The various education and training lobby groups proceeded on the basis that no detail about the transfer of responsibility was too small to be contested and, as a result, Minister Robertson was bombarded with letters, submissions and personal communications demanding one thing or another. In terms of macro-policy matters, three major areas of contention required resolution before the handover could take place: the type of bureaucratic structure required to operate an education system; determining who would employ education and training staff; and the role of the Darwin Community College.

Through its continuing opposition to the transfer of the education and training functions to the new government, the Northern Territory Education Division only served to reinforce the generally negative views about the public service held by the members of the Legislative Assembly. Deep distrust emanated from the previous actions of the official members of the Legislative Council and their perceived role in building and maintaining their own empires and careers while ignoring the aspirations of Territorians. Weller and Sanders (1982, pp. 11–13) report that ‘the ministers were determined that whatever happened they would not become captives of the public service. The public service was an organisation to be tamed, to be the servant, not master’. They go on to describe that, due to their deep suspicion of the public service, the early Northern Territory ministry was more decisive in changing the operations and accountability of public servants than any of the counterparts
in the other states. ‘Like it or not, a minister has been given a licence not accorded to a public servant regardless of experience and expertise, a mandate to govern’ (Chief Minister Everingham cited in Weller & Sanders 1982, p. 15). The transition from reporting to a large, distant bureaucracy based in Canberra to being immediately responsive to a local minister with frequently populist political imperatives was not easy for the public servants either—one senior public servant is reported to have described the new Territory ministers as the ‘last of the cattle barons’ (Weller & Sanders 1982, p. 42).

In order for the Northern Territory to make progress on matters to do with education and training, Cabinet came to rely upon a mere handful of trusted senior public servants hand-picked to give effect to ministerial decisions. Unlike current ministers that have the entire education bureaucracy at their service, to address the large policy matters Robertson had to work with an actively resistant Northern Territory Education Division of the Commonwealth Department of Education, the Darwin Community College Council with its extensive legislated powers not
yet subject to his intervention, and antagonistic groups of teachers and parents. While not fully resolved until many years later, all teachers and public service positions in the Education Department would eventually come under the general employment conditions of the Northern Territory Office of the Commissioner of Public Employment—that is, under the direct control of Cabinet. However, the other two matters have remained topics of discussion, contestation, change and tinkering. The organisational arrangements used by government to manage vocational education and training and the place and powers accorded to the Darwin Community College’s various predecessor institutions remain interrelated and subject to intense ministerial interest and intervention.

Since those who opposed the transfer of education and training to the Northern Territory could not stop the process, advocating for an arms’ length commission was the next best remedy to the perceived problems of a nationally important function falling into the hands of an ‘ill-prepared and inexperienced’ government. Heatley (1990, p. 116) believes that the establishment of a commission or statutory authority for education and training had never been a viable option for the Territory Executive’s consideration prior to self-government. This view is supported by the contents of a letter written on 3 March 1978 by Ken Jones, the Commonwealth Education Department’s Secretary, to the Northern Territory Director-General of the Department of Chief Secretary and member of the trustworthy senior inner circle, Martyn Finger, in which the view was provided that:

the most appropriate system for the Northern Territory would be a single administration under ministerial control covering policy formulation at all levels of education. It would probably be necessary to amend the Darwin Community College Ordinance to specify that responsibility for broader policy development in the tertiary area is vested in the minister and not in the Darwin Community College Council (Northern Territory Archives Service 1977–1979).

In preparation for the legislative program that would provide the mechanisms for the Northern Territory Government to assume responsibility for education and training on 1 July 1979, Robertson established an Education Advisory Group on 11 May 1978. This group’s membership consisted of representatives of the major pressure groups and had highly restricted terms of reference to guide their task of consulting with Territorians and making recommendations to the minister on the preferred structure of educational administration post-handover.
The Education Advisory Group held public consultations and received written submissions. The contributions were almost exclusively from the same lobby groups that had dominated the discussions for the past two years. In a further demonstration of fine political instinct that characterises successful Northern Territory politicians, one analysis reports that:

given the late establishment of the Education Advisory Group and the extremely short period within which it had to operate, it appears that general community input into matters relating to the transfer of education was not a matter of high priority with the Northern Territory Government (Urvett, Heatley & Alcorta 1980, p. 55).

