



**NORTHERN TERRITORY
UNIVERSITY**

**HIGHER EDUCATION AT THE
CROSSROADS**

RESPONSE TO ISSUES PAPERS 1-6

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ISSUES PAPER 1

Striving for quality: learning, teaching and scholarship

Changing patterns of student enrolment, engagement and expectations

A key element that is missing from the discussion under this heading is student income support. Some consideration of financial support mechanisms for students needs to be addressed in the Review.

Many students are opting to study part-time because they cannot afford to study full time. Whilst this may impact on study patterns in terms of attendance on campus and juggling of work and study commitments, care should be taken in any 'overall reorganisation of academic and student life'. Providing students with the option to complete degrees more quickly removes the opportunity for critical reflection and may not necessarily enhance the quality of the academic experience. In other words, there is a need to guard against fast learning and superficial learning.

It is also the case that not all students attend university with the aim of completing a degree. Some choose only to complete subjects they may need for work related or other purposes and for this reason care needs to be taken in the interpretation of attrition rates.

Funding models need to recognise diversity in the types of programs offered as well as the mode of delivery. Programs that lead to qualifications in the service professions carry with them increased engagement with relevant professional associations, work based practicums and so on, which are more resource intensive.

Graduate outcomes for the new century

All universities are required to report annually on graduate attributes to DEST in their Institutional Quality Assurance and Improvement Plans. The plans for 2002-2004 indicate an increased focus on the importance of graduate attributes and a higher level of responses from employers on the requirement for graduates to be 'work ready'. The majority of universities have mechanisms in place to seek regular and ongoing feedback from employers on the performance of graduates in the workplace and the identification of specific 'work ready' skills. There are a number of similarities in approaches between universities particularly in the identification of generic skills. However, there is less evidence on how graduate attributes are being implemented and how progress is assessed.

NTU is opposed to the compulsory application of a GSA Test. The test would appear to focus on general skills and does not address discipline specific learning outcomes. As the AVCC states 'it is a major lapse in assessing the professional degrees where there is a clear, dominant, expectation that graduates have the required professional knowledge and skills that underlie employment in particular fields'. This is an important issue for universities that have a strong focus on programs in the service professions. The benefits would be unlikely to offset the cost and would be strongly resisted by students if they were required to meet the cost associated with sitting the

test. However, there may be some merit in making the test available for internal use by individual institutions as a measure of how graduates are tracking in the acquisition of generic skills and as a means of assessing performance in teaching and learning.

It would be useful if the Commonwealth supported an investigation on how we determine what knowledge and skills are required and necessary. Facilitation of engagement between industry and the professional associations and universities in identifying reasonable expectations would be helpful.

Assessing the quality of teaching and learning

The introduction of AUQA has caused a flurry of activity in the sector to implement or extend existing quality systems with perhaps an incorrect assumption that institutional QA should be the driver. AUQA is

‘interested in plans and actions, and the effectiveness of these in achieving an organisation’s objectives. Thus, AUQA is concerned with the processes planned, the processes carried out (both planned and unplanned ones), and the outcomes produced by these processes with particular focus on the core business of the institution ie teaching and learning and research’.

This is more than just ‘an assessment of process.

The University believes that AQUA has the potential to appropriately assess institutional QA and outcomes and externally validate standards. We believe that the Agency should be given the opportunity to undertake the planned quality audit cycle and that its independence from DEST is a critical factor in its ultimate effectiveness.

AUQA’s work may also facilitate benchmarking through the public availability of the audit reports and in some cases, institutional portfolios.

NTU would strongly oppose an overly bureaucratised, centralised and inspectorial model of quality assurance and believes that the idea of publishing league tables is inappropriate.

In regard to reporting requirements NTU would support a rationalisation of the current arrangements

In regard of assessments of student satisfaction and employability, while the University supports the GSD and CEQ instruments, difficulties are currently experienced by some institutions, including NTU, in achieving the required response rate. There is also an argument that CEQ data are released too late to be of use to teaching staff

The propositions regarding identification of minimum standards in the paper are too simplistic as there are many variations between individual institutions that would need to be accounted for if comparisons are to have validity.

An overarching question is how certain can each university be that its assessment mechanisms are appropriate and the assessments are comparable across the sector. Each institution should be explicit about what it wants its graduates to look like and to be judged against these criteria.

Suggestions about internal and external moderation procedures are supported, assuming the university controls the procedures. NTU does not support the suggestions on national assessment.

The use of a common grading scale is supported and would ensure that there is consistency across Australia with the awards of specific grades. It would also encourage institutions to focus on how these grades are established and would further enable quality procedures to be implemented.

An HE discipline review process is not supported on the grounds of expense and practicality.

