

Charles Darwin University
Submission to the Australian
Universities Accord Discussion Paper

April 2023



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Delivering on our role as Australia's most connected university

Charles Darwin University's (CDU) vision is to be Australia's most connected university by being courageous and making a difference in the Northern Territory (NT), Australia and beyond. CDU is in an unparalleled position to embrace the vitality and resilience of the NT and contribute to the future prosperity of Northern Australia.

This submission proposes a new approach to funding for CDU through the Universities Accord so that future generations of Territorians continue to have access to world-class training and higher education.

CDU is positioned to make a significant contribution to some of the nation's biggest challenges: shoring-up energy and water security in the face of climate change; acknowledging our geopolitical environment to protect our national interests; and developing sustainable economic growth in Northern Australia, particularly for First Nations peoples.

Case studies throughout this submission demonstrate that innovative research for Northern Australia is much more impactful when underpinned by First Nations knowledges appropriately interweaved 'with' Western knowledges.

Part I outlines a case for a five-year National Institute Grant for CDU to deliver better outcomes for the NT, its people and for Australia's national interests. It outlines that delivering high-quality training, education and research is contingent on addressing the flaws of the current universities' funding model. **Part II** addresses the remaining opportunities to improve systems that underpin all Australian Universities.

Summary of Recommendations

Recommendations

Part I addresses CDU's role in the NT and recommends that:

1. The Accord recognise the role of CDU as a place-based university in providing equitable access to higher education and research, professional employment for regional communities and a backbone of community infrastructure.
2. A five-year National Institute Grant to support Australia's interests in the North is provided to CDU to underwrite research and education, along with training and economic development for the NT's regions.
3. A renewed compact system or individual Accord, be developed to ensure CDU is held accountable to its place-based mission in the NT under a National Institute Grant.

Part II responds to the Discussion Paper, and CDU recommends that:

4. The Accord reintroduce demand-driven places, with first uncapping places for all First Nations students not just those in regional and remote areas and then for all students in regional and remote areas.
5. The Accord notes the critical importance of improving school education outcomes to student success in tertiary settings.
6. The Tertiary Enabling Program be reformed to:
 - a) restore the prominence of enabling in the tertiary landscape;
 - b) align with the AQF so that it can be used for a 'one tertiary' entrance;
 - c) have its own specific funding cluster to allow flexibility of course design; and
 - d) include a low student contribution that can be placed on HECS-HELP.

7. Future funding available to support student success for equity cohorts includes low socio-economic status; experience of disability; regional, remote and very remote location; and First Nations students; and that this funding be accounted for by headcount rather than per EFTSL basis.
8. The ISSP be expanded to allow activities to be undertaken including staff attraction and retention and embedding First Nations knowledges and that this funding be accounted for by headcount rather than per EFTSL basis.
9. While encouraging students to pursue their aspirations as a first priority, the Accord considers incentives for students to move to regional and remote areas, such as expanding the Tertiary Access Payment.
10. A new funding model for students undertaking placement be introduced as a matter of urgency, for all placements required to complete an undergraduate or qualifying postgraduate course.
11. Current Centrelink settings for student payments are reviewed so that carefully targeted additional supports can be provided for students as they study and that Masters by Coursework students can access student payments as soon as the relevant course is accredited.
12. The Quality Indicators for Learning and Teaching Student Experience Survey continue to be refined to better address: non-school leaver cohorts; effective online delivery models; the assumptions behind 'learner engagement' parameters; and adoption and continuous improvement of technologies.
13. The Accord endorses work underway in the Migration Review, including to Review the Genuine Temporary Entrant criteria; increases the NT's allocation of subclass 190 Skilled Nominated visas; and identifies other opportunities and incentives for international student graduates to access permanent migration streams.
14. In the first 10 years, the Accord brings to life valuing the vocational and higher education sectors equally, by moving to a 'one tertiary' system and addressing fundamental barriers between the sectors.
15. Dual sector universities are used to light the path for future harmonisation between vocational and higher education in the first five years of the Accord by:
 - a) committing to the goal of a 'one tertiary system' model;
 - b) extending self-accreditation across vocational qualifications;
 - c) using dual sector universities to trial regulatory reform options; and
 - d) drawing on dual sector universities as an advisory forum.
16. Near-future improvements are also prioritised to drive better harmonisation between vocational and higher education by:
 - a) extending VET-HELP loans;
 - b) increasing the amount payable by the Commonwealth for Recognition of Prior Learning;
 - c) reclassifying Certificate III apprenticeships at a higher skill level, Level 5; and
 - d) promoting nested qualifications with both vocational and higher education qualifications.
17. First Nations knowledges be authentically recognised as a catalyst for embedding knowledges in curricula.
18. The Accord addresses improved ways of measuring research impact.
19. To ensure access for regional universities to research funding, future Research Support Program costs differentiate to provide a higher cost structure to regional universities; and that regulatory burdens on applications are removed for research grant applications.
20. The reporting of long-term research priorities that preserve academic independence are included in a renewed compact system, or individual Accords with universities.

Part I:

A place-centred university

CDU is deeply connected to the NT and this connection is the catalyst for all our training, education and research. The NT spans approximately one sixth of Australia's landmass and although it is home to just one per cent of the population, 30 per cent are First Nations peoples. At the heart of CDU's place-based mission is engaging First Nations students and supporting their attainment in vocational and higher education.

Being a dual sector university allows CDU to meet the education needs of Territorians with campuses in Darwin, Alice Springs, Palmerston and Katherine and study centres in Nhulunbuy, Jabiru and Tennant Creek. CDU also has a proud history of delivering on country in some of the NT's most remote locations,¹ bringing training to First Nations communities who need it in places such as Galiwin'ku, Maningrida, Borroloola, Wadeye and Hermannsburg. CDU teaches three First Nations languages: Yolŋu Matha, Arrernte, and Bininj Kunwok and co-delivers training in language with First Nations people.

CDU's contribution to social and economic outcomes for the NT should not be understated. Developing local intellectual capital and attracting and retaining talent were two of the driving forces behind establishing the Territory's own university in the late 1980s. As a large employer, CDU provides employment stability and economic growth to the NT's workforce.

The NT Government's collaboration with CDU is critical, including as a research partner, evidenced in initiatives like the Northern Drought Hub and Australia's first jurisdiction-wide social index.

Case Study: The Molly Wardaguga Centre

The Molly Wardaguga Research Centre is leading the way in maternity care outcomes for First Nations women in regional and remote communities through culturally sensitive care. The Centre was established in 2019 in honour of a Burarra Elder and midwife who worked extensively to improve health outcomes, with a vision of returning birthing services to First Nations communities and control. The research centre has grown significantly and has conducted more than 20 research studies on maternity care.

