

Charles Darwin University

Submission to the Review of Secondary Education in the Northern Territory

June 2023



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Australia's most connected university

Charles Darwin University's vision is to be Australia's most connected university by being courageous and making a difference in the Northern Territory (NT), Australia and beyond.

Being a dual sector university allows Charles Darwin University (CDU) to meet the education needs of Territorians in campuses in Darwin, Alice Springs, Palmerston and Katherine and in study centres in Nhulunbuy and Tennant Creek. CDU has a proud history of delivering on country in some of the NT's most remote locations, bringing training to communities who need it in places such as Galiwinku, Maningrida, Borroloola, Wadeye and Hermannsburg.

At the heart of CDU is to engage First Nations students and support their attainment of vocational and higher education. The NT spans approximately one sixth of Australia's landmass and yet is home to just one per cent of the population, of whom 30 per cent are First Nations peoples. CDU teaches three First Nations languages: Yolŋu Matha, Arrernte, and Bininj Kunwok and co-delivers training in language with First Nations people.

Summary of submission and recommendations

CDU supports the NT Government's efforts to review and implement opportunities for improvement in secondary education. CDU appreciates, first-hand, the challenges of operating in the NT and supports a strengths-based approach to building better education systems for future generations of Territorians.

In line with the Review of Secondary Education in the Northern Territory Discussion Paper (May 2023), this submission focuses predominantly on CDU's expertise in the NT's unique learning environment (as it relates to Domain 1 of the Review); CDU's involvement in the secondary years through Vocational Education and Training (VET) in schools (as it relates to Domain 2 and Domain 3 of the Review) and as a critical enabler of school workforces, especially teachers (as it relates to Domain 5 of the Review).

CDU's Northern Institute has also been engaged by the NT Government to work with Deloitte on the Review to provide First Nations expertise and support the engagement process across the NT. This Submission reflects CDU's independent views.

Recommendations

CDU recommends that the Review:

1. inform future bilateral agreements with the Commonwealth in the National School Reform Agreement from 2025 and in particular whether the loadings within the Schooling Resource Standard sufficiently meet the complex and multifaceted disadvantage of some of the NT's school students.
2. provide for greater co-design and flexibility for schools with appropriate support where this can make a demonstrable impact on education attendance and outcomes.
3. acknowledge the need to recognise and incorporate First Nations knowledge systems.
4. include a strong focus on incorporating vocational pathways in schools to improve transitions into further education and training.
5. address funding models for VET in schools to adopt a cost of delivery approach and consider how approaches can be used to deliver numeracy, literacy and digital literacy to students.
6. acknowledge the importance of remote training for First Nations people and provide for the importance of establishing enduring pathways for the teacher training of First Nations people.

7. acknowledges the limitation of national teacher accreditation through the LANTITE for First Nations people.
8. facilitates, in partnership with CDU, an internship model to encourage ITE graduate retention similar to the those in other jurisdictions to assist with targeting workforce demands.
9. identify how the NT education system can prepare for future areas of education priority and support the professional development of teaching workforces to upskill in areas of future demand.

Domain 1: Recognition of learning

The NT Context

As a dual sector university CDU is invested in school-leavers being equipped to take on vocational or degree studies after secondary schooling. Around 45 per cent of students who complete a NT Certificate of Education and Training receive a minimum Australian Tertiary Admissions Rank (ATAR) sufficient to apply directly to university after high school.

In the Australian Government's Australian Universities Accord consultation process currently underway, CDU recommended that the Accord recognise the critical importance of improving school education outcomes to student success in tertiary settings.¹ Whereby a key focus of the Universities Accord is to drive better university access for equity groups, especially First Nations students, CDU argues that 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 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.

Many of the challenges students face are related to historical disadvantage, our location and the sparse population base. Thin and ultra-thin markets define the NT's operating environment – impacting the delivery of 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.

Data shows that NT school students have the lowest or near-lowest levels of literacy and numeracy in Australia, compounded by remoteness. CDU supports this review informing future bilateral agreements with the Commonwealth in the National School Reform Agreement from 2025 and in particular whether the loadings within the Schooling Resource Standard sufficiently meet the complex and multifaceted disadvantage of some of the NT's school students.

