

## **Education Policy Reforms of Secondary Education in the Northern Territory**

### **Dr Bill Palmer**

#### **Introduction**

An original study of the Ramsay Committee report entitled *Future Directions for Secondary Education in the Northern Territory (The Secondary Review)* was presented in December 2004 at the ANZCIES National Conference in Melbourne. This was prior to the Northern Territory Government deciding how many of the recommendations of the *Secondary Review* would be implemented and what additional measures would be taken to improve secondary education in the Northern Territory. In February 2005, the Northern Territory Labor Government stated its plans for secondary education. On 18 June, 2005, there was a Northern Territory election in which the main features of the Labor manifesto were economic management, health and education. The Labor government was returned with a greatly increased majority. Currently many features of the government's educational policy are in the early stages of implementation. It should be noted that websites formerly under the *priority education* banner have been replaced by sites labelled *beterschools*. The full text of the *Secondary Review* is still available online as indicated in the references. This paper provides information about the Northern Territory and the *Secondary Review*, the reactions of different interest groups to the *Secondary Review*, specific issues of middle schools, leaning precincts, Indigenous education, the Northern Territory Open Education Centre and senior secondary education. The study of secondary schools in the Northern Territory continues, though the author of this paper remains disappointed that more has not done in Indigenous education by the Northern Territory Government.

#### **Features of the Northern Territory context**

The Northern Territory is the third biggest of the Australian states/ territories with an area of 1,349,129 square kilometres (URL: Area of Australia, States, and Territories). The permanent population of the Northern Territory is about 195,500, which is only 1.0% of the total Australian population (URL: Population by age and sex, Northern Territory). About 59.1 percent of the population lives in the urban centres of Darwin and Alice Springs. There are a number of small towns, such as Katherine, Tennant Creek, Jabiru, Batchelor and Nhulunbuy, where mining was or is the major industry. Approximately 60,000 Indigenous people live in the Northern Territory, about 29% of the Territory's population. Nationally, Indigenous people account for only 2.4% of the total Australian population. Nearly half of the Northern Territory is owned by Aboriginal people compared to the national figure of 14%. (URL: Northern Territory of Australia). The Northern Territory is thus very different to the rest of Australia in its geography and demography.

#### **Background in secondary education.**

The *Secondary Review* (Ramsay, 2004a) provides much of the data needed to understand the Northern Territory situation. For example, the *Review* estimates that 'up to, if not more than 3 500 Indigenous young people in the NT, or more than 20% of the secondary-aged cohort, are not enrolled in secondary school at all' (Ramsay 2004a, p. ix).

Also, an institution called the Northern Territory Open Education Centre (NTOEC) receives considerable criticism in the report; its role is to provide distance education to isolated students in the Territory. Its own web page states: NTOEC is a wonderful school catering not only for students across the whole of the Northern Territory, but interstate and overseas students as well. (URL: NTOEC). This institution has been threatened with closure if the report's recommendations are carried out and has had considerable local support through the columns of the local newspaper. In a short period of time there were six letters in the *NT News* praising the institution and its staff and one criticizing it.

There are less than twenty secondary schools in the Territory and about a third of these are independent schools. However it is the private schools that in general provide boarding for Aboriginal students of secondary age in return for government grants. Aboriginal students of secondary age thus have the choice of leaving their families and attending a boarding school, going to live with relatives in a town, receiving an extended primary education at a community school, or in many cases dropping out altogether. In general, the Northern Territory urban secondary schools in Darwin, Alice Springs, and the major rural centres are similar to secondary schools elsewhere in Australia and in Darwin there is a considerable variety of educational choice. There is one old-established school, whose places are much sought after, one college for years 11 and 12 only, renowned locally for its excellent results, two catholic schools, and two protestant schools and five other state secondary schools, all with fairly small groups in years 11 and 12. Outside Darwin, there are secondary schools in each of the major centres of population; in Alice Springs, there are two private and three state secondary schools. For the past year, one of the Alice Springs campuses (Centralian), which includes higher education, TAFE and senior secondary facilities, has been run by Charles Darwin University. Various international and Australian surveys and examination results give some confidence that standard Australian secondary education for urban students (Lokan, Ford & Greenwood, 1996: 1997) is in reasonable health, though close observers may well find a number of shortcomings.

