



QUEENSLAND

NON-GOVERNMENT SCHOOLS

BUS FARE ASSISTANCE PROGRAM

GUIDELINES

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Abbreviations

DEEWR *Department of Education, Science & Training*

ISQ *Independent Schools Queensland*

NGSTAS *Non-Government Schools Transport Assistance Scheme*

QCEC *Queensland Catholic Education Commission*

QT *Queensland Transport*

STAS *School Transport Assistance Scheme*

1 INTRODUCTION

The Queensland government considers families have the prime responsibility for making suitable travel arrangements for their children to attend school. Since 1997 the Queensland government has provided funding to enable the non-State school sector to administer a transport assistance scheme for students attending non-State schools.

The scheme is known as the Non-Government Schools Transport Assistance Scheme (NGSTAS). It is a joint initiative of the Queensland Catholic Education Commission (QCEC) and Independent Schools Queensland (ISQ). The scheme is oversighted by the Schools Transport Reference Committee and is administered by QCEC on behalf of all non-State schools.

The NGSTAS consists of two programs:

- The Bus Fare Assistance Program (BFAP), and
- The Students with Disabilities Transport Assistance Program (SWD).

THE BUS FARE ASSISTANCE PROGRAM

Objective

The purpose of the program is to provide financial assistance to families who pay more than a nominated weekly threshold in bus fares to transport their children to a non-State school located outside the Brisbane City Council boundary. Funds are not unlimited and the level of assistance provided to eligible applicants depends on the program funds available in the relevant semester.

2 ELIGIBILITY GUIDELINES

2.1 For Applicants

To be eligible for travel assistance an applicant must be paying more than a nominated weekly threshold on bus and/or ferry fares for all eligible students in their family.

In special circumstances, some schools may elect to assist parents with the cost of fares by paying a proportion of the fares to the transport operator on behalf of the parent. To qualify for BFAP assistance it is essential that any parent receiving assistance from their child's school pay the relevant weekly threshold, as a minimum. These arrangements are at the discretion of the school principal.

Applications for assistance will normally only be accepted from a parent or carer of eligible students. However, in exceptional circumstances applications may be accepted from charitable organisations or government agencies acting on behalf of a student.

Students who live independently of their parents or carer may also apply for assistance if they satisfy the eligibility criteria for Applicants and Students.

2.2 For Students

To be eligible for travel assistance a student must:

- reside in Queensland,
- be eligible to attract the Australian Government General Recurrent Grant for the school attended,
- attend an accredited non-State school in Queensland,
- attend a non-State school located outside the Brisbane City Council boundary, and
- use a publicly available bus or ferry service operated by the company that has an urban service contract with Queensland Transport for the area in which the student resides, if one is available, or travel on an NGSTAS approved service. In either case it is essential that the fares charged by the bus operator do not exceed those set by Queensland Transport in its School Transport Maximum Cash Fare Schedule.

* *Refer to the explanatory notes on the following page for further clarification on student eligibility for bus travel assistance.*

Exchange students participating in a Student Exchange Program with an exchange organisation that is registered by the Queensland Department of Education, Training & the Arts are eligible for travel assistance.

2.3 Criteria for QT Subsidised Bus Travel and the Impact on Non-State School Students

Urban Service Contract Areas

Throughout Queensland several bus companies have been granted urban service contracts by Queensland Transport. The companies are required to provide a range of services for the general public, including school students, within a declared geographical area. The contracts are generally restricted to cities and provincial towns such as Cairns, Townsville, Rockhampton, Mackay, Toowoomba, Maryborough, Hervey Bay, Bundaberg, and Warwick.

Even though an urban service contract has been granted to a bus company for a particular geographical area other bus companies may also be permitted to provide bus services within that geographical area. However, government subsidies for school students are only paid for students who travel on buses operated by the company that has the urban service contract for a particular geographical area. The fact that Queensland Transport only pays assistance to contracted operators has a direct impact on a student's eligibility for travel assistance through the Non Government Schools Bus Fare Assistance Program (BFAP), as explained below.

