The post–World War Two period to 1978

As a result of the bombing of Australia’s north by the Imperial Japanese Navy, a new political motivation to develop and populate the region replaced the three decades of neglect that had been the hallmark of the Commonwealth’s early administration of the Northern Territory. With most of Darwin’s pre-war population of 2,000 evacuated to the south, military government was introduced for the duration of the war. The civil administration of the portion of the Territory not under martial law was conducted from Alice Springs until the end of the war. In the final years of World War Two, the Commonwealth took renewed measures to build a sustainable economy and increase the European population of the north with the establishment of an Interdepartmental Committee on the Development of Darwin and the Northern Territory in 1944 and the creation of the North Australia Development Committee in 1945 (National Archives of Australia 2014a). The advancement of Northern Australia has re-emerged as a major public agenda item with the election of the Coalition Government in 2013. This serves to demonstrate the longevity of some ideas, particularly the desire to develop the north being rediscovered by a new generation of politicians.

With the return to civilian control and governance still provided by the Administrator—who was responsible for the implementation of ministerial decisions made in Canberra—the final three decades of Commonwealth management of Territory affairs demonstrate a glacially paced evolution of constitutional development leading to the local exercise of state-type functions as described in the Australian Constitution. The first section
of this chapter describes the implementation of legal structures and processes, before turning to the use of vocational education and training in the social and economic improvement of this still problematic territory.

The Commonwealth continued with experiments in political structures and processes in response to demands from Territorians for a greater say in the governance of the jurisdiction; a deep distrust of the intentions of Territorians on the part of Commonwealth bureaucrats and politicians; and an Administrator’s office that had grown comfortable with applying a British colonial style of management to the Northern Territory. A partial return to the rule of parliamentary democracy, eliminated with the handover from South Australian governance to the Commonwealth, was made possible by the creation of the Legislative Council in 1947.

This council consisted of six elected members representing vast geographical divisions of the Territory and seven official members who were mostly drawn from the senior public servants based in Darwin. The council was presided over by the Administrator—it had the power to make ordinances for ‘the peace, order and good government’ of the Territory subject to assent by the Administrator or the pleasure of the Governor-General, both being highly responsive to the policies and pragmatics of the Commonwealth Government of the day. This Legislative Council met for the first time in 1948. Heatley (1979) reports that the parliamentary processes of the Legislative Council were characterised by an absence of party politics, having been replaced by continual bickering between the elected members seeking greater influence, and official members that were reluctant to release their grip on public finances and staff:

Once on the Council, the chances of re-election depended upon the success of its members in promoting or defending the interests of their electorates, in supporting the Territory’s constitutional, social and economic progress and in attacking the bureaucracy’s handling of Territory affairs (Heatley 1979, p. 55).

In 1958, the member for the Northern Territory in the House of Representatives was allowed to vote on any proposed law or matter relating solely to the Territory. In the following year, the official members of the Legislative Council lost their hold on the majority of positions when the composition was altered to eight elected members, six official members and three non-official members appointed by the Governor-General. In 1968, the Administrator was replaced as President of the Legislative Council by an elected member. The non-official seats were redesignated in
1968 making the composition of the Legislative Council 11 elected and six official members. At the national level, the member for the Northern Territory in the House of Representatives was granted full voting rights that same year.

Figure 9. The first Legislative Council, 16 February 1948.
Seated, left to right: JN Nelson (Stuart), JG McGlashan (Chief Medical Officer), WS Flynn (Acting Deputy Crown Solicitor) AR Driver (President), M Luke (Darwin) RW Coxon (Director of Mines), FC Hopkins (Darwin); standing, left to right: A Turner (Acting Clerk), RS Leydin (Government Secretary), LC Lucas (Director of Works), VH Webster (Tennant Creek), FH Moy (Director of Native Affairs), RC Ward (Alice Springs), HC Barclay (Director of Lands), W Fulton (Batchelor), DRM Thompson (Clerk).
Source: Creator Unknown. PH0120/0060, N Gleeson Collection, Northern Territory Library.

Finally, in 1974, a fully elected Legislative Assembly of 19 members was established. In addition, federal legislation was passed to give Territorians two Senators in the 1975 Australian Government elections. The overall result was a return to state-type parliamentary government and a voice in both the House of Representatives and the Senate that had been in place (albeit via South Australia) prior to the handover in 1911. The constitutional development of the Northern Territory during this latter period of Commonwealth control climaxed in the introduction of limited powers to a Northern Territory Executive (similar to a government ministry) from 1974–78. It was this Territory Executive that negotiated and planned the transition to self-government.
Post-war, the Commonwealth Government retained its newly found wartime enthusiasm for the use of formal training to support individual skills acquisition that would lead to employment, generating consumption of goods and an overall improvement to the national economy. The Commonwealth’s position was clearly laid out in Prime Minister Curtin’s 1945 *White Paper on Full Employment* (Coombs 1994). At the national level, public policy at the end of World War Two positioned vocational education and training as a vital component of Australia’s social and economic well-being, a stance that has not substantially altered since, regardless of which political party has been in office. However, the Commonwealth’s activity in social welfare areas that had been reserved to the states was challenged by constitutional experts even though both the state and federal governments were supportive. The bipartisan consent for Federal Government funding of social welfare benefits was reaffirmed and explicitly formalised in 1946 when the Australian Constitution was amended through the torturous national referendum process. In response
to a ruling by the High Court calling into question the Australian Government’s ability to fund certain programs, this amendment removed any doubt by allowing the Australian Parliament:

- to make laws for the provision of maternity allowances, widow’s pensions, child endowment, unemployment, sickness and hospital benefits, medical and dental services, benefits to students and family allowances (Commonwealth of Australia 1946, p. 587).

Unlike the Reconstruction Training Scheme, this amendment to the constitution substantially increased the Commonwealth’s reach into the socioeconomic lives of citizens and would have major impacts in the Northern Territory. During the parliamentary debates on this alteration to the Commonwealth’s responsibilities, the ‘benefits to students’ phrase was singled out for attention. The Federal Manpower Minister Barnard spoke in favour of inclusion because Australia had subscribed to the 1944 International Labour Organization recommendations and ‘the assurance of equality of educational and vocational opportunities’ served as a major rationale for the amendment to the constitution (Commonwealth of Australia 1946, p. 992). In reflecting upon the history of Commonwealth support that allowed ‘basic-wage-earning families’ access to higher education in Western Australia, the Member for Fremantle Mr Beazley pointed out that ‘benefits to students have been used as a means of social transformation and has democratised the universities’ (Commonwealth of Australia 1946, p. 1025); to which the Member for the Northern Territory, Mr Blain, queried ‘is the University of Western Australia as full of “commos” as those in Melbourne and Sydney’?

At the resumption of the debate four days later, Mr Blain (Commonwealth of Australia 1946, pp. 1170–1171) supported the provision of a free university education as long as matriculation was used to ‘cull’ entrants to ensure that education was not wasted upon those without ‘the necessary talent to continue them to the end’—those without this talent should ‘learn a trade at the age of 15 years and later have taken their places in the community’. Mr Blain was concerned that if education is given to too many people:

we shall have a community of democratic idealists and misguided intellectuals who will be a menace to the country. The true unionist, the craftsman, is the salt of the earth while the democratic idealists poison the minds of people when they turn to pseudo-sciences such as economics (Commonwealth of Australia 1946, p. 1171).
Of the 44 proposed amendments to the Australian Constitution that have gone to referendum, the 1946 Social Services Amendment is one of only eight to have met the requirements for change, including support from both houses of the national parliament, an absolute majority of voters nationally as well as a majority of votes in the majority of states. The peculiar Australian attachment to colonial socialism has surfaced yet again, this time with support from across the political spectrum to promote government involvement in areas that had previously been the domain of philanthropic activity. Familiar arguments were used to justify this incursion—those to do with social and economic improvement, equality, humanity and the promotion of democracy and the related rights of citizens. The provision of ‘benefits to students’ who undertake education and training programs allowed the Commonwealth Government to behave like the British philanthropists of the previous century by devising schemes to promote access to these services in the name of equity.