### **Educational Reports: A Comparative Perspective.**

When enquiring into the educational histories of a number of countries, reports with the names of their chairpersons tend to be prominent and appear to be the vehicles of change that drive and mould educational systems. Yet this is not really so. The author of this paper has lived through a variety of educational changes and has studied many educational reviews. British educational history appears to consist of Royal Commissions and their reports, local government reports and Acts of Parliament. Many of these reports are reactive to events rather than driving change and even those that appear to drive change often only reflect educational consensus. On the other hand, some reports scarcely dent the educational surface. For reports to be effective the politics have to be favourable and the timing of reports in the lifetime of governments is often critical. Usually the person chairing the Royal Commission needs to be closely in tune with the government of the day, otherwise the proposals, however well thought out, will never be enacted into law. It is also worth noting that comparative perspectives can be difficult, as indicated by the following quotation:

One of the key issues occupying educational comparativists is how to find the Ariadne thread to follow among the many discourses, theories, methods, and paradigms that define and challenge the field of Comparative Education.

(Silvestre, 2004)

Kandel expressed a similar view. He believed that:

... education systems do not operate in a vacuum. They are intertwined inextricably with other social and political institutions and very often can best be comprehended by examining the historical, cultural, political, social and economic environments and contexts. (Pollack, 1993, p. 775)

This study of the NT *Secondary Review* can follow only a few of these pathways. The difficulty of covering much detail is obvious from the fact that the report itself covers 343 pages and, with its associated web pages, probably triples that amount. However, the study has a further purpose which is to make the *Review* and the problems that secondary education faces in the Northern Territory more widely known.

There are a number of underlying principles and arguments that relate to educational change. Some relate to what is seen as a moral or national imperative, whilst others relate to political, educational or financial possibilities. Perhaps the idea of action seen as a moral imperative is the one which needs explanation in the context of this paper. The British Education Act of 1944 should be seen as a moral or national imperative (Curtis, 1967, p. 383). This Act was a complete overhaul of a national education system to build a better country for the future at the culmination of a brutally destructive war. Similarly the introduction of Universal Primary Education (UPE) in Nigeria (Bray, 1981; Palmer, 1990) on 6th September, 1976 by the military dictator, General Gowon, can be said to be a moral imperative due to the very low rates of educational enrolment at that time across the whole of Northern Nigeria. Certainly the educational advice was that UPE was impossible to implement and would be a disaster. Eya (2000) quotes Federal Ministry of Education statistics from 1996 (twenty years after the introduction of UPE) to show that only 14.1 million children of school age were enrolled in primary school out of the 21 million children of school age. This is a terrible statistic for those missing out on school, yet a tremendous improvement on 1976. These are examples of actions taken in education because morally they had to be taken. Lack of resources, lack of money, limited administrative capacity, these are generally justifiable reasons for delaying action, but where there is sufficiently strong moral justification, then the action must go ahead.

### **The *Secondary Review***

The Northern Territory Government requested bids for a research consultancy, which was won by a project team consisting of Dr Gregor Ramsey, Prof Mary Ann Bin-Sallik, Prof Ian Falk, Dr Neville Grady, Ms Trish Hansen, Ms Rita Henry, Prof Greg Hill, Ms Annette Jamieson, Ms Liz Wauchope, Ms Metta Young. The consultancy was valued at \$300,000 (URL: Hill). The Project leader was Dr Gregor Ramsey. A number of criticisms of the report relate to the way in which the group collected information and the