Effective and efficient learning experiences and environments

NTU supports student centred approaches to learning. The goal of the learning process should be for students to engage in deep learning where understanding and application is the focus. A range of different strategies are required that need to recognise the needs of the student group, the needs of the discipline area, and the strengths of the individual lecturers involved and resources to facilitate the implementation of strategies need to be identified.

Constructions of academic work and the quality of teaching and learning

Given the changing nature of academic work, it is time for a refocusing on the role of teaching and learning accompanied by increased resourcing, professional development and benchmarking of good practice. Issues include:

- There needs to be a connection between prestige for teaching and the commitment to address issues of quality in teaching performance. This would be facilitated by rewarding scholarship in teaching with funding as happens in research.
- Teaching is changing rapidly and if student centred teaching is to become the cornerstone, then it has to be supported by professional development, qualifications and other ways of developing innovative and responsive practices. Probation or promotion could be made conditional on demonstrated teaching competence. It needs to be recognised that a formal qualification may not be the most appropriate means for achieving the requisite skills.
- It might be useful to develop a national approach to professional development in innovative teaching practices similar to the AVCC Leadership programs.

- The role that 'non academic' staff play in teaching and learning needs to be recognised to a greater extent. Increasingly, programs offered in flexible mode require teams (IT specialists, information managers, design consultants) to implement and are not built around a single academic developing, delivering and evaluating the entire unit.
- Opportunities for casual staff to engage in professional development should be enhanced.
- Research and scholarship must underpin teaching to provide an effective university education.

Commonwealth role in the quality of teaching and learning

Ways in which the Commonwealth may contribute to maintaining and improving teaching and learning quality include:

- Reviewing the role of the AUTC with the aim of extending access to grants from projects of national significance to support more individual institutions to develop innovative teaching practices
- Paying continued attention to initiatives that ensure best practice on teaching and learning is broadly disseminated across the system
- Continue to support and promote AUQA as an independent agency.

ISSUES PAPER 2

Setting firm foundations: financing Australian higher education

Key Issues

In evaluating any funding model, its capacity to take into account the varying costs of delivery across the sector should be critical and it must ensure the HECS principle that education is free at the point of entry can be preserved.

The University regards appropriate funding to the tertiary sector as an *investment* in Australia's future. We highlight the use of the term "investment" to make clear our firm opposition to the use of the term "subsidy" with regard to tertiary funding.

According to the discussion paper, the average rate of return to Government on its investment in higher education has been estimated at about 11%. This is an exceptional return and perhaps there is no better evidence that investment in higher education pays off.

NTU supports the AVCC position that Australian investment in HE should be 2% of the GDP and effective national investment in HE will underpin the international quality of Australia's universities.

NTU considers that the Commonwealth should aspire to provide a higher education place for every person who is qualified. There are strong moral, social and economic arguments to support a significant increase in government investment in higher education. NTU supports the AVCC's *Vision for 2020* that "all Australians will access post school education or training with more than 60% completing higher education, at least 10% at postgraduate level".

If the argument, which is flagged in this discussion paper, that higher education students should pay part of their tuition fees because some time in the future they will benefit privately through salary levels is accepted then perhaps some consideration should be given to extending this argument to the TAFE sector, given that students also gain qualifications that are an advantage in the market place, except perhaps for those acquiring certificates at levels one and two. The Commonwealth would need to consider whether the general community would find the introduction of TAFE fees acceptable.

NTU supports the notion that greater attention should be paid to shoring up the provision of pathways through TAFE as both an end in itself and as a way of meeting unmet demand. It is noted, however, that the persistence of under funding in TAFE is also an issue.

We note that current HECS charging practices lead to market distortions; students shy away from high cost options.

Funding models

The NTU's response is framed by our familiarity with the disadvantage experience by regional and remote universities. Even though the models aim to enhance diversity they in fact assume all institutions experience the same costs.

A recent independent study recommended that the level of base funding for NTU be of the order of 40% above the national average rather than the current situation that approximates to 15% above the current average.

In relation to the various suggested funding models, NTU supports the AVCC position and is more comfortable with arrangements based on models 1 and 2 although we do not support a comprehensive application of a fee deregulation policy.

NTU does not support models 3 and 4.

- In practical terms, the learning entitlement (voucher system) erroneously assumes a significant level of conformity in tertiary programs and in costs across the sector.
- These models assume that demand should be the only driver in course offerings. However, institutions such as the NTU have as part of their mission the delivery of a reasonable range of programs that can support local development needs and provide access to tertiary education for Territorians.
- A number of equity issues would be compromised.

Research

The Northern Territory University considers that the current model for funding research is broadly adequate. The University would oppose strongly any attempts to uncouple research and teaching elements of operational grant funding. The University also strongly opposes the redistribution of current infrastructure block funding to a project basis as this would diminish the University's capacity to strategically invest in infrastructure in support of its selected research mission.

