

POPULATION STUDIES

RESEARCH BRIEF

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WHAT CAN POTENTIAL INTERSTATE MIGRANTS FIND OUT ABOUT PROFESSIONAL OPPORTUNITIES IN THE NT ON THE NTG WEB?

KEY FINDINGS

- Attraction and retention strategies are very similar across 3 NTG Departments considered with emphasis on unique Territory lifestyle, quick career progression and high pay and conditions.
- Higher levels of conditions are offered for remote workers.
- The other main focus of information for remote workers is the opportunity to 'Experience' Indigenous culture.
- Work in the NT is often portrayed as an adventure holiday, and a temporary break from working elsewhere.
- More research is needed into what information works to attract different types of migrants, and what sorts of information help with recruitment and (separately) retention.

RESEARCH AIM

To determine what attraction and retention strategies targeting professional movers can be found on the NTG website.

This research brief was prepared by **Dr Kate Golebiowska, Ms Megan Brown and Associate Professor Dean Carson.**

Background

The Northern Territory faces increasing difficult competition in attracting and retaining skilled (and unskilled) workers from interstate, as evidenced by a large net outflow of interstate migrants recorded in the 2006 Census, and recent research into specific sectors of the workforce (see www.cdu.edu.au/sspr/researchthemes.htm). The role of information in assisting potential migrants to make decisions has been widely discussed in the academic literature, and it is common for jurisdictions like the Northern Territory, and individual professions, to set up structures for providing information to potential migrants. This research brief compares the information content that selected NT Government (NTG) Departments offered on their websites to attract professionals from interstate as of August/September 2008. We identify what aspects of the NT are promoted, and what themes emerge from the content. This analysis can help NTG assess whether the likely appeal of the information content matches the desired migrant market. New information strategies may emerge. This brief is restricted to interstate migration, with overseas migration the subject of a forthcoming analysis.

Data and methods

This research brief focuses on web-based information and incentives communicated to potential interstate professionals enticing them to take up employment with the NT public service. Information from the following NTG Departments is reviewed:

1. Department of Health and Families (nurses)
2. Department of Education and Training (teachers)
3. NT Police, Fire and Emergency Services (police).

These professionals are in particular demand in the Territory at the moment. The first website that we have visited is www.coreservices.nt.gov.au and it contains brief information about opportunities in each of these professions and further links to the relevant departmental websites.

A qualitative content analysis approach was used to analyse this web-based information. This approach is one of the classical procedures for analysing textual information regardless of where the material is coming from. This type of analysis is characterised by the use of categories (Flick, 2006, p. 312). Here, we are analysing contents of selected NTG websites. To this end, we categorise this information into work and lifestyle-related (Tables 1 and 2, respectively). Next, we group it under lower-level headings. For example, in Table 1 we distinguish 'Rewards', 'Pay & conditions', 'Career progression' and alike.

Results

As of September 2008, the NTG home website www.nt.gov.au features an icon entitled 'Great Territory Jobs' on the left hand side (www.coreservices.nt.gov.au). The location of the icon amongst potentially disturbing messages on accompanying icons is an initial observation of interest. These icons take visitors to:

1. NT Jobs Show' website;

2. 'Cracking down on youth crime' website;
3. 'Closing the Gap' website;
4. **'Great Territory Jobs' website;**
5. 'First Response Patrol' website.

Table 1 below compares the work-related information and incentives offered by the above Departments.

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Table 1. Work-related information and incentives.