Guided by the terms of reference, the Education Advisory Group’s recommendations included a department of education with a TAFE branch answering to a fully responsible minister through a permanent department head while the Darwin Community College was recommended to be a separate body corporate that would follow Northern Territory Government policy and direction (Education Advisory Group 1978, p. 1). They also proposed that the vexed matter of TAFE coordination be achieved through an Education Advisory Council that would provide advice to the minister on all levels of education. This Council would incorporate the existing Further Education Council as a specialist advisory body on vocational education and training (Education Advisory Group 1978, p. 13) because all post-school education and training was to be part of the coordinated system of education envisaged for the Northern Territory by the new government. Robertson tabled this group’s report in the November 1978 sittings of the Legislative Assembly, and Cabinet commenced consideration of the recommendations during their meeting held on 22 December 1978 (Northern Territory Archives Service 1977–2003b).

The Cabinet notes supporting the proposed legislation contained provision to give the minister power to appoint or approve the appointment of staff to the Darwin Community College (Section 11b) and to transfer the employment responsibilities from the Darwin Community College Council to the minister (Northern Territory Archives Service 1977–2003b). Additionally, ‘the powers of the Darwin Community College to assess the needs for education and training courses throughout the Territory, and to make provision to meet those needs, should be curtailed’. Finally, it was proposed that the new Director-General of Education should enforce the legislative requirements in all areas of
post-school education except for the daily operations of the community college. Robertson went on to inform his Cabinet colleagues ‘that the major concern of the Darwin Community College would appear to be a belief that the autonomy of the college is under threat’, but dismisses the issue as speculation guided by self-interest (Northern Territory Archives Service 1977–2003b).

Figure 21. Darwin Community College looking towards Alawa, April 1979.

Berzins and Loveday (1999, p. 54) recount that ‘the Darwin Community College was greatly alarmed by the prospect of subordination to the Department of Education and protested strongly in November’. In the December Cabinet meeting, Robertson tabled a letter from the Chairman of the Darwin Community College Staff Association, Alan Powell. These 10 single-spaced pages vigorously attacked the Education Advisory Group recommendations by rejecting an Education Department TAFE branch and the concept of a single Education Advisory Council to advise the minister, instead arguing for a separate Post-Compulsory Advisory Council (Northern Territory Archives Service 1977–2003b).
After deliberating, Cabinet endorsed a repeal of the *Darwin Community College Act 1973* and replaced it with one that ‘curtailed’ the college’s powers over vocational education and training provision. This made the terms and conditions for Darwin Community College staffing subject to the approval of the Administrator; renamed the position that would head the Department of Education to ‘Secretary’; and agreed to form a Post-School Advisory Council to advise the minister as a separate body from the Education Advisory Council, whose focus would now be on schooling up to year 12 (Northern Territory Archives Service 1977–2003b). The federal minister’s Further and Technical Advisory Council was disbanded and replaced by the Post-School Advisory Council, which was appointed by Minister Robertson on 12 November 1979 and held its first meeting in February 1980 (Northern Territory Archives Service 1980–1982b).

Dealing with the Darwin Community College was only one of many changes in the vocational education and training landscape following the functional transfer to the new Northern Territory Government on 1 July 1979. From September 1974, the former South Australian-operated Adult Education Centre, operating out of the old Alice Springs High School buildings at Anzac Oval, had been redesignated as the Alice Springs Community College. While it was operationally a part of the Darwin Community College, there was a local advisory council. During the period 1975–79, complaints about remote control, previously aimed at Canberra, appeared at the Northern Territory level with Alice Springs residents being quite critical of the management of the college being based in Darwin, some 1,500 kilometres away. In April 1979, the college decided to take up an offer from the Education Department for independent management of day-to-day operations and the newly named Community College of Central Australia was transferred from the Darwin Community College to the Northern Territory Government on 1 July 1979 (Berzins & Loveday 1999, p. 56).