Diversification of funding sources

NTU supports the recommendation that universities should increasingly explore further diversification of funding sources but cautions that there can be hidden costs and that the pursuit of additional resources from diverse sources must be ultimately cost beneficial.

Effective pursuit of diversified funding sources often requires start up or investment money less available to smaller institutions without the financial reserves acquired through legacy. Partnerships with the Commonwealth and State / Territory governments to fund investment activities would be worth exploring.

NTU would support a review of payroll tax arrangements.

The idea of commercialisation of research and other activities is sound, but it should be acknowledged that some universities are in a more optimal position to gain benefit from commercialisation than others. It should also be appreciated that commercialisation is only one aspect of the research enterprise at universities and that the value of research and research training that contributes to social, economic and cultural development of a region needs also to be appropriately valued.

ISSUES PAPER 3

Varieties of excellence: diversity, specialisation and regional engagement

While acknowledging that there is scope for further differentiation and specialisation among Australia's universities a key issue is how differentiation and specialisation impact upon equity of opportunity.

The issue of equity of opportunity is particularly pertinent to regional and remote Australia whose citizens have strong expectations of access to educational programs and other services similar to those provided by universities located in metropolitan settings. An important issue to unpack is what might represent, and what can practically be achieved, in relation to equity of opportunity in Australia where the population is so dispersed yet unevenly distributed.

One commonly held view equates opportunity with geographical proximity to the "bricks and mortar" of one or more University campuses. In terms of traditional delivery of programs it is self-evident that there would be less impact of "programmatically differentiation" on opportunity for those living in metropolitan areas supporting clusters of Universities, than Australians domiciled in more remote and regional settings where there is usually only one geographically proximal institution. The closest University to the Northern Territory University (NTU) is in Indonesia with the nearest Australian alternative being several thousand kilometres away and if NTU does not offer a particular program, the alternative for a student wishing to attend university to study such a course is to move inter-state and experience significant dislocation and often expense. This loss of human capital from the Territory has an impact on its social, cultural and economic development as a proportion of those moving interstate to attend other Universities inevitably do not return. A traditional lack of mobility among students in other parts of Australia and the higher costs of living in northern Australia deter migration north to study. The introduction of mechanisms that further encourage student mobility, particularly to less populated and more remote parts of Australia would be welcomed.

Increasingly Australians are accessing university programs through flexible delivery modes that require less or no attendance at the physical locus of a university. Leaving aside the issue that in metropolitan areas students will usually have a greater choice of programs offered in either face-to-face or non-traditional modes, those living in remote and regional Australia can suffer disadvantage in their access to flexibly delivered programs, particularly those involving rich learning environments delivered through the internet by the use of new learning technologies, as a result of a lack, or differential cost to access, the necessary infrastructure. It is a limitation to Universities servicing remote and dispersed populations that use of modern technology mediated delivery mechanisms that ultimately could be more cost effective and provide a potential for market extension are restricted by lack of access to bandwidth and it is hoped that current government initiatives directed at improving universities' access to bandwidth will remedy this situation.

Establishment of greater co-operation and further partnerships between universities and between universities and other organisations could assist in the maintenance, enhancement and more rational provision of educational programs across Australia assuming that such arrangements were not inhibited by current competition policy. Partnerships that NTU has with other Australian universities and with the Open Learning Agency have facilitated the delivery in a cost-effective manner of programs with relatively low student demand. One issue the University is encountering is the inexperience of some professional course accrediting bodies with partnership arrangements. It is to be hoped that accrediting bodies will embrace the notion that programs delivered in partnership between universities can be of an equivalent quality and have similar beneficial outputs to those delivered by a single provider.

In addition to equal opportunity of access to educational programs communities in regional Australia have a reasonable expectation of benefiting from the range of other services that universities provide including locally based research and development activities. A defining character of universities recognised in the current Australian Higher Education Protocols is engagement in the production of new knowledge through research as well as in the interpretation of existing knowledge through scholarship. NTU strongly supports the maintenance of the nexus between teaching and research and would not support the notion of “teaching only “ universities. However NTU also recognises the desirability of universities focusing their research effort and has strong strategy and practice in place of targeting its research in areas of regional relevance. It should be noted that while the University is seeking to concentrate its research effort in areas of relevance to its immediate constituency, outcomes from this research are significant in, and transferable to, a national and international context. In terms of research and in terms of teaching and learning we believe the aim should be to facilitate Australia having a world-class higher education system through which centres of world-class activity emerge in several universities, rather than focusing on a need to have one or two world-class institutions. The establishment of appropriate partnerships between universities and between universities and other organisations may well be an important element of achieving such a goal, especially for smaller and more isolated institutions where partnerships can assist in the achievement of needed critical mass.