Distance Eligible Students

Students who reside more than a specified distance from their nearest State school may be eligible for assisted bus travel to their nearest State school. For primary school students the distance threshold is 3.2 kilometres. It is 4.8 kilometres for secondary school students. Any students who reside more than the relevant distance from their nearest State school and meet other general criteria are considered to be 'distance eligible' students. The total cost of the bus fare for distance eligible students is paid directly to the bus operator by Queensland Transport. These students are generally granted a bus pass and travel at no cost to their family, courtesy of the Queensland Government.

Students Attending Non-State Schools

All students who attend non-State schools and reside more than the specified distance threshold (3.2 or 4.8 km) from their nearest State school may be eligible for assistance based on the distance between their residence and their nearest State school. If the distance to the non-State school attended by the student is greater than the distance to their nearest State school the student must pay a 'top-up' fare to cover the cost of travelling the additional distance to their non-State school. This arrangement only applies to distance eligible students who travel on a bus operated by the company that has the service contract for the area in which the students reside. Students who travel on a non-contracted service are not eligible for the assisted travel provided by Queensland Transport to distance eligible students.

To be eligible for a BFAP rebate students must use a bus operated by the company that has the urban service contract for the area in which they reside, if such a contract exists.

Even though a student may reside within an urban service contract area, on occasions it may be necessary for him/her to use a non-contracted bus service. This might occur when a student has no option other than to catch a late bus due to an after school activity such as sport or music practice. This is often unavoidable. Providing the student uses the contracted service for the majority of trips to and from school, he/she will be eligible for a BFAP rebate.

Students Travelling on Buses outside an Urban Service Contract Area

Students who reside in locations not covered by an urban service contract are not affected by the above eligibility requirement. However, these students must use a bus operated by a bus company approved by the Non Government Schools Transport Assistance Scheme.

The following students are **not eligible** for travel assistance:

- Students who attend a State school,
- Students not eligible to attract the Australian Government General Recurrent Grant for the school attended,
- Full Fee Paying Overseas Students (FFPOS),
- Pre-Preparatory Year students,
- Students residing outside Queensland,
- Boarding school students, unless they are weekly boarders who make a minimum of two single journeys between home and school each school week. e.g. a student might travel by bus from home to school at the start of the week and travel back home at the end of the week. For the purpose of determining BFAP eligibility, students who travel from their home at the start of a week to stay or board with a relative or friend during the school week, because the relative/friend resides closer to the student's school, are considered weekly boarders, providing they travel to their own home at the end of the week,
- Students travelling on a bus/ferry service that is not an NGSTAS approved service, including buses owned, leased, chartered or arranged by a school, parent or organisation affiliated with a school. Due to government approved arrangements implemented by Queensland Transport prior to the introduction of the Bus Fare Assistance Program in 1997, school owned bus services operated by two non-State schools have been deemed NGSTAS approved services.

2.4 General Guidelines

2.4.1 Distance to School

Travel assistance will only be provided from a student's normal residential address to the school attended, via the shortest trafficable route. An exception may be made if a student is required to reside in temporary accommodation or if the student is conveyed to or from an alternative residence where the student receives before or after school care.

If the distance, by the shortest trafficable route, from the alternate address to the school attended is greater than the distance from the student's normal residence to the school attended, travel assistance will be based on the student's normal residential address.

2.4.2 Attendance Requirements

The travel subsidy will be based on the average number of trips travelled by a student each week of the school semester. When completing a BFAP application form applicants are required to record any anticipated periods of absence during the current semester. If it is known that a student will miss a certain period of school during the semester due to a holiday during school term time, a school camp or known hospitalisation, the details and dates must be provided. If a student commenced travelling by bus and/or ferry after the first day of the semester, applicants must specify the date the student commenced travelling.

