

Committee Secretary  
Senate Rural and Regional Affairs and Transport References Committee  
PO Box 6100  
Parliament House  
CANBERRA ACT 2600

Via email: [rrat.sen@aph.gov.au](mailto:rrat.sen@aph.gov.au)

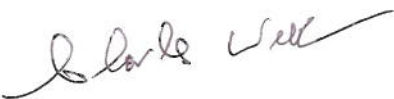
Dear Committee Secretary

I am pleased to provide on behalf of Charles Darwin University (CDU) the attached document in response to your request of July 9, 2009 inviting the University to provide a submission regarding the Rural and regional access to secondary and tertiary opportunities.

We look forward to discussing this with you in more detail and to engaging with your department on key matters directly relevant to the submission.

Should you require any additional information regarding this submission, please do not hesitate to contact my office in the first instance.

Yours sincerely



Professor Charles Webb  
Acting Vice-Chancellor

6 August 2009



## Preamble

Charles Darwin University is a dual sector (Vocational Education and Training and Higher Education) institution that successfully operates in a unique learning environment that includes the most remote but resource rich areas in Australia, the highest proportion of Indigenous students of the Australian states and Territories and proximity to, and a substantial shared history with, Southeast Asian nations. In developing this submission to the Senate Enquiry, the University's response is underpinned by five key action areas that inform all of our activities:

1. Responding to the unique learning environment
2. Being a leader in Indigenous education
3. Undertaking regional research with a global reach
4. Developing and maintaining powerful partnerships
5. Maintaining long term quality and sustainability

There is ample evidence of the social, economic and cultural advantages of having a regionally based tertiary provider. CDU has been able to take a strong leadership role in providing a highly successful and integrated model between education and training sectors that is unique in Australia.

Specific responses to the Terms of Reference are as follows:

### **a. the financial impact on rural and regional students who are attending metropolitan secondary schools, universities or TAFE;**

The discussion around this item tends to be very traditional with a conventional and one way conceptualisation applied to the provision of education and training to rural and remote students. The underlying, but flawed position is that there can only be movement to urban areas rather than bringing the services to the students. As a consequence a particular funding model is in place that reinforces the traditional view. It would be possible to take the total costs of individual student support and add those to the institution's delivery income that would allow for entirely different delivery models in rural and remote communities based upon a hybrid of individual contact and the use of emerging technological and broad band investment being made in other areas of Government activity. Given the vastly improved access to modern Information and Communications Technologies (partly driven by the very presence of a university in the NT) and the fact that CDU has existing campuses or centres in regional areas, it is possible to have a mixed mode delivery model that uses technologies to reduce the need to leave the regions for metropolitan areas.

This term of reference seems to preclude the possibility of supporting students who wish to leave metropolitan areas and study in regional areas. For example, CDU offers national award winning Indigenous language programs that are keenly sought out by interstate and overseas students. We believe that as part of the movement to contestability envisaged by the Bradley Review and Mission Based Compacts, this issue should be considered in terms of student mobility in relation to quality provision and specialisation rather than simplistic thinking of students leaving the country to go to the city.

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**b. the education alternatives for rural and regional students wanting to study in regional areas;**

CDU offers a range of qualifications from VET Certificate One through to Doctor of Philosophy. This includes over 300 separate VET qualifications in 18 Industry Groups and over 80 HE qualifications in 11 Fields of Education. The highly successful dual sector nature of the University allows for significant efficiencies of scale which will be further enhanced through our ongoing partnership with the other regional provider in the NT – the Batchelor Institute of Indigenous Tertiary Education. There is significant education and training infrastructure available in the NT that can be better utilised through optimisation of partnerships that are in place between BIITE, CDU and the NT Department of Education and Training. Funding mechanisms should be restructured so that they enhance, rather than work against, shared usage and partnership approaches to delivery.

It is also important to note that while technology will provide significant support and access for students in rural and regional areas, the personal factor is still a very important component of the process. The human interaction in both individual and group activities such as debating ideas, demonstrating particular skills, assessing student competency and interacting in a challenging, academic environment are all crucial to the learning experience.

Offerings in remote and regional Australia which cater for Indigenous communities need to be absolutely aligned with emerging and local livelihood opportunities. Learning needs to be negotiated with each community (each is unique) and truly respectful learning partnerships must be developed between the community and tertiary provider. This requires considerable community engagement activity prior to the delivery of any programs and requires skilled staff. This level of engagement is not funded at this stage, but there is strong evidence to suggest that successful transition into employment requires this foundational activity.

The NT is well placed with significant infrastructure in many communities, a rapidly developing ICT infrastructure from other Government programs and significant experience in remote and regional delivery to ensure a wide range of programs are on offer with a requisite amount of direct interaction. Given that much of the flag fall costs for education and training have already been accounted for, any policy and program responses that increase student enrolments with regional providers will enable increased capacity and new programs to be offered.

**c. the implications of current and proposed government measures on prospective students living in rural and regional areas;**

In keeping with the theme of partnerships that is central to CDU's activities and approach, we would strongly support mechanisms that allow for an alignment between the many government programs that are now or planned to be implemented in the NT. As Australia's largest provider of education and training for Indigenous people, CDU has a wealth of experience in successfully delivering programs in rural and remote locations. This knowledge base is being further enhanced through partnerships with BIITE which will ensure the achievement of significant efficiencies in the delivery of tertiary programs. If the many government initiatives could be made flexible enough to reward partnerships and improved quality, significant progress could be achieved.

**d. the short- and long-term impact of current and proposed government policies on regional university and TAFE college enrolments;**

CDU anticipates an increase in enrolments due to the Compact with Young Australians, National Participation Requirement, National Partnership on Youth Attainment and Transitions, COAG targets and the National Partnership on Indigenous Economic Participation.