For a University such as NTU the establishment and maintenance of partnerships with community on a local and regional scale is an important issue. Providing community, business and industry service through

- Promotion of the economic, social and cultural well being of the community
- Provision of leadership and support and promotion of business and industry in the territory and region
- Creation of collaborative relationships with the community to ensure that optimal use is made of all resources in the provision of education, training and research
- Promotion of community engagement with the University

are key objectives for the University. Major strategies in progress to achieve these objectives include the conclusion of a broad partnership agreement between the University and the Northern Territory Government, the engagement of business and industry leaders in planning and course development, collaboration with and support of other educational organisations including schools and a structured approach to community engagement with emphasis on Alumni and the University Foundation.

In terms of Commonwealth support for regional and community engagement, proper recognition in funding models of cost disabilities and for community service obligation would be beneficial. A major consideration for differential investment by the Commonwealth in regional universities is their role in nation building that in the longer term will bring significant returns to Australia as a whole.

ISSUES PAPER 4

Achieving equitable and appropriate outcomes: indigenous Australians in higher education

Aboriginal people make up 30% of the Northern Territory's population and consequently one of Northern Territory University's major goals is a commitment to contribute to better educational outcomes for Indigenous people across the Northern Territory.

The NTU supports Commonwealth initiatives that assist it to strive for improved outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students through:

- Teaching Aboriginal and Islander students in both professional awards and specially constructed enabling courses
- Making all its staff and students aware of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultural and intellectual issues
- Promoting the goals of Reconciliation
- Fostering professional development of Indigenous staff; and
- Employment of qualified Indigenous academic and non-academic staff.

Indigenous people in educational decision-making

The University agrees that there is an on-going need to consider alternative ways in which higher education institutions can ensure that Indigenous educators and researchers contribute to the development of practical strategies to improve indigenous higher education.

When the Commonwealth established the National Aboriginal Education Committee it created a precedent that could inform current discussions. The establishment of a similar committee with specific terms of reference just for the higher education sector would be timely and provide an urgently needed mechanism to ensure there is a more coordinated approach to providing advice on Indigenous higher education.

A further and obvious way to create opportunities for greater input from Indigenous educators is to increase the number of Indigenous staff at universities. This University is up-dating its Indigenous Employment Strategy one of the outcomes of which will be to increase the opportunities for the University to put in place mechanisms for ensuring Indigenous input in to decision-making.

This University would advocate Commonwealth support for those initiatives that aim to create greater linkages between universities and their Indigenous communities and create opportunities for partnerships.

Overcoming cultural isolation and prejudice

The University would support measures which maximise the opportunities to respond to the diverse needs of the Indigenous students and meet their social and cultural needs.

The University supports the incorporation of Indigenous knowledge and practice into mainstream education as part of a suite of strategies to overcome prejudice and reduce cultural isolation. In setting its own strategic directions, the NTU aims to ensure that Indigenous knowledge is appropriately integrated into its curriculum. For example, a suite of compulsory Common Units has been developed for all first year students in which representations and exploration of Indigenous knowledge are included. The University has identified Indigenous knowledge as one of its niche areas. Further, the Faculty of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies offer a wide range of Indigenous knowledge units across the University.

The University offers more than one model of support to its Indigenous students to increase its capacity to meet the diversity of its Indigenous students' needs. Indigenous students can access the same support services as non-Indigenous students; students can seek support through a range of associations with the Faculty of Aboriginal and Islander Studies and students can seek support from the Indigenous students' Academic Support Lecturers who are located in each of the Universities' faculties.

Maximising the financial position of Indigenous students

The University is aware that students are under increasing financial pressure and strongly supports an urgent review of student income support arrangements for all students in which the particular needs of Indigenous students are addressed.

Far too many students are disadvantaged by the impact on their study from long hours in part-time employment and their need to reduce their course load and prolong enrolment. It is reasonable to assume that the negative impact of the current levels of income support on Indigenous students who already come from a position of economic disadvantage will be compounded.

While there is no direct data to link the decline in Indigenous higher education enrolments with the Commonwealth's changes to Abstudy and its cessation of the Equity and Merit Scholarships, the decrease in financial support must be a prime suspect in interrogating the decline.

The University agrees that increasing Indigenous students' awareness of the financial support available to them is necessary and should be a shared responsibility with Government. The provision of properly resourced Centrelink offices on campus would go a long way to addressing this issue.

Effective support funding

The University makes the following comment on the current Commonwealth targeted funding initiatives.

ATAS

It is recognized that ATAS has made a positive impact on the graduate outcomes for Indigenous students whether they entered university through the successful completion of year twelve, enabling courses or other special entry procedures. Consideration should now be given to extending ATAS funds to students enrolled in enabling programs and we put this case in the following section.

IESIP

The University has experienced on-going difficulties with IESIP funding with regard to reaching agreement on realistic targets and performance indicators.