Building on 25 years of health services research, Centre co-directors, CDU Professor of Indigenous Health, Yvette Roe, a proud Njikenawu woman, and Professor of Midwifery, Sue Kildea, run the Birthing on Country program. As a demonstration of its impact, the Birthing on Country program has seen a 38 per cent reduction in pre-term birth and neonatal nursery admissions. With support from both the Australian and NT Governments the research team is now expanding the service to East Arnhem with a pilot maternity clinic in a region with one of the highest proportions of pre-term births in Australia.

CDU partners with the Batchelor Institute of Indigenous Tertiary Education and First Nations-led training organisations and acknowledges the immeasurable impact of these organisations in meeting the aspiration of First Nations people, especially, but not exclusively, on country.

¹ This submission uses the term 'remote', which often addresses both remote and very remote locations.

CDU's role in delivering on national interests

CDU supports the NT Government's ambitious goal of a \$40 billion economy by 2030 by leveraging the strengths of the NT and its people. In practical terms, we know this will require a demographic and economic step-change unprecedented in the NT. We also support the Commonwealth Government's agenda to develop Northern Australia, both in economic and social infrastructure.

While the NT Government continues to incentivise Australian workers to move to the NT there is broad consensus that the population base must also increase through international migration. CDU advocates for the recognition of Northern Australia's fundamentally different workforce trajectory than other places described as 'regional' and accordingly that skilled migration targets for the NT should be more than 2.5 per cent of national migration. Allowing international students to access pathways to permanent migration is a key lever available to governments and is further discussed below.

Northern Australia plays a critical role in biosecurity, food security, water security, energy security and national security. CDU's research intensity is demonstrated across each of these security interests and as such, CDU's location in the NT is a catalyst for impactful research that cannot be done elsewhere in Australia.

Case Study: NT's role in Defence

Responding to our national security environment, the imminent release of the Defence Strategic Review will provide a roadmap for leveraging Australia's interests through the Australian Defence Force. CDU submitted that the Defence Strategic Review should address workforce capability and development and ensure any investments by Defence are made in both materiel and human capital.

Defence contributes around \$2.2 billion each year to the NT economy, around 8.8 per cent of the Territory's Gross State Product and is in the midst of an \$8 billion NT infrastructure investment to 2025, with another \$12 billion earmarked for 2026-2035.

The March 2023 announcement of AUKUS arrangements and Australia's acquisition of nuclear submarines is an important example of Defence development. The Nuclear-Powered Submarine Task Force has already advised academia that the majority of specialists will be needed in mechanical, electrical, and chemical engineering, materials science, and supporting trades. Alongside the renewed focus on these capabilities, AUKUS provides an important context for lifting higher education and vocational training aspirations in science and technology especially, but across all fields more broadly. It is critical that the NT seizes the opportunity to be part of AUKUS' once-in-a-century role as a nation-building project, especially through local workforce development.

Operating in thin and ultra-thin markets

Thin and ultra-thin markets define CDU's operating environment and impact its operations across training, education and research, with higher travel costs, supply chain interruptions and workforce scarcity. Economies of scale are almost impossible to realise with Australia's most dispersed population base, of only 250,000 people.

CDU has had an average of 7,281 higher education and 3,082 vocational full time equivalent students per year (EFTSL) over the past five years. Importantly, our head count over the same period is much higher at an average of 9,549 higher education and 11,818 vocational students.

The 2008 Bradley Review noted a 1986 estimate that a comprehensive university could only be economically viable with a minimum catchment area of 500,000 people to sustain a student load of 5,000 (full time) students. The Bradley Review reflected that even then, 5,000 students were unlikely to support a comprehensive university in Australia.² Over the 40 years since this viability estimate, while physical infrastructure demands for universities have remained similar, extraordinary technological infrastructure demands have been added. CDU argues the issue of viability remains as relevant as ever and should not be dismissed by access to technology or availability of online learning.

To remain viable in a thin market, over the past 10 years CDU broadened its scope particularly as an online university provider. As with other regional universities this allowed us to capture new student markets by utilising the lessons of flexible delivery in the NT. However the online student market is now much more competitive with most Australian universities offering flexible delivery.

CDU has grown its international student cohorts to 13 per cent of students in higher education and two per cent of vocational education students. It is important to acknowledge operating without online delivery and international students would significantly heighten viability constraints on CDU. That is, while our mission is focused on delivering for the NT and its people, we would not be a viable university without students from overseas or studying online.

The Bradley Review contemplated a consolidation of regional and outer metropolitan campuses that was not supported or adopted by successive governments. CDU suggests this is because universities have strong connections to their place their value in supporting regional economic growth is widely evidenced.³ Specifically, it does not make sense to further disadvantage regional communities by withdrawing educational opportunities for students; diminishing the economic and workforce opportunities offered by place-based universities, or marginalising research capacity and capability built to address the needs of regional stakeholders.

In the years since Bradley, the case for regional education has become stronger with mounting evidence that students who study in regional and rural settings are more likely to stay there upon graduating. The case is especially strong for health workforces where there are complex and critical shortages in regional and remote areas.⁴

These shortages drive, for example, CDU's investment in broadening its health and allied health courses where professional gaps persist in the NT, especially in remote communities. However, CDU must constantly assess decisions of course viability and weigh this against our purpose to provide training and education opportunities.

Case Study: East Arnhem Region

The East Arnhem Region is home to 11 remote communities on the Gove Peninsula and surrounding islands, as well as more than 50 homelands and satellite communities. Travel to the Peninsula is via sea, on a barge from Darwin; by car, around 12-14 hours from Darwin (subject to road conditions and closures in the wet season); or on a light aircraft. These communities and homelands are amongst the most remote in Australia.

² Australian Government, *Review of Australian Higher Education (the Bradley Review)*, p110.

³ See e.g., Nous Group for the regional Universities Network, *Economic Impact of RUN Universities 2020*, slide 7, whereby Regional Universities Network universities contributed up to 15 per cent of real GDP in their respective regions.

⁴ See e.g., James Cook University, *Making Rural Health Matter*, 2020 whereby 70 per cent of James Cook University students from outer regional locations stayed outer regional; and 78 per cent of James Cook University students from remote locations stayed outer regional or remote.

The Gove Peninsula has a growth plan that transitions it from a predominant resource-based industry to a diversified economy over the next 10 years, with new jobs in tourism, agribusiness, aquaculture, construction, aerospace and manufacturing. There are significant training needs to prepare for a more diversified economy; along with persistent barriers to students' success, as discussed below.

CDU has recently invested in East Arnhem to establish an education hub which will provide a student training venue, workshop, study area and student services and be a base for visiting lecturers and researchers. This decision is not driven by an economic argument for establishing this education facility. Rather, the benefits to students and the region in having a 'most local' university outweighs the significant costs of delivery in line with CDU's missional approach to connecting with place.