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CDU already has an extraordinarily high market share with nearly 11% of residents of the NT over the age of 14 enrolled with CDU in a VET or HE offering. It seems possible that restrictions on access to Youth Allowance might serve to increase the number of students who will apply to study with regional universities and Registered Training Organisations particularly if there are high quality offerings in place. This has an added potential benefit of increasing the numbers of students participating in tertiary studies in rural and regional locations. Of course, this has significant cost benefits to students who do not have to leave home to study while also building the capacity of the local providers that emerge with economies of scale. It will be important that measures that the Commonwealth Government has signalled post the Bradley review to better service the tertiary education needs of regional Australia are truly effective. The need for the Commonwealth to invest in and support CDU as an independent, comprehensive dual sector institution is paramount and that funding arrangements through schemes such as regional loading and additional support for increased participation of target equity group students are adequate.

**e. the adequacy of government measures to provide for students who are required to leave home for secondary or post-secondary study;**

CDU recognises the reality that some will need to attend specialist offerings not offered in the NT, however, many more students could study in the regional settings. Increases in rural and regional offerings can be brought to fruition through the development of relevant partnerships such as the one recently concluded between CDU and Flinders University to bring medical training to the Northern Territory. CDU would strongly advocate for funding models that promote such partnerships which increase the availability of relevant education and training programs in rural and regional areas as well as taking advantage of metropolitan based infrastructure and specialisation.

The best approach is not framed in the terms of 'either-or' but rather should be 'both-and'. Government measures should encourage and reward new ways of thinking and acting to resolve the chronic under-representation of non-urban students in tertiary programs. The mechanism of mission based compacts is certainly one avenue that could change the current paradigm by making the need to leave home for the most well subscribed courses an exception rather than the expectation.

As mentioned elsewhere in this submission, this notion of adequacy should not be solely based upon movement from the country to the city, but should be based upon the best fit and support mechanisms should reflect the real cost of the movement and ongoing living expenses.

**f. the educational needs of rural and regional students;**

Given the plethora of Council of Australian Governments, Northern Territory and Commonwealth Government initiatives that are being implemented in the NT, it is clear that there are a number of education and training opportunities emerging. Local drivers include the NT Emergency Response, Closing the Gap on Indigenous Disadvantage, National Partnership – Remote service Delivery, national Partnership – Indigenous Economic Development, Working Futures – Territory Growth Towns, Strategic Indigenous Housing Infrastructure Program, Regional Partnership Agreements, Reform of Community Development Employment Program and NT Local Government Shires.

In addition, there are national targets in early childhood, schools, youth, skills and workforce development, employment and higher education with the educational needs of rural and regional students being substantially the same as those in metropolitan areas. A clear consequences of having these desired national outcomes is a need for a funding regime that recognises the real cost of delivery in rural and remote settings. to the achievement of similar levels of outcomes in rural and metropolitan areas will require differential levels of inputs. The advantages of having a regionally based dual sector institution include the provision of seamless academic pathways from school to VET to Higher Education. This allows for, and encourages students to build a relationship with the

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institution that enhances progression and success. This is an important aspect of providing higher levels of education and training to Indigenous students, many of whom will be mature age students. Likewise, there is the need to recognise that there is not always a linear progression directly from school into tertiary studies and responses to programs should not solely conceptualise university students or apprentices as being 17 – 20 year olds with little life or work experience.

**g. the impact of government measures and proposals on rural and regional communities;**

As indicated previously, there is no shortage of programs from Governments that impact on NT communities. These are often very complex, only sometimes complementary and generally have very high levels of compliance/reporting requirements that divert delivery resources into administrative functions. CDU would propose another conceptual re-alignment based upon viewing local delivery in rural and regional areas as an investment rather than an expense. Currently, CDU (in partnership with the Catholic Education Office) is delivering a Bachelor of Teaching and learning degree to Indigenous Teaching Assistants in five remote communities. The outcomes will ensure local permanent employment, reduced recruitment and relocation costs and increased community capacity amongst a variety of outcomes. However, the costs associated with the initial delivery are much higher than the standard undergraduate rates. If one views the initial expenditure as a cost, this Growing Our Own program is not all that attractive. However, if one takes a five to ten year view of the overall benefits of having trained teachers locally and employed in their community, positive role models being seen on a daily basis and guaranteed income into those families, then the result is a very cost effective investment.

Both Indigenous and Non-Indigenous communities in the rural and regional areas of the NT express a strong desire to both retain young people and increase the skill levels in their local communities. It appears that the various national targets and, in particular, the recently released NT Department of Education and Training (DET) Strategic Plan 2009-12 have a focus upon regional development. The DET Strategic Plan makes particular reference to programs and strategies such as “School to University to NT Government”, “Beyond School Guarantee”, “Higher Education” and “Post School Workforce”. Each of these implies or specifies the need to deliver rural and regional education and training outcomes.

**h. other related matters.**

Building the capacity of rural and regional providers also has significant strategic implications for Australia. In particular, CDU is well placed to support a much broader set of Government activities related to Australia’s support for Timor Leste. This would not be possible if the NT Government had not had the foresight and determination to establish a university in the NT and that the University has successfully grown and developed expertise in the whole range of activities ranging from training to higher education studies to research skills.

State and territory borders are becoming less relevant in the emerging tertiary sector and CDU feels that while our partnership with the NT Government is crucial, much of our knowledge and success should be viewed in a national context and given the adoption of appropriate funding models that CDU could successfully take on a more significant role nationally and internationally as a VET provider.

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