Department of Education and Training, - Great Territory Jobs – Teaching (n.d. c), Teaching in the Northern Territory (2008a, b, c) (2007a, b).							
Rewards	Pay & conditions	Other benefits	Work arrangements	Work environment	Specialisation	Career progression	Aboriginal & multicultural
<p>Opportunities to work all over the Territory, Australia, and the world. Working with cutting-edge educational practices¹</p> <p>Competitive pay and conditions commensurate with the rest of Australia</p> <p>Ongoing professional development and a supportive work environment</p> <p>The knowledge that you are making a difference</p>	<p>Excellent salary and allowances, especially in remote areas. Average teacher annual salary \$70,047 & substantial allowances</p> <p>Recreation Leave 6 weeks/year with 17.5% leave loading on recreation leave</p> <p>Maternity Leave- after 12 weeks service – 14 weeks paid. Up to 6 years unpaid</p> <p>Exemplary Practice Allowance of up to a maximum of 20% of a teacher's salary.</p> <p>Dependants receive \$960 each (not provided in other states)</p>	<p>Subsidised housing (up to %100) in regional and remote communities. Up to 3 airfares a year, isolation allowance, freight allowance and laptop for every teacher in an NT Government school.</p> <p>Specific Remote Area Entitlements:² Professional isolation allowance up to \$ 1819/year; special study leave program – points system; free housing; leave to attend business outside the community -4 business days/year (unavailable in QLD & WA govt.schools); FOILS³ up to 3x/year + dependants (QLD & WA have similar systems but not as many trips); reimbursement of freight on household goods 15-29kgs/week. Unavailable in QLD& WA govt.schools); guaranteed transfer to Katherine, Darwin or Alice if stay in remote community for 3 or more years</p>	<p>Special offer for interstate teachers – No obligation trial. Only need to commit for 1 term (10 weeks) and return flights paid. Conditions apply</p> <p>The Teacher of Exemplary Practice scheme recognises teachers for excellent classroom practice and the support they provide to other teachers (see also Column 2)</p>	<p>You will love the unique lifestyle, professional challenges, cultural experience... and the sheer adventure of teaching in the Territory*</p> <p>Numbers and type of schools given (109 in total)</p> <p>Numbers of students (33,000)</p> <p>Indigenous 41% in primary school and 29% in secondary school</p> <p>Explanations of different types of schools</p>	<p>Great professional development and experience (especially in English Second Language)</p>	<p>Access to a wide range of professional learning programs. Links to Professional Learning Events Calendar</p> <p>Ability to advance to the top of the salary scale in 5 years compared with average of 8 years in other states.</p> <p>Teachers who wish to advance in their careers may apply for executive teacher, assistant principal and principal vacancies</p>	<p>Teachers who have moved here, especially those in the remote parts of the Territory, say that they love the sense of adventure, the responsibility of developing the skills children need, experiencing a new culture and teaching kids from different backgrounds⁴</p>
Department of Health and Families - Great Territory Jobs – Nursing (n.d. a), Nursing and Midwifery Jobs Northern Territory (2008b, c).							
Rewards	Pay & conditions	Other benefits	Work arrangements	Work environment	Specialisation	Career progression	Aboriginal & multicultural
<p>Diverse career options, with opportunities to work all over the Territory, Australia, and later on, the world⁵</p> <p>Great opportunities exist</p>	<p>Great</p> <p>Among the highest salaries and best conditions in the nation</p> <p>On commencement new</p>	<p>Generous allowances for nurses who work in RAs incl. additional study leave, airfares, freight allowance, professional isolation allowance, family travel assistance and 100% rental rebate</p>	<p>Opportunities for flexible working hours incl. F/T, P/T, casual and standard business hours</p>	<p>Different settings and communities incl. schools, aged care, home birthing, remote communities, health centres and</p>	<p>Great opportunities to specialise in a field of your choice</p>	<p>Opportunities for career advancement and the ability to easily transfer to other work environments such as community and remote practice</p>	<p>Working with Aboriginal clients – treating their diverse clinical needs</p>

