote students, the other key component in ensuring that ICT resources are fully utilised is the professional development of teacher skills and confidence in ICT integration in the curriculum. Access to ICT affects the ability of students to access a diversity of services. If those services are not in the local community, there needs to be other mechanisms to promote and provide access.

These gaps in services need to be innovatively addressed by our education system – for example, equity of access to a diversity of learning pathways, access to student support services and contemporary career education services.

The ability to participate in education means getting there in the first place. The ability to participate in broader extra-curricular activities is a challenge particularly in some areas, and schools in regional, rural and remote areas are supported to access experiences often not available in their local community.

In terms of transport, many Tasmanian school bus routes service large areas, in difficult terrain, with low numbers of passengers. This makes operating a cost-effective public transport system more difficult and results in higher per student costs to provide the minimum level of service.

Further, access to allied health professionals continues to present challenges as psychologists, social workers and speech and language pathologists work across several sites.

From all of this we have learnt that we need to adapt education and training to fit a local community context, and when we do that we get better outcomes, in contrast to trying to force the education approach of a community into a generic structure designed for a different or irrelevant context. We have thought differently about educational provision.

Given our unique characteristics we know that tailoring initiatives are required to ensure we can meet our shared commitment to our learners.

Some of those areas of reform include:

- Focussing on wellbeing for learning. This has been highlighted particularly through COVID-19. We need to focus on a more co-ordinated approach – one that sees schools (and the broader community) in regions working together to support our students.
- Increasing participation and engagement – ensuring our students remain connected and engaged in learning until the end of Year 12. We continue to build our approach to re-engagement and are embracing a forward thinking approach to Years 9-12 curriculum provision.
- In the early years - ensuring improved connections early in a young person's life and a smooth transition to kindergarten in our schools.
- An absolute commitment to every school improving their approach and practices to ensure that every individual student can be successful – so moving to a very tailored and individualised approach to learning. To achieve this requires a real focus on embedding quality teaching for learning in all of our schools.

The Years 11 and 12 extension program is a key component of reforms that recognise the barriers to rural and remote students accessing colleges (we have eight across the State), or further education and training options, in Tasmania's larger population centres. To date, 47 Tasmanian high schools have joined the Extension Program since it began in 2015.

As well as reducing the barrier of significant travel time, the increased number of schools particularly in regional areas of Tasmania leads to increased options for students in developing their learning programs for Years 11 and 12.

This has also led to the development of collectives or partnerships, in regions across the State where schools meet to regularly align their course offerings, monitor and reengage missing students and review data to improve retention and attainment.

Complementing this program, DoE has been working to strengthen anywhere and anytime learning through Virtual Learning Tasmania (VLT). VLT offers another approach for students to enrol in subjects that are not offered by their school increasing the breadth of courses available to a student. We have an alternative option for those

students who face insurmountable access issues, provided by the Tasmanian eSchool services and programs which have approximately 240 enrolments.

In terms of specifics on the size and location loading, I would firstly note that they are a material component of Tasmanian State funding and, for the range of policy drivers outlined, are integral to overall funding that supports service delivery. The location loading is approximately 7 per cent or \$73 million of the total government sector school resourcing standard and the size loading is approximately \$25 million or 2 per cent. Secondly, it is submitted that it is not always possible to consider each loading in isolation, nor completely separate it from the SES loading. Together the elements can have a multiplier impact.

Consequently, the local context in which education is delivered must inform resource allocation to maximise efficiency and truly reflect need. Flowing from the above is recognition of the balance between programs which are best served to run across schools at a system level and flexible funding provided to schools at a per student rate. We will separately provide further details on the location and size based funding mechanisms that we gave an overview of at the consultation meeting with Board members.

In respect of the location loading, as you would be aware, under the ARIA methodology Tasmania has a large concentration (approximately 95 per cent) of government schools that are classified as 'inner regional' or 'outer regional' schools and has no 'major city' schools. Consequently, based on the current settings and with Hobart under the population size for a 'major city' the loadings are considered reasonable and equitable to meet need.