atmosphere of conflict which appears to have been engendered. The composition of the project team was strong in the representation of staff of the Northern Territory Department of Education and of Charles Darwin University, but did not have direct input from other stakeholders such as, for example, the Education Unions and the independent schools. It is true that members of report project teams should not necessarily be associated with particular interest groups, but later criticisms from some of these groups does indicate that it might have been prudent to include a wider variety of views. As was pointed out previously the University was also running a secondary school at the time, so the question of conflict of interest arises. The terms of reference (Ramsey, 2004a, pp. 330-331) are included as Appendix 1 to assist the reader to understand government policy in context. These terms of reference were broadly based. The reviewing team were thus compelled to make choices very early on in the planning stages due to the time constraints. Even though there are criticisms of the report, it must be acknowledged that the reviewing team was certainly set a difficult task. Further contextual factors to be considered are previous reports on primary and secondary education within the Territory.

The last report in the Northern Territory on secondary education was *Continuity and change*, which submitted recommendations to government in 1992. It was the work of an Education Advisory Council team (Cameron, 1992) under the chairmanship of Dr J. M. R. Cameron and it followed an earlier major review in 1985. It is interesting to note that the terms of reference of the 1992 review were restricted to three comparatively tightly defined areas and that the composition of the review team was representative in nature. The recent review of secondary education (Ramsey, 2004a, p. 330) states:

Secondary education in the NT was last reviewed in 1991-92, by the Education Advisory Council, although not comprehensively. The focus of that review was on the outcomes of the structural changes introduced to secondary schools in 1986, and whether further changes should be made. It also considered the point at which all urban primary students should transfer to secondary schools. While Government accepted the EAC report '*Continuity and Change*', it did not action the recommendations made. (Ramsey, 2004a, p. 330)

The 1992 report was particularly concerned with how senior classes should be organised between secondary schools. The reasons that it was largely ignored was that politicians believed that implementing the report's recommendations would harm their electoral chances. The lack of attention to the 1992 report in the 2004 secondary review may indicate that the educational centre of public attention has moved over the past twelve years from the upper years of secondary education to the middle years. Failure to give sufficient attention to senior secondary school issues may prove to be a serious weakness of the 2004 *Secondary Review*.

Another recent and important Northern Territory Education Report is the *Collins Report (Learning lessons. an independent review of Indigenous education in the Northern Territory)* (Collins & Lea, 1999). This report presented 150 recommendations, many of which closely linked health and educational outcomes for Indigenous people; the Northern Territory Government is slowly implementing many of these recommendations.

The government's policy in implementing the Collins report can be found concisely stated online (URL: Indigenous Education Strategic Plan, 2000-2004). In view of the direction taken by the Collins report in linking health and education, it was expected that the *Secondary Review* would strongly take up its principles, applying its lessons to secondary education, yet this connection does not figure strongly in the review.

### **Preview and Government Action**

The author of this paper wrote prior to the review suggesting that the major issues to concern the Review Panel should be: schooling in the Aboriginal communities; the possibility of developing middle schools; Year 11 & 12 schools and teacher numbers. The first item is vital:

There is an obvious crying need for the development of secondary education for all Northern Territory pupils of secondary age. I believe the attempt at equity of provision for rural Aboriginal students has to be made, but the path to equity is likely to be a rocky one. (Palmer, 2004)

The schooling of all children to Year 10 regardless of race and geographic location was the main item on the agenda before the review and remains so after the review. The fact that not all children in the Northern Territory receive secondary education is something of which all Australians should be ashamed. The fact that the review does make some attempt to grapple with this is its major positive feature. However, it provides only three recommendations (19, 20 and 21) specific to Indigenous needs, though other recommendations could contribute towards secondary education for all. Briefly, recommendation 19 is flawed, recommendation 20 could be helpful, and the aims of recommendation 21 were not assisted by the actions of the review team when they visited the boarding schools referred to in the recommendation, as the boarding schools are independent institutions. Many rural community schools are failing badly, not through any fault of the excellent staff who work hard in difficult circumstances, but through factors such as a lack of resources, distance and lack of housing. Indigenous students at these schools have problems of health (Otitis media, for example), attendance and motivation. It seems obvious that education will not solve these problems on its own and that some sort of integrated action between the various branches of government will be the only way of improving the life-chances of the Indigenous peoples. The review team's approach to the solution of these problems appears to be the creation of school precincts and middle schools. An alternative view is that there are quicker, cheaper and more effective ways of solving the major social injustice. This view forms the basis of the author's criticism of the review.

