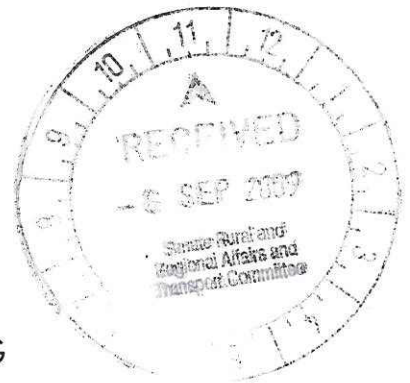




CHIEF MINISTER
MINISTER FOR EDUCATION AND TRAINING



Parliament House
State Square
Darwin NT 0800
chief.minister@nt.gov.au

GPO Box 3146
Darwin NT 0801
Telephone: 08 8901 4000
Facsimile: 08 8901 4099

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

Dear Ms Radcliffe

Thank you for inviting me to provide a submission to the Senate inquiry into rural and regional access to secondary and tertiary education opportunities.

Yours sincerely

PAUL HENDERSON

2/4/09

Northern Territory Submission to the Inquiry into Rural and
Regional Access to Secondary and Tertiary Education
Opportunities

Senior secondary Students in the NT

At the senior secondary level the NT is starting to see some improvement for Indigenous students, but there is a long way to go. While the percentage of 15- 19 year olds in the NT population is around 40% only 31% of the year 10-12 cohort attending school is Indigenous and only 14% of NTCE completers are Indigenous. Of these only 28% reside in remote areas.

From a government service delivery point of view the challenge of delivering quality services for this group is also the biggest logistical and resourcing challenge.

- Only six remote community schools have a SACE Provider number and may offer NTCE subjects and /or use NT Open Education Centre (NTOEC) Delivery. These schools have senior school provider options - Maningrida CEC, Kalkaringi CEC, Yirrkala CEC, Shepherdson College, Ramingining CEC, and OLSH Thamarrur.
- Other communities may access NT Open Education Centre courses. However this delivery mode does assume a level of family support and education knowledge that does not necessarily exist in many Indigenous communities. Other options are to use virtual delivery. The subjects currently on offer in NT include Stage 1 Japanese, French and philosophy.
- Another more recently available option is for schools to use the NT Senior Years School provider number (933). This makes it possible for all the schools that do not at this stage have their own provider number to offer locally developed subjects from the regional school.
- Boarding is offered in Alice Springs - Yirara College, in Darwin - St John's College, Marrara Christian College and Kormilda College. Boarding Hostels are available in Tennant Creek and Katherine.
- For families that choose a boarding school option the NT offers financial assistance under the Northern Territory government Student Assistance and Supplementary Boarding Allowance Schemes. These scheme are designed to complement the student assistant schemes provided by the Australian Government. It provides some travel assistance for isolated primary, middle or senior students and supplementation of costs of boarding but not for students who already receive these same subsidies through the Australian government Aboriginal Study Assistance Scheme (ABSTUDY).

Future Planning - Working Future Initiative

The Northern Territory recently launched *A Working Future* initiative that identifies 20 of the largest remote Indigenous communities in the NT as Territory growth towns. The aim is to improve services, buildings and facilities to a level comparable to any other country town in Australia and for the towns to become economic and service delivery hubs for their regions.

As part of A Working Future, the Australian Government and the Northern Territory government will work together to provide services that local people need using a one stop model of service delivery. This includes a whole of Government and government/ community collaboration on the provision of student and industry focussed training and student transition support approaches.

A Working Future will also include the development of a remote transport strategy, improving access to education services for people living in the smaller nearby communities. The NT is also engaging with the Australian Government to ensure that their plans for locating residential or boarding facilities in the NT can be an integral part of strategic planning within the Working Future context.

