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BER Design Range

Building the Education Revolution (BER) is part of the Australian Government's \$42 billion Nation Building Economic Stimulus Plan and is first and foremost about stimulating the economy and supporting jobs, especially jobs in local communities. A component of BER is Primary Schools for the 21st Century (P21).

The BER Program Office specifically developed the BER Design Range (BDR) to ensure that smaller schools with less than 50 enrolments would have the same opportunities under P21 as larger schools – that is, a choice between a refurbishment or new construction project.

The BER Design Range is tailored to meet the needs of smaller schools and their P21 allocation of \$250,000. The BER Design Range is a useful addition to small schools and their local communities and can be configured as a library, a combined library and classroom, a multi-purpose hall or a classroom, depending on the school's need.

Project Budgets

The BER Program Office has to manage expenditure across the whole program. The Australian Government's guidelines are clear that there is no additional funding available for project over-spends and that un-spent funds may be in jeopardy.

Our aim is to deliver each school's Australian Government approved project in full, or where this isn't possible, to make sure the school's full allocation is used to deliver works at that school.

To bring school projects within the school's funding allocation we sometimes need to work with the school Principal and explore ways of reducing the project's cost and make changes.

In the case of BER Design Range projects, the allowed changes don't impact on safety or the functionality of the building – the changes reduce costs not benefits. For instance, the Schools Facilities Standards relating to the durability of building materials are being applied flexibly, because fewer students mean less pedestrian traffic and wear and tear.

We only make changes that are reasonable and don't reduce safety or overall functionality. That is why we are making sure that all BER Design Range buildings include:

- reverse cycle air conditioning units in line with the Department of Education and Training's policy
- sinks and necessary utility connections, as this offers significant additional functionality for small schools
- maintenance or upgrade works to the school's main electrical board if this is necessary to comply with the Building Code of Australia
- power and data outlets

Developing the BER Design Range for small schools

The BER Design Range had to be developed and finalised very quickly to meet the Australian Government's deadlines for P21 project nominations.

Our early assessment of the likely cost of the BER Design Range indicated that it would be affordable for smaller schools with a P21 funding allocation of \$250,000. These initial costings were based on cost estimates for a modular building at a generic site assuming average costs for things like statutory planning and ground conditions.

Once the initial designs were developed, the BER Program Office began working closely with the Managing Contractors to refine the initial costings and identify regionally specific efficiencies and cost savings where possible.

For instance, in the Western NSW, Riverina and Illawarra regions we have been working with the Managing Contractor and building manufacturers to achieve significant cost savings through a competitive procurement process and the decision to buy the buildings in bulk and negotiate a discount.

The design solution being used in the Western NSW, Riverina and Illawarra regions enables the buildings to be manufactured off-site and transported direct to remote school sites. This approach is faster and cheaper for these remote school sites where the costs of getting building resources and workers to the site can be very high.

In other regions, the difficult terrain makes the costs of delivering modular buildings to site prohibitively expensive, and it's more cost effective to construct the whole building on-site. In these regions the Managing Contractors are leveraging cost efficiencies by bulk ordering materials and supplies.

Developing and Delivering P21 Projects

The costs for each school project will vary, sometimes significantly. Poor site access or the presence of poor ground conditions or a sloping site can cause a school's project to cost more. The remoteness of a school site can also affect the cost.

Each school's P21 allocation needs to cover the full costs of developing and delivering the project. This includes design and documentation, statutory planning, site management and establishment, construction (sub-structure and super-structure) and the connection of all utilities. The Managing Contractor can provide schools with more information about their particular project and any site specific issues that affect costs.

Design and documentation covers the costs of the architects, engineers and ground surveyors which are required to finalise the site of the new building to take advantage of natural light and minimise the potential costs of ground conditions (eg asbestos remediation works or deeper foundation pilings for a sloping site). Getting the siting right can save money and dramatically improve the benefit and usability of the building.

The school's P21 allocation also covers the costs of statutory planning. This cost can be relatively high for small schools representing a significant percentage of their overall allocation, particularly if the school's site is located in a heritage, bushfire or flood zone.

The BER Program Office and the NSW Nation Building and Jobs Plan Taskforce have been successful in reducing statutory planning costs on BER Design Range projects by getting the law changed to streamline the planning process. This change will save time and mean that more money is available for building work at the school.

The [P21 Project Budget Fact Sheet](#) provides more information on the costs of delivering P21 projects and the processes in place to deliver value for money across the program and on every school project.

Budget Transfers Procedure

In a program as large as P21, there are going to be some projects that don't fit within the school's funding allocation, despite all reasonable efforts, generally because of extraordinary site specific issues. In these situations, the project cannot proceed until we find another public school that has money left over because their full P21 project costs less than their P21 allocation.

The BER Program Office has procedures in place to talk to those Principals that have money left over and get their approval to transfer left-over funds to the BER Program Office Transfer pool. The funds from the transfer pool will be used towards other NSW public school whose project is at risk if top-up funding isn't identified. School communities are kept informed of any decision to transfer funding to or from their school's project.

The Primary Principals Association and the NSW Federation of Parents and Citizens Associations support our approach to managing affordability across the P21 program and transferring left-over funds between P21 schools.