ISF funding

The discussion paper posits that ISF funding should be better accounted for which is not an unreasonable position. However, in considering the application of ISF funding, the target group needs to be considered. Poor performance might well be the result of inadequate funding in the first instance and so the initial problem is potentially exacerbated. The University considers there is a strong case for Indigenous Support Funding to be enhanced.

Overcoming early educational disadvantage

The University welcomes the suggestion that enabling programs be appropriately funded and that the funding should be independent of ATAS monies. These programs are more expensive to run than most undergraduate programs, but currently this is not recognized. Universities should have primary responsibility for enabling funding so that it can be used flexibly and appropriately.

Any consideration as to how universities might overcome Indigenous students' educational disadvantage must be part of a holistic approach that aims to improve Indigenous students' participation in the education system from early childhood through secondary education and vocational education and training. This University, for example, is currently in negotiations with the Northern Territory Government to develop a partnership agreement and one of the areas that we expect will be addressed will be how the University can contribute to measures to reduce Territory Indigenous students' poor educational outcomes. As well, the University is currently considering a range of options to support Indigenous students in high schools.

In considering improving participation in pre-tertiary education, the Commonwealth must also take into account the serious health issues that affect a significant proportion of Indigenous children in the Northern Territory that have an impact on educational outcomes with *otitis media* being one of the more obvious. The flow on effect of poor health in childhood requires no elaboration and the nexus between

good health and a good education outcome is nowhere made more obvious than in the Territory. Through a number of collaborations and partnerships the University is a participant in research into these critical issues including roles in the CRC for Aboriginal and Tropical Health and the Centre for Remote Health. However, more could and should be done to address this problem if educational outcomes for Indigenous people in the Territory are to improve.

Enabling programs are one of the main ways in which universities are directly involved in overcoming Indigenous students' disadvantage. Most students in these programs have educational deficits of at least five to seven years and would greatly benefit from one on one, and or extra special group tutoring. Research shows that students with educational deficits or learning difficulties have a better chance of academic success with one on one, or special group tutorials assistance.

There is no doubt that the numeracy and literacy skills of students in enabling programs greatly improve, but these improvements are not enough to provide a significant number of students with confidence in their ability to enrol in undergraduate studies. These students are ideally placed to benefit from the support of the one to one, and or group tutorial assistance provided by ATAS funding that has been successful with their Indigenous counterparts enrolled in accredited awards. If the students who are enrolled in professional awards are in need of extra tutorial assistance, it makes sense that the students who have greater educational deficits would also benefit from such assistance.

Encouraging retention, and increasing Indigenous participation in the professions

The retention rate for Indigenous students is an issue across the sector. The University agrees that to improve the outcomes of Indigenous people in higher education, regular reviews of course structures, course content and attendance options must be encouraged. Mentoring and appropriate academic support for a diverse Indigenous student population is critical.

The University recognizes the importance of engaging Indigenous educators in the development of initiatives to combat disadvantage and notes the proposal to increase support for campus-based Indigenous units. We would welcome a commitment from the Commonwealth to increase funding to support this activity. At the NTU the Faculty of Aboriginal and Islander Studies offers a range of programs in both TAFE and higher education specifically for Indigenous students as well of generating teaching and research activities that promote Indigenous studies and Indigenous knowledge.

The financial pressures facing students can be addressed through scholarships from both the private and public sectors. Though this is happening to some extent a more substantial contribution from the Commonwealth is needed to have any significant impact on the gross under-representation of Indigenous Australians in the professions. This contribution could be similar to the model, developed by the National Aboriginal Education Committee, which was used in the 1980s that focussed on having a thousand indigenous teachers trained within that decade. That scheme

proved very successful in that the number of Indigenous teacher trained graduates exceeded one thousand. Such a scheme could provide students with a wider range of professional options not restricted to the public sector. For example, it might target specific professional groups such as counsellors/social workers to increase the number of Indigenous counsellors working in universities to reduce Indigenous attrition. It could also target Indigenous students enrolled in Indigenous Studies to increase the number of Indigenous academics teaching in this area. The best thing about this model is that it was developed by Indigenous professionals themselves and was highly successful.

Opportunities for Indigenous researchers

The University supports initiatives that will create more opportunities for Indigenous researchers.

The University is of the view that establishment of the Indigenous Higher Education Centres (IHEC), one of which is the Centre for Indigenous Natural and Cultural Resource Management (CINCRM) located at NTU, has been a highly successful initiative that warrants an on-going commitment from the Commonwealth.