The Commonwealth Government’s interest in education and training did not take long to find its way into Northern Territory political calculations with the post-war return of civilian administration along with the resumption of popularly elected representation in a local legislative body. The inaugural piece of legislation passed in the first session of the newly formed Legislative Council was the Apprentice Bill 1948—partly because this ordinance was considered to be ‘non-controversial’ (Northern Territory of Australia 1948, p. 88). ‘The purpose of the bill is to set up machinery whereby apprentices may be trained in a proper and regularised manner’ (Northern Territory of Australia 1948, p. 92). This ‘entirely new venture’ for the Northern Territory would address the general scarcity of trained tradesmen and ‘also help to keep lads within the Territory because they will not be forced to go to the Southern States to qualify for trades they wish to follow’ (Northern Territory of Australia 1948, p. 90). The legislation provided for a four-person Apprentices Board to oversee the use of South Australian correspondence lessons augmented by visits from the supervisor of technical correspondence. Northern Territory Administration workshops and machinery were used for training due to the absence of dedicated vocational education and training facilities while the Board also employed staff to monitor employment conditions of the apprentices. The Director of Works and official member, Mr Lucas, enthused, ‘I agree that this is one of the best things that can happen in the Territory’ (Northern Territory of Australia 1948, p. 91). The fledgling Northern Territory politicians, with the wholehearted support of the Commonwealth bureaucrats and trade
unions, believed that bringing vocational education and training under the control of a government body was a very high priority and important contributor to social and economic development. Although the local politicians wanted to have control over vocational training, they did not want to be responsible for the actual delivery. They followed a precedent that had been set by the missionaries’ philanthropic use of training—they outsourced it. This contracting out of the delivery of training by the Northern Territory Government is still in force today.

A few years later, the ‘common sense’ logic of training for employment would also take over the space that had been occupied by the missionaries undertaking their philanthropic activities in the Aboriginal communities. The Legislative Council enacted the *Welfare Ordinance 1953* (Northern Territory of Australia 1960) that, following the Administrator’s assent, created the Welfare Branch and gave its director a range of powers over those declared to be wards of the state. These responsibilities included the promotion of:

> their social, economic and political advancement for the purpose of assisting them and their descendants to take their rightful place as members of the community of the Commonwealth (Northern Territory of Australia 1960, p. 2309).

This was to be achieved through a variety of educational, medical, housing and social interventions into their lives including:

> to arrange for their vocational training and to obtain suitable employment for them in industrial and other enterprises and for this purpose to establish and maintain a liaison with appropriate organisations (Northern Territory of Australia 1960, p. 2310).

While in theory any person in the Northern Territory could be made a ward, Aboriginal Territorians were the target of the legislation. Following a detailed census of the entire Indigenous population of the Northern Territory that was completed in 1956, all but six full-blood Aborigines were included in the so-called ‘stud book’ that ran to 272 pages listing each ward’s district, European name, tribal or personal name, group, tribe, sex, year of birth and subdistrict. This register of wards was abandoned in 1964 and Aboriginal people were progressively brought into mainstream social welfare programs.
As a result of the Welfare Ordinance, the Commonwealth Government developed a new interest in the work of the missions and began establishing its own settlements throughout the Northern Territory following World War Two. This heralded the beginning of more direct government provision of public funding to the missions to replace the private philanthropy that had sustained their work for almost 70 years. The missionaries that would come to work in the new settlements, such as the Baptists at Yuendumu, Hooker Creek (Lajamanu) and Warrabri (Ali Curung), would be more focused upon spreading the Christian faith within Indigenous culture and less concerned with the provision of vocational training (Jordan 1999). From 1952, according to Baker (2012), Commonwealth funding for the Methodist Missions in Arnhem Land was channelled through the recently established Welfare Branch of the Northern Territory Administration ‘with the new emphasis on the Aborigine as an individual and with increased demands for welfare and training’, leading to the Church seeking even greater levels of government monies. Along with the public funds came the inevitable demands for more government bureaucratic control over the use of the resources.

The Ward’s Employment Ordinance of 1953 provided more protection for Aboriginal workers (as wards of the Territory) and an Employment Advisory Board was also established. The ordinance permitted wards to be apprenticed and included provisions allowing for part of the ward’s wage to be placed into a trust account administered by the Director of the Welfare Branch. ‘Provisions were set down for training, employment and assistance to wards. The director decided the suitability of wards for training and the type of training they would receive’ (Baker 2012). For a brief period, the missions argued for and won an exemption from the Ward’s Employment Ordinance on the grounds that they were not employers but providers of welfare and training. However, this exception was revoked in 1963 giving those Aborigines living on the missions the same opportunities and scope for training as those living in other parts of the Territory:

From 1951 until the introduction of the government funded Training Wages Scheme in 1969, The Church Synod set rates of pay. A portion of the wage subsidy received by the missions paid for the missionaries and the rest of the subsidy money was used to finance more mission employees and to pay Indigenous workers (Baker 2012, p. 142).
The gradual increase of government-directed funding and the implementation of national industrial award wages and conditions through the 1960s spelled the effective end of the missionaries being the sole providers of philanthropically inspired vocational education and training to Indigenous Territorians. In a description of the intended outcomes of vocational instruction in this period (Working party on vocational training for Aboriginals in the Northern Territory 1973, p. 2), it is noted that ‘settlements and missions in the Northern Territory were regarded primarily as training centres to promote social change amongst Aboriginals’. The Aborigines were being instructed on the need to work to get money to buy food and other things rather than a traditional lifestyle: ‘this is the primary and complex lesson for the Aboriginal to learn’ (Working party on vocational training for Aboriginals in the Northern Territory 1973, p. 2). In addition to the work on missions and settlements, a Central Training Establishment operated in Darwin from 1959 and a small-scale vocational training centre operated at Batchelor in the late 1960s using the facilities taken over from the Australian Atomic Energy Commission that had become idle due to the cessation of uranium mining at nearby Rum Jungle.

Figure 11. Mission Aboriginals [sic] working in a carpentry shop, May 1968.
Source: Creator Unknown. PH0139/1599, Northern Territory Department of Lands Collection, Northern Territory Library.
The transition of training Northern Territory Aborigines from private philanthropic provision to government responsibility provides a clear example of the Commonwealth’s willingness to use the jurisdiction as a social laboratory. The lack of training capacity on the part of the Federal Government and its purposeful decision to leave adult and vocational training to the states has already been described. However, that did not stop the Commonwealth from effectively taking over training from the missionaries in the pursuit of population control and socioeconomic development. Training became an essential pillar of the Commonwealth’s policies for the assimilation of Indigenous people into mainstream society.

Assimilation was built upon the rather simplistic belief that in order to survive and prosper ‘the Aborigines must live and work and think as white Australians do so that they can take their place in social, economic and political equality with the rest of the Australian community’ based upon social rather than racial principles (Minister for Territories 1958, p. 1). The *Assimilation of Our Aborigines* is a small booklet that describes the new national policy and proposes that ‘education programmes should aim at preparing Aborigines for suitable employment according to local circumstances’ (Minister for Territories 1958, p. 2). In describing the work of the Commonwealth and its replacement of missionary philanthropy, the Minister for Territories (1958, p. 3) proudly recounts that in 1949 there was only one government Aboriginal school in the Territory with 20 pupils and that by 1958 this had grown to 1,850 pupils enrolled in 27 schools. Hart (1970, p. 197) provides a rather more prosaic rationale for the Northern Territory Administration Welfare Branch’s takeover of the education of full-blood Aboriginals being due to the refusal of the South Australian Department of Education to enrol Aboriginal students into the Territory schools it was engaged to operate on behalf of the Commonwealth Office of Education. South Australia furnished staff and curricula for schools, apprenticeship training and adult education in the Northern Territory under contract to the Commonwealth from 1 January 1945 until 1972 (National Archives of Australia 2014a; Urvett 1982).