If a student's travel pattern changes after an application form has been submitted applicants are obliged to notify the School Transport unit at the Queensland Catholic Education Commission.

2.4.3 Work Placements

Travel assistance will not be provided to enable a student to participate in any form of "work experience" program.

2.4.4 Travel Assistance Available from Queensland Transport

Some students attending non-State schools may be eligible for bus fare assistance through Queensland Transport's *School Transport Assistance Scheme (STAS)*. The assistance from Queensland Transport (QT) may be provided for all or part of the journey to school, depending on the distance from the student's residence to the school attended and the nearest State school.

To qualify for travel assistance from QT students should normally reside more than a nominated distance from either their nearest State school or the non-State school attended. The distance threshold is 4.8 kilometres for secondary students and 3.2 kilometres for primary students. Students living further than the relevant distance threshold from their nearest State school or the non-State school attended are normally considered *distance eligible students*. Parents/carers should contact their nearest Queensland Transport office to determine if a student is eligible for travel assistance.

It is essential that parents/carers of distance eligible students apply for travel assistance through QT to ensure they receive their entitlement. Some students may be eligible for free bus travel to and from school. Others may be eligible for a Part Pass, which provides free bus travel for part of the journey between the student's residence and school attended. The balance of the fare must be paid by the parent/carer.

Any fare subsidy provided by QT will not only reduce the weekly fares paid by families, it will also ensure NGSTAS funds are not used to subsidise fares that are the responsibility of QT.

2.4.5 Financial Assistance Available through the Bus Fare Assistance Program

Eligible applicants will receive a rebate for any bus and/or ferry fares they have paid in excess of the weekly threshold. The weekly threshold is a per family threshold, not a per student threshold. The weekly threshold is determined on a semester by semester basis and depends on the government funds available for distribution to eligible applicants as well as the amount of money spent on fares during the semester by all eligible applicants.

e.g. A family with one child spending \$25.50 per week would receive a rebate of \$10.50 per week, if the weekly threshold was set at \$15.00 per family per week.

A family with three children spending a total of \$76.50 per week would receive a rebate of \$61.50 per week, if the weekly threshold was set at \$15.00 per family per week.

2.4.6 Concession Card Benefits

Applicants who have one of the following concession cards will be eligible for additional assistance, provided the card is current and valid. The card must have been issued in the name of the applicant or have the applicant's name listed on the front of the card.

- Health Care Card issued by Centrelink,
- Pensioner Concession Card issued by Centrelink, or a
- Veterans Affairs Pensioner Concession Card issued by Centrelink.

The additional assistance takes the form of a lower weekly threshold. The weekly threshold for holders of valid concession cards is generally \$3.00 per week lower than that applying to applicants who do not have a valid concession card.

e.g. A family with one child spending \$25.50 per week would receive a rebate of \$13.50 per week, if the weekly threshold was set at \$12.00 per family per week.

A family with three children spending a total of \$76.50 per week would receive a rebate of \$64.50 per week, if the weekly threshold was set at \$12.00 per family per week.

Students living independently who apply for assistance through this program may qualify for the lower weekly threshold if they have a valid concession card issued in their own name and are paying their own bus fares.

3 APPLICATION PROCESS

Parents and carers are required to submit a separate online application form each school semester.

The online application form is normally completed by the parent or carer. As not all parents are able to apply this way there is an alternative. A simplified paper application form is available from the school that your child attends. The arrangements require it to be submitted to your school where staff will enter it online on your behalf. For each application entered by the school, a service fee of \$5 will be paid to the school. Only one application is permitted from each family. The details for all eligible students are to be provided on the form, even if the students attend different non-State schools.

The online application form must be submitted by the nominated closing date (31 October 2008 for Semester 2 2008). The submit command sends the application to the Queensland Catholic Education Commission for processing. If a paper form is used it must be returned to the school by the nominated closing date (31 October 2008 for Semester 2 2008). Applications for bus fare assistance cannot be accepted after the closing date.