CDU has, as envisaged by the Bradley Review, maintained and strengthened its dual delivery of vocational education and training and higher education. CDU believes there is value especially in universities being a backbone of community infrastructure. In recognition of their important role in communities, universities often receive funding from regional infrastructure portfolios so that campuses can be used and enjoyed more broadly in the community.

Recommendation 1

That the Accord recognise the role of CDU as a place-based university in providing equitable access to higher education and research, professional employment for regional communities, and a backbone of community infrastructure.

A New National Institute Grant

The reality of the present university funding structure must be confronted if CDU is going to continue delivering high-quality training, education and research in the NT to enable a strong Northern Australia.

As outlined above the NT's population base of 250,000 people cannot organically sustain a university. CDU therefore advocates for a new approach to recognising the national significance of training, education and research in the NT. As a nationally significant university, that is the only provider headquartered in the NT, CDU has an important role which should be buffered against the vagaries of student demand in a thin market.

CDU's proposal is for a five-year National Institute Grant to support Australia's interests in the North. Connected through its mission with the Australian and NT Governments, this grant could underwrite research and education, along with training and economic development for the NT's regions.

Recommendation 2

That a five-year National Institute Grant to support Australia's interests in the North is provided to CDU to underwrite research and education, along with training and economic development for the NT's regions.

CDU recommends a renewed compact system, or individual Accord be developed to ensure that CDU is held accountable to its place-based mission in the NT under a National Institute Grant.

Recommendation 3

That a renewed compact system, or individual Accord be developed to ensure CDU is held accountable to its place-based mission in the NT under a National Institute Grant.

Part II:

Responding to the Australian Universities Accord Discussion Paper: opportunities for Australia's higher education sector

Achieving success for all students

CDU agrees that better outcomes for all students should be a major focus of the Accord to unlock the aspirations of students from disadvantaged backgrounds.

Despite acknowledging student diversity, government policy settings largely still reflect a presumed cohort of school-leavers, which is not accurate broadly (only around 40 per cent of commencing undergraduate students are school leavers). More specifically, commencing undergraduate students who are school-leavers account for only 21 per cent of First Nations students, 22 per cent of students at regional universities, and less than 10 per cent for CDU.

The basis of admission for CDU students is predominantly former higher education, including enabling programs (52 per cent of enrolling students on average over past five years), then former vocational education (23 per cent of enrolling students on average over past five years).

CDU students strongly represent equity cohorts: 7.9 per cent First Nations; 20.3 per cent are low socio-economic status; 9 per cent are remote or very remote, 13.8 per cent are non-English speaking background and 10.6 per cent are people with disability. On the whole, CDU students are predominantly already working; more students are women (74 per cent); and on average are aged 33 years on commencement. Many students are unable to engage in full-time study because of work, family and other commitments.

Supports available to students are critical for their success and include pathways programs, mentoring, additional numeracy, literacy and language support and financial support for cost-prohibitive course requirements such as placements. Students with cumulative disadvantage face multiple barriers that require additional support. However, the higher costs associated with scaffolded and relevant support are genuine challenges faced by regionally located universities.

CDU supports a return to demand-driven places in line with the recommendations of the Productivity Commission's 5-year Productivity Inquiry: Advancing Prosperity.⁵ If this is not agreed on as an immediate action, CDU recommends a first step should be uncapped places for all Indigenous students, not just those in regional and remote areas; and then all students in regional and remote areas.

Recommendation 4

That the Accord reintroduce demand-driven places, with first uncapping places for all First Nations students not just those in regional and remote areas; and then for all students in regional and remote areas.

CDU supports the establishment of targets for student success along the 10, 20 and 30-year timeframes, as envisaged by the Panel's discussion paper. The ultimate goal of all universities should be to achieve population parity for equity cohorts, but the pathway to achieving parity is not underestimated.

⁵ See Productivity Commission, *5-year Productivity Inquiry: Advancing Prosperity Volume 8*, p64.

Ensuring students are ready for post-school education and training

Many of the challenges CDU students face are related to historical disadvantage, our location and the sparse population base. About 45 per cent of students who complete a NT Certificate of Education and Training receive a minimum Australian Tertiary Admissions Rank sufficient to apply directly to university after high school.

Data shows that NT school students have the lowest or near-lowest levels of literacy and numeracy in Australia, compounded by remoteness. CDU supports the NT's Government's approach to review and improve school education through a two-step process: first at Primary School, and then Secondary School. These reviews will be critical to any considerations for future bilateral agreements with the Commonwealth in the National School Reform Agreement from 2025.

If the Accord is to make a difference to the lives of First Nations peoples in the NT, there must be an improvement in school education outcomes. This is a critical challenge that is multifaceted and complex. For example, First Nations peoples are the most disadvantaged group in Australia, and this stems from historical marginalisation and racism toward them. Unfortunately, the result is multi-generational where low levels of literacy and numeracy are prevalent, as are high unemployment, incarceration rates, and low transition rates into tertiary education study.

Whilst the above is relevant to all First Nations peoples across Australia this extreme disadvantage is exacerbated for First Nations communities in the NT, particularly for remote communities, and is compounded by a myriad of factors including remoteness, long distances to travel, low-bandwidth internet, high cost of living (e.g. inflated prices for fuel and fresh food), English a third, fourth or even fifth language, cultural obligations and low levels of school attendance.

To address this, we have taken the approach of listening to First Nations peoples and genuinely engaging with them in a co-design process. We know that listening to community and co-designing programs work. For example the Principal of Yipirinya School in Central Australia (and former CDU Lecturer) Dr Gavin Morris listened to community voices that proposed a 'sunset school' model to address low participation rates. The proposal was to operate school hours from 3pm to 8pm, which saw 277% increase in participation rates within 12 months of its implementation.

Case Study: improving teacher education pathways in remote communities

Remote Aboriginal Teacher Education (RATE) is a partnership between the NT Government and CDU to support capacity building of First Nations educators in remote NT education settings at every step of their careers, while creating opportunities for those who aspire to become qualified teachers. RATE delivers a targeted suite of professional development opportunities, including initial teacher education (ITE) courses, Vocational Education and Training (VET) and non-accredited training.

In 2021, the RATE higher education pilot program commenced in Angurugu, Galiwinku, Milingimbi and Yuendumu, with 22 Aboriginal Assistant Teachers enrolled in the Undergraduate Certificate of Remote Educators at CDU. In 2022, the RATE pilot continued, expanding to engage Assistant Teachers based in Nyirripi, Yipirinya (Alice Springs), Woolianna and Adelaide River schools, with 30 RATE students enrolled in higher education courses across all sites as of July 2022. In 2023, CDU will commence offering a Bachelor of Teaching.

