Mergers likely in Territory shake-up

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TERTIARY education faces its biggest change in the Northern Territory in more than a decade, with the federal Opposition claiming the proposed shake-up is face-saving for the Howard Government.

The Northern Territory University is likely to merge with two other Territory institutions and its council has approved a name change to Charles Darwin University as part of the reforms.

The NTU may also put its research activities into a new institute to be shared with the Canberra-based Australian National University, among other undisclosed alliance proposals to the ANU.

"There is a fair bit of negative baggage attached to the name NTU" says Professor McKinnon, NTU vice-chancellor.

The Darwin-based NTU, founded in 1989, is talking with the Menzies School of Health, also in Darwin, and the Centralian College TAFE high school in Alice Springs about a merger of the three.

Recently arrived NTU vice-chancellor Ken McKinnon said both institutions had responded positively to the NTU approach but had not made final decisions.

A spokeswoman for NT Education Minister Syd Stirling said people of the Northern Territory have access to high quality tertiary education which includes teaching and research," Senator Carr said.

But he said the proposed changes amounted to the closing of one university and the opening of another.

The NTU's "funding stress" had caused continuing cuts in courses which had discouraged student recruitment, Senator Carr said.

Most regional universities, including the NTU, had been unable to meet the Government's goal for publicly funded universities of getting most of the extra income they need from private sources, he said.

But Professor McKinnon said Senator Carr was being irresponsible in suggesting the Darwin university was financially endangered.

The NTU was "small but flourishing" and was looking for a way of overcoming the confines of the territory's low population, Professor McKinnon said.

Earlier, Professor McKinnon told the Northern Territory News: on the name change: "There is a fair bit of negative baggage attached to the name NTU. It is not as well thought of in the Darwin area as it should be."

Federal Education Minister Brendan Nelson said the NTU's finances were sound and it would not close but he reiterated his observation last February that it faced "significant challenges" as a dual