### **Critiques of the Review from different interest groups**

Some criticisms of the report indicated below were gathered during many hours of attendance at meetings where the secondary review was discussed. A variety of sources have been used such as information from public meetings, the report itself and related web pages, the Council of Government School Organisations (COGSO) evaluation, letters to the *Northern Territory News* and private opinions expressed outside these sources.

A. The composition of the team. On occasions the review team did not appear to act as a team, though only those within the team could confirm this. It is not certain that all the team saw all the report prior to publication. If this were so, it might indicate a lack of confidence in its final conclusions.

B. The relationship of the team to the broader community. The team appeared to go out of its way to antagonise those who might otherwise have been supportive. A variety of criticisms are mentioned below, but in general the review team showed a lack of respect for those wishing to contribute to a successful outcome. Some of the alleged gaffes made by the review team and the faults of process are mentioned below.

C. The Northern Territory Institute of Educational Research (NTIER). NTIER thought educational research played too small a role in validating conclusions and there seemed to be no consistent methodology. This was the general view of those who read the report.

D. The Charles Darwin University School of Education. The first meeting with those in the Charles Darwin University School of Education was very badly managed by the Chair of the Review, with the Chair indicating that he thought teacher educators could contribute little to the process of the review. Certainly the School of Education at Charles Darwin University was virtually excluded from the deliberations of the team in spite of their expertise in the area.

E. Independent schools. In the Territory, four independent schools share the major responsibility for educating Indigenous students who do not have secondary education available in their communities. These Indigenous students receive education whilst they board at the schools. The schools are reimbursed through the Federal and Territory governments. Given this situation, it was interesting to note that one of the independent school's representatives expressed the feeling that their views were not valued by the review team. It also seemed that the leader of the review team at a joint meeting was unclear as to the way in which the review would affect independent schools.

F. The Northern Territory Open Education. The staff at the Northern Territory Open Education Centre (NTOEC) was evidently not treated with courtesy when they were visited. They were deeply offended by the conclusion that their institution should be closed, as the evidence is that the community values their work. The disestablishment of NTOEC was strongly opposed by NTOEC and many parents.

G. Union concerns. The unions (Education) were worried about the report because they felt that the chair's previous track record was anti-union, though this was denied. Union members in the Northern Territory expressed misgivings about the effect that the review might have on pay, on increased administrative loads and on the effects of age at which students start secondary school. They were also very concerned about the possible removal of school councils.

H. The Registration Board. The newly established Registration Board was worried that much good work would be lost because it would be disestablished if the report's recommendations were implemented.

I. Parents. Some parents did not like the suggested age changes on the system and the removal of school councils.

J. Primary school teachers. Those in primary schools felt that they had not been able to voice an opinion on middle schools. This was a problem as the report effectively decided that the senior year of primary education (year 7) would go into the newly created middle schools and the year 10 students would move to senior secondary school leaving a 6:3:3 structure (Primary 6 years: middle school 3 years: upper senior 3 years). This system has been widely adopted, for example in Nigeria.

K. Other views. Others are disappointed that the report did not make even more dramatic change to the secondary system. As soon as education is discussed there is a wide variety of opinion, yet comparatively few of the views have overwhelming evidence to support them.

A widespread view was that the report would need considerable modification if the disparate criticisms of the report threatened to derail it completely. The team and its actions had offended major parts of the Northern Territory educational community. In the end, Government did not implement many of the report's recommendations.

