

The Honourable Ken Wyatt AM MP
Minister for Indigenous Australians
House of Representatives
Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600
By email: IESP@niaa.gov.au

17 September 2021

Dear Minister Wyatt,

Re: Charles Darwin University submission on the National Indigenous Australians Agency's Indigenous Skills, Engagement and Employment Program (ISEP) Discussion Paper

Thank you for the opportunity to respond to the 'Indigenous Skills, Engagement and Employment Program' (ISEP) discussion paper. Our response is informed by our deep experience of engagement with First Nation's peoples of the Northern Territory via our Office of the Pro-Vice Chancellor Indigenous Leadership and Regional Outreach (OPVCILRO), colleges, research institutes and regional campuses/centres. Whilst we have campuses/centres in other state jurisdictions of Australia, our response focuses on the Northern Territory context and importantly, how CDU can contribute to improving the Indigenous workforce in the NT.

As an institution, Charles Darwin University (CDU) has a significant role to play in the future prosperity of the Northern Territory through research, education and training, and in particular upskilling of Territorians. We are mindful that the Northern Territory workforce will develop in response to industry growth sectors (e.g. Agribusiness, Tourism, Energy and Minerals, International Education and Training, Defence and Defence Support Industries) and industry sectors which are currently developing (e.g. Tropical Health and Research, Creative Industries, Renewable Energy, Environmental Services and Human Services). As a dual sector provider, we provide a range of VET courses that align with these industries and are thus well placed to provide a response to the discussion paper. Further to this, we are unique in the context of Tertiary Education in Australia with no other Australian university serving such a large area of the continent, in such remote locations and with such a small population to sustain it.

We are also well-placed to serve the needs of Indigenous communities throughout the Northern Territory and have focused our work accordingly. The OPVCILRO drives the university's implementation of the 'Indigenous Leadership Strategy' which identifies 61 Indigenous-specific initiatives. On September 15, 2021, CDU launched the 2021 CDU Strategic Plan. The new Strategic Plan has a goal to '[b]e the most recognised university for Australian First Nations training, education and research'. Whilst the remit is for all Australian First Nations Peoples, it has a specific redefined focus on Northern Territorians.

We therefore welcome the introduction of the Indigenous Skills, Engagement and Employment Program (ISEP) which forms part of the Indigenous Skills and Jobs Advancement Package. It commits an investment of \$42.8m per annum, building to \$60m in future years, and *replaces* the Vocational Training and Employment Centres (VTEC), Tailored Assistance Employment Grants (TAEG) and the Employment Parity Initiative (EPI). These three *replaced* programs are accessed by 1% of Indigenous peoples who access government



employment programs and/or related programs. It will therefore be critical to map out the current and emerging workforce occupations within each region according to current and/or emerging industries. We now provide this information in the table below, identifying the sector, key priorities and associated workforce occupations for each region of the Northern Territory.

West Arnhem – Jabiru and Kakadu

SECTOR	KEY PRIORITY	WORKFORCE OCCUPATIONS
Tourism	Significant investment in the development and growth of Jabiru as a tourist hub, with a whole town redevelopment planned and funded through the Jabiru Masterplan. Development of a 10-year Tourism Master Plan for Kakadu National Park currently underway.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tour guides or operators • Cooks, Chefs and Kitchen Staff • Bar Staff and Baristas • Hotel Staff and Housekeeping • Wait and Hospitality Staff • Business Administration Staff
Renewable Energy	A new power station is in the proposal stage for Jabiru, with at least half the power to be renewable.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Electrical • Construction and Engineering • Civil • Plumbing • Logistics • WHS, Safety and Management
Science and Research	Jabiru Masterplan 2018-2028 identifies Jabiru as a “key location for research” ¹ and for the creation of a research hub. This aligns with the Jabiru Education and Research Campus Strategy.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Researchers • Research Assistants • Scientists • Technical Assistant • Technical Officer
Health & Community Services	Roll out of the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS). The Northern Territory Government (NTG) has committed to continue providing essential future services during Jabiru’s development, with a focus on health and education.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Community services • Aged care • Disability care • Alcohol and other drugs • Childcare and education support • Nursing and health
Environmental Science	The Jabiru Masterplan also prioritises the region as a key location nationally for excellence and best practice in Indigenous land management knowledge.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Environmental Consultants • Agricultural Scientists • Researchers • Research Assistants • Rangers

The ‘West Arnhem - Jabiru and Kakadu Region’ is home to the world heritage listed Kakadu National Park which has massive potential for growth and economic impact for the region. It is Indigenous owned with a Joint Board of Management consisting of the majority Traditional Owners on its board. Kakadu is an Australian icon and is ideally placed for growth across several sectors including Tourism, Renewable Energies, Science and Research, Health and Community Services and Environmental Services. CDU has a range of research partnerships in this region across various disciplines including conservation and land management with Traditional Owners and ranger groups.