The welcome but limited period of funding of IHECs occurred during a period when all universities have been under increasing pressure from the Commonwealth to diversify their sources of income. This has meant that universities themselves have faced difficulty in funding centres once Commonwealth support has ceased. Some IHECs (including CINCRM) have been successful in attracting competitive research grants and consultancies, but in themselves these have been insufficient to fully meet operational costs. Indigenous issues are at the lower end of the commercial consultancy market. Consultancies and fee-for-service activities deliver little in the way of income once costs of services are met. They therefore tend to divert effort away from core research and training functions, thus undermining the capacity of IHECs to achieve their objectives of providing career paths for Indigenous academics.

IHECs provide a well-established network which could be re-invigorated to achieve improvements in Indigenous participation in higher education at all levels, to increase the number of Indigenous academics, and to promote a greater prominence, understanding and respect for Indigenous knowledge and Indigenous issues in the university system as a whole, and society at large.

Resumption of Commonwealth funding directly to IHECs would be a cost-effective mechanism for achieving at least some of the improvements in higher education signalled in the Commonwealth's discussion paper. Direct funding would assist IHECs overcome the problems of meeting rising operating costs. It should be allocated in such a way that universities hosting the centres are required to continue funding the centres. One means of ensuring continued commitment of adequate funding by host universities might be for DEST to provide funding to IHECs on a performance based model.

However, performance based funding that considers only past performance will not assist Centres to grow. A significant proportion of funds should therefore be

allocated to future growth. This might require Centres to submit proposals for activities for a three to five year period.

ISSUES PAPER 5

Meeting the challenges: the governance and management of universities

Legal and accountability frameworks

In considering the issues around legal and accountability frameworks, the University response is informed by two over-arching considerations:

- The University does not agree with the underlying assumption that universities should as a matter of course, become more commercial and follow the business model in their operations. Universities are publicly funded organisations within a national unified system in which some universities will have or develop business-orientated practices to support specific aspects of their activities.
- The pressing issues facing dual sector institutions such as the Northern Territory University should be included in any consideration of legal and accountability frameworks. Dual sector institutions are caught in a mess of untenable reporting requirements that derive from a lack of coordination between the Commonwealth and Territory governments.

The Commonwealth accountability framework

The Northern Territory University shares the view expressed by the AVCC that University's are under great pressure from the current administrative and regulatory burden under which they labour and we argue this is further exacerbated in dual sector institutions.

The University agrees with the proposition that there should be streamlining of accountability requirements between the Commonwealth and Territory Governments, but not just in relation to HE activities. The opportunities to streamline reporting requirements for dual sector institutions should be investigated and given high priority.

A significant contributor to the current administrative workloads in universities is the conflation of the various reasons for data collection under the rubric of accountability. Currently the data collection required by the Commonwealth far exceeds that which could be meaningfully required for accountability purposes. In data collection, it must always be clear as to what purpose the data is being used, and who needs the data and to this end we agree that the Commonwealth should rationalise the information it requires of universities by focussing on the outputs and outcomes of its expenditure. Data not integral to the accountability requirements should not be confused with data useful to a range of other purposes.

The University supports the AVCC proposition that the Commonwealth should consider the creation of a national data agency, to collect and publish all higher

education data to provide basic public information on the outcomes and performance of Australia's universities and higher education providers. (AVCC, *Quality through diversity*, p14). The AVCC proposes that such an agency would work closely with related agencies to collect data on vocational education and training, a proposition that we strongly support. While some comparison of data across the sector is proposed, data collection must also ensure that universities are being measured against their own objectives that reflect the increasing diversity of the sector. We endorse the AVCC concern that "reporting must be minimised and the requirements not be such that they normalise activity into common approaches." (AVCC, *Quality through diversity*, p11).

The establishment of the Australian Universities Quality Agency (AUQA) should ultimately be a further step in streamlining reporting requirements. For a start, it suggests that the collection and publication of the Quality Assurance and Improvement Plans by DEST is no longer necessary. However, the inclusion of AUQA in the discussion of the burden of current legal and accountability frameworks is probably inappropriate. If universities have in place effective quality assurance measures, then the reporting requirements for the AUQA audit should not be onerous. The Northern Territory University participated in the trial AUQA audit in 2001 and thus can speak from experience.

The NTU does not support the proposition that an intermediary body be established to stand between universities and government. There does not seem to be a consensus on what function such a body might undertake and we would not support any steps that remove direct responsibility for higher education from the Commonwealth Government.

The University welcomes the suggestion that the Commonwealth and the sector work to reach agreement on outcome measures to replace the current unnecessary emphasis on process and inputs. However, an over-emphasis on outcomes measures must be guarded against, bearing in mind the extent to which outcomes can be serendipitous and not sustainable. Outcomes must be linked to strategy and process.