### **Some Issues: Middle Schools and Learning Precincts**

There is little educational evidence to indicate that any one division of the grouping K-12 is better than another. Around the world, there are a variety of educational systems, some with and some without middle schools. The idea of precincts is a good one in as far as it involves co-operation between schools. However the team asserts that the model of school precincts chosen has a proven track record, which is not the case.

What one can be fairly sure about is that if much of money or resources spent on buildings or additional layers of bureaucracy will not necessarily produce improved educational outcomes. What is needed is improving the resources for teacher education (under great stress at the moment) increasing teacher's salaries, so that the people to carry out the task are available, etc. In other words, it is people involved in education who need support, rather than building programs.

Middle schools As background to the question of whether a separate stage of schooling called 'Middle schools' should be established, it can be pointed out that the system has been tried and widely embraced in a number of countries. For example, in 1968, when the London Borough of Merton underwent a reorganization of its educational system, as a part of this comprehensive reorganization it introduced a system of middle schools. This reform was planned in detail and well executed, with a minimum of new building. Thus the idea of middle schools is hardly new. The age range of middle schools in Merton was very different to that suggested in the Northern Territory. It is also noticeable that some

local education authorities (l.e.a.s) in the United Kingdom have taken up middle schooling and others have not. Strangely the system of middle schools suggested is nearest to senior and junior secondary schools, which is almost a retreat to the 1990s system in the Northern Territory. One reason for implementing a 6:3:3 structure, is that it is said to be cheaper to run, as costs per student in middle schools are lower than those in secondary schools. It is true that the sharing of resources using a system of school precincts (see below) might reduce these differences, but the *Secondary Review* provided very limited information on costs of implementation.

Learning precincts The *Secondary Review* makes the establishment of learning precincts a major feature of the report. The sections on learning precincts may be found in Chapters 6 & 7 (pages 109-158). Chapter 6 has four associated recommendations and Chapter 7 has two associated recommendations. These recommendations are divided into many subsections, but leave the definition of learning precincts vague, the background research largely unquote and the size, school population, and composition of learning precincts as a matter for future decision. The haziness of the scheme was illustrated by a website, now defunct, which was the summary of the report prepared for those not wishing to read *Future Directions for Secondary Education in the Northern Territory* in its entirety. Palmer (2005) stated:

The reader will note that assertions about possible benefits of the recommendations in this web page abound, as they do throughout the report. The problem is that these general answers which appear to indicate what learning precincts will deliver, may well have disappeared if and when the report disappears and no one will have evidence of what was promised. (Palmer, 2005)

Currently the original web pages referred to above have disappeared and have been replaced by the more balanced summary of the community consultation (Learning Precincts, 2005). A letter (Ramsey, 1994b) by the Chair of the Review warned of the dangers of 'unfounded assertion', which he claimed existed in another letter (Anon, 2004) written to the *Northern Territory News*. Ramsey claimed that the debate needed to be based on 'thorough reading of the review report' as opposed to 'unfounded assertion'. The report, the related web pages and the letters to the *Northern Territory News* all contain unfounded assertions. Whose assertions are right? Unfounded assertion is the weakness of the report, because its authors have not undertaken thorough educational research on at least some significant parts of the problems of secondary reorganization. Various earlier web pages, (now defunct), consisted of many assertions about learning precincts, some of which were of dubious validity. Assertions to be credible need the evidence on which they are based.

It is true however that many Northern Territory secondary schools are small and there are apparent advantages in grouping them together in some way. However, no administrative fiat can change the geography of the Northern Territory and make the large distances between rural schools closer or improve the state of the roads linking them. In other words the practical problems in many situations will tend to make this administrative arrangement ineffectual for some proposed precincts. Later it is argued that greater



formality of links would be an advantage to schools; this is a typically bureaucratic argument. The truth is probably that there will be advantages in some cases and not in others. The Council of Government School Organisations (COGSO) commented in a similar vein on the secondary review in general and on learning precincts in particular in section 4 (COGSO, 2004, pp. 17–22) and provides a useful summary (COGSO, 2004, pp. 48-49). The COGSO evaluation was well written and modest in its approach. The COGSO evaluation criticized the learning precincts section of the report on the grounds that learning precincts are expensive, unnecessary and untested and that the probability is that better results could be obtained with the current system if the proposed increases in resources were available.