¹ 2018. 2018-2028 Jabiru Masterplan. Jabiru, Australia: Gundjeihmi Aboriginal Corporation.

Projected growth within this region is documented in: 1) the Jabiru Masterplan 2018-2028; 2) the development of a 10-year Tourism Masterplan for Kakadu; and 3) the NDIS. Growth in the Health and Community Services sector will require future services and programs targeting Indigenous peoples. In many cases, specific jobs will likely be designated for Indigenous peoples only.

East Arnhem – Nhulunbuy

SECTOR	KEY PRIORITY	WORKFORCE OCCUPATIONS
Space & Aerospace	Development of Arnhem Space Centre and subsequent deals with NASA	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Electrical • Construction and Engineering • Civil • Plumbing • Logistics • WHS, Safety and Management • Business Administration
Manufacturing	Manufacturing is a key sector in this region, increasing in importance as mining projects curtail.	
Art & Creative Industries	Grow the existing community-based galleries in line with the Creative Industries Strategy in development after being identified as a growth area in the NT Economic Development Framework.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Artist • Art gallery worker • Musician • Media • Visual Arts Centre Coordinator
Aquaculture	Potential for small and larger scale commercial fishing, supported by the Port facility expansion in Nhulunbuy and the development of the Central Arnhem Road.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Environmental Consultants • Agricultural Scientists • Researchers • Research Assistants
Tourism & Hospitality	Nhulunbuy Port Upgrades are identified as a possible underpinning of a Gove Port Tourism Hub and related marine tourism.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tour guides or operators • Cooks, chefs and kitchen staff • Bar staff and baristas • Hotel staff and housekeeping • Wait staff and hospitality • Event management
Health & Community Services	The NT government has identified the development of a residential aged care centre in Nhulunbuy as a priority project, and has increased provision for Urban Public Housing.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Community services • Aged care • Disability care • Alcohol and other drugs • Childcare and education support • Nursing and health

Similar to the previous region, the 'East Arnhem – Nhulunbuy Region' is unique due to its geographical features and it has a focus on the Tourism and Community Service sectors. For example, its coastal location is ideal for the development and growth of aquaculture and marine based industries which in turn, are suited to research and farming industries. The NTG commitment to build an aged-care centre in Nhulunbuy and expansion of urban public housing will see growth across the Health and Community Services sector. The strategic location of this region has attracted the Space and Aerospace sector which will bring growth, and demand a workforce in the areas of construction, civil engineering and trades.

Big Rivers

SECTOR	KEY PRIORITY	WORKFORCE OCCUPATIONS
Tourism & Hospitality	\$10M improvements to the Nitmiluk Visitor Centre to invest in tourism into the future and revitalisation of Katherine Hot Springs to expand tourism product.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tour guides and operators • Cooks, chefs and kitchen staff • Bar staff and baristas • Hotel staff and housekeeping • Wait staff and hospitality • Event management
Arts & Creative Industries	National Iconic Arts Trail will link and grow Aboriginal Arts and Cultural Centres through the NT, including extensions to Katherine Art Gallery.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Artists • Art gallery workers • Musicians • Media • Visual arts centre coordinators
Defence & Defence Construction	Project R8000, Facilities Requirements for the New Air Combat Capacity (NACC) RAAF Base Tindal. Project R8099 RAAF Base Tindal. Redevelopment Stage 6 and Project R8109 USFPI RAAF Base Tindal Airfield Works and Associated Infrastructure.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Electrical • Construction and engineering • Civil • Plumbing • Logistics • WHS, Safety and management • Environmental consultants • Agricultural scientists • Researchers • Research Assistants • Technical Officers
Oil & Gas	Beetaloo Basin.	
Renewable Energies	\$40M development of Katherine solar farm by international investors ENI with buy-back by Jacana in place.	
Mining	Ongoing growth in minerals in the short term with Mt Todd Mine, with further development planned across next 10 Years.	
Agribusiness	Development of the Katherine Agribusiness and Logistics Hub underway, with a vision to develop Katherine as an inland port.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Farmers or growers • Environmental consultants • Agricultural scientists • Researchers or Research Assistants

The 'Big Rivers Region' has potential for growth across a range of sectors including Mining, Defence, Oil and Gas and Renewable Energies. Significant investment to-date in Defence and Defence Construction is particularly noted for this region with the strategic location of the RAAF Base Tindal. Agribusiness and Transport/Logistics has potential for growth, and again Tourism is a key industry for this region with an investment in upgrading the Nitmiluk Visitor Centre. Tourism growth potential for this region is also due to its iconic landmarks such as the Katherine Gorge, the Katherine Hot Springs and Bitter Springs at Mataranka.