University governing bodies

The University supports the proposition that good governance is critical to the effectiveness of universities, and in the case of the Northern Territory University, to the contribution it makes to the social, economic and cultural development of the Northern Territory. To this end, the University Council has recently completed a review that has aimed to enhance its best practice of university governance. The recommendations from the review are currently with the Northern Territory Government for its comment. Implementation is being planned for those recommendations that do not require changes to the *NT University Act*. The proposed changes largely reflect the recommendations of the Higher Education Management Review chaired by David Hoare published in the *Report of the Committee of Inquiry* (the Hoare Report). The University recognises the assistance provided by Professor Robert Smith in undertaking the review.

The Council affirmed the central importance of strategic planning and the inculcation of a planning culture to the University and agreed to review the University's mission at least every three years. The Council will require regular reporting on the progress of the objectives set out in the University's strategic plan.

The Council was firm in its view that members serve as trustees for the University as a whole, regardless of the manner in which they become members (elected, appointed, or by virtue of office held) and has refined the roles and responsibilities of Council. Consideration also is being given to adopting a probity policy or fiduciary rule to address issues including conflict of interest.

The University Council took the opportunity to refine its position on the expertise and understandings it expects of its Council members in the current environment.

The Council had recognised that it must develop measures to assess its performance annually, the aggregated results of which should form the agenda for an evaluation of Council performance by an external moderator. The Council has also addressed the need to develop appropriate training and induction activities and will develop measures to evaluate the performance of its members at least annually. The University supports the proposed collaborative development of a good practice manual for university governance.

University management issues

The Institutional Quality Assurance and Improvement Plans demonstrate that there is no "one size fits all" in relation to quality assurance, quality management, quality improvement and performance measurement. The advent of the AUQA will assist in creating a continuous improvement culture within the sector without imposing one particular framework or model.

At the same time, there are real challenges for dual sector institutions in the extent to which they are required to demonstrate accountability to external reporting bodies. The recent introduction of the Australian Quality Training Framework (AQTF) has placed an added burden on a number of institutions in terms of the work required to ensure external audit compliance at the cost of time and resources for ongoing continuous improvement.

The Northern Territory University would support initiatives that promoted better managers in universities and agrees that exploring the options for partnerships between the Commonwealth, the AVCC and the state and territory stakeholders to develop appropriate strategies would be a good starting point.

Sharing and rationalization

The University would fully support the Commonwealth looking at options that would facilitate greater sharing and rationalization of infrastructure between universities and inter-institutional cooperation. We would add that in any such exploration, however, there should be scope to look ways in which state/ Territory governments and the Commonwealth might support sharing and rationalization across the sectors as well.

This is particularly relevant to regional institutions where distance limits aspects of sharing with other universities but where the community would clearly benefit from sharing infrastructure and other arrangements across sectors. Some universities, including the Northern Territory University, already have such arrangements but have experienced varying degrees of support from the state, territory and commonwealth governments.

While sharing arrangements and rationalization of infrastructure that address aspects of the disadvantage some regional and remote institutions suffer as a consequence of the economies of scale should be fully supported, such actions should not be regarded as negating the critical issue of developing a funding model that addresses the disadvantage of higher costs in remote and regional areas.

Any Commonwealth intervention to support rationalizing use of campus space and sharing infrastructure must necessarily be forward thinking and should not be regarded as a substitute for proper Commonwealth investment in universities' infrastructure. If universities are to continue to develop innovative delivery modes and to maximize opportunities offered through the information revolution in teaching and research, then the Commonwealth must accept that it will need to invest in the kind of infrastructure that will facilitate such transitions. While rationalizing the use of space is a commendable aim, thinking ahead about how to best invest in technologies and infrastructure that move beyond the constraints of place and space is surely more critical. The University would welcome clear indications from the Commonwealth that it is ready to invest in the kinds of infrastructures that universities in the future will require to effectively participate in the information revolution. Juggling space and outsourcing some functions is good management practice but hardly visionary.

Workplace relations

In posing the question how might the Commonwealth work together to foster significant workplace reform, there is an assumption of a consensus between universities and the Commonwealth on the need for significant workplace reform and secondly, that there is a common understanding of what workplace reform might look like. We do not share the assumption that there is a consensus.

The Commonwealth address of issues around workplace reform implies that universities are not working efficiently and effectively and have not reached maximum productivity. At the same time, the Commonwealth assumes that Enterprise Bargaining will continue to lever efficiencies to increase productivity at the rate of about 4% per year. The unsubstantiated and repeated assertions by the Commonwealth that universities have not reached maximum productivity and are not working efficiently and effectively continue to be a contentious point with management and staffs at Australian universities

This University does not find that the tendency to dichotomise unfettered enterprise bargaining and pattern bargaining is helpful in taking forward discussions about the best way to manage the workplace. Rather, we consider that neither is able to respond to the diversity across the sector while ensuring equitable outcomes.