‘The training of Aboriginals for suitable employment and establishing them in industries is a major aspect of assimilation’ (Minister for Territories 1958, p. 4). The Northern Territory Ward’s Employment Ordinance provided for the full educational needs of Aboriginals up to and beyond university level and, in addition, provided for up to £1,000 for individuals to establish economic enterprises of various kinds. The
take up and success rates of these two measures are not described. Two years later, the rationale for the policy of assimilation is further elaborated in *The Skills of Our Aborigines*:

The philosophical basis of Aboriginal society is rather too fragile to withstand the stresses of social change; there are no suitable Aboriginal institutions that can easily be used as a basis for community growth (Acting Minister for Territories 1960, p. 19).

‘The Commonwealth Government and the various State Governments, with the help of Christian Missions, are now guiding and helping Australian Aborigines towards their proper place in the world’ (Acting Minister for Territories 1960, p. 21) and this was being done in the Northern Territory through the provision of vocational and other training to both children and adults who were deemed to be able to benefit from it. Hart (1970, Appendix E) recounts the ‘Philosophy of Aboriginal Education’ that had been adopted by the Welfare Branch of the Northern Territory Administration: ‘in deciding upon an educational programme which will meet the needs of the Aboriginal population we need a basic philosophy; the Government’s policy is that of assimilation’. In describing the theoretical basis for programs of assimilation, Elsey (1986, p. 89) relates it to ‘an eugenic ideology’ where ‘the social strata that exist are simply outcomes of different endowed abilities’. This interpretation is based upon ideas of individualism, *laissez faire* and residual welfare where the impoverished are seen as a burden to society. The official policy of assimilation remained in place in the Northern Territory until 1973, when all schooling and adult education was brought under the control of the Commonwealth Department of Education Northern Territory Division. In particular, vocational education and training for Aborigines became ‘mainstreamed’ at this time and was to be guided by principles of self-management aligned with a community development approach to training (Strike 1981, p. 26).

The assumption of complete responsibility for vocational education and training by the Commonwealth in the 1970s marks the end of the missionaries’ exclusive philanthropic use of training for the envisaged project of improvement aimed at Aboriginal people in the Northern Territory. Although the Independent Schools Association and Nungalinya College still provide some training for Indigenous Territorians, they are funded on the same basis as all other providers and are subject to government procurement processes and quality arrangements.
Vocational education and training as a tool of social control and population conduct had become completely dominated by the state by the mid-1970s due to its superior funding capacity and will to train people.

Having described the transition of vocational education and training from its roots in British middle-class philanthropy and its initial use as a technique to change Aboriginal society, it is now time to examine how training would be positioned as an important consideration in the post-war development of the Northern Territory and for those residents who were not subject to the *Welfare Ordinance*. As described previously, prior to and including World War Two, vocational training was not formally supplied to Northern Territory residents for two major reasons: the population was too small, and a more general incapacity on the part of the Commonwealth to intervene in and deliver services that were constitutionally reserved to the states at the time of Federation. However, following World War Two, the Commonwealth became more active in workplace skills formation as a result of the war time experience of training through the Army Education Service (Whitelock 1974); the report of the Walker committee, which found adult education to be an important national economic concern (Tannock 1976); Prime Minister Curtin’s *White Paper on Full Employment* (Coombs 1994); and the Social Services Amendment to the Constitution. The following will concentrate upon adult education and apprenticeships—the two areas that would eventually be combined and recognised as Technical and Further Education (TAFE) in 1974 and then be rebadged as ‘vocational education and training’ in 1992.

The very first attempts by the Commonwealth Government for the provision of adult education in the Northern Territory were planned to commence in 1951 with two mobile vans, one in Central Australia and one in the Top End, fitted out with the modern technologies such as film projectors, sound systems and musical recordings to supplement their small mobile libraries. Berzins and Loveday (1999, p. 2) report that the Territory’s Administrator in 1950, AR Driver, said that ‘adult education was not yet absolutely necessary’ and that the Assistant Supervisor of Education (NT Schools), LC Dodd, ‘doubted whether adult education should be undertaken in the Territory’. The original plan for the use of the mobile vans was dropped altogether in 1951 in response to the Administrator’s views.
In the meantime, Administrator Driver had approved the introduction of evening classes in Alice Springs in April 1950. These lessons would allow students to reach the South Australian intermediate level of secondary schooling. In the following year, Darwin was given approval by Driver for supervised apprenticeship study to support the correspondence courses from South Australia as well as other courses in typing, shorthand, French and subjects leading to public service employment (Berzins & Loveday 1999, p. 2). In 1949 the Apprenticeships Board commenced formally regulating apprentices and by 1953 there were 33 apprentices under indenture in the entire Territory (Wilson & Estbergs 1984, p. 43). By 1954, all of the educational provision for Darwin’s 9,000 residents was delivered through the Darwin Higher Primary School, which incorporated the Adult Education Centre operating under the direction of its part-time registrar who was also the school’s headmaster (Giese 1990, p. 1).

Because of the contractual links to South Australia for the provision of educational services, the Northern Territory was included in the rather aggressive extension of adult education through the Education Department schools located in so-called country areas, that is, places outside the Adelaide metropolitan region. According to Alexander’s (1959, p. 24) history of adult education, the South Australian Premier was reluctant ‘to embark on any very costly and sweeping reorganisation of existing adult education services’ in 1956–57 and this set the scene for open competition over the provision of post-school education between the University of Adelaide and the Education Department. It seems likely that the contestation between institutions over the control of vocational education and training that will be so highly evident in the remainder of this story can trace its roots back to this demarcation dispute between the university and the government department. Certainly, the South Australian Education Department was determinedly positioning itself in the field by changing the names of its country technical high schools to ‘adult education centres’ to facilitate ‘a very considerable expansion of services’ under the supervision of the Superintendent of Technical Education (Alexander 1959, pp. 24–25).
As a result of this contest, fully fledged adult education centres were established in Alice Springs and Darwin in January of 1957 with part-time registrars in charge and casual staff providing the instruction (Economic and Statistical Branch 1961). In 1958 the Administrator, JC Archer, recommended the creation of the position of principal for the Darwin Adult Education Centre and this position was filled from January 1959 by Harold Garner who oversaw a 'spectacular growth in enrolments' (Berzins & Loveday 1999, pp. 4–5). In 1957, the number of enrolments in Darwin stood at 482 students in 16 classes while Alice Springs had 129 people studying in 11 different areas (National Archives of Australia 1961c). The number of students studying at the Alice Springs Adult Education Centre increased to almost 1,000 by 1972 (Urvett 1982, p. 14). In the Top End, the Darwin Adult Education Centre had 993 students in 1961 and this would continue on an upwards trajectory to reach 5,974 in the Centre’s final year of operations in 1973 (Berzins & Loveday 1999, p. 6). Between 1963 and 1966, additional adult education centres were opened in Katherine, Tennant Creek and Batchelor (Urvett 1982, p. 14). Due to the increased workload experienced by the principal, the Alice Springs Adult Education Centre was removed from Garner’s responsibility.
and returned to the control of the South Australian Adult Education authorities in 1969. This allowed Garner to concentrate upon operations in the Top End.

The Apprenticeship Board had the legally enforceable power to declare trades as a result of the 1948 ordinance, which made it illegal to work in a declared trade except as an apprentice or journeymen. Twenty-two trades had been declared by 1953 but the reality was that the Territory had less than three dozen apprentices in only eight different trades that year. In 1958–59 there were 79 apprentices in 10 trades with 15 of them being employed in Alice Springs (Berzins & Loveday 1999, p. 11). With the 1967 appointment of three full-time trades teaching staff to the Darwin Adult Education Centre to conduct apprentice training in the automotive, electrical and carpentry and joinery trades, the total Territory numbers grew to almost 300 in 1973 (Berzins & Loveday 1999, pp. 11–12).