¹ See Submission at CDU's April 2023 submission at <https://www.cdu1prdweb1.cdu.edu.au/files/2023-04/Charles%20Darwin%20University%20Submission%20to%20the%20Universities%20Accord%202023.pdf>.

Recommendation 1

That the Review inform future bilateral agreements with the Commonwealth in the National School Reform Agreement from 2025 and in particular whether the loadings within the Schooling Resource Standard sufficiently meet the complex and multifaceted disadvantage of some of the NT's school students.

To support education attendance and outcomes, CDU acknowledges that there could be greater co-design and flexibility adopted by schools with appropriate support. 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 reportedly saw a 277 per cent increase in participation rates within 12 months of its implementation.

Recommendation 2

That the Review provide for greater co-design and flexibility for schools with appropriate support where this can make a demonstrable impact on education attendance and outcomes.

First Nations Knowledges

CDU also supports the better recognition and incorporation of First Nations knowledge systems. 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. As a university, CDU has been developing its cultural competency and adoption of First Nations knowledge, both within curricula and research.

Embedding an expectation of First Nations knowledge in the school system would better recognise the advanced knowledges systems of First Nations knowledge and improve our ability to respond to future challenges. This recognition would also support First Nations Teacher Assistants and Teachers in schools with greater autonomy and knowledge sharing. This is especially relevant where students are learning on country and school systems can support a ground-up model for recognising and incorporating localised knowledge.

Recommendation 3

That the Review acknowledge the need to recognise and incorporate First Nations knowledge systems.

Domain 2: Transitions between and beyond school and Domain 3: Learning Access and Design

VET in schools

CDU undertakes extensive VET delivery in schools through CDU TAFE. Across the last five years, on average, 1,122 students (by headcount) studied a VET in school course. This was 1,086 students in 2022. More than 30 per cent of those students were First Nations students across the last five years.

This means almost seven per cent of all secondary students in the NT studied a Vocational course with CDU in 2022.² In 2022, CDU taught VET in schools to students from 48 different Middle or Senior Schools.

The spread of courses is diverse – with those popular including Sales and Personal Service, Building and Construction, Tourism and Hospitality, Automotive and the Arts. The vast majority of VET in schools was split between Certificate II level (460) or non-award courses(440), such as skill sets. Many of these skill sets and qualifications have a direct pathway into future training and jobs.

According to the latest Productivity Commission Report on Government Services data, 76.5 per cent of NT students increased their employment status from training and 72.5 per cent of First Nations students increased their employment status from training. No other jurisdiction had a better overall employment outcome, and only the ACT and Tasmania, with much smaller proportions of First Nations people, achieved a higher outcome for First Nations students.³

Recommendation 4

That the Review include a strong focus on incorporating vocational pathways in schools to improve transitions into further education and training.

VET-in-schools is an area of opportunity for NT school students. For example, industry or interest-focused courses could be used to delivery numeracy, literacy and digital literacy to students. With appropriate design and funding models, more VET-in-schools could be delivered in remote settings.

While CDU supports a stronger focus of numeracy, literacy, and digital literacy, we acknowledge there remain constraints with the current delivery. In particular, the current model facilitates extended delivery time and additional classroom support from industry lecturers, rather than numeracy, literacy and digital literacy experts. Even where additional support is effectively delivered, the expectation on relatively short and intensive periods to bridge years of lost learning is unreasonable.

An important challenge is the high-cost for small cohorts which could be addressed with auspicging arrangements to allow linkages with VET providers, school staff and industry. Where small numbers of students exist, it is critical for funding models to adopt a cost of delivery approach, rather than a ‘per student per hour’ basis as VET is usually funded.

Recommendation 5

That the Review address funding models for VET in schools to adopt a cost of delivery approach and consider how approaches can be used to deliver numeracy, literacy and digital literacy to students.