This separation was also undertaken because of ‘the Minister for Education’s [Robertson] desire to decentralise decision-making and encourage community participation’ (Northern Territory Archives Service 1984–1991a). It is more than mere coincidence that Robertson’s electorate of Gillen covered a large portion of urban Alice Springs—this was a clear example of a local member responding to a major issue in his constituency. A ceaseless debate about how much higher education should or could be offered in Alice Springs by the local institution accompanied the Community College of Central Australia being placed
under the control of the Northern Territory Education Department’s Director of TAFE, Geoff Chard. In advising Minister Robertson on how to respond to aspirations held by some locals for the new college to become more than a TAFE college along the lines of the Darwin Community College, Chard recommended that it ‘would be prudent for both practical and political reasons to nip these visions in the bud’ (quoted in Berzins & Loveday 1999, p. 56). Expectations were managed and the Darwin Community College remained the sole provider of advanced and higher education throughout the Northern Territory.

Figure 22. Geoff Chard (Left).  
Source: Creator Unknown, PH0703/0063, Tschirner Collection, Northern Territory Library.

In other electorates around the territory, the various activities being undertaken at the Batchelor Vocational Training Centre, including the Aboriginal Teacher Education Course, were to come under the auspices of a revamped organisation—the Batchelor College of TAFE in 1979 (Uibo 1993, p. 29). After an extended period of intense lobbying by both the community and local members of the Legislative Assembly (Northern Territory Archives Service 1977–1979), Cabinet agreed to act upon the Katherine Rural College Planning Committee Report (Katherine Rural College Planning Committee 1976) and establish what would commence as the Katherine Rural Education Centre in 1979 as well. On another front, the 25 May 1979 Cabinet meeting decided to finally act upon recommendations from the 1960s reports on education to establish a
technical high school in Darwin. However, the Director of TAFE, Geoff Chard, responded that the matter could not be progressed ‘primarily due to insufficient data’ and Minister Robertson approved keeping ‘the matter under review as suggested’ (Northern Territory Archives Service 1981). Each of these moves were aimed at increasing access to training throughout the Northern Territory and demonstrating the hallmark behaviour associated with ministerial responsiveness to the perceived needs of local electorates. In spite of several bursts of enthusiasm in Cabinet over the years, the technical high school first mooted for Darwin in the 1960s has yet to materialise.

However, these actions to increase access to vocational training and create space for more local influence in the operations of the provider institutions was not just a set of random acts. On the contrary, they were part of a very carefully thought out strategy being guided by the Chief Minister, Paul Everingham. The matter of an education policy review by the Darwin Branch of the Country Liberal Party led by the former member for Fannie Bay, Grant Tambling, is canvassed by Everingham in a memo, dated 27 October 1978, to his Private Secretary, Bryce McNair:

I am not anxious to rock the education boat before the 1980 election, nor am I keen to see either the Community College or the Department of Education exercising a dominant role in Northern Territory; and bearing in mind that if I do not put in something significant now Tambling will overpower this Party Committee that he is chairman of, and bring in some sort of report, creating a huge empire for the Community College (Northern Territory Archives Service 1977–1979).

Ministerial control of the education and training function was clearly at the forefront of the Chief Minister’s thinking when constructing this memo, as were the electoral consequences of being perceived as too aggressive in asserting authority over the disparate groups with an interest in training. On the other hand, the option to not take action was never seriously considered by Cabinet. In line with the guiding theme of ‘starting all things anew’ in the Northern Territory, the freshly minted ministers had one last task to complete in vocational education and training before the end of the year. As a consequence of passing the Industries Training Act 1979, the Apprentices Board was replaced by the Industry Training Commission to ensure ‘that a trained and skilled workforce is ready to meet the challenges of industry and government in the years ahead’ (Northern Territory Industry Training Commission 1981, pp. 1–2). The annual report also notes that there were 1,007 apprentices indentured at this time and that
21 trades required that local students be sent interstate for off-the-job training. The Northern Territory Industries Training Commission (1981) consisted of 5 divisions:

- manpower planning;
- training and development;
- trade training;
- industries training; and
- administration.