Figure 13. Electrical experiments at Darwin High School adult training classes, 30 June 1967.
Source: Creator Unknown. PH0139/1418, Northern Territory Department of Lands Collection, Northern Territory Library.
In 1960, as a result of changes made the previous year, the elected members of the Legislative Council had finally broken the political dominance exerted through the absolute majority that had been held by the public service–based official members. The Legislative Council was composed of eight elected members, six official members and three non-official members who were appointed by the Governor-General. The Commonwealth Government was not yet ready to hand over its control over Territory affairs to the elected representatives of the people, however. The national political scene was dominated by the policies of the Liberal Party and Australia’s longest-serving Prime Minister, Sir Robert Menzies. The era was characterised by rapid population growth due to both immigration and the post-war ‘baby boom’ and a focus upon industrial development in the southern capital cities:

The post-war growth of Australian secondary industry into technically more demanding fields; the technical transformation of primary industries requiring complex machinery and biological and chemical knowledge; and the changing character of service industries, especially public administration and community and business services with informational and interpretative functions—all demanded a more highly skilled workforce (Butlin, Barnard & Pincus 1982, p. 205).

While the Northern Territory was not sharing in the industrial development experienced in other parts of the nation, its population was rapidly increasing nevertheless. There were about 3,300 non-Indigenous residents in the Territory in 1911 at the time of the handover to the Commonwealth—this had grown to almost 26,000 in 1960 and, by including Aboriginal residents in the official census for the first time in 1961, would leap to 44,481 the following year (Australian Bureau of Statistics 2011). In keeping with the increased national interest in improving Australia’s human capital that would contribute to economic and social growth, the Commonwealth established the Education Enquiry Committee in 1960 to investigate and recommend upon the future education and training needs in the Northern Territory. Three public servants comprised the membership of this committee: Mr R Marsh (Assistant Administrator of the Northern Territory), Mr J Pratt (Deputy Director of the Commonwealth Office of Education) and Mr C Griggs (Deputy Director of Education in South Australia).

The Education Enquiry Committee was very busy throughout the year and by October 1960 had conducted consultations in the major population centres of the Northern Territory. Up until this time, some 78 persons
had appeared to give evidence to the committee, nine written submissions had been received and several others were expected in the near future (National Archives of Australia 1961c, folio 165). One of these latter submissions came from the senior psychologist for the South Australian Education Department, Mr LS Piddington, in November 1960. While Piddington’s proposals canvassed a wide range of educational matters, he singled out vocational training for very specific roles:

A large number of those children will require various forms of technical education as they will be going into skilled and highly skilled trades. To this end, therefore, the secondary schools plans for the Northern Territory should be along the lines somewhat similar to the Whyalla Technical High School [in regional South Australia] where a variety of courses are [sic] available. Special consideration must be given to slow learning children and the part Aboriginal children, as well as dull whites, who are not going to work beyond the semi-skilled level, and for a number who are going to work only at the unskilled level (National Archives of Australia 1961c, folio 193).

If assimilation [of Aboriginals] is the policy then an important step is to apply the principle of goodwill and this should involve a major adult education drive with the white and part Aboriginal population [to overcome prejudice] (National Archives of Australia 1961c, folio 192).

Piddington’s comments clearly demonstrate the migration of vocational education and training that was taking place in the public policy arena. Training was moving from a philanthropic tool used by the missionaries solely for Aboriginal ‘improvement’ to a set of actions that could be used by government to better manage the whole population. The new conception for government deployment of training was less focused upon race and more interested in those problematic groups who were deemed to be disadvantaged, slow, dull and low- or unskilled. This transition had commenced with the Apprenticeships Board being established in 1948 and continued to build momentum. For example, another submission to the committee on education from the Northern Territory Administration’s Director of Agriculture, WM Curteis, proposed the necessity of establishing ‘an agricultural college in the Northern Territory’ to assist in ‘the development of the Territory’ and ‘afford Asiatic students facilities for training that at present are not available to them’ (National Archives of Australia 1961c, folio 174).
In presenting his evidence to this committee on education, the principal of the Adult Education Centre, Harold Garner, reported that 14 different courses were offered in Darwin in 1959 and that ‘the present system of providing [apprenticeship] courses by correspondence together with supervised periods once a week is not entirely successful and only few apprentices complete theoretical studies’ (National Archives of Australia 1961c, folios 106–107). As described previously, this situation would not be addressed until 1967 when three full-time technical teachers were appointed to Darwin by the South Australian Education Department.

![Darwin Primary School in January 1957, it later became Darwin Higher Primary and then Darwin High School. This building in Woods Street became the Adult Education Centre under principal Harold Garner.](image)

Source: Creator Unknown. PH0320/0009, WC Laidlaw Collection, Northern Territory Library.

The Committee on Education’s report contained 121 recommendations, of which the most significant were that the Territory sever its links with South Australia’s Education Department over an 8 to 10-year period and assume responsibility for education matters through the establishment of an Education Branch to take over responsibility for general education, adult education, vocational training and preschools (National Archives of Australia 2014a). The major organisational response to the Education
Enquiry Committee’s work came about in 1961 when the Commonwealth Government Minister approved the establishment of a Northern Territory Education Board ‘to advise the Administrator on matters of education policy and planning and coordination of the operations of the Education Branch and the Welfare Branch’ (National Archives of Australia 1961b, folio 6). This board held its first meeting on 24 November 1961 and its members included the Assistant Administrator Economic and Social Affairs, the Director of Welfare, the Superintendent of Education and the Superintendent Special Schools. The history of vocational education and training in the Northern Territory is littered with the establishment of committees and their eventual demise.

In common with many other areas of governance in the Northern Territory, the elected members of the Legislative Council felt that the public service was not always working in the best interests of the electorates and established its own Select Committee on the Educational Needs of the Northern Territory, which issued its final report in 1962. Despite finding that the topic was very complex and there was insufficient time available and not enough resources for the Select Committee to make a detailed investigation, the report was ‘able to distinguish quite clearly three problems’:

a. the problems associated with the administration and staffing of schools through the medium of the Education Department of South Australia;

b. the problem of the integration of the separate administration of the European population and the Aboriginal population; and

c. the difficulties arising from the fact that post–primary education in the Territory is incomplete (The Legislative Council for the Northern Territory 1962, p. 7).

The first problem could be addressed by taking over local control of schooling from the far-distant South Australian Department of Education, as had been recommended by the Education Enquiry Committee the year before. The Select Committee also recommended that the resolution of the matter of separate schooling for European and Aboriginal residents be accomplished by ‘one control for both types of schools with a view to ultimate integration’ (The Legislative Council for the Northern Territory 1962, p. 6).
In describing the post–primary education and training situation, the Select Committee noted that some higher education tutorial classes in English, accounting, economics and public administration were on offer at the Darwin Adult Education Centre in conjunction with the University of Queensland. The small number of apprentices and their difficulties with correspondence theory lessons was also reiterated with the observation that:

the establishment of the new Technical High School may open the way to the provision of some advanced technical training above the secondary level, but at present the demand is not sufficient to call for any measures beyond those mentioned (The Legislative Council for the Northern Territory 1962, p. 7).

Following on from these two major examinations of the provision of education and training, the Northern Territory Administration commissioned a detailed review of Indigenous schooling by BH Watts and JD Gallacher in 1963–64. The Report on an investigation into curriculum and teaching methods used in Aboriginal schools in the Northern Territory to the Honourable CE Barnes, MP, Minister of State for Territories March 1964 made several direct references to vocational education and training and the role it would play in the assimilation of Aboriginal people into mainstream Australian society:

The settlements and missions now provide training in a wide range of vocational skills, gradually increasing in scope as more facilities and staff become available. All staff on settlements have, as one of their many responsibilities, the training of Aborigines in special fields related to their own technical skills (Northern Territory Archives Service 1964, p. 17).