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<p>in the bush, where autonomy and delivering primary health care can be a rewarding experience</p> <p>Our career pathway is different to that in other jurisdictions; nurses can apply for and be rewarded with exemplary practice status</p>	<p>employees are normally paid the salary at the bottom of the range applicable to that designation. After 12 months service at that level the salary is increased to the next level until the top of the range is reached</p> <p>Recreation Leave 6 weeks/year with additional week granted if 10 or more Sundays are worked.</p> <p>Study Leave- available for approved courses, but there is no inalienable right</p> <p>Northern Territory Allowance</p>	<p>Specific RA Entitlements:</p> <p>rental concession; special study leave program; accommodation allowance in conjunction with fares out; family travel assistance scheme; reimbursement of household contents insurance premiums</p>		<p>hospitals</p> <p>You won't see any doctors in white coats or ties up here.⁶ Another positive aspect of the Territory nursing experience is the lack of professional boundaries in health. There's a greater level of mutual respect between health professionals and an awareness that every contribution is essential to positive health outcomes</p>			<p>and sharing their culture – is the stand out feature of the Territory nursing experience</p> <p>With one of the most diverse population mixes in Australia the Territory also presents many other cultural experiences for nurses and midwives</p>
<p>Northern Territory Police, Fire and Emergency Services - Great Territory Jobs – Policing (n.d. b), Northern Territory Police, Fire and Emergency Services (2008a), Northern Territory Police (2008).</p>							
<p>Chance to live and work all over the Territory; huge variety of professions within one career</p> <p>Career a bit out of the ordinary; [you] can get out of the 9 to 5 routine and into something really special and interesting</p>	<p>Great</p> <p>Competitive allowances, incl. overtime and shift rates, 7 weeks' annual leave and 4 months' long-service leave after 10 years</p> <p>Your salary after graduation is \$45 482pa, with consolidated allowance and</p>	<p>Supplied housing</p> <p>Officers who provide their own housing receive a significant additional allowance to help meet their costs</p>	<p>Must be prepared to work shift work</p> <p>All members of the NT Police are required to serve anywhere in the Territory throughout their career. You will be required to accept, as a condition of employment, that the Commissioner may require you to serve at any location in the NT Whenever you are</p>	<p>Must be prepared to work in remote locations</p>	<p>Huge variety of professions within one career</p> <p>Varied and interesting roles and exciting opportunities</p> <p>Dozens of career choices</p>	<p>Plenty of training opportunities and promotions recognising those who work hard</p> <p>You will get a range of experience unavailable in any other Australian jurisdiction. While still relatively junior, you are likely to be given great responsibility</p>	<p>Not listed</p>

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	<p>General Duties Allowance you will be paid \$56 827pa, on top of which you will also be paid an allowance for night shift work and overtime, housing allowances and other benefits as applicable</p>		<p>transferred to another location, the NT Police will pay the relocation costs</p> <p>Interstate fares for NT public sector staff has been abolished. Police working in RAs get 2 to 3 (depending on location), FOILs³ for themselves and their families to regional centres each year</p>			<p>and opportunities and the chance to serve at bush stations. Another bonus in the Territory is the quick promotional prospects. Because we are such a small police force people tend to move through the ranks relatively quickly</p>	
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Notes:

1. Encourage short term experiences of the NT, adventure holiday.
2. Remote schools and tutors links not working 28 August 2008.
3. FOILs – Fares Out of Isolated Localities.
4. They show on the www.teaching.nt.gov.au website very happy student and teachers with a focus on Aboriginal children.
5. Encourages outmigration from the NT.

They are indeed shown on the www.health.nt.gov.au website to illustrate the way medicine is practised in the NT.

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Table 2. Lifestyle-related information and incentives.