The year 1979 had been a very busy one for the inexperienced Northern Territory Government in asserting Cabinet control over vocational education and training. The powers and geographic reach of the Darwin Community College had been ‘curtailed’. Meanwhile, the Department of Education had entered into the direct delivery of training with the establishment of the Katherine Rural Education Centre, Batchelor College of TAFE, the Community College of Central Australia, remote Aboriginal adult education and a migrant English program. The Apprentices Board had also been replaced by the Industry Training Commission and new
ministerial advisory arrangements had been put in place with advent of the Post-School Advisory Council. The leaders of each of these new entities was acutely aware of the priorities of an interventionist government driven by a mandate for change after decades of distant colonial rule, social experimentation and a level of benign neglect. With an election due in 1980, Everingham’s preference for ‘not rocking the education boat’ was achieved while ensuring that there was no doubt as to who was in charge.

The general election held on 7 June 1980 provided the residents of the Northern Territory a chance to express their views on the progress towards self-government. The election essentially maintained the status quo with the Country Liberal Party only losing one seat, Nhulunbuy, to the Australian Labor Party and the single independent, Dawn Lawrie, being re-elected. This allowed the government to claim yet a further mandate to negotiate the handover of a variety of other state-type functions, such as the employment of teachers and adult educators. The major responsibilities that were not handed over included the non-controversial area of industrial relations, while Aboriginal land rights, uranium mining and control of the two major national parks, Uluru and Kakadu, were highly contested and are still the source of severe irritation for successive Northern Territory governments.
The period leading up to the 1980 election was also very significant for another reason—the financial year 1979–80 would serve as the baseline year to determine how much funding the Commonwealth would furnish to the Northern Territory to carry out the functions of a state. Heatley (1990, p. 123) points out that the Commonwealth erred on the side of generosity in the early years to ensure that self-government did not fail. The Northern Territory Government was also doing everything it could do to ensure that this base year funding could be maximised. In a memo from Minister Robertson dated 11 September 1978 to the head of the Department of Education, Jim Eedle, the eventual fate of Dhupuma College, an Aboriginal boarding college near Nhulunbuy in East Arnhem Land, was discussed. Robertson proposes:

What I am saying is that if we can get the money in our base year, it is then available for other purposes in education if we were to subsequently close Dhupuma College. I would suggest you destroy this memorandum (Northern Territory Archives Service 1977–1979).

Figure 25. Dhupuma College, February 1975.
Source: Creator Unknown, PH0703/0506, Tschirner Collection, Northern Territory Library.
Dhupuma College had been opened by the Prime Minister, Gough Whitlam, in 1972 as the Northern Territory’s second Indigenous boarding school. It used portions of an abandoned missile tracking station and featured a number of specialist vocational training facilities. Despite its symbolic importance as a sign of the Commonwealth’s support for greater Aboriginal self-determination, by the time of self-government the college facilities had become quite dilapidated and the number of students attending was small. However, in keeping with his soon-to-be minister’s wishes, Jim Eedle, issued a media release detailing his recommendation to the Federal Education Minister Carrick for Dhupuma to remain open in 1979. The college did continue operations, but was consequently closed in the following year after education responsibility had been transferred to the Northern Territory Government.

In 1980, the Northern Territory Government brought in a consultant to develop an education specification for the Community College of Central Australia to guide the three-year construction schedule of a new campus on land adjacent to the Sadadeen High School in the New Eastside residential development of Alice Springs. According to the author of the final report (Pattinson 1980, p. 2), the government wanted to have a college that would give effect to a TAFE-only institution, as recommended by Chard the previous year, and would promote access to training and education by facilitating ‘self-realisation, self-understanding and self-development’ by ‘deliberately encouraging the social, cultural, aesthetic, economic health and development of the community’. In addition, the Community College would develop both ‘link’ and ‘transitional-vocational type courses for students’ of Alice Springs schools ‘who had no wish in attempting matriculation’ (Pattinson 1980, pp. 14–16).