With that in mind, at this point Tasmania has not deeply explored alternate models for locational disadvantage but is willing to be an active participant in any work that explores alternatives. Again, noting the challenges Tasmania faces, there would be significant concern if either: (a) alternate models had significant negative impacts on needs based funding; or (b) within the current model the Hobart population increased above the existing 'major city' threshold and there was no adjustment to that threshold to reflect general population growth over time. Conversely, any models which inferred significant increases in funding contributions would need to be considered in terms of financial sustainability.

The [2020-21 State Budget](#) certainly reflects investment in the areas that the loadings contribute to, for example :

Engaging and empowering our learners to succeed

This deliverable intensifies the work of encouraging more learners to meaningfully engage in senior secondary education through providing flexible learning pathways to and through Years 9 to 12 with a continued focus on strengthening industry liaison and school-based apprenticeships. It directly aligns with Premier's Economic and Social Recovery Advisory Council (PESRAC) recommendation 41 which states "The State Government should accelerate existing strategies to deliver improved educational opportunities that meet individual student needs as well as providing clearer pathways to jobs in identified post-COVID-19 industry priority areas, the training system and university".

Specifically, the funding will support:

- accelerating the Packages of Learning Program that is designed for Year 9 and Year 10 students and is an integrated approach to teaching the Australian Curriculum core learning areas through a practical, industry-focussed lens, with the first additional prioritised package being in 'Health and Community Systems'
- the development of a career website with pathway maps and selection guides to support student career planning, preparation and development during and after their schooling years
- resources, professional development and systems that support multi-level, modularised and micro-credentialed courses (also known as short qualifications) aligned with the Australian Curriculum General Capabilities which will promote increased engagement in learning by giving students in Years 9 to 12 greater flexibility in what and how they learn, and regular recognition of their learning achievement
- strengthening industry liaison and vocational placement through extending services from two sites to four sites in 2022

- the 'Back on Track' pilot at Hellyer College and Claremont College which aims to reconnect with young people identified as not engaged in education and training, understanding their barriers to learning and assisting them to re-engage in education or training.

Funding of \$978 000 will be provided in 2020-21 and \$6.6 million over four years.

Extend Every Tasmanian High School to Year 12 by 2022 (also Job Ready Generation 2.0)

Recognising the geographic, psychological and social barriers for learners to continue to access, participate or engage in education and training, after Year 10, additional recurrent funding of \$36 million will be expended, over four years to continue the Government's commitment to extend every Tasmanian High School to Year 12 by 2022. As indicated above, 47 schools have already been extended to Year 12, with a further nine to commence in 2021, leaving one to be extended by 2022. The extension of schools includes innovative partnerships between urban and rural schools and Colleges providing students with the best opportunities to be job ready. This allocation is in addition to the significant investment already allocated towards supporting this initiative.

More Support for Prep (first year of 'formal' schooling)

As part of supporting our youngest learners the Government is committed to developing the capacity of current Teacher Assistants and providing funding for Education Support Specialist positions, to build on and improve the quality of differentiated support to our early learners to enable them to develop necessary foundational skills. To support a play-based inquiry-led approach to the delivery of the Australian Curriculum in the Prep year, the Government will commence staged funding based on need in 2021. Importantly, the Education Support Specialist positions, which formed part of the last Teacher Agreement, provide Teacher Assistants with a new paraprofessional career pathway.

These examples demonstrate the emphasis to provide learners with localised, flexible and differentiated pathways, taking into account our local context. The size and location loadings and current settings are an integral element of the overall education funding commitments in place that provide improved opportunities for targeted funding that seeks to respond to localised need and deliver on our commitment to inspire and support all learners to succeed as connected, resilient, creative and curious thinkers.

The Australian Government is the minority funder for the Government school sector and education is the constitutional responsibility of states and territories. The importance of predictability of funding is critical to the stability of this responsibility.

DoE understands that there are challenges to providing budget neutral changes to loading settings; however, the consideration of option/s that limit the budget impact for states and territories, particularly in light of the impact COVID-19 has had on state budgets should be prioritised.

Thank you once again for the opportunity to provide the Board with Tasmania's feedback on this important review, and I would be happy to provide any further information or clarification as required.

Yours sincerely



Tim Bullard
SECRETARY