Adult education classes were introduced on most missions and settlements in the early 1950s because of the official view that adult education was of vital importance to the assimilation program. In 1964 there are over 40 instructors employed (Northern Territory Archives Service 1964, p. 53).

Aboriginal adolescents need to develop pre-vocational skills and work attitudes, vocational interests and ambitions. In due course, they must also acquire vocational skills in their chosen field (Northern Territory Archives Service 1964, p. 211).

The report of this investigation, more commonly known as the Watts-Gallacher Report, had a major influence on the contents of the Aboriginal school curriculum and how it would be taught. Equally importantly, it also established a way of thinking about the purposes of education
and training that would spread far beyond remote primary school classrooms and influence the development of specialised Indigenous training institutions. For example, in 1968, a teaching assistant course for aspiring Aboriginal teachers was established at Kormilda College, the Darwin-based boarding school for remote Aboriginal secondary school-aged students. In March 1972, as part of a purposeful desire to rationalise Aboriginal adult education in the Darwin region, the teaching assistant course and several others were moved to the Batchelor Vocational Training Centre in the former Atomic Energy Commission buildings (Uibo 1993, p. 9). After further consolidation, the Batchelor College opened in 1974. In Central Australia, the Uniting Church opened the Institute for Aboriginal Development under the guidance of the Reverend Jim Downing in 1969 and handed over control of this training organisation to an Aboriginal controlled board of management two years later. Nungalinya College was also established in Darwin in 1974 and continues to operate as a combined churches training college for Indigenous Australians.

There was also activity in the non-Indigenous post-school space at the same time. In 1968, the Commonwealth Government commissioned Max Bone, the Director of Technical Education in South Australia, to report on post–secondary education in the Northern Territory with a clear term of reference that excluded the possibility of a university being established (Giese 1990, p. 2). His major recommendation was for the establishment of a community college in Darwin—a ‘unique’ type of institution that was relatively unknown in Australia at the time (Urvett 1982, pp. 39–40). It was envisaged that this dual-sector college would deliver vocational and advanced education courses and would increase in scope and complexity as the population of the Northern Territory increased. The Commonwealth Minister for Education and Science accepted the key recommendation and established a planning committee to undertake detailed scoping and public consultation for the community college. This group supplied two reports to the minister in 1970 (Darwin Community College Planning Committee 1970a, 1970b). The contents of these reports guided the development of a greenfields site in Darwin’s northern suburbs at Brinkin, and the Darwin Community College commenced operation on 5 March 1974 (Urvett 1982, p. 39) having incorporated the operations of the Darwin Adult Education Centre. In August of that year, the Darwin Community College also gained managerial responsibility for the Alice Springs Adult Education Centre, which was rebadged as the Alice Springs Community College (Giese 1990, p. 6).
Heatley (1990, p. 40) argues that in the early 1970s, the federal Labor Government’s commitment to the Northern Territory was focused upon the social rather than the economic. This period saw the first Labor government at the national level since 1949, and they brought a new social agenda to Australia generally and, due to the Commonwealth’s continued control, had unfettered capacity to introduce change into
the Northern Territory. This was certainly evident in matters to do with education and training. In addition to establishing major post–secondary school institutions described previously, the Commonwealth brought to fruition the decade-long recommendations for the removal of South Australian provision of education and training in the Northern Territory and bringing general and Aboriginal schools under the control of a single agency. The transition commenced in 1971 with a phased five-year withdrawal; this gained momentum in 1973 with the establishment the Commonwealth Department of Education Northern Territory Division, which took over the management of all general and welfare schools as well as the activities of the adult educators in remote communities (Urvett, Heatley & Alcorta 1980, p. 13). The new ‘unified’ school system commenced operations on 13 February 1973 (Department of Education Northern Territory Division 1974) and ended the contractual relationship with South Australia for the operation of schools and adult education that had commenced towards the end of the Second World War. Operational support for the Apprenticeships Board was also incorporated into the new department although the board still had its own legal identity and membership. The number of registered apprentices had grown to 360 in 38 declared vocations by June 1973 (Department of Education Northern Territory Division 1974, p. 40). It was also foreshadowed that the Darwin Community College would take over ‘responsibility of technical training of apprentices in the Territory’ when it became operational in 1974 (Department of Education Northern Territory Division 1974, p. 40).

The Labor Party’s views on the role and place of vocational education were captured in a series of essays written by leading members several years after the Whitlam Government left office. In the introduction to the series, Evans and Reeves (1980) reject setting up a dichotomy between ‘efficient economic management’ versus ‘radical social change’ because a strong economy is required to finance social policy objectives. They believe this to be a long-standing feature of Labor policy dating back to World War Two expressed through programs that encouraged full employment; greater fiscal power centralised with the Commonwealth; large scale migration; and major expansions in health, education, industrialisation and social security (Evans & Reeves 1980, p. 1). Labor Party policy would continue to ‘give special emphasis to the relation between education and employment by encouraging technical training, retraining programs and recurrent education’ (Evans & Reeves 1980, p. 78). In his contribution, Bennett (1982, p. 162) notes that the Australian Labor Party lacked
interest in education in the first half of the twentieth century with the significant exception of technical education, which was seen to be more appropriate for the working class. He also argues that education systems are the ultimate normalising institutions and deeply reinforce and entrench class divisions. However, the counter view that Australia would be a more just and equitable place if there were ‘more equal opportunities to obtain an education’ became the centrepiece of Labor policy (Dawkins & Costello 1983). In particular, Dawkins and Costello (1983, p. 70) saw a very specific role for vocational education and training to increase post-compulsory school aged retention and skill levels in order ‘to seize economic opportunities’ that would allow Australia to become its own economic master.

It is this pattern of thinking that envisaged the economic and social development of the Northern Territory as being integrally linked to the increased provision of vocational education and training through Labor’s bipartisan support for the community college concept; the unification of the separate school systems; and an increase in apprenticeship numbers in the Northern Territory during the Labor years 1972–75. The anticipated social improvement would be supported by economic development that, in turn, would require a more highly skilled workforce and higher rates of labour force participation. One of the major policy shifts that accompanied Labor’s use of the Northern Territory as a ‘social laboratory’ (Heatley 1990, p. 29) was the replacement of the Aboriginal assimilation policy of the 1950s and its related integration policy of the 1960s with one of self-determination and self-management (Uibo 1993, pp. 13–14). The policy of self-management is part of a complex web of economic ideas that presupposed that individuals will make rational choices that are personally beneficial. Such thinking underpins human capital theory (for example, see Becker 1993) and supports policies that are predicated upon the belief that equal opportunity will arise from equal access to education and training.

The reverse side of this policy regime is that individuals can also be deemed to be personally responsible for making bad or incorrect choices that limit their social and economic opportunities in society while ignoring such factors as racism or even the possibility that people will frequently make economically irrational choices in the face of social pressures. Strike (1981, pp. 26–28), an adult educator working at Bamyili in the Top End, believes that the introduction of the policy of self-management was premised upon Aboriginal people ‘establishing their own goals and making choices
as to their lifestyle, recognising the rights and obligations that flow from them’. The adult educator function in the remote settlements and missions would be based upon ‘the philosophy, one of developing the individual in relationship to their needs, in a time/space relationship appropriate to them, relating to their community development is an appropriate role’ (Strike 1981, p. 75, emphasis in original).