Intensive effort and resources will be injected into schools in the 20 Territory growth towns to make them education hubs. The schools are our highest priority sites or Science and/or Language Centres and for trade training in School infrastructure referred to above

These schools

- cater for 14.4% of all NT students and 33.6% of all Indigenous students (6000 Indigenous students, representing over 62% of the total of very remote Indigenous students)
- are in the bottom SES decile – according to the ABS SEIFA –IRSD allocation these schools have an average score of 560 and very poor average student attendance (57%)
- are attended by a high proportion of students who either did not take part in national testing (absent) or do not meet National Minimum Standards in Literacy and Numeracy.
- For 98.6% of the students, English is not their first language.

The Northern Territory Government is working with the Australian Government to examine the potential role of residential hostels to support access to high quality secondary education including vocational stream for students from remote and very remote locations.

Such facilities would provide an important addition to the range of opportunities available to remote and very remote students. However, this approach requires careful planning to ensure cost and operational sustainability, the provision of appropriate wrap-around support services for students and the interface with student income support arrangements.

Future planning - Vocational education and training

On 30 April 2009, COAG announced the Youth Compact to ensure that young Australians have the skills required to realise their potential as we recover from the global recession. Under the Compact, young people aged 15 to 24 will have an entitlement to an education or training place. As part of this the Australian Government will implement the 'earning or learning' initiative that will require young people to be engaged in education or training in order to be eligible for any income support payments.

This will require education and training across the Territory that is relevant to the needs and aspirations of all young people. It will also require improved retention, completion and attainment rates of NT students, especially Indigenous students. This will be a significant priority for the department in 2009–10.

With 60% of our Indigenous population living in remote communities, the Northern Territory VET and higher education systems face unique demographic, geographic and cultural challenges. Underpinning these challenges are the realities of the high

cost of training, year-round access to communities most in need of training and the availability, or lack, of suitable infrastructure to facilitate training delivery. Indigenous students often require additional literacy and numeracy support to assist them to gain the basic knowledge and skills that will lead to accredited training outcomes.

Expenditure per hour of training delivery in the Northern Territory is the highest of all jurisdictions. In 2007, the cost per hour for the Northern Territory was approximately \$21 with lowest being Victoria at approximately \$11.60 per hour. The cost in the other jurisdictions ranges between \$12 and \$15 per hour.

The Territory has some concerns about the possible impact of current and proposed government policies on regional university and VET enrolments. Some of the proposed changes, such as demand-driven models of funding, will present significant challenges for the Northern Territory's thin market, regional delivery and the sustainability of institutions.

The provision of a suitable range of vocational course is also a challenge because of the high infrastructure support requirements for some courses. The Australian Government trade training in schools program and the science and language centre components of the Building the Education Revolution (BER) provide an important opportunity to increase fit for purpose infrastructure to support quality training provision across the larger remote communities.

The Northern Territory Context – a unique population and needs profile

The profile of school age and youth population in the Northern territory differs quite significantly from the rest of Australia. According to the ARIA classification of the population by geo-location the Northern Territory has no urban areas and the only area classified as provincial is the greater Darwin region.

The table below provides a summary of how NT school age population differs from other jurisdictions, with 44 per cent of NT student residing in remote or very remote compared to a national profile of 2.3 per cent

Percentage of population by remoteness classification, 2006 Census

Jurisdiction	Major Cities of Australia	Inner Regional Australia	Outer Regional Australia	Remote Australia	Very Remote Australia
NSW	72.6%	20.3%	6.5%	0.5%	0.1%
VIC	74.7%	20.3%	4.9%	0.1%	0.0%
QLD	60.0%	21.8%	15.0%	2.0%	1.2%
SA	72.7%	12.0%	11.5%	2.9%	0.9%
WA	71.6%	12.5%	9.2%	4.4%	2.2%
TAS	0.0%	64.7%	33.2%	1.5%	0.5%
NT	0.0%	0.0%	56.0%	21.6%	22.4%
ACT	99.8%	0.2%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%
Australia	68.6%	19.7%	9.4%	1.5%	0.8%

Source: 1379.0.55.001 National Regional Profiles 2002 to 2006

Within NT, the geographic spread of students differs markedly by Indigeneity as the following table shows

	Provincial	Remote	Very Remote
Indigenous Students	25%	24%	51%
Non Indigenous Students	74%	20%	6%

Even within the very remote cohort, spread differs by Indigeneity, with 84 per cent of non Indigenous students residing in two mining communities or in Tenant Creek and the vast majority of Indigenous students spread across a large number of discreet Indigenous communities or homeland living areas.