The community consultation after the review took all these points into account (URL: Learning Precincts, 2005) concluding that the community generally had not been convinced of the value of learning precincts

Overall, the responses on Learning Precincts are negative. It was summarised by ANTSEL [the Association of Northern Territory School Educational Leaders] as, “At this stage we do not believe that Learning Precincts will make sufficient difference to learning outcomes. (URL Learning Precincts- section 9.5)

However, the community is cynical about how a restructure will deliver better educational outcomes. The community is also concerned that many logistical issues, such as transporting of teachers and students, have not been thought through in considering how Learning Precincts can work in a practical sense. Many have commented about how ‘they just cannot see how it can work’.  
(URL Learning Precincts- section 9.5)

In the end the Government response in February, 2005 dropped the idea of learning precincts. The issue caused such a furore with so little purpose that the cynical may wonder if was a ‘a straw man’ and was never really a serious practical proposition.

The review proposed disestablishing the distance education centre (NTOEC) in Darwin as a way of providing staffing for the precincts. Precincts have not been established so NTOEC remains with expanded functions.

Palmer (2005) considered that implementation should involve:

- (i) government increasing support for human resources rather than buildings.
- (ii) government moving slowly and purposefully into establishing learning precincts.
- (iii) government support for existing successful institutions (For example NTOEC)

Even Dr Ramsey had modified his views on learning precincts by the end of 2004:

It would be wise not to put precincts up across all of the Territory, but they should be put where people want them. They are a suggestion. (Ramsey, 2004c)

However since learning precincts were central to the report and were to be implemented through legislation within six months of the acceptance of the report (Recommendation 14), this was certainly a volte-face. It can perhaps be assumed that the change was perhaps a retreat to save some recommendations from the wreckage.

### **Senior Secondary Education**

As stated earlier, Charles Darwin University became the owner of the Centralian Campus in Alice Springs in early 2004, with facilities worth \$14 million and became responsible for its activities, including running the only government senior secondary school in Alice Springs. The horse now seems to have bolted here as well. The headlines state 'School still public: community worries put brakes on merger' (King, 2004, p. 2). More attention to the 1992 Education Review and its lack of results could have helped the current review. It is sad but true that politicians will respond to pressures by parents and teachers of year 11 and 12 students more readily than to most other sectors of the community. King, (2004, p.2) also reports several views of interested parties and the Minister, Syd Stirling. The outcome is probably a victory for the education union whose members want nothing to do with the management style of Charles Darwin University. Presumably the assets must now be returned to the Northern Territory Government. The situation in Alice Springs may change the ownership and running of the senior secondary college planned for the University campus at Palmerston. The feature to which some attention needs to be drawn is that the secondary review team, some of whom hold senior positions in the university failed to see the problems that must arise or because of their positions ignored them. This is typical conflict of interest scenario. The Minister, Syd Stirling, is quoted as saying:

It was found that there were a number of difficulties in merging secondary education delivery with CDU, including different staff recruitment processes, the potential professional isolation of teaching staff, different IT systems, a potential lack of input from the school council and different policies on school fees.

(Syd Stirling as quoted King, 2004, p. 2)

Why did the secondary review team fail to see these predictable features that would be labelled as the cause of the failure of CDU's attempt to run a multi-level institution harmoniously? Would not some of these difficulties, mentioned by the Minister (above) be similar to the sorts of problems that may arise when running any educational precinct? The documented instance of the Centralian Campus is an example of foreseeable difficulties of trying to force co-operation bureaucratically.