The final four-year phase of Commonwealth control of the Northern Territory and the transition to self-government commenced in earnest in 1974. This year would also be significant in the history of vocational education and training in the jurisdiction due to both man-made and natural events. The Northern Territory Legislative Council passed the Darwin Community College Ordinance, which received the Administrator’s assent in July 1973. The importance of ministerial control and relationships between the various government agencies were crucial and contested from the very establishment of the Territory’s largest training organisation. This legislation gave the College the power to provide:

> for Darwin and such other parts of the Northern Territory as the College considers necessary or desirable education and training in such fields of science, technology, the arts, administration, commerce and other fields of knowledge or the application of knowledge as the Council, with the Approval of the Minister, determines or as the Minister requires. It was, as people came to appreciate later on, a very broad empowerment, giving the College ample room for experimentation and development.

The broad charter of the College embroiled it later on in arguments about the coordination of post-secondary education in the Northern Territory and its own autonomy. Technical, trade and further education was under the control of the special projects branch of the Northern Territory Education Division, but the College, in respect of all its work, was directly responsible through its Council to the [Commonwealth] Minister (Berzins & Loveday 1999, p. 31).

The Darwin Community College was officially opened on 10 March 1974 by HRH Prince Philip, Duke of Edinburgh, deputising for the Queen, even though many of the facilities were yet to be completed and handed over to the council (Berzins & Loveday 1999, p. 32). In common with the rest of Darwin, the operations of the College came to a screeching halt on Christmas Eve 1974.
Cyclone Tracy swept into Darwin overnight and by Christmas morning almost 70 per cent of the small tropical city’s buildings were destroyed and 71 people were killed. In a repetition of events following the bombing of Darwin during World War Two, much of the population was evacuated south, reducing the number of residents from about 47,000 to just over 10,000 in less than one week. Although the population’s progressive return to Darwin (and many former residents did not desire to do so) commenced by late January 1975, entry to the city was strictly controlled by a permit system that was monitored by police checkpoints at both the airport and on the Stuart Highway near Noonamah for the next six months. As the Northern Territory was still a Commonwealth responsibility, the relief effort was directed by Major-General Alan Stretton and the rebuilding
of Darwin was undertaken by the Darwin Reconstruction Commission. While the initial relief effort was well-received, the bureaucratic processes of the Reconstruction Commission further fuelled the demands for greater autonomy in the conduct of Northern Territory affairs. The post-Tracy actions taken by Commonwealth technical experts reinforced the absence of genuine local contributions to the planning and execution of the Territory’s future. While not being ungrateful for the Commonwealth and national response to the resurrection of Darwin, the members of the first fully elected Legislative Assembly, put into office on 19 October 1974, some two months before the cyclone, were left in no doubt as to their inferior position and which level of government was making the most important decisions.

By May 1975, the city’s population had increased to about 30,000 residents and the decision made in early January 1975 to reopen the Darwin Community College, commencing with a limited number of trade courses, seemed well-founded. By mid-January, it was determined that by redeploying staff and moving some offerings to Alice Springs, making temporary repairs to the Casuarina campus, and using other available facilities around Darwin, the College could offer technical, trade and recreational courses, library services, tutorials for Queensland external university-level courses and classes for humanities, matriculation and public service entrance examinations (Berzins & Loveday 1999, p. 48). As Darwin was rebuilt, the Darwin Community College was also repaired and expanded its offerings in line with the original vision of a multi-campus, multi-level institution and as the provider of technical education in those trades with sufficient numbers of apprentices. The Technical and Further Education Commission report for the triennium 1977–79 (1976, p. 226) shows that the Northern Territory had some 4,138 enrolments in the post-school technical courses in 1975, with adult education having over half of these students, followed by art and design with 995 enrolments and closely followed by personal services on 819. The report also rather blandly describes, ‘In the Northern Territory the administration of TAFE [Technical and Further Education] is shared by the Commonwealth Department of Education and the Darwin Community College’ (Technical and Further Education Commission 1976, p. 38).

The other significant influence upon vocational education and training that occurred in 1974 was the release of *TAFE in Australia: Report on needs in Technical and Further Education* (Kangan Report).
This report identifies Technical and Further Education (TAFE) as an equal, but different, mainstream educational sector allowing for the Commonwealth to provide funding to the various state training systems to improve both the quantity and quality of students who study what would come to be known as vocational education and training (Australian Committee on Technical and Further Education 1974, p. 1). The Kangan Report, named after the chair of the Commonwealth-appointed committee and Australia’s leading expert on personnel management, reflected the national Labor Party platform of 1971, which defined equity as ‘equality of opportunity’ (Goozee 2013, p. 140). Numerous descriptions of how TAFE contributes to modern society are listed in the Kangan Report’s summary of conclusions and recommendations. These are used to justify the provision of Federal Government funds to support an area that has been constitutionally reserved to the states:

(2) The main purpose of education is the betterment and development of individual people and their contributions to the good of the community. Technical and further education should be planned accordingly.

(3) The emphasis in technical college type institutions should be primarily on the needs of the individual for vocationally oriented education and the manpower needs of industry should be seen as the context for courses.

(5) There should be unrestricted access to assessments of knowledge and skills for the purpose of gaining formal qualifications, irrespective of where or how the individual prepared himself. Entry requirements should be progressively eased.

(10) Opportunities for recurrent education should help individuals who wish to repair inadequacies in their initial formal education or add to their knowledge and skills in order to change the direction of their vocational interests.

(24) Access to further education by many persons who reside outside large metropolitan areas would be facilitated by the development of community type colleges which would help adults overcome deficiencies in their primary and secondary schooling and offer courses up to diploma level, where necessary, in addition to the range and level of courses customarily available from technical colleges (Australian Committee on Technical and Further Education 1974, pp. xxiii–xxvi).
In terms of national policy, the Kangan Report also positions vocational education and training as a tool of government that can be used to alter the conduct of individuals and allow them to gain the necessary skills to be gainfully employed in productive economic ways. The original philanthropically inspired benefits of training directed at the individual that had guided the missionaries’ activities in the Northern Territory Aboriginal population have been updated and translated into more contemporary terms, but serve a similar role. Vocational education and training becomes an unquestionable good that is applicable to everyone at any stage of their life in order to give them the skills to meet the economic and industrial needs of the economy. It is such a good thing that it also justifies the expenditure of public monies in a manner approved by government ministers without regards to the once-important separation of powers that reserved education as a state function at the time of Federation in 1901. The release of the Kangan Report in April, the election of the first fully representative Legislative Assembly in October, the destruction of Darwin in December, when combined with an activist Commonwealth Government that ran the Territory through ministerial fiat, made 1974 a pivotal year in the evolution of greater local control and demonstrated to political aspirants the possibilities of exercising ministerial power in Australia’s least populous jurisdiction. Jaensch (1981, p. 87) believes that despite warranted criticism, censure and condemnation of political representation in national and state politics elsewhere, ‘the Northern Territory, as a new polity, has the opportunity to produce something better’. In keeping with this theme of fresh starts, the first Chief Minister of the Northern Territory, Paul Everingham (1981, p. 2), proposed that in spite of the small and remote population, the decisions taken by the Northern Territory politicians:

are no less important than those of other states. In fact, many are more important, since in the Legislative Assembly, as in many facets of Territory life, we are laying the groundwork. We are setting precedents where other Australian governments are only modifying them. There is a refreshing quality to starting anew all things. I like the Territory as it is but for me development is a tool – not an end in itself. We need it to create jobs to expand the population to a level of, say, half a million to provide a reasonable home market and support the level of social infrastructure most of us would like.
With the demise of the Whitlam Labor Government at the national level in 1975 and the election of the Fraser Coalition Government, the politics of self-government moved into the realm of the possible. Darwin was well on the way to recovery and the other population centres of the Northern Territory were also in a substantial growth phase. The fully elected Legislative Assembly negotiated with the Commonwealth for the establishment a so-called Territory Executive under the leadership of Goff Letts. Executive members acted in a manner that was similar to a more traditional Cabinet and each would-be ‘minister’ was responsible for the transfer of state-type governance functions from the Commonwealth to the Northern Territory. Nevertheless, Heatley (1990, p. 56) reports that ‘the real work of negotiation took place between federal ministers, senior public servants and Letts and Grant Tambling, who had become Deputy Leader’. The first tranche of functions to be transferred on 1 January 1977 included the staff of the Administrator and Legislative Assembly as well as the police, fire and prisons branches. Some 20 statutory boards and authorities to do with areas such as professional registration, tourism, museums, ports, parole and housing were also negotiated to be in this initial handover. Also included were public service functions to do with legislation, local government, libraries, emergency services, correctional services, water supply, electricity and sewerage and motor vehicle registration.