Until long-term school reform can be realised, deeply entrenched barriers to educational success for First Nations students remain. Consequently, many First Nations students that do transition into CDU do not have the required literacy and numeracy to successfully complete further training and education.

Recommendation 5

That the Accord note the critical importance of improving school education outcomes to student success in tertiary settings.

Tertiary Enabling Program

The funding and associated policy for enabling courses, known as the Tertiary Enabling Program (TEP) at CDU, should also be reviewed within the Accord to restore the prominence of enabling pathways in the tertiary education landscape. CDU recommends aligning TEP with the Australian Qualifications Framework (AQF), at Level 5, to ensure students have access to a 'one tertiary system'. That is, students could more readily access TEP to prepare them for either vocational or higher education studies. To some extent this could be more like a tertiary-based Year 13.

While there are many success stories from TEP, overall, the levels of success and engagement are lower than we would like. Some of the reasons for this include that students access TEP with no student contribution, allowing enrolment to come with very little 'buy-in' from the student. Because it sits outside the AQF, it is not well understood and can vary greatly from one institution to another, making recognition of enabling studies difficult across institutions. TEP is often foundational in its nature, whereas a more subject-specific focus has been seen to encourage greater student achievement.

CDU has had a greater level of success for First Nations students implementing its four-week intensive pre-programs that are closely aligned with specific disciplines; for example the health pre-program builds students' foundational skills in a way that is connected to health content. Students are therefore building foundational skills that are relevant to the discipline they wish to study, whilst also stimulating interest in their chosen field. At the end of the pre-program students are eligible to apply directly into a variety of courses, (in either vocational or higher education) that is right for them.

Excellent initiatives like the pre-Law program, which has increased the number of First Nations law graduates significantly, could be more readily expanded if student contributions were permitted. CDU therefore advocates for enabling programs to have a specific funding cluster, allowing for the charging of a student contribution that could be paid with HECS-HELP.

Recommendation 6

That the Tertiary Enabling Program be reformed to:

- a) restore the prominence of enabling in the tertiary landscape;
- b) align with the AQF so that it can be used for a 'one tertiary' entrance;
- c) have its own specific funding cluster to allow flexibility of course design; and
- d) include a low student contribution that can be placed on HECS-HELP.

Funding to support the success of students

Some of the most important priority cohorts for the NT's sustainable economic prosperity, First Nations students, regional and remote students, students with disabilities, women in non-traditional fields and mature age students, tend to have very part-time study patterns and yet need to draw on support from academic and professional staff with a pattern of demand that often exceeds that of full-time students. It is therefore problematic for an institution like CDU to receive equity funding on an EFTSL basis as this significantly under-resources the population that needs support the most.

Regional and remote students

Fixed delivery costs in regional and remote settings are higher, and individual costs to students from these areas are also higher. However, the grouping together of remote and very remote with regional areas, especially major regional centres, discards the degree of difficulty in remote areas or with remote students. The significant impact of remote and very remote locations on student accessibility and success and on costs of delivery is hard to comprehend from a metropolitan perspective but requires policy attention.

This is recognised by the VET sector funding model in the NT where regional delivery (which is aligned to the ABS Remote category) is funded with a 15 per cent loading whilst remote delivery (which is aligned to the ABS Very Remote category) is funded with a 70 per cent loading.

CDU supports broadly a model which would see loadings provided to take account of equity indicators including low socio-economic status; experience of disability; regional, remote and very remote locations; and First Nations students. CDU argues that this funding should be entirely accounted by headcount rather than EFTSL.

Recommendation 7

That future funding available to support student success for equity cohorts includes low socio-economic status; experience of disability; regional, remote and very remote location; and First Nations students; and that this funding be accounted for by headcount rather than per EFTSL basis.

First Nations students and ISSP

CDU acknowledges that First Nations students are traditional custodians. Therefore support provided to achieve their success should be considered alongside the necessary reform outlined in this submission to better acknowledge First Nations knowledges and embed knowledges in curricula.

First Nations students comprise 7.8 per cent of the higher education and 26.4 per cent of vocational students at CDU. Importantly, CDU has the highest proportion of remote students (9 per cent, including very remote), and this is more than double that of the next University. For many First Nations students there are additional language, technology and other barriers. Additional cultural expectations and responsibilities are also apparent and for remote students who move for university the draw back to community as needed can impact studies.

Since the implementation of the Bradley Review there has been a number of funding model reforms to support student success including for First Nations students through the Indigenous Student Success Program (ISSP). ISSP is considered supplementary funding with universities also expected to commit alternate funding to support and improve First Nations success.

The current activities within the ISSP program are limited to three activity areas: 1) student support, 2) scholarships and 3) tutoring. Whilst these activities are critical to First Nations Success in higher education there is value in broadening the scope of activities, or potentially adding more activity areas. For example, in addition to reporting their performance against the three identified areas, universities are required to report on the number of First Nations staff employed at the provider institution, demonstrating the importance of increasing the number of First Nations employees for student success. However, ISSP funding does not allow universities to invest in employee attraction and retention activities.

Similarly, universities are required to report on how they have embedded First Nations Knowledges into the curriculum, even though this is not a permitted activity under the ISSP guidelines. Broadening the scope of the ISSP activities would allow for a more holistic approach to increasing First Nations success. CDU supports ISSP as an appropriate supplementary fund for universities to increase First Nations success but would argue for an expansion of permitted activities.

Recommendation 8

That the ISSP be expanded to allow activities to be undertaken including staff attraction and retention and embedding First Nations knowledges and that this funding be accounted for by headcount rather than per EFTSL basis.

Attracting students to the regions

CDU supports all students pursuing their aspirations to study – whether that be at their most local university, relocating, or studying remotely. Support available for regional universities should be targeted at encouraging students to study in regional and remote areas, but not at the loss of student choice. One option could be the investment in a Tertiary Access Payment expansion whereby students from metropolitan areas are incentivised to move to regional and remote areas with a \$5,000 payment, just as regional students can access that payment moving to cities.

Recommendation 9

While encouraging students to pursue their aspirations as a first priority, the Accord considers incentives for students to move to regional and remote areas, such as expanding the Tertiary Access Payment.

Placements and other forms of work-integrated learning

One of the major hurdles to student completions in critical areas such as nursing, allied health and teaching is the successful completion of student placements. Too often this represents a key attrition trigger for students, particularly low SES students, who need to pause or give up paid work and sometimes relocate in order to complete the required hours. While CDU allocates some of its Higher Education Participation and Partnerships Program (HEPPP) funding to help students in need, it does not meet demand, and the allocation is exhausted quickly at the beginning of every year. An urgent revision to the current student funding model is needed to support placement activity, prioritising the completion of placements ahead of other nice-to-have options, for example study abroad (supported by OS-HELP).