### **Events move on: 2005**

A letter to the *Northern Territory News* (Niemoller, 2004), prior to the Territory election, made the political point very clearly that the writer would not vote for the government if they implemented some parts of the report. There was considerable speculation that the report would not be implemented in its entirety, as some recommendations were electorally unpopular. However the Northern Territory Government proved politically astute. The various public consultations all over the Territory were generally well handled. After considering the report and the public's reaction to it, the Minister for

Education, Syd Stirling, announced the government's education policy on 8 February, 2005. (Hinde, 2005, p. 6; Betterschools, 2005). The amount of additional money promised was \$42 million over four years, a modest increase on the amount that is currently spent. In general terms, it is probably fair to say that the Government carefully picked items from the report to be implemented. In particular it chose items that were unlikely to be an electoral liability.

For example, NTOEC has not been closed, but its responsibilities have been widened and its funding increased with the addition of \$1.87 million to amalgamate NTOEC, Katherine School of the Air and Alice Springs School of the Air (Hinde, 2005, p. 6). Staff at the institution and the public who they serve will now feel vindicated after the savaging that NTOEC received at the hands of the *Secondary Review*. The minister in a recent report to the Northern Territory Parliament does acknowledge the contribution of review in pointing out the weaknesses in distance education.

The Ramsay report into secondary education identified clear weaknesses in the delivery of distance education [sic: education] in the Territory, particularly the need to coordinate existing distance education services and resources. While we have not proceeded with his recommendation of abolishing the Northern Territory Open Education Centre, there is a major review of all of our distance education providers under way. It is our intention to create a distance education centre of excellence that will best meet needs of remote students. (URL: Hansard, 2005)

One major item in the additional expenditure by government was to provide a school counsellor for each secondary school at a cost of \$15.39 million (Hinde, 2005, p.6). This decision is in agreement with one of the recommendations of the review (Recommendation 13a, p. xxiii) 'to make provision so that every secondary school has a counsellor or access to a counsellor to meet the social and emotional needs of students'. Yet although this is the second highest cost item of additional expenditure, it could not be said to be the major concern of the report.

The highest cost item budgeted for in the additional expenditure was to improve Indigenous education by providing more teachers in remote schools and more support services at a total cost of \$15.84 million over four years (Hinde, 2005, p.6). Taken together with the additional expenditure on NTOEC and the general service provisions, the remote community schools will certainly benefit considerably from the minister's statements, the increased expenditure and the on-the-ground improvements that have certainly taken place in the last six months. Nonetheless, policy for indigenous education has been quietly and sensibly improved, but it has not taken a quantum leap demanded as a moral imperative so that it can be said that all young people in the Northern Territory can even start education.

The most positive feature of the *Secondary Review* has that the general public has been more interested and involved in the issues relating to secondary education than at any time in the past ten years.

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## **APPENDIX 1**

### **Terms of Reference (Appendix A of report, pp. 330-331)**

The consultant is required to undertake full consultation with all stakeholder groups, and investigate secondary education provision in other Australian jurisdictions, and internationally as appropriate, in order to

1. produce a profile of the secondary student cohort in the Northern Territory and current urban and non-urban education provision for them, including associated resourcing and support systems, and determine the appropriateness, effectiveness and efficiency of this provision in meeting the diverse educational needs of secondary students in the NT
2. assess the comparability of the outcomes achieved by urban and remote secondary students within the Territory, and the outcomes of NT students with those of students in other jurisdictions
3. review existing policy, planning procedures and accountability measures for secondary education provision in the NT, and make recommendations for improvement
4. identify and assess internal and external impacts on current and future secondary education provision in the NT, and make recommendations for ways to address these
5. identify opportunities for expanding pathways, particularly through Vocational Education and Training (VET), and for improving student retention rates
6. identify options for future secondary education provision that will lead to improved outcomes, and meet the expectations of stakeholders
7. prepare plans that detail implementation strategies for these options, and identify associated resource implications.