

Preparing CDU's place in a deregulated system

Vice-Chancellor **BARNEY GLOVER** reflects on his first months at CDU and anticipates its position five years down the track.



INTERVIEW

Robyn McDougall

IMAGE

Peter Eve

You've been Vice-Chancellor for seven months now. What are your early impressions of CDU?

Very positive and reassuring! I am impressed by the calibre and professionalism of our staff and very pleased with their enthusiasm for the significant projects that have been initiated this year. Most of these projects are in response to the emerging national tertiary education agenda and our need to position the institution for the future, particularly post-2012.

CDU's dual sector nature is another feature that has made a strong first impression, again because of the opportunities the structure brings to the NT in the context of a national education reform agenda. So, generally speaking, the impressions are very strong.

What in particular excites you about the role?

The role of Vice-Chancellor at any university is fundamentally exciting. By working with colleagues, students and external partners, you are able to bring about change and reposition the institution for the future. More importantly, you are able to guide the university in addressing really challenging issues facing the people of northern and central Australia. It is the possibility of making a difference that is most exciting.

Has your experience in the role been as you expected?

It is not entirely as I expected because of the scope of change that we will be confronted with over the next three years and the speed with which we need to respond to the national agenda. The GFC has impacted on the Australian and regional economies and that also needs to be factored into our forward planning and the way we position the University.

In "normal" circumstances, a new VC could expect a gentler period to adjust to the new environment and carefully work through options for change. Unfortunately, we don't have the luxury of time. We have needed to work very rapidly, along with the rest of the sector, to assess the impact of radical reform and to relate that to the current position of CDU and our local and regional priorities.

Nevertheless, I believe we have mapped out a very exciting path and I look forward to engaging with the Australian Government on key issues affecting CDU over the coming months.

An impressive array of funding has flowed to CDU this year, including \$30.7 million for a joint project with the Batchelor Institute for Indigenous Tertiary Education to establish the Australian Centre for Indigenous Knowledge and Education, and \$27.8m for the NT-based medical program, a joint project with Flinders University. How important are these partnerships to our growth?

Partnerships are the cornerstone of our sustainability strategy. They support the quality and breadth of our teaching and learning activities, they provide comprehensive opportunities to students, and they influence the perceptions of the community and our partners about the University. Partnerships also help us to sustain a vibrant and relevant research environment.

We are not alone in seeking strong links to other institutions as a mechanism to address the major reform proposals in the Bradley Review of Australian Higher Education, but we have the opportunity to build innovative relationships that provide tangible and significant outcomes for students and staff. This year's infrastructure funding was only possible because we have collaborated with BIITE and Flinders.

Fast forward five years. How do you expect CDU in 2014 to differ from CDU in 2009?

A very interesting question. By 2014 we will have completed our major capital projects (but only just) so many of our new facilities will be in the early stages of occupancy. I would expect CDU to have emerged from the first couple of years of the deregulated system as a quality, highly regarded provider of tertiary education with an innovative approach to delivery focusing on a robust, well-managed and supported learning technology platform.

I expect our student load to have grown towards 5000 EFTSL in Higher Education and more than 15,000 students in VET. We will have almost 1000 international students, many living in expanded student accommodation on Casuarina, Palmerston and Alice Springs campuses. I anticipate our partnerships with ANU, Flinders and BIITE will have matured and that NT students will have seamless access to a broad range of dual and articulated programs.

Our VET programs will be embedded in a competitive national system and we will be increasingly recognised in key areas for our international training programs. Finally, the first and second phases of the Australian Government's Excellence in Research for Australia initiative, to measure the quality of research in universities, will have concluded and CDU will have been recognised as a research-intensive university with focused and targeted areas of research strength. It is ambitious but achievable.

You were a maths teacher at the start of your career in 1983. What inspired your move in 1990 to the university sector?

A desire to do my PhD in an area of mathematics that fascinated me - optimisation.

What sort of projects has your research fed into?

My research focused on problems that arise in many areas of human endeavour where we need to locate a "best possible" solution for a complex and often highly constrained problem. Fundamentally, such problems once suitably modelled and translated into mathematical language require sophisticated solution techniques to locate the optimum or to determine that no optimal outcome is possible. My particular interest was in some of the more "pathological" problems where standard techniques are likely to fail.

Do you expect to have time to continue researching?

It would be nice to think I would have time, but in any discipline you need to remain up to date and across the latest results and ideas. This requires time that I simply don't have. My priority needs to be focused on the University.

Do you come from an academic family?

No. My father and mother did not have the opportunity to attend university although both achieved a considerable amount in their chosen careers in public service and nursing, respectively. I was fortunate to have the opportunity to attend university in the 1970s because the Australian Government of that time opened tertiary education to all - a great step forward for this country.

How do you like to spend your leisure time, assuming you have some?

I have some and I enjoy exploring Darwin and surrounds. My great passion, though, is Australian football and in particular Geelong. I very much enjoyed the 2007 Grand Final and I am looking forward (hopefully) to 2009. No need to discuss 2008.

Is life in the Territory as you expected?

To some extent. We arrived in February at the end of the wet season and the humidity was difficult, but the dry season has been sensational (although some tell me that this year is not the best dry season in comparison with recent years). The people are extraordinarily friendly and supportive of new arrivals and the general feeling I have is of a vibrant community.