Recommendation 10

That a new funding model for students undertaking placement be introduced as a matter of urgency, for all placements required to complete an undergraduate or qualifying postgraduate course.

Student contributions and Job Ready Graduates

Job Ready Graduates reform included an overhaul of student contributions and price signaling to incentivise students into courses that would meet future skills needs. CDU agrees with analysis that these changes have not dramatically shifted course demand, and in addition, have negatively impacted equity cohorts. Some of the reforms were unintentionally punitive, such as the 50 per cent pass Rule. CDU has contributed to the Universities Australia's Submission to the Accord Panel Discussion Paper and endorses its recommendations in respect of Job Ready Graduates.

Addressing affordability

Current Centrelink settings require a full-time (more than 75 per cent) study load for students to access student payments, with an exception for people with disability who are unable to study full-time. CDU recommends reviewing this requirement so carefully targeted additional supports can be provided for students as they study.

In addition, Masters students are only eligible for student payments when undertaking Masters by Coursework where those Masters courses are not covered by any conditions. In practice many courses at first accreditation are subject to conditions, meaning that students are then ineligible for student payments. Perversely, universities receive their full funding from the student co-contribution even where the course accreditation is subject to conditions, but the student cannot access support for their cost-of-living.

Recommendation 11

That current Centrelink settings for student payments are reviewed so that carefully targeted additional supports can be provided for students as they study; and that Masters by Coursework students can access student payments as soon as the relevant course is accredited.

Designing future-focused quality education

Australian university graduates have strong employment outcomes and generally Australia's university teaching and learning environment is highly regarded. This has been closely scrutinised in recent years due to the disruption of delivery models for most Australian universities during COVID. For CDU this disruption was not as severe – before COVID, 78 per cent of CDU's student cohort were already studying remotely or with a blended mode of delivery – and this is unchanged.

However, CDU would agree that students who are school leavers have different expectations now. Students are more familiar with remote learning and while they expect flexible delivery options, they also do not want their university experience to be diminished. Delivering both high-quality online and on-campus delivery magnifies the demands on universities to maintain both physical and technological infrastructure.

In parallel, there are challenges confronting education systems globally with the emergence and acceleration of Artificial Intelligence (AI), including ChatGPT. CDU argues that the core business of universities in 'transferring' knowledge and engaging students in critical thinking remains as important as ever. AI is not a threat to education and CDU believes there are opportunities for AI to act as a 'learned friend' and in fact become an equaliser for disadvantaged students.

While the benefits of AI will not be realised without concerted effort on the part of universities, it is also true that universities do not have the optimum approach in place at this stage. A continuous improvement approach to measuring, utilising and regulating AI will be important in the future.

To better address these challenges CDU suggests quality indicators for teaching and learning should be redeveloped and monitored over time to improved future-focused quality education. Specifically, the Quality Indicators for Learning and Teaching Student Experience Survey should continue to be refined to better address: non-school leaver cohorts; effective online delivery models; the assumptions behind 'learner engagement' parameters; and the adoption and continuous improvement of technologies.

Recommendation 12

That the Quality Indicators for Learning and Teaching Student Experience Survey continue to be refined to better address: non-school leaver cohorts; effective online delivery models; the assumptions behind 'learner engagement' parameters; and adoption and continuous improvement of technologies.

International education

The reliance on international education to support the viability of activities in Australian universities is now well known. Universities experienced a real threat to international student markets presented by the COVID-19 pandemic and the sector as a whole has not yet fully recovered. However, the NT international student market was resilient during COVID-19 and was the only state or territory in Australia that recovered beyond its pre-COVID-19 levels in Semester 1, 2022. Education and training is the sixth largest contributor to the NT economy, around 1.5 times that of Tourism and supported nearly 800 Territory jobs in 2019-2020.

International students contribute to the NT as a source of part-time employment whilst studying and contribute towards the skilled workforce upon graduation in a wide range of occupations. One of the key attractions for international students to the NT is the availability of in-field work at the completion of their studies. International student graduates in the NT go on to work in major companies, consultancies and the NT Government. CDU's graduate overall employment outcomes place us second nationally.

For the Accord, it is important to contextualise economic considerations with the significant societal benefits derived from international students. International students improve the NT's vibrant and diverse community and are often active volunteers, supporting the local community via a range of initiatives and organisations.

Value international students by providing pathways to permanent migration

CDU supports the recent extension of post-visa work rights for international students, which is presently six years in the NT. CDU argues that differential post-visa work rights provide a necessary competitive advantage for regional and remote Australia.

In addition, consideration should be given to developing permanent migration pathways for international graduates, who can spend around 10 years participating in their Australian communities with no guaranteed pathway to citizenship. This is especially relevant if graduates have demonstrated a connection to the community where they have studied and have the opportunity to ease demographic challenges outlined above.

The NT is provided with a limited allocation of subclass 190 Skilled Nominated visas, which must be shared amongst international student graduates and migrant skilled workers. It is recommended that the allocation of subclass 190 Skilled Nominated visas is increased for the NT, particularly for international student graduates, to ensure that graduates do not need to compete with migrant skilled workers to remain in the NT and thereby help alleviate the chronic workforce shortages.

Another option supported by CDU is to allow international students to access additional points towards skilled visa applications where a student has studied in regional or remote areas. CDU has advocated through the Review of Australia's Migration System for reviewing the Genuine Temporary Entrance criteria so that it is not a disincentive to attracting students open to staying to Australia after their studies.

Recommendation 13

That the Accord endorses work underway in the Migration Review, including to Review the Genuine Temporary Entrant criteria; increase the NT's allocation of subclass 190 Skilled Nominated visas; and identify other opportunities and incentives for international student graduates to access permanent migration streams.

Diplomatic ties

The so-called soft power achieved through educating international students in Australia, and remaining connected with those students upon graduation, cannot be overstated. CDU's International Student Strategy allows us to focus on key markets of growth, and there is strong overlap with those that supply net migration to the NT. Our top source countries for international students are Nepal, India, China, Bangladesh and Vietnam.

CDU supports a stronger focus on diplomatic ties with our near North and sees one of our key purposes as building and sustaining these relationships through effective diplomacy. Indonesia and Timor-Leste are also key student markets due to our proximity and close business ties to the broader NT economy.

Case Study: Stronger ties with Timor-Leste

Being around a one-hour flight from Darwin, Timor-Leste is a natural partner for the NT. Key areas of collaboration for CDU are predominantly in vocational education and research collaboration. In vocational training, CDU delivers training blocks in Timor Leste in conjunction with the national training provider, Timor VET, and provides immersion opportunities for Timor trainers at CDU to build language and teaching skills.