The CDU Katherine Rural Campus is a purpose-built training, conference and accommodation facility, located 16 kms north of Katherine on the Stuart Highway. The facility, catering and accommodation is available for hire to external clients and caters for both internal and external training programs or workshops. The Katherine Rural Campus encompasses over 4400 hectares of land. It is the home of our award-winning Brahman Stud composed of 150 purebred Brahman Cattle and a commercial breeder group of 150 Brahman cows bred to Brahman and crossbred bulls. The stud and farm provide an onsite training facility to prepare students for employment in the North Australian Pastoral or Agricultural environment. It is also an excellent environment for engagement work and executive retreats.

The CDU Katherine Town Centre Campus provides CDU students and staff with a friendly, central and accessible facility including teaching facilities, business room, student lounge and internet and computer access.

Barkly Region

SECTOR	KEY PRIORITY	WORKFORCE OCCUPATIONS
Mining & Resources	Barkly Mining and Energy Services Hub, increased focus on Tennant Creek. Multiple significant mines operational and in exploration and development stages.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Electrical • Construction and engineering • Civil • Plumbing • Logistics • OHS, Safety and management
Renewable Energies	In line with NTG's Road to Renewables (2017).	
Health & Community Services	Top employing industry in Tennant Creek, a focus on aged care in the Barkly has been identified as a priority in the Barkly Regional Deal.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Community services • Aged care • Disability care • Alcohol and other drugs • Childcare and education support • Nursing and health
Art & Creative Industries	Elliott Arts Centre development in consultation stage, \$10M investment in Nyinkka Nyunyu Art and Culture Centre through the Arts Trail.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Artists • Art gallery workers • Musicians • Media • Visual arts centre Coordinators
Tourism & Hospitality	Tennant Creek Visitor Hub Development as part of the Turbocharging Tourism action plan, legacy mines undergoing safety repair, consultation taking place with Traditional Owners around establishment of Mining Heritage Trails.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tour guides and operators • Cooks, chefs and kitchen staff • Bar staff and baristas • Hotel staff and housekeeping • Wait staff and hospitality • Event management

The potential growth industries for the 'Barkly Region' are Mining and Renewable Energy sectors. As these industries expand, so too does the workforce and accompanying sectors including Health and Community Services, Arts and Creative Industries and Tourism and Hospitality.

Our CDU Tennant Creek Centre is a hub for training and is well placed to service Indigenous communities living in Tennant Creek and the surrounding Barkly region. Training is also delivered to Elliot, Canteen Creek, Ali Curung, Alpururulam, Barrow Creek, Epenarra, Robinson River, Borroloola, McClaren Creek, and others from this centre. An area east of Tennant Creek has been identified as "possibly" holding new mineral deposits worth billions of dollars, with prospective mining companies seeking to explore lucrative iron ore, copper and gold deposits. Any future developments in the mining industry would benefit from the learnings of other mining projects across regional Australia in terms of actual employment outcomes for local Indigenous peoples. Remoteness and civil infrastructure needs remain a priority need for the Tennant Creek and Barkly region, which also provides opportunities for training and employment of local Indigenous peoples.