Department of Education and Training - Great Territory Jobs – Teaching (n.d. c), Teaching in the Northern Territory (2008 d), The Territory (n.d.).				
Lifestyle	Amenities & activities	Drive time	Holiday doorstep	About Darwin/NT
<p>The Territory is unlike anywhere else in Australia</p> <p>The Territory's warm weather and long hours of sunshine encourage Territorians to live an outdoor lifestyle: favourite activities include camping, swimming, sailing, bushwalking. The Territory's coastline is 10,950km long, with several large river systems – so it's no wonder fishing is a popular pastime</p>	<p>Links to The Territory website with information on sport, fishing, health, arts & culture, parks & wildlife and getting around</p>	n/a	<p>Links to Tourism NT and Travel NT</p>	<p>You might be surprised to learn how cosmopolitan the Territory is. As well as some of Australia's most vibrant Indigenous culture, our population is comprised of people from more than 100 nationalities, food and music.</p>
Department of Health and Families – Great Territory Jobs – Nursing (n.d. a), Nursing and Midwifery Jobs Northern Territory (2008a, b).				
<p>Quality of life - another key reason why many nurses and midwives choose to make the Territory their home and preferred place of work. The climate, openness and geographical diversity along with the unique professional opportunities have their addictive qualities</p>	<p>Property is still affordable</p> <p>Residents at RDH have everything at hand to enjoy a fantastic lifestyle – including swimming pool, tennis courts, squash courts, gym and barbeques</p> <p>Short stroll to pristine beaches and nature (...) just a few minutes walk from RDH</p> <p>The Casuarina Coastal Reserve has walking and bicycle paths, picnic tables – and an abundance of wildlife. Chances are you will meet many Darwin locals – including fellow hospital staff - who use the reserve for jogging, walking their dogs and as a venue for Tai Chi or meditation classes</p> <p>At the Casuarina Shopping Square you will find everything from Coles, Woolworths and K Mart to specialty shops and eateries. There are also plenty of takeaway food chains close at hand</p>	<p>You really can be home from work in 5 minutes</p>	<p>Asia is closer than any other Australian capital city</p> <p>[Darwin is the] gateway to the Northern Territory's Top End, which encompasses famous destinations such as Litchfield National Park and the Tiwi Islands. It is also the launch pad for travel to Kakadu National Park and Arnhem Land</p>	<p>Modern and tropical city</p> <p>Probably Australia's most culturally diverse location. More than 50 nationalities make up the town's 100,000-plus population, including the traditional landowners, the Larrakia Aboriginal people</p>
Northern Territory Police, Fire and Emergency Services - Great Territory Jobs – Policing (n.d. b), Northern Territory Police Fire and Emergency (2008b).				

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<p>The Territory is a vibrant and beautiful place that continues to offer great work and lifestyle opportunities, framed by the unique character of vast distances, remote locations, ancient culture, bush characters and fantastic landscapes</p> <p>People are surprised that we have such a great balance between a laidback lifestyle and just about all the creature comforts in our major centres that you'd get back at home</p> <p>Some aspects of living here are slightly higher than interstate, but not as much as people would have you believe. However, you save in other areas. You won't have to buy suits or winter wardrobes in the Top End</p>	<p>N/A</p>	<p>No traffic jams</p>	<p>With world renowned national parks, spectacular river systems, extensive offshore islands and strong Aboriginal cultural connections, [NT] offers some of the more accessible opportunities to see the real Australia</p> <p>Close to Asia and many of Australia's famous tourist attractions, such as Kakadu and Ayers Rock</p>	<p>[There is] no point beating about the bush. Sometimes [it is] very hot and humid in the 'Top End'!</p> <p>The Top End has a beautiful dry season, when all the tourists come; a pretty humid 'Mango Season' when the air-conditioners become very popular; and a lovely Wet when everything turns green and the brilliant electrical storms put on a performance you couldn't buy</p> <p>Central Australia is very hot in summer, although it is a much dryer heat than in many other parts of Australia, and a cooler 'winter' when the maximum temperature reaches up to 20 degrees. Nights can be freezing</p>
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Discussion

Table 1 illustrates that the NTG Departments in question are emphasising the unique character of the employment opportunities in the NT. Opportunities for career advancement are highlighted: one can quickly step up the ladder in the police force, there are no professional boundaries for nurses and teachers have seemingly easy access to senior and managerial positions. While this quick career progression may appeal to some individuals and retain them here for as long as they are progressing in the ranks, at the same time nurses and teachers may be indirectly encouraged to use the NT work experience as a springboard to move interstate or overseas (see column 'Rewards'). Also, in case of teachers, putting up the number of years needed to advance to the top of the salary scale in the NT and elsewhere in Australia may indirectly lead people to consider employment in the NT only for this 'required' temporary period.