The University recommends the following matters be given consideration in addressing workplace reform:

- The University would support initiatives that aim to measure staff productivity in appropriate ways, with the emphasis on measures of staff activity that are constructed around output.
- The University would support measures that aim to create greater flexibility in staffing profiles in response to fluctuations in student demand and changing priorities. As the discussion paper notes, a key issue for universities is flexibility to adjust employment profiles to workforce plans.
- The University considers the current award structure inhibits the capacity of universities to respond to the demands to match innovation in scholarship, research and management appropriately. The arbitrary divide between academic and general staff artificially segregates work practices and does not recognise the need for "new" employment types. The extent to which the highly separate and prescriptive nature of each of the awards limits flexibility and the capacity to respond innovatively to the changing nature of university work cannot be underestimated.
- Within the academic and general staff awards respectively there is considerable scope for reform. One of the more obvious issues that we have addressed elsewhere in this submission revolves around academic staff who want to develop a career path around teaching and scholarship rather than teaching and research.
- At NTU, as will be the case with other dual sector institutions, there is a third player to take into account in the award structure - the TAFE staff. Current awards complicate the status of staff who teach across both sectors.
- Flexibility should also be fostered through ensuring universities have the capacity to use consultants and short term contracts effectively.

ISSUES PAPER 6

Varieties of learning: the interface between higher education and vocational education and training

This University, being a dual sector institution, believes that it is time to review the broad range of structural arrangements that are currently in place across the country to bring the VET and HE sectors closer together. These have been described within the discussion paper and include dual sector, single institutions, multi sector and educational precincts. This University supports the existence of dual sector Universities contingent on a clear rationale and positive outcomes underpinning their establishment. We also note that there is a diversity of internal structures even within the existing dual sector Universities. It is for this reason that any evaluation should extend beyond the suggested multi sector campuses and be expanded to cover the broad examples described above.

Before the proposed national pilot program is considered, there needs to be national debate about the definition, focus and purpose of those qualifications at the interface between VET and HE. The current definitions within the AQF are verbose, lack clarity and do little to define the difference between VET Diplomas and Advanced Diplomas and HE Diplomas. Although currently not part of the AQF the existence of Associate Degrees contributes further to the lack of clarity of qualifications spanning this interface. The paper points out that Graduate Certificates and Graduate Diplomas also add to the confusion. This is the case when non-graduates complete them.

In undertaking a national debate, it would be important that the primary role of each qualification informs the discussion and outcome, for example it should focus on the key vocational objectives or outcomes of the VET Diplomas /Advanced Diplomas with a secondary (although very important) focus on articulation. This is to avoid the “tail wagging the dog” whereby a drive and subsequent change to improve articulation might in fact detract from the primary purpose or outcome of the VET qualification.

After this exercise on definition is completed then it is appropriate to consider what is the best articulation arrangements and amount of VET/HE credit transfer between the two sectors. Much of the paper focuses on increasing transfer when in fact in some cases it could be argued that there is too much transfer, particularly in many offshore delivery situations.

There is a real danger that the quality of those awards at the VET/HE interface might be severely diminished if the definitions do not match the primary outcomes or the articulation and if the amount of credit transfer is too large, too small or inappropriate. It might be said that credit transfer exceeding 30% for a VET Diploma articulating into an undergraduate degree might diminish the value of the undergraduate degree.

A question might be posed as to whether the increase in multiple exit opportunities from a single block of VET training and/or education has resulted in a proliferation of awards that have in fact devalued the VET awards themselves. Currently it may be possible to achieve a Cert II, Cert IV, Diploma and an undergraduate degree from a

three year block of education and training and it may be asked if this has devalued any or all of the individual qualifications.

The reduction of underpinning and general knowledge content within VET courses up to the level of Diploma and Advanced Diploma is also an important factor when considering credit transfer and articulation between the two sectors. Similarly the opportunity for students to obtain 100% RPL for VET courses also provides difficulties when these courses are used to obtain credit transfer into undergraduate degrees.

Before governments try to address the questions such as income contingent loans and incentives for good practice in admission and credit transfer it is vital that they clearly define each qualification and identify what is good admission, credit transfer and articulation. Many of the possible questions listed to generate responses are actually secondary to these vitally important primary tasks.

Similarly the suggestion of trials of graded assessments again is secondary to the real issue of what is the correct assessment within the VET sector, particularly at the HE/VET interface. Contrary to the robust line taken by many of the VET industry bureaucrats a substantial number of students, current and potential employers want assessment that grades students. NTU has provided the option for staff to use grades with competency-based assessment for over 6 years. The use of grades assists with increasing articulation and credit transfer. The use of grades with competency-based assessment, however, needs to be developed and implemented carefully. Not all competency-based assessment circumstances within the VET sector lend themselves to the use of grades. Because of NTU's experience with the use of grades with CBT we would support expanded trailing and would like to participate in any expansion of the trials.