Central Australian Region

SECTOR	KEY PRIORITY	WORKFORCE OCCUPATIONS
Mining & Resources	Multiple significant mining opportunities in Garnet, Rare Earths, Base metals, V, Ti, FE, Mo, W and Salt.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Electrical • Construction and engineering • Civil • Plumbing • Logistics • OHS, Safety and management • Environmental consultants • Agricultural scientists • Researchers or Research Assistants
Defence & Defence Construction	JORN Phase 6, BAE Systems, part of a \$1b Australia-wide project – estimated locally around \$40M. Joint Defence Facility (Pine Gap).	
Renewable Energies	Establishment of Intyalheme, SETuP Solar Energy Transformation Program, Road to Renewables.	
Tourism & Hospitality	“Red Centre Adventure Ride” cycling tracks funded by Turbocharging Tourism, Hermannsburg Historical Precinct, including completed upgrades to Kata Anga Café.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tour guides and operators • Cooks, chefs and kitchen staff • Bar staff and baristas • Hotel staff and housekeeping • Wait staff and hospitality • Event management
Arts & Creative Industries	Funding for Alcoota Megafauna exhibition, National Arts Trail, including potential National Aboriginal Art Gallery and Cultural Centre.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Artists • Art gallery workers • Musicians • Media • Visual arts centre Coordinator
Aviation	Potential for International Aviation Academy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Electrical • Construction and engineering • Civil • Plumbing • Logistics • WHS, Safety and management
Space & Aerospace	Real-Time Earth (RTE) facility announced for Alice Springs, Territory Space Industry 2020 report.	
Health & Community Services	Planned investment in Alice Springs Allied Health facility, as well as ongoing hospital upgrades	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Community services • Aged care • Disability care • Alcohol and other drugs • Childcare and education support • Nursing and health
Agribusiness	Upgrades to Wamboden Abattoir, ongoing agribusiness developments and farming.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Farmer or Grower • Environmental Consultant • Agricultural Scientist • Researcher or Research Assistant
Voyages & NITA	Ongoing Tourism in Yulara, training and development for Indigenous students through NITA in Tourism, Retail, and Horticulture. Learning and Development also focuses on Tourism, Hospitality, Cookery, Business and other skills.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tour guide or Tour operator • Cooks, chefs and kitchen staff • Bar staff and Baristas • Hotel staff and housekeeping • Wait staff and hospitality • Business managers • Horticulturalists

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Landscapers • Retail sales people • Retail managers
International Students	Alice Springs has existing provision for International Students, projected to grow Options to upskill internationals on work visas, rather than just service International Student visa holders.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Current CRICOS courses in Commercial Cookery • Planned CRICOS courses in Business • Various

The Central Australian Region has the most number of industries for the NT. Tourism, Defence and Mining are notable. Similar to Kakadu, Uluru-Kata Tjuta National Park is Indigenous owned with a Joint Board of Management consisting of the majority Traditional Owners on its board. Uluru is also an Australian icon, and perhaps the most renowned of all Australian icons.

CDU's Alice Springs campus is our second largest campus in the Northern Territory and is a major educational hub catering for domestic and international students in Alice Springs itself, as well as surrounding remote communities. This dual-sector campus provides higher education, research and vocational studies in a modern and well-resourced environment on site and is the base for extensive training for other communities in the Northern Territory. The multi-sector campus includes a modern 85-seat lecture theatre, specialist IT classrooms, a clinical training laboratory for nursing and a science laboratory for Higher Education. The dedicated Higher Education Building offers a hub of resources for more than 30 staff and 190 undergraduate, postgraduate and research students, some of whom work collaboratively with research and brokerage institution Desert Knowledge Australia. It includes multi-media equipped lecture theatres, class, tutorial and research rooms. A Trades Skills Centre is the centrepiece of the Alice Springs campus which provides resources and facilities to support VET training in the plumbing and construction industries. These modern facilities provide state-of-the-art equipment providing further reach and opportunities to students undertaking trades skills and apprenticeship training locally.

VET in Schools training is provided to Alice Springs' five high schools and many secondary schools in remote communities. The campus is also home to an outstanding library, including the electronic Learning Resource Centre, a new Specialist Training Hub, and extensive facilities for tourism and hospitality students, including the multi-Brolga Award-winning Desert Lantern Restaurant.

Our capacity to invigorate local research is further increased by our [Central Australian Research Group \(CARG\)](#) whom are based at the Alice Springs campus. Its vision is to maximise the research capacity of residents in Alice Springs. CDU is a leader in regional and remote education delivery, and the offices of the CDU Regional Directorate are located in Alice Springs, servicing all of the regional campuses and centres throughout the Northern Territory. The Alice Springs Student Accommodation (ASSA) provides accommodation for CDU students, students from other universities undertaking placement, CDU staff and visiting guests, and groups. We offer twin share and sole occupancy rooms across two houses, as well as communal kitchen areas, a self-service laundry and access to WiFi via the CDU/Eduroam network.

Our research strengths are informed by our deep understanding and evaluation of local (Centralian) social and economic issues, opportunities and participation. We also have broad networks and significant histories of working with Centralian communities. Better linkages between our networks, research evidence and Centralian economic plans (for further education, training and employment) are strongly supported.

The Tourism industry is well represented across all regions in the NT. It has potential for growth particularly due to iconic tourist attractions such as Uluru and Kakadu which are internationally renowned. Given the uncertainty of the COVID environment, we cannot rely on international markets. However, the return to normal must be anticipated as this sector will need to be ready for the workforce demand that will come when Australia re-opens its borders to international visitors.