Travel assistance rebates are normally deposited into the nominated bank accounts of eligible applicants at the end of June, for Semester 1 entitlements, and end of November for Semester 2 entitlements. All eligible applicants are advised by email or letter, if no email address is provided, that their payment has been deposited into their nominated bank account.

A fee may be deducted from the rebate if applicants provide inaccurate bank account details or fail to advise QCEC of any changes to bank account details prior to rebates being paid.

4 BFAP FARE AUDITS

Each semester a random selection of applicants will be required to prove that they have incurred the expenditure declared on their application form. The proof may be in the form of receipts from the bus operator or bus tickets issued to students. It is therefore recommended that parents retain all receipts and tickets for a period of six months after the semester has ended.

Definitions of Terms

Accredited Non-State School

An accredited non-State school is a school that is provisionally accredited, or accredited, under the Education (Accreditation Non-State Schools) Act 2001.

General Recurrent Grant

Funding provided by the Australian government for operational expenses incurred by non-State schools, such as teaching and ancillary staff salaries, professional development of teachers, curriculum development, maintenance and general operation provisions. The funding is based on the number of eligible students.

Charitable Organisation

A charitable organisation is an incorporated not-for-profit agency whose objects include providing a public benefit in the field of welfare. Under these guidelines, the charitable organisation may not be the school attended. The following organisations are examples of charitable organisations:

- Anglicare
- Rotary
- Salvation Army
- St Vincent de Paul Society

Conveyance Allowance

Queensland Transport provides travel assistance to enable eligible students to travel to and from school. Some non-State students may be eligible for various forms of conveyance allowance, such as Class A, Class D or Class I. Eligibility is determined by Queensland Transport.

Distance Eligible Students

Refer to sections 2.3 and 2.4.4.

Exchange Students

Exchange students are school age students participating in a Student Exchange Program with an exchange organisation that is registered by the relevant State or Territory education authority.

NGSTAS Approved Service

An NGSTAS approved service is a bus or ferry service that has been approved by the Schools Transport Reference Committee. Buses that are owned, leased, chartered or arranged by a school, parent or organisation affiliated with a school are not approved bus services.

Parent

As defined in Section 10 of Queensland's Education (General Provisions) Act 2006.

School Attended

The school attended is the non-State school attended by a student.

School Transport Maximum Cash Fare Schedule

Each year Queensland Transport issues a schedule listing the maximum fares that can be charged by a bus operator for various distance categories. The fares are the maximum allowable and are not a mandatory fare schedule. Where an operator charges fares below this

maximum fare schedule, these fares may only be increased by a maximum of 10% each six months, until the maximum fare is reached (with due notice to customers and notification of fares to Queensland Transport).

Schools Transport Reference Committee

The committee comprises three representatives from the Queensland Catholic Education Commission and three from Independent Schools Queensland. Click here to download a copy of the Committee's charter. [Schools Transport Reference Committee Charter July 2008](#)

Shortest Trafficable Route

This is the shortest route using roads open for public use between the entrance to the school attended by the student and the property alignment at the vehicle access point to the student's residential property nearest to the school attended. No measurements are taken on private property. In calculating this distance, the single journey is used. In cases where the distance to and from school varies because of different routes (eg. one way roads), the average distance is taken.

Student Living Independently

A student living independently is a student who resides independently of a parent or adult carer. These students must be supporting themselves financially and be responsible for their own transport costs to access the school attended.

Urban Service Contract Areas

Refer to section 2.3.

Weekly Threshold

The weekly threshold is the weekly amount the applicant is required to meet. The weekly threshold is determined on a per family basis, not on a per student basis. The weekly threshold is set by the Schools Transport Reference Committee each school semester. For applicants who have been granted a Health Care Card, Pensioner Concession Card or Veterans Affairs Pensioner Concession Card the threshold may be set at a slightly lower rate.