The protracted negotiations conducted by the Letts Executive for the handover of the remainder of state-type functions to the Northern Territory produced a timetable that would see the final tranche leave the Commonwealth on 1 July 1979 (Heatley 1990, p. 68). The Apprentices Board would come over in January 1978 and in the last group would be education services and the Darwin Community College. While there would be much debate and a reordering of particular agencies, this timeline was met. The process was complicated by the requirement to hold an election for the Legislative Assembly in 1977 that served as a type of referendum on self-government. In the end, the Country Liberal Party was returned with a healthy majority, although Letts lost his seat. Heatley (1990, p. 77) attributes this loss due to Letts’ inability to service his large rural seat, a very hard-working opponent and the leader’s ‘sometimes imperious and patronising leadership and his volatile and often abrasive temperament’. In his place, Paul Everingham became the Majority Leader in the second Legislative Assembly and he concluded the transfer of powers that had commenced in 1974.
The Apprenticeships Board was not included in the first group because of its attachment to the Northern Territory Division of the Commonwealth Education Department, while the Darwin Community College, although established by Northern Territory Ordinance, remained responsible to the Commonwealth minister because the ‘education function’ (and most other major agencies) remained with the Federal Government. By June 1976, the Apprentices Board reported that 830 apprentices were registered across the Territory and ‘there was considerable public debate about the operations of the Board and it was suggested in some quarters that the Board should be served by a department other than the Department
of Education’ (Department of Education Northern Territory Division 1977, p. 44). It was also reported that six of the eight members of the Apprentices Board represented private enterprise.

This rather banal bureaucratic account masked a frequently heated and much larger debate over which level of government would control education and training as the Territory moved towards self-government. Quite simply, the Commonwealth Department of Education public servants did not believe that the Northern Territory possessed adequate local resources or expertise and that the peculiar problems of the Territory required the Commonwealth to retain responsibility for this nationally important function (Heatley 1990, p. 115). This position was further reinforced with the previously mentioned release of the Kangan Report into Technical and Further Education and the impending federal funding and policy direction that would follow Kangan recommendations in the area of training. In the Northern Territory Education Division’s 1974 submission to the Joint Parliamentary Committee on the constitutional development of the Northern Territory, a firm line was drawn in the sand:

The Department’s view is that whatever form of self-government the Northern Territory may attain, responsibility for education services in the Northern Territory should continue to be a function of the Australian Minister for Education (Northern Territory Archives Service 1974–1987).

To further stress the importance of the Commonwealth’s contribution, the submission also noted that the Education Division’s resources were used to provide secretariat function as well as the chairman of the Apprenticeships Board; the Darwin Community College (having taken over the Adult Education Centres) would remain a semi-autonomous provider of post-school education and training into the foreseeable future in both Darwin and Alice Springs; and that this unique community college would need to rely upon the department for a considerable time into the future. Both the teachers’ union and the government school parent body supported the strongly held position that the Commonwealth should retain control and that a statutory authority, distanced from Northern Territory Cabinet responsibility, would be ‘the ideal organisational form for educational administration in the Territory’ (Heatley 1990, p. 115).

Although proposals for Commonwealth retention and an education commission had the support of major interest groups, the idea was never politically feasible in the spirit of self-government negotiations. The Northern Territory politicians had experienced the influence and control that emanates from remote ministerial offices and faceless
bureaucracies for the past 65 years and they were not going to bypass the opportunity to assume direct management of state-type responsibilities. In reflecting upon the proposals for health and education commissions to be established in the Northern Territory in conjunction with self-government, the Territory's first Chief Minister, Paul Everingham, leaves no doubt as to his views:

I wasn't going to become Chief Minister and hand over whatever control I might have [to commissions]. It doesn't matter whom you put on those statutory bodies. They can be your best friends but they soon turn into crazy megalomaniacs and empire-builders. The most logical, sensible or rational businessmen, when put on a statutory authority, seem to become putty in the hands of the bureaucrats who work for it and start running along its boundary fence like a dog (quoted in Heatley 1990, p. 89).

Based upon the experiences of Commonwealth colonial rule, two things were made clear by the majority party members of the Legislative Assembly as the Northern Territory assumed its new constitutional status:

- ministers and Cabinet would be in charge, making the key decisions; and
- public servants were unelected and must be responsive to their ministers.

The anti-self-rule positions that had been taken by the various vested interests in the robust discussions over the relocation of responsibility for education and training gave rise to quite strained relationships between the Northern Territory Government, the successor organisations to the Darwin Community College and the various government agencies with responsibility for training that occasionally reappears even today. However, disharmony in the education and training field was not a sole product of self-government discussions. With the annexure of the Apprentices Board into the newly established Northern Territory Education Division in 1974 and the creation of a unified education agency, arguments with the Darwin Community College and its Territory-wide training mandate soon erupted over the coordination of post-school education and training. Unsurprisingly, each organisation sought domination over vocational education and training and proposed different administrative arrangements to give effect to their preferred position. The Commonwealth minister was strongly lobbied by all parties making their claims on the basis that they could best provide that Holy Grail of public service functions—coordination.
In response, Minister Carrick established a three-member Northern Territory Technical and Further Education Advisory Council in late 1976. They would advise the minister on ‘all matters relating to post–
compulsory education in the Northern Territory. One member is to be a nominee from the Legislative Assembly’ (Northern Territory Archives Service 1971–2003). The member for Sanderson, Elizabeth Andrew, proposed Marshall Perron as the Legislative Assembly nominee on 2 March 1977 after he had been endorsed in a Cabinet meeting 17 February. In speaking to the nomination as former Executive member with responsibility for education, she noted that ‘the need for this committee has become very obvious since the last election. Ministers of the Federal Government in many portfolios suddenly bounded on a great urge to vocationally train everyone’ (Andrew 1977, p. 34). Perron, in accepting the Assembly’s endorsement, notes that of the council’s terms of reference, ‘I believe that decision-making at the local level is the most important of all areas’ (Andrew 1977, p. 37).

Vocational education and training was high on the agenda of the Northern Territory Government-in-waiting. The discussions endorsing Perron’s appointment to the Technical and Further Education Council took place in only the third meeting of Cabinet. In his Cabinet Submission, Perron informed his colleagues that the Legislative Assembly nominee would join the Director of Education, Jim Eedle, and the Principal of the Darwin Community College, Joe Flint, on the Council. This group was to rationalise, coordinate, promote and plan improvements in all aspects of further education in the Northern Territory in response to ‘a confusing range of departments and agencies involved in further education that included the Department of Education, the Darwin Community College, Department of Aboriginal Affairs, Employment and Industrial Relations and the Apprentices Board’ (Northern Territory Archives Service 1971–2003). Perron summarised his views on the impending work of the Council as follows:

My impression from the first meeting is that the Council will involve a lot of work, some travel and the wisdom of Solomon to ensure co-operation from a hundred people who see the Council as a threat to their empire (Northern Territory Archives Service 1971–2003).

