



19 February 2018

**Secretary
National Schools Resourcing Board
Australian Government Department of Education and Training**

Review of the socio-economic status (SES) score methodology

UNSW Sydney welcomes the opportunity to provide this submission to inform the current review of the current socio-economic status (SES) score methodology for determining the capacity of non-government school communities to contribute to the operational costs of their school.

The UNSW 2025 Strategy commits our institution to the active promotion of equality of educational opportunity both within and beyond the University. This priority is operationalised through a range of HEPPP funded outreach, access and participation initiatives such as the nationally recognised UNSW ASPIRE Program and the recent establishment of the Gonski Institute for Education (GIE) which brings together scholars, policy-makers and practitioners to conduct research that will help improve academic and wellbeing outcomes particularly for disadvantaged students and those who live in rural and remote Australia.

Further, UNSW is adopting a more systematic approach to the recruitment and support of students of high potential that better acknowledges the educational impact of socio-economic backgrounds. Given the significant link between low levels of achievement and educational disadvantage, particularly among students from low socioeconomic, regional, remote and Indigenous backgrounds, UNSW supports the establishment of a robust, needs-based, transparent and equitable SES score methodology, ensuring that students with the same need, in the same sector attract the same level of support from the Commonwealth.

UNSW Sydney looks forward to assisting the Board with this review. Should you require any further information regarding any of the issues highlighted within this submission, please do not hesitate to contact in the first instance

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SUBMISSION QUESTIONS

- 1. What are the strengths and limitations of the current SES methodology that is used to determine the capacity of a school community (school, family, parent) to contribute to the recurrent costs of the school? Please provide any supporting evidence.**

Through the current work of the UNSW ASPIRE Program in 55 partner schools across LSES communities in regional and metropolitan NSW, the following observations are made.

- The current SES methodology correlates education with occupation and income. However, for schools with significant enrolments from migrant and refugee families, this is often not the case and can unfairly skew the determination of 'capacity to contribute'.
 - In urban areas, the distribution of affluence is dynamic and subject to several variables, making SA1 data a less reliable tool over time.
 - Particularly in regional areas, families reporting nil income through the ATO may in fact be affluent and enrolling their children in high-fee paying non-government schools.
 - The relative affluence of regional communities can be impacted seasonally and by unusual weather events which impact upon crop yields and tourism. Non-government schools in these communities can find their fee-based income severely curtailed without warning, and therefore need a mechanism to buffer against such occurrences.
- 2. What refinements or alternative methodologies could be considered to improve on the current SES measure, including how frequently should measures be updated?**

It is suggested that the Board investigate the current resource allocation model employed by the NSW Department of Education (DoE), The Family Occupation and Education Index (FOEI). While the FOEI does correlate parental education with student and school performance, it is based on an annual extract of data from the enrolment system, so it captures information about the latest student population enrolled in each school. This contrasts with SA1 data which is updated only in relation to census data gathered every five years.

Separate loadings for school remoteness and Aboriginal student background should be employed, as is the case in NSW DoE schools.



A funding mechanism to incentivise schools' focus on progression to higher education by LSES students might also be considered through 'value-addedness' adjustments to the SES score methodology.

Further, any methodology must use a robust regression technique to manage outliers (i.e. schools that exhibit different patterns of relationships between parental background and student achievement), resulting in a more stable model.

3. Are the guiding principles appropriate to assess alternative approaches or are there other principles that should be considered?

In addition to the stated principles, we believe that alternative approaches to the methodology should be agile, in as much as they should be able to respond quickly and effectively to unforeseen and sudden changes in economic/demographic circumstances, particularly for regional communities.

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