Pay and conditions are summed up as 'great/excellent' for all three professions, although what actually makes them great is different in each case. For nurses, the benefits increase with the time they remain employed in the NT: after each year of employment, their salary is increased to the next level, which seems intended to act as one retention measure. Teachers are attracted by relatively high base salaries, substantial allowances and bonuses. Those who sign up merely for one term are paid their return flights within Australia. For those in the police force, it is the allowances rather than the base salary that are presented as incentives and they serve to increase retention. The minimum annual recreation leave is six weeks for teachers and nurses; for the latter it can be extended under certain circumstances. Policemen can get seven weeks annual recreation leave. Such longer periods of recreation leave are common for the NTG public servants.

Although information on types of available housing can be classified as lifestyle-related, it is integrated into work-related information and indeed it is made to be perceived as part of the employment package. For nurses and teachers, accommodation cost is fully covered in remote areas (RAs). Newly employed nurses at RDH, used here as an example of an urban hospital, can rent a place on the hospital grounds. For police officers housing can be either supplied or a 'significant' allowance is provided to those who provide their own housing.

It seems that intra-Territory rotation is highlighted as a unique professional opportunity. This represents a broader concept of retention not limited to one particular location, but expanded to cover the entire NT. This is an option for nurses, and is presented as 'the ability to easily transfer to other work environments'. Upon closer reading of information communicated to potential police officers, it turns out that the 'chance to live and work all over Territory' is actually a requirement and a condition of employment. In the case of such transfer, the employer covers the relocation costs. It is not hard to imagine the difficulty one may be presented with when such a transfer is impending and one's young family, including spouse, is unwilling to move. This rotational character of employment might best appeal to young, unattached people.

Benefits coming with working in RAs are particularly emphasised for nurses and teachers. Although when listed on the website they seem impressive, they are in fact

necessary to enable one to maintain social contacts, undertake professional development courses and alike. Some of them may also make potential movers concerned. Professional isolation allowance may ring alarm bells and reimbursement of household contents insurance premiums (nurses) may suggest that levels of community safety are questionable. Nurses and teachers get paid, along with their family members, to travel out of RAs (for example, for holidays, but whether this is for travel interstate, is unspecified). Police officers and their families are paid to get to the nearest regional centre.

Finally, the unique aspect of work in the NT to experience Aboriginal culture is highlighted for all professions. The remote teachers 'love the sense of adventure, the responsibility of developing the skills children need, experiencing a new culture and teaching kids from different backgrounds'. For nurses, 'great opportunities exist in the bush, where autonomy and delivering primary health care can be a rewarding experience'. In general, 'working with Aboriginal clients – treating their diverse clinical needs and sharing their culture – is the stand out feature of the Territory nursing experience'. In the police force, one can expect, 'while being still relatively junior (...) to be given great responsibility and opportunities and the chance to serve at bush stations'. Such messages may reinforce the idea that the 'adventure', 'experience', and 'opportunity' can mostly be had in the bush, whereas in fact, Aboriginal culture can be experienced in urban areas, too. These words may also conjure up the idea that the NT is a good place for a temporary relocation rather than a longer-term settlement. An adventure is typically perceived as a break from 'normal' activities, an opportunity to gain a refreshed outlook on life before returning to one's usual business. A careful web surfer may also notice on the main NTG website (www.nt.gov.au) that the message about the great professional opportunities in the NT is placed amongst icons indicating serious crime issues as well as reminding readers about the NT Intervention. Those hoping to reap the rewards of working in the bush may realise that there is a high chance of coming across issues being tackled by the Intervention first hand. Hopeful new professionals may be alerted by these accompanying messages about the potential risks involved in taking up these opportunities and whether the remuneration is sufficient for the potential risks involved.