Pattinson (1980, p. 5) also reported that ‘to date the Community College of Central Australia has not made considerable inroads into Aboriginal education. There are no full-time Aboriginal students at the college and part-time Aboriginal enrolments have been estimated at less than 5 per cent’. In response to this miniscule number of Aboriginal students, Cabinet decided in December 1979 to purchase a property and basic set of buildings in the Priest Street light industrial area of Alice Springs to serve as a space for a more culturally inclusive training facility. In 1980, the Centre for Appropriate Technology opened in these premises and, over a number of years, developed into a completely independent organisation with its own Aboriginal-controlled board. The Centre for
Appropriate Technology has gone on to open branches interstate and has also expanded into the former CSIRO buildings adjacent to the Desert Knowledge Precinct to the south of Alice Springs.

A series of Northern Territory Government decisions that were made in 1979 and 1980 regarding how vocational education and training would be conducted laid the foundations for the separation of policy, funding and delivery functions that remains in place today. Compared to the other states, these decisions have served the government well in terms of public policy flexibility. The operationally messy teaching of students and apprentices was assigned to two organisations. The Darwin Community College’s offerings, including the provision of advanced education, were concentrated around the capital city. This left the Department of Education with control over a disparate group of institutions and programs based in regional areas of the jurisdiction. After the organisational and bureaucratic restructuring of the previous year, 1980 saw the Northern Territory Cabinet make a series of high-level vocational education and training policy decisions intended to provide the missing components of the single education and training system envisaged by Everingham when he spoke at the teachers’ federation conference several years earlier.

In the Cabinet meeting held on 26 March 1980, the ministers held preliminary discussions ‘to consider the establishment of a University for the Northern Territory within a Territory system’ (Northern Territory Archives Service 1980b). Their deliberations were directed by a joint submission prepared by the head of the Education Department, Jim Eedle, and the Principal of the Darwin Community College, Joe Flint. These sometime protagonists and strong advocates for their own institutions had recommended a multi-college/university model growing from the existing Darwin Community College. When Cabinet next considered the matter of a university in July 1980, it ‘approved the introduction of a Bill for an Act to establish a Planning Authority for the University of the Northern Territory’ (Northern Territory Archives Service 1980b). The future of vocational education and training was now firmly tied to the extension of advanced and higher education provision in the Northern Territory.

In another major policy area, the Cabinet meeting of 7 May 1980 endorsed ‘an integrated approach for Aboriginal communities’ based upon three background documents:
VOCATIONAL EDUCATION AND TRAINING

- Development of Aboriginal rural towns;
- A five year community development process towards a fair social influence for Aboriginal people; and
- Aboriginal vocational training (Northern Territory Archives Service 1980c).

With the formal adoption of the concept of community development and policies built upon local responsibility supported by adult educators, all Northern Territory government departments were encouraged to employ the process and work through local community councils. In particular:

Cabinet noted that the community development process increases employment opportunities for Aboriginal people and their need for skills and that the Department of Education will need to respond to this. There will be many skills required by Aboriginal communities so that they can seize these new initiatives. Vocational training, if developed with communities, is the logical coordination point for the many educational requirements of these new responsibilities (Northern Territory Archives Service 1980c, p. 5).

In the Cabinet paper Aboriginal vocational training (Northern Territory Archives Service 1980c, p. 4), the new public management style for the provision of training was also set out and would be used to guide the work of adult educators based in Aboriginal communities:

The policy direction is for the Department [of Education] to provide resources and skill training, manpower, technology, buildings and funds in a form that is determined by communities. Eventually all training would be contracted by communities. The Department would provide a consulting service on contract to communities to provide all educational training services in a form they require.