While research collaboration in Timor Leste spans disciplines, the strongest example is the Menzies School of Health Research (Menzies). Menzies works with the Timor-Leste Government and partners to strengthen health systems for responding to infectious diseases challenges. Our projects in Timor-Leste have been designed to build capacity in clinical, surveillance and laboratory settings, emphasising the importance of the health system working together to improve response to infectious diseases at both the individual patient and the public health level. Menzies has an office in Dili where around 60 staff are located, including those locally engaged to lead health research with a practical application.

Menzies is one of Australia's leading medical research institutes dedicated to improving the health and wellbeing of First Nations peoples, and a leader in global and tropical research into life-threatening illnesses. From 40 years of research driven from the NT, Menzies translates research into effective partnerships and programs in communities across Australia and the Asia-Pacific region.

Better connecting skills and higher education

Delivering effectively the breadth of vocational training, education and research is critical to meeting the training and education needs of the Territory, and the aspirations of its people.

Lifelong learning

A model of lifelong learning requires upskilling, reskilling and career changing across people's working lives. It will require students to undertake higher education where they have previously undertaken vocational studies, and vice versa. In addition, some qualifications are likely to be much shorter than an undergraduate degree or an apprenticeship, including associate degrees or advanced diplomas. Microcredentials will be an important qualification level that can be quickly deployed and acquired.

CDU supports the equal value of skills and knowledge, allowing students to aspire and attain credentials across their lives. As such, CDU cautions against impliedly or explicitly presenting student learning as linear or hierarchical. This is an important bias and can be seen in terms like, 'articulation', 'progression' and even 'stacking' when describing the skills and knowledge people seek and attain across their lives.

'One tertiary' system

While several reviews commissioned by successive governments have proposed ambition for a more unified 'one tertiary' system, the vocational and higher education systems are as entrenched as ever. Currently, overcoming the barriers between systems requires the concerted efforts of students, or the provider, or both. This is exacerbated with smaller student numbers and so the financial return to the university is harder to achieve. The Accord has the opportunity to look beyond the practical impediments of the two systems and set a bold ambition for a 'one tertiary' system on the 10-year horizon.

Recommendation 14

That in the first 10 years the Accord brings to life valuing equally the vocational and higher education sectors by moving to a 'one tertiary' system and addressing fundamental barriers between the sectors.

The Northern Territory University, and then CDU since 2003, has operated several dual-sector models over the years and is well placed to reflect on the challenges and successes of operating across sectors – amplified by the NT's thin and ultra-thin markets.

Most recently, between 2018 and 2022, CDU operated vocational and higher education within a combined college structure. This meant for example that one Dean was ultimately responsible for vocational-level horticulture, as well as university-level Engineering. While this integrated model is often considered an ideological preference, students suffered from the practicalities of professional and academic staff navigating two regulatory and funding structures. Ahead of the 2023 academic year CDU realigned its structure to establish CDU TAFE to drive better vocational outcomes for students with dedicated leadership and expertise.

Streamlining the regulatory environment

CDU's view is that there are currently too many impediments to combining vocational and higher education. If a priority of the Accord is to streamline the vocational and higher education sectors, this must be accompanied by a commitment to true regulatory and funding reform.

Future regulation could see the amalgamation of ASQA and TESQA so that there is one regulator. Under this system, the AQF could be better aligned and become the focus of the regulator to create genuine pathway opportunities between vocational and higher education. One national regulator could contribute to decreasing the regulatory burden, through the creation of peer review opportunities between providers and a more broadly-based self-assurance model.

Dual sector universities light the path for future harmonisation

Dual sector universities can be used to light the path for future harmonisation over the first five years of the Accord. This could include dual sector universities being able to self-accredit units and trial regulatory reforms that may be replicable in time across institutions. For example certain qualifications could be available in both sectors to be accessed as a vocational course and undertaken as a minor within a degree. Such examples highlight the continuum already available, especially in the mid-range of the Australian Qualifications Framework.

Dual sector universities could also provide a suitable advisory forum to the government as regulatory reform options are identified, trialed, evaluated and implemented. CDU has contributed to and supports the submission made to the Accord Panel by the six dual sector universities and believes there is opportunity to build on the collective expertise of these diverse institutions.

Recommendation 15

That dual sector universities are used to light the path for future harmonisation between vocational and higher education in the first five years of the Accord by:

- a) committing to the goal of a 'one tertiary system' model;
- b) extending self-assurance across vocational qualifications;
- c) using dual sector universities to trial regulatory reform options; and
- d) drawing on dual sector universities as an advisory forum.

Near-future priorities

CDU also supports more immediate measures that would support students now as they train and study. As a first priority, the current availability of VET-HELP to only those studying Diplomas and above creates greater financial barriers for vocational training.⁶ Studying a Certificate-level qualification can cost a student between \$1,500 and \$3,000 a year in student fees. While CDU appreciates this is after significant government funding is applied to the training sector, it still creates a cost barrier for students, which is felt more by students from low-SES backgrounds.

The extension of VET-HELP would allow more students to participate in our world-leading student income-contingent loan system. CDU supports a staged approach to allow rigorous analysis of impacts, such as extension first to Diplomas, then Certificate IV, and so on. Dual sector universities would be well placed to trial any extension, should greater caution be required.

CDU would also like to see a stronger emphasis on Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) to improve the efficiencies available through RPL. CDU recommends that RPL should be exempt from student contributions so that universities are still incentivised to undertake the assessment work, but students do not experience the cost barrier of the assessment. In addition, students should be allowed to have their RPL assessment undertaken before enrolment, so they are well informed of the likely effects of the RPL.

The AQF plays a fundamental enabling role in tertiary design and was the subject of an important Review in 2019.⁷ Although the Noonan Review in completeness would be a valid basis for developing a 'one tertiary' system, in particular CDU advocates for the reclassification of Certificate III apprenticeships at a higher skill level, of level 5.

CDU assesses its courses for appropriate 'nesting' of VET qualifications in higher education and identifies meaningful supplementary vocational education for higher education courses. With respect to the latter, there are not currently efficient ways for a vocational qualification to be undertaken within a higher education degree. For example, as a Certificate in Construction pathways could be a minor in an Architecture degree, or as is presently available at CDU, a Certificate IV in Personal Training fully nested into a Bachelor of Exercise Sports Science. This would require the mapping of skills across the curriculum that align to both competencies and attributes. Undertaking such planning with agility is extremely beneficial for students and their employability.

⁶ See Productivity Commission, *5-year Productivity Inquiry: Advancing Prosperity Volume 8*, p86.

⁷ Department of Education, *Review of the Australian Qualifications Framework* (the Noonan Review), 24 October 2019.