² Using the NT enrolment data for secondary years of 16,027 in 2022, Table 4A.3 of Productivity Commission 2023 Report on Government Services available here <https://www.pc.gov.au/ongoing/report-on-government-services/2023/child-care-education-and-training/school-education>.

³ Table 5A.19 of Productivity Commission 2023 Report on Government Services, available here <https://www.pc.gov.au/ongoing/report-on-government-services/2023/child-care-education-and-training/vocational-education-and-training>.

Domain 5: Systems of support

ITE courses at CDU

CDU delivers a full suite of Initial Teacher Education (ITE) programs and has a strong collaboration with the NT Department of Education to respond to school system workforce needs. In addition to ITE, CDU offers important TAFE level courses which are an ITE pathway, including for Teacher Assistants and Aboriginal Teacher Assistants.

In 2022, CDU graduated 312 students from ITE courses, and this represents a strong increase from around 200 students per year in the preceding four years. Across ITE courses in 2022, a comparison of headcount (1,768) to equivalent full-time student load (1,098) shows a significant proportion of students are studying part-time. The basis for admission to CDU ITE courses in 2022 was predominantly from other higher education courses (41 per cent), TAFE or vocational courses (25 per cent) and Tertiary Enabling Programs (11 per cent). A much smaller proportion, only three per cent, had an ATAR as the basis of admission.

The 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 ITE courses, Vocational Education and Training and non-accredited training.

In 2021, the RATE higher education pilot program commenced in Angurugu, Galiwinku, Milingimbi and Yuendumu, with 22 Aboriginal Teachers Assistants enrolled in the Undergraduate Certificate of Remote Educators at CDU. In 2022, the RATE pilot continued, expanding to engage Teachers Assistants 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 commenced offering a Bachelor of Teaching through this program for students in remote locations.

Recommendation 6

That the Review acknowledge the importance of remote training for First Nations people and provide for the importance of establishing enduring pathways for the teacher training of First Nations people.

CDU is developing a clinical educator model to better recognise remote teachers' strengths and focus on gap training. This approach is not compatible with the national models of teacher accreditation and an alternative accreditation to LANTITE (which is culturally-based and in English only) is necessary. CDU argues the Teaching Portfolio could be better utilised to support remote teachers engagement and recognition of their strengths and professionalism.

Recommendation 7

That the Review acknowledges the limitation of national teacher accreditation through the LANTITE for First Nations people.

To further address the supply of teachers, CDU recommends the review contemplates alternative models of training and retention, such as the internship model available as a partnership between the University of Tasmania and the Tasmanian Government's Department for Education, Children and Young People.⁴ This model aims to retain ITE students in the schooling system in their final year of study through paid internships and effective mentorship.

Recommendation 8

That the Review facilitates, in partnership with CDU, an internship model to encourage ITE graduate retention similar to the those in other jurisdictions to assist with targeting workforce demands.

Over the next 18 months CDU is introducing four new programs to assist with the teacher workforce demands. This includes two early childcare courses for the birth – five year old sector and two secondary programs to qualify Design and Technology teachers. Qualifying teachers for teaching in the Design and Technology discipline areas will assist in supporting and promoting Vocational Education programs in schools.

These new courses are further supplemented by support for professional learning opportunities through Microcredentials in both education disciplines and other disciplines. For example, a newly funded Microcredential, *the Pedagogy of Indigenous Knowledge Sharing through Creative and Cultural Practices* will provide teachers the opportunity to upskill in embedding First Nations knowledges. In addition, CDU offers post-graduate studies in inclusive education, Teaching English as a second language and leadership designed to enhance teachers' professional knowledge.

Recommendation 9

That the Review identify how the NT education system can prepare for future areas of education priority and support the professional development of teaching workforces to upskill in areas of future demand.

Conclusion

A stronger secondary school system would be an investment in generations of Territorians and support the further aspirations of young people into training, further education and research.

CDU would be pleased to provide any further data, information or insights to support the Review process.

⁴ See <https://www.decyp.tas.gov.au/about-us/teach-tasmania/intern-scholarships/>.