The setting up of the Technical and Further Education Council for the Northern Territory would only be the first move in a never-ending struggle for the control of vocational education and training policy, finance and programs that continues to this day. It must have brought some sense of poignant satisfaction to Minister Carrick’s office that the creation of the Council met the spirit of impending self-government by forcing those
who fought the battles over TAFE domination in the Territory to present him with potential solutions rather than the problems. Whether intended or not, the composition of the Council effectively positioned the future Minister for Education, and eventual Chief Minister, as the arbiter between the heads of the two institutions who vigorously squabbled over the future direction of training at every opportunity. While it may not have seemed obvious at the time, the precedent of ministerial discretion and decision-making in vocational education and training was built into the very genetics of Northern Territory governance. There is little evidence that this Council made a significant impact on the overall coordination of training and certainly one of the early actions of the newly formed Northern Territory Government in mid-1978 was to disband this group.

In the same Cabinet Meeting held in February 1977, Perron also initiated the process to transfer responsibility for the Apprentices Board when the second suite of state-type functions was scheduled to take place on 1 January 1978 (Northern Territory Archives Service 1977–2003a). He ensured that his colleagues knew of Senator Carrick’s support for the move. Perron also proposed that ‘the composition of the Board leaves much to be desired and I would suggest a complete review at the time we accept responsibility’ (Northern Territory Archives Service 1977–2003a). Cabinet’s 14th decision approved in principle: the transfer of the Apprentices Board to the existing Department of Transport and Industry as soon as possible; the conduct of an inclusive consultation with all those who could provide useful and constructive advice on a review of the existing Ordinance; and, if possible, joint timing of the introduction of a new Ordinance with the transfer of the Board.

This decision is notable for a variety of reasons. It separates vocational training from the general education function and introduces yet another government agency into the already crowded space—a department whose focus is unashamedly economic. The first Northern Territory Government use of the review process in vocational education and training would eventually be replicated by most ministers over the following years. The transfer also demonstrated to senior public servants that Cabinet and ministers will be deciding on which functions will be undertaken by each department. But this decision is much more than rearranging the bureaucracy. The rather innocuous reference to six of the eight members of the Apprentices Board representing private enterprise that was made in the Northern Territory Education Division’s Annual Report for 1976 was referring to a much larger political debate.
The Apprentices Board did not agree with the position taken by senior public servants of the Education Department that the Northern Territory was incapable of taking responsibility for education. These representatives of private industry were much more closely aligned with the political aspirations of Cabinet in the pursuit of self-government regardless of Perron’s concerns about the composition of the Board. When it became apparent that the education function would not be handed over until the very end of the transfer process, the decision was made to place as many allies and supporters into every function that was now under Northern Territory control as a matter of priority. This initial divorce of training and education would be only the first of many institutional reorganisations that would come to characterise the vocational education and training sector and its usefulness to ministers in the making of public policy. Regardless of the vigorous debates and political manoeuvres, by mid-1977, the number of apprentices had grown to 869 employed in 51 declared trades. In addition, the Northern Territory Executive had asserted its authority because ‘as from 1 January 1978, the responsibility of the Apprenticeship Board was transferred to the Northern Territory Public Service’ (Department of Education Northern Territory Division 1978, pp. 36–38).

With Everingham’s elevation to the position of Majority Leader of the Northern Territory Executive as a result of the 1977 election, a concerted effort was made to accelerate the handover of functions from the Commonwealth. Everingham argued that the politics of implementing new policies and inserting a more responsive administration into the Territory required enough time to take effect before the next election was due to be held in 1980 (Heatley 1990, p. 88). While this advocacy for increasing the pace of transfer had success in some areas such as land administration, education and health were specifically singled out by Prime Minister Fraser as areas that should stick to the July 1979 date set out in the original transfer program to ‘ensure a smooth transition and obviate administrative difficulties and untidiness which could occur otherwise’ (quoted in Heatley 1990, p. 88):

Neither Everingham nor Jim Robertson, as the Executive Member (and later Minister) concerned primarily with education, readily accepted that reasoning. To them the delay was unnecessary and possibly politically disadvantageous. Moreover, it appeared to afford the Commonwealth considerable leverage over the fashioning of the new system, a matter for which the Territory ministers saw as their sole prerogative.
Both Everingham and Robertson later admitted that their handling of the transfer was flawed, particularly in their tolerance of complex consultative mechanisms and in their willingness to brook unwarranted compromise. Both factors, they believed, effectively eroded their control over policy-making (Heatley 1990, p. 116).

The high level of frustration in the Northern Territory Executive was clearly evident in a memorandum from Robertson to Everingham dated 19 May 1978 (Northern Territory Archives Service 1977–1979):

The people clearly expect us to govern in this at the same level as if I had executive responsibility in the area. As I have previously indicated to you, my main difficulty is going to be maintaining my present level of enthusiasm for the education side of my portfolio for another full year under these circumstances — when the satisfaction of demands, and their cause, remains absolutely beyond my control and when the abuse is being taken on behalf of someone else.

In looking back upon the general relationship between the Northern Territory and the Commonwealth, the Territory’s third Chief Minister, Steve Hatton, recounts how ‘the Commonwealth Public Service still wanted the NT to be their social agenda playground and was opposed to anything that would further erode their power over the NT’ (Martin & Dewar 2012, p. 50). Nevertheless, with the advent of self-government on 1 July 1978, Northern Territory ministers had already commenced exercising political, financial and organisational control over a wide range of areas in their desire to transform the jurisdiction from a colonial backwater to a modern and economically viable society in Australia’s centre and north. Although the new Cabinet was clearly frustrated at not yet having operational control over education and training, Robertson negotiated the eventual transfer as both a member of the Northern Territory Executive and eventual Minister for Education from September 1977 until November 1982. He would be the first of 26 different ministers that have had either full or partial responsibility for vocational education and training in the Northern Territory since self-government. Only one, Labor’s Syd Stirling from 2001 to 2006, would serve as long in the portfolio as did Robertson.
Figure 19. Jim Robertson, Member of the Legislative Assembly, February 1974.
Source: Creator Unknown, PH0120/0050, N Gleeson Collection, Northern Territory Library.
Even though the highly visible self-interested pressure groups (principally the teachers’ federation, government school parent groups and the Darwin Community College) had delayed the transfer of education and training to the new government, they had only postponed the inevitable. Their tactics only served to make the politicians even more determined to exert their authority over the sector and to seriously discount any submissions made from those groups. On the other hand, with the electoral demise of Letts as the first majority leader, the ministers were already acutely aware of the unique power of electors. The miniscule electorates and the intensely personal interaction with a population that expects governments to do things reinforced the importance of ministerial decision-making.

In the characteristically pugnacious and forthright style that marked his leadership of the Executive and Government, Paul Everingham’s determination to exert ministerial authority is exemplified in the following extract from a letter dated 21 March 1978 when he wrote to a senior member of the Country Liberal Party’s organisational wing, Graeme Lewis. Several Country Liberal Party members of the Legislative Assembly had been speaking out against a number of land developers who were putting poorly serviced parcels into the marketplace in order to make a short-term profit without due consideration of the longer-term consequences for those who purchased the blocks and for town planning principles. Lewis had made strong representations to both Marshall Perron, member for Stuart Park, and Everingham following comments in the Assembly that had upset the developers and surveyors and, consequently, their support for the party. The Majority Leader responded to Lewis in a manner that left no doubt as to how his government would work when he wrote:

I want it to be made perfectly clear that I will not ever under any circumstances, buckle under to threats or any attempts to intimidate me or other Members of the Parliamentary Wing. Once a person tries this on me, so far as I am concerned, he loses any chance of my sympathetic consideration. I told you this on the day in question and I repeat it now (Northern Territory Archives Service 1977–1979).

The politically inspired desire for Northern Territory ministerial accountability and the eventual federal handover of responsibility for vocational education and training provide the backdrop and set the scene for the next era. The enthusiastic fresh ministers would finally have access to all of the contributing factors that would enable them to act as wealthy philanthropists. They had both a desire and a publicly validated
mandate to improve the social and economic conditions experienced by Territorians as well as access to the financial means that would allow many agendas to be set locally. In common with the original Australian states, vocational education and training is important to ministers because it is one of the few policy areas that remain under provincial control.
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