In order to continually improve access to higher education a number of nested vocational qualifications are available at CDU which provide a clear career pathway, along with an ability for students to be in paid relevant employment as they finish their higher education degree. Nested qualifications should also be considered for higher education Associate Degrees, or similar. The Productivity Commission recommends moving to this type of nested higher education degree format.⁸

Recommendation 16

That near future improvements are also prioritised to drive better harmonisation between vocational and higher education by:

- a) extending VET-HELP loans;
- b) increasing the amount payable by the Commonwealth for Recognition of Prior Learning;
- c) reclassifying Certificate III apprenticeships at a higher skill level, Level 5; and
- d) promoting nested qualifications with both vocational and higher education qualifications.

CDU acknowledges the opportunity to provide a more cohesive education, skills and employment landscape. The establishment of Jobs and Skills Australia, which includes state and territory representation on its board, provides opportunity for greater integration, preparation and responsiveness to skills needs.

The connection between vocational education and research

CDU's research and innovation portfolio sits parallel to faculties, as is commonplace in universities. However, CDU distinctly believes that the VET and research connections are as important as the higher education and research connections. This is especially true in areas of emerging priority, such as cyber security, advanced manufacturing, agriculture and health research. Streamlining vocational education with higher education and research allows for the agile adoption and implementation of research.

Case Study: Cyber Territory Skills Hub

CDU's cyber security hub is an example of the connection between vocational education and research. CDU has partnered with the NT and Commonwealth Governments and industry partners to deliver 100 Certificate IV in Cyber Security training places, and 200 places in a cyber security short course. The short courses are aimed at equipped NT small-medium enterprises to upskill in cyber security. These vocational courses are informed and strengthened by CDU's cyber research, with one of the top one per cent of cyber scientists in the world based at CDU and providing course advice.

Embedding First Nations knowledge in future research for the Territory

First Nations knowledge is an untapped resource for addressing some of the most challenging problems we face in the history of the planet, however it has rarely been taken seriously by Western Science. The evolution of the 'Western scientific' perspective of First Nations knowledge, began initially out of curiosity while positioning it as inferior and primitive, and likening it to 'early man'. This began to change in the latter part of the 20th century, with some momentum being gained at the turn of the millennium.

⁸ See Productivity Commission, *5-year Productivity Inquiry: Advancing Prosperity Volume 8*, p125.

Many research projects today containing Indigenous methods, approaches and co-design, are increasingly being funded through the ARC nationally competitive grants schemes. In 2020 the Australian and New Zealand Standard Research Classification (ANZSRC) was updated to include Indigenous Studies Field of Research (FoR) 45 at the division level (2-digit) and Group (4-digit) to be part of the 2023 Excellence in Research for Australia (ERA) evaluation.

A committee and working group (consisting of CDU scholars) was established to develop appropriate information designed to guide universities on how to assess Indigenous Studies 45 code for ERA 2023 and Excellence and Impact 2024. In 2022 CDU researchers contributed to and co-edited a book titled 'Indigenous Engineering for an Enduring Culture', which over the course of 16 chapters contained deep dive glimpses into how First Nations knowledge influences and value adds to disciplines knowledge in Anthropology, History, Cultural Studies, Architecture Design, Archaeology and Environment.

Case Study: Fire management

Landscape management is an area where tens-of-thousands of years of First Nations knowledge is embraced by Western science and adopted into new technologies. For around 20 years, CDU researchers have mapped fires in Northern Australia's tropical savannas and rangelands. That mapping and the knowledge of First Nations rangers are brought together to inform the controlled burning of savannas and rangelands in the dry season. High-resolution burnt area maps are generated and produced on North Australia and Rangelands Fire Information Service to improve planning and operational risk assessments for bushfires.

A commercial spin off from this work has been the development of a 'carbon credit' industry for First Nations enterprises and communities in Northern Australia based on cultural landscape burning practices.

CDU is a leader in working with First Nations knowledges. Currently, we have around \$15 million of active externally funded research projects in the NT that partner with First Nations peoples. This equates to around 10 per cent of our current active projects. However, many research projects particularly within health, education and environment, also involve informal partnerships in remote communities. As the university 'of' and 'for' the Territory, we are ideally placed to engage deeply and genuinely with First Nations peoples, and to take seriously the potential of First Nations knowledge for future research in Australia.

A key feature of effective engagement with First Nations people is the principle of genuine co-design, paying equal respect and recognising the validity of both First Nations and western knowledge and contribution to build community rapport and reciprocity. Co-design leads to a higher likelihood of research being implemented, or informing practice, which in turn is likely to lead to economic and social development in communities.

Recommendation 17

That First Nations knowledges be authentically recognised as a catalyst for embedding knowledges in curricula.

Sustainable and impactful research

CDU has established itself as an exciting and progressive research-intensive university with a regional focus that prioritises the complex issues facing Northern Australia and the Asia-Pacific. Research Institutes at CDU including the Research Institute for the Environment and Livelihoods, the Menzies School of Health Research, the Northern Institute, Energy and Resources Institute and their collaborative research networks, provide a strategic framework for research engagement.

Case Study: Northern Institute

The Northern Institute was formed in 2010 through an innovative partnership between the NT Government and CDU to spearhead the provision of social and policy research informed by national, international and local expertise in regional, remote and Indigenous issues. The Northern Institute has since become recognised as a flagship regional ‘think tank’ and as nationally leading in its engagement with Indigenous knowledges and its commitment to co-designed research.

The Northern Institute is home to over 40 researchers and 60 higher degree by research students spanning disciplines from anthropology, linguistics and education to demography, economics, and environmental studies. Its academic research output and related teaching contributes substantially to CDU’s current Times Higher Education ranking as ninth in Australia and 175th globally in the social sciences.

Working in collaboration with territory, state and federal government departments, industry, non-government organisations, and regional and remote communities, the Northern Institute prides itself above all on research for impact; delivering key, evidenced-based reports, policy and program evaluations, and community consultations.

CDU’s research outputs consistently outperform for its size and are evaluated as being well above world standards in areas of importance to Northern Australia. In 2022, Stanford University included 24 CDU scientists within the top two per cent of most Influential Scientists in the world.

The Times Higher Education World University Rankings list CDU within the top 400 universities internationally, with CDU research ranking at 348 globally. Within Australia, this places CDU 28th of 37 ranked universities, despite being one of the smallest. The Times Higher Education Impact Rankings, which assess universities against the United Nations’ Sustainable Development Goals, saw CDU ranked within the top 200 participating universities in the world.

Research connected to place

Research impact should be inclusively defined to properly recognise the engagement of First Nations people. In this respect, only research academics that have experience and grounded knowledge in Northern Australia can truly undertake and measure impact. CDU has noticed a stubborn trend of researchers venturing into the North, especially into remote communities, to undertake research projects. While this may produce effective papers, there is often an absence of long-term impact. Frequently, the research does not leave remote communities better off.