Table 1 further illustrates that the retention measures used by these NTG Departments are either financial in nature, relate to time in remote areas, free/subsidised accommodation and study leave programs (the latter for teachers and nurses). However, unavoidably, these measures can be seen at the same time as components of a NTG-funded 'adventure holiday', something to boast about when back home. While it has been established that the NT population is transient in nature (reference here some earlier mobility work), there may be still scope for a smarter recruitment strategy, which could entice interstate migrants to remain here for longer. For example, providing more information about work environment could be considered, or some timeframes encouraging thinking within them, removed.

Table 2 offers an overview of the lifestyle-related information that can be found on the websites of the three Departments. In keeping with the 'adventure' message, the unique natural beauty of the NT, including its two famous national parks, is promoted. The potential new nurses and police officers can learn about this immediately, while

teachers are encouraged to visit the NT Travel and the Tourism NT websites. The proximity of the NT to Asia is highlighted on the nurses' and police force's websites.

The Territory may appeal to those enjoying outdoor sports as these are mentioned on the teachers' and nurses' websites. Unsurprisingly, the climate is presented as a drawback to all three professions; seemingly though only those in the police force can immediately learn that 'sometimes [it is] very hot and humid in the 'Top End''. While contact with the Aboriginal population is emphasised as a unique feature of one's professional experience, when it comes to lifestyle-related considerations, the multicultural, cosmopolitan mix of the Territory and Darwin gets more prominence for teachers and nurses. All the above factors can be seen as obvious, easy 'selling points' for the NT.

Yet, the decision whether to move here is unlikely to be solely based on information regarding decent salaries and other work-related benefits, or the natural beauty of the Territory. One would realistically be interested in the actual cost of living, too. Cost of weekly groceries, petrol and childcare could be regularly updated, perhaps in comparison with the adjacent regional areas of Western Australia and Queensland, with whom the NT may be competing for professionals. Given that similar claims about lifestyle quality and 'unique' professional opportunities can probably be made by these regions, some more detailed, honest information may better resonate with potential migrants than claims that are only broad in nature. At the moment, by browsing the promotional websites of the three NTG Departments in question, nurses can learn that 'Property is still affordable', while future police officers are informed that 'Some aspects of living here are higher than interstate (...). However, you save in other areas'. Some additional information is available in linked publications from The Territory (n.d.) website, which discusses for example cost of renting and choice of available facilities (with some focus on families). Some convincing messages saying that the NT is a good place to raise a family could also be helpful.

Summary

This Research Brief has summarised information that can immediately be found on three NTG Departmental websites set up to attract more professionals to the NT. Broadly speaking, the attraction and retention strategies put up by these Departments are similar. Interested individuals can find out that professional opportunities in the NT are unique, with opportunities for a quick career progression, very well paid and coming with generous allowances and benefits. Work opportunities that exist in the bush are particularly worth looking into. There are also opportunities to interact with Aboriginal clients and to experience Aboriginal culture firsthand. Apart from the travel to the NT to take up employment, which in some cases can be paid for by the NTG, one can also expect more travel as rotation around the NT is encouraged. It appears that while some of these work conditions are intended as measures enhancing retention, they may at the same time be perceived as an encouragement to take up NTG-funded 'adventure holiday', or in other words, a temporary move.

The web sites reviewed target relatively young, early career, temporary movers. They include the types of information that would be expected – about the locations, the jobs, the rewards, and the lifestyle benefits. They make limited reference themselves to family issues, or to issues around longer term residence such as purchasing a

house, undertaking tertiary study, schooling and recreation for children, opportunities for investment in the Territory and so on. Some such information can be found in linked publications. Careful consideration needs to be given to whether web sites such as these contribute to the recruitment of populations with likely high rates of turnover when other populations may be possible, or whether they simply recognise an inevitability of conditions in the Territory.

Further research is required into the success or failure of these recruitment programs. Perhaps there needs to be a decision made on what the target populations are, whether focus is on short or long term placements and look at consistency in rewards offered by departments. Further research might include analysis of what works for what markets, what current migrants are looking for and how long they will stay under what conditions.

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