There are more than 450 homelands across the NT. DET provide education services to 11 with schools, 4 through Schools of the Air and 45 through Homeland Learning Centres (HLCs) There are approximately 850 children currently enrolled at these HLCs.

Other relevant factors

- Over 50 per cent of the NT's schools are in the bottom decile of the SEIFA-IRSD (Index of Relative Socioeconomic Disadvantage) list of Australian schools and these schools are almost all in remote locations. Over 26 per cent of NT students attend these schools, almost all of whom are Indigenous.
- It is forecast that, by 2014, 50 per cent of school age students will be Indigenous. The national figure is 4.4 per cent.
- The NT has the highest proportion of students who speak languages other than English, most often at least one of the NT's 49 recognised Indigenous languages. Almost all of these students reside in remote locations. Students in these schools only experience English through their classroom teachers. This lack of exposure to English or to a literate language culture impacts significantly on the acquisition of English and of literacy skills
- Lack of English use in the community reduces the incidence of using reading and writing for social or other purposes, thus further reducing its relevance in the eyes of students.
- NT Indigenous students often experience chronic ill-health. Access to appropriate health services is not reliable. Physical, social and emotional development and wellbeing are affected by multiple factors including Foetal Alcohol Syndrome, poor nutrition, chronic ear, eye and skin problems exacerbated by overcrowded housing.
- NT communities tend to have limited employment opportunities and low numbers of Indigenous adults engaged in the labour market. Notably, the younger the age group, the lower the proportion in employment. This suggests that the older siblings and parents of students are less likely to be in employment. This reduces the relevance of employment as a desired or understood future, limits young people's understanding of the world of work and makes it harder for schools to promote the benefits of education.

Quality teaching challenges

- Attracting, retaining and developing appropriately trained and experienced teachers are a big challenge. Most teachers who register to teach in the NT come from interstate and the vast majority are either neophytes or have provisional registration with another jurisdiction - that is they are in their first

two years of teaching and also have no previous experience with Indigenous students, Indigenous communities or even with the challenges of living in remote locations.

- It is often difficult to recruit and or to retain specialist teachers to remote and very remote locations, in part because of inadequate services and infrastructure such as housing. This is a particular challenge in relation to ensuring that the schools have access to expertise in teaching in an English as foreign language context, and on a school's ability to offer student and industry driven vocational training and senior secondary courses
- High staff turnover impacts on the ability of staff to form ongoing and positive relations with students and the community and limits the impact of professional development and a schools ability to effectively implement a whole schools approach to literacy or pedagogy with any real integrity.

The educational needs of remote students

Of all the young people residing in regional, rural and remote communities in Australia there is overwhelming evidence that it is Indigenous students in remote discrete Indigenous communities who have the highest needs.

- The biggest challenge for students in remote contexts in the Northern Territory – the vast majority of whom are Indigenous - is to get to senior secondary school level having attained a level of literacy, numeracy and English language competence to take advantage of senior secondary and tertiary opportunities, and to be prepared for the world of work.
- The NT has the lowest school retention rate of all jurisdictions and most Indigenous students in remote schools are attending at rates that mean they have little chance of meeting National Minimum Standards.
- The average attendance rate for Indigenous students in very remote schools is 65 per cent. However, to make satisfactory progress, 80 -100 per cent attendance is needed. This is achieved by 74 per cent of Indigenous students in Darwin primary schools, 46% in small very remote schools and 27 per cent in very remote large schools.
- The 2008 NT NAPLAN mean scores for remote and very remote Indigenous students are almost all one band below the Australian means. The gap is far greater for Year 3 and 5 Reading and Year 9 Numeracy is the only result with a gap of less than one band.

These issues need to be systematically addressed as part of any approach to improve Indigenous educational outcomes. Addressing the secondary and post school educational needs in isolation of other barriers and issues will not deliver the outcomes desired.