CDU is firmly of the opinion, supported by our experience, that building and maintaining local ‘place based’ research capacity and capability where academics/researchers live in the community delivers real, meaningful research outcomes and impact particularly to our First Nations partners. The Case Study above on Fire Management is a key example whereby academics based in Darwin, ‘of the Territory’, collaborate closely with First Nations Rangers on country.

Just as this submission argues for the better recognition of First Nations knowledges as the culmination of thousands of generations of history, so too is it important to value research which is embedded in communities and leaves communities better off. For First Nations people this is consistent with a request to tread softly on their land. Relationships and trust are critical to this process.

CDU also plays an important role as a collaborator for other universities and research partners, such as the Australian National University and the Australian Institute of Marine Sciences. This is most effective where there is respectful collaboration and the Territory benefits from the breadth of external expertise. Without such critical research collaborations the research needs of the Territory would not be met.

Industry collaboration

Industry collaboration – with both business and government – is increasingly important for all universities. The Australian Higher Education Magazine ranked CDU seventh nationally in 2022 for industry collaboration, based on co-authored publications with industry partners. The percentage of projects with industry partners is now 11 per cent and has grown by almost 400 per cent over the past five years. This is important in the context of evidence that the colocation of research activity with regional industry partners through regional campuses is a strong driver of regional business innovation.⁹

Being a place-based university is an asset in this respect, and this extends to our collaboration with the NT Government. Almost five per cent of CDU research projects across 2021 – 2022 have included the NT Government as a partner. The value of this partnership cannot be overstated, as the NT Government’s involvement is often an impetus for other collaborators and ensures the application and impact of research is realised.

Case Study: The future of biosecurity in Northern Australia

CDU has established the Research Institute for Northern Agriculture, initially supported through the Regional Research Collaboration Program. A partnership between CDU, NT primary production industries and the NT Government, the Institute has been established to build place-based research capacity and capability to address the unique challenges and opportunities facing northern tropical agriculture. NT lies at the frontier of biosecurity threats from our northern neighbours. Recent outbreaks of foot and mouth disease and lumpy skin disease in Indonesia highlight the need for northern Australia to be prepared with robust prevention, intervention and response measures.

Measuring impact

In order to establish and maintain research with impact, CDU supports better measurement of impact particularly relating to cultural, economic, educational, environmental, health, political, social and technological impact. Noting that successful research translation often also indicates greater engagement with research partners and end-user collaboration. Such measurement does not need to exclude foundational research, which presently only accounts for around nine per cent of all Australian research.

Acknowledging the suspension of Excellence in Research for Australia and Engagement and Impact measures, the Accord should address improved ways of measuring research impact.

Recommendation 18

That the Accord addresses improved ways of measuring research impact.

⁹ See Department of Industry, Innovation and Science, *How Regional Universities Drive Regional Innovation 2016*,

Sustainable Research Support funding

The Research Support Program (RSP) increasingly does not cover the systemic costs of research not supported directly through competitive and other grants. CDU supports an increase in the RSP and RTP to address the real decline in government-funded research over the past 20 years.

Regional universities are at risk from higher costs experienced in regional Australia - from the procurement of goods and services to the need to compete for a limited labour pool with the government and private sectors. Building on the previous government consultation on Research Block Grant reform, we suggest the Accord examines options for RSP allocation that recognises the cost challenges of regional universities. This could also be addressed by the continuation of regional Research initiatives such as the Regional Research Collaboration Program.

In coming years Australia's Economic Accelerator and the National Reconstruction Fund are both likely to play a key role in translational research. As highlighted in CDU's submission to the review of the Australian Research Council Act, it will be important to make sure research funds are accessible to all institutions, including removing the regulatory burden on applications and introducing more stage-gated opportunities. In practical terms, this includes processes like expressions of interest with lower thresholds than full applications at early stages. This will allow research funds to be more readily accessed by smaller institutions, and in the case of incubators, small and medium enterprise.

Recommendation 19

That to ensure access for regional universities to research funding, future Research Support Program costs differentiate to provide a higher cost structure to regional universities; and that regulatory burden on applications are removed for research grant applications.

Strategic collaboration between Government-funded research

There are a multitude of government funding avenues for research and development. While universities often focus on the major funding streams available from the Australian Research Council and the National Health and Medical Research Council, funding sources also include individual Commonwealth Agencies, CSIRO and the Defence Science and Technology Group and State and Territory Governments.

CDU supports better strategic collaboration between all levels of government-funded research that would enable universities to focus their efforts. Such efforts could be more deliberately linked to the National Science Priorities. While maintaining academic independence, universities would benefit from a more cohesive understanding of government priorities and the national interest.

CDU would support the reporting of long-term research priorities that preserve academic independence in a renewed compact system, or individual Accords with universities to ensure that universities deliver research that takes account of their mission and the national interest.

Recommendation 20

That the reporting of long-term research priorities that preserve academic independence are included in a renewed compact system, or individual Accords with universities.

Conclusion

To inform this submission, CDU ran student focus groups, opened a generic inbox for feedback from all interested staff, and ran targeted consultation with individual professional and academic teams. As such this submission is the genuine contribution of students, staff and Senior Officers of the university.

CDU's priority was to respond to Professor Mary O'Kane's request for big ideas.

This submission contains just a few big ideas to supplement more practical suggestions for strengthening the existing system. By virtue of the Discussion Paper asking, 'what would you change', CDU has naturally not focused on the fundamentals that we would preserve, but for completeness we emphasise here that these are important:

- retaining research as a fundamental pillar of the *universities* model in Australia;
- Australia's HECS-HELP system for student contributions is world-leading practice for income contingent loans and should never be taken for granted; and
- the recognition of structural supports required for equity cohorts of students, though this submission argues for improvements.

CDU's big ideas are firstly, to address the funding flaws of the universities model to properly recognise CDU's contribution to the NT and its people through a new National Institute Grant (**Recommendation 2**). CDU wants to be – must be – part of the call to action in responding to Australia's greatest challenges.

CDU's second big idea, albeit not a new one, is to seek a 'one tertiary' system on the 10-year horizon (**Recommendation 14**). This would surely stimulate a lifelong learning approach in Australia and provide greater opportunities for all students to succeed.

CDU's final big idea, woven throughout this submission (also **Recommendation 17**), is to genuinely engage with First Nations knowledges – in research and curricula, and in creating a culturally safe environment for First Nations students in training, education and research. As the nation addresses the question of enshrining a First Nations Voice to Parliament in 2023, this could be the Accord's contribution to give better voice to First Nations peoples in universities.