Key Factors for Consideration

We strongly support local approaches to effectively deliver Indigenous programs that can be adapted to regional specific needs. However, there are a number of factors that are common across many Indigenous communities including historical factors such as the experience of colonisation, marginalisation, dispossession and negative historical treatment, all of which has resulted in their extreme disadvantage. This underpins their current socio-economic status, and they continue to be the most disadvantaged group in Australia. This is reflected in the statistical evidence and has prompted Australian government to implement a whole-of-government Closing The Gap policy that consists of annual reporting – albeit, there has been little positive progress to-date.

One key barrier to Indigenous Higher Education (HE) and Vocational Education and Training (VET) success is the low levels of English literacy and numeracy, particularly in remote and very remote communities. There is also a lack of relevant English literacy and numeracy training more broadly across the NT. Whilst research in this area is sparse, the evidence that does exist, suggests it is ‘ongoing’ and ‘problematic’, and has a follow-on effect whereby it becomes a foundational barrier to the successful completion of qualifications and/or competencies, which further inhibits/prevents positive employment outcomes for Indigenous peoples and communities.

There are economies of scale to consider too. The Northern Territory covers approximately 16 percent of Australia, yet in 2015 its residents represented just over one percent of the total Australian population. Of this one percent, 30 percent were Indigenous. And whilst the proportion of Indigenous peoples in the NT (30%) is much higher than the national average (3%), the actual number of Indigenous peoples in the NT is quite low in comparison to Australia’s overall Indigenous population. This is where funding must be proportionate to need, and not necessarily proportionate to the overall population.

Our CDU experience is that there are low success rates for Indigenous peoples across HE and VET. We have mapped CDU HE and VET disciplines to the growth areas (as identified in the above tables) and concluded that they broadly align to the growth areas, and therefore we are well-placed to make a contribution to the developing NT workforce. And given that each region is unique, it will require local solutions.

Implementation of the ISEP is Key

The implementation of the ISEP will be key to its success. This is where the four priority reforms are critical. These reforms are:

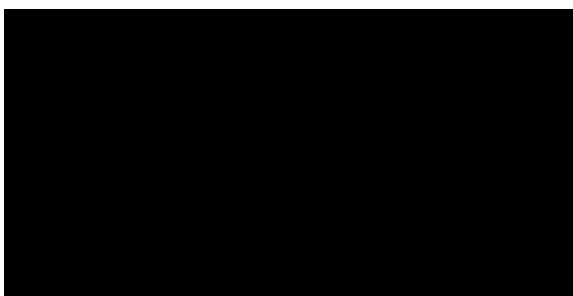
- Partnering with Indigenous communities;
- Working better for Indigenous communities;
- Better data access and sharing; and
- Shared decision-making.

These reforms speak directly to a collaborative approach and co-design model. We commend the value of the design of the ISEP in this regard, as it refocuses investment on local approaches for the development of initiatives and solutions targeted at local issues. Whilst this is an important nuance that acknowledges the unique needs, strengths and interests of each community, we also suggest the following as key to implementation:

- Engagement with Indigenous peoples must be genuine and deep;
- Education and training must be part of the process to support Indigenous peoples into jobs;
- The social and cultural fabric of the community must be embedded into specific projects so that they support the community to develop skill sets across a range of disciplines;
- All programs should have built in Language Literacy and Numeracy (LNN) support and funding, but the focus should be on outcomes in a project and not individual training as it is difficult to achieve scale. If this happens then communities become neglected because increased levels of LLN is the pre-requisite and must be in place before other training can take place;
- The project must have multi pathways and options into employment which can support the ever-changing environment in communities/regions;
- Each community must be viewed as unique in terms of its geographical area and relevant/accessible industries;
- We caution against the one-size-fits-all approach to program design, delivery and evaluation and advocate for detailed programs that suit the communities in which they are co-designed.
- Consideration for culturally appropriate training timelines, potential job share arrangements and work ready care.

We welcome the ISEP and believe it has the potential to impact positively on Indigenous employment outcomes, however it must find the right balance in relation to co-design of distinct programs 'with' Indigenous peoples. Drawing on engagement principles such as those in the Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies Code of Ethics for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Research (the AIATSIS Code) should be the first step to begin the program design and development phase. We believe that when such principles are adopted effectively and in a meaningful way, it will result in robust and targeted programs that have a much better likelihood of successful implementation, and thus, positive impact on employment outcomes for Indigenous peoples in the NT. This would also make a contribution to addressing the workforce demands that continue to increase as industry sectors continue to grow within the NT.

Yours sincerely



Vice-Chancellor and President