The development of the Centre for Appropriate Technology in Alice Springs was one of the first concrete actions taken by government to implement this policy of self-management and self-realisation. The prominence given to vocational education and training also reinforced its long-standing use as a philanthropic intervention aimed at improving the lives of a target population. While the mantra of community development in Aboriginal training would guide much operational activity for the next two decades, the reality was that the ministers were not willing or able to relinquish control of vocational education and training policy and finance.
Nevertheless, with training delivery now ‘outsourced’ to the Darwin Community College, semi-autonomous colleges/centres and local Aboriginal communities, the Northern Territory Government confirmed and strengthened the policy role of the Industries Training Commission. In the Cabinet meeting of 30 July 1980 (Northern Territory Archives Service 1980d), in-principle approval was given to the commission’s four-year action plan that included objectives to:

- introduce competency-based training to the Northern Territory;
- research the tasks and skills in over 160 major Northern Territory occupations to set up appropriate training programs;
- establish the Industries Training Commission’s role as ‘the main training’ agency in apprentice, occupational and industries training as well as manpower forecasting and planning;
- assist Northern Territory industry in the development of its most vital resources, those of manpower, with the ultimate aim of promoting industrial growth;
- research vocational education and training; and
- promote training to Northern Territory industry.

In approving the above plan, Cabinet decided that where a functional task is to be carried out by the Industries Training Commission, it will utilise the agency within the Technical and Further Education (TAFE) sector of the Northern Territory Government, that is, the Education Department.

In the same meeting, Cabinet agreed to withdraw a part of the overall submission dealing with the Industries Training Commission’s desire to move into the delivery arena through the establishment of a skills training centre in the former powerhouse buildings in the inner Darwin suburb of Stuart Park. The proposed centre was to be under the control of the Commission and provide off-the-job apprentice training while serving as the employer of Northern Territory Government apprentices. Much of the financial modelling in support of the skills training centre was based upon using the Commonwealth Rebate for Apprentices in Full-time Training (CRAFT) and it was envisaged that the centre would expand to private employers over time.

In a demonstration of the pervasive influence of colonial socialism, business and industry maintained pressure on the Northern Territory Government to provide for a more skilled workforce even when they were not prepared
to employ apprentices in the private sector. The Industries Training Commission returned to Cabinet with a revised submission for the skills training centre based upon a significantly reduced budget for 40 first-year apprentices and confirmation that ‘Darwin Community College advise there is no capacity for this number of additional apprentices without building expansions’ (Northern Territory Archives Service 1980e, p. 4). On 8 October 1980, Cabinet approved the establishment of the skills training centre as an exception to the general policy of pushing delivery of training away from policy functions. The new skills centre would have to use trainers drawn from existing employees of the Electricity Commission and Department of Transport and Works. The business case relied upon the realisation of $85,000 from CRAFT sources to support the Northern Territory Government’s commitment of $257,000.

![Training Centre, Stuart Park, September 1981.](image)

In September 1980, Minister Robertson responded to continued bureaucratic boundary skirmishes between the Industries Training Commission, the Darwin Community College and the Northern Territory Education Department by commissioning a review to be conducted by the Assistant Director-General (Technical) of the Western Australian Education Department to ‘report on options relating to the future development of Technical and Further Education in the Northern Territory’ (Northern Territory Archives Service 1981). In his report that
was handed to the minister in December, Peter Forrest found that the existing system suffered from a ‘lack of coordination’ and the Northern Territory Government should develop a ‘TAFE Authority based on the Industries Training Commission’ (Northern Territory Archives Service 1981). Additionally, Forrest rejected the so-called Alaska-model of a multi-college university that had been endorsed by Cabinet in favour of keeping vocational education and training as a separate sector. In his covering letter to Robertson dated 2 December 1980, Forrest states ‘the present situation in the Northern Territory concerning post-school education is undoubtedly troubled and complex’ (Northern Territory Archives Service 1981).

In the end, Forrest’s advice was not followed. The ability to use Commonwealth TAFE capital infrastructure funding would allow Darwin Community College programs to be reconsolidated at the Brinkin campus by closing down the converted Winnellie warehouse that had been used since Cyclone Tracy. In addition, there would a number of potential efficiency benefits, such as a shared library, from creating a single campus that could be more easily modified to cater for the planned university. Again, the importance of ministerial discretion in vocational education and training outweighed the independence of the sector. In fact, Cabinet had already decided in meeting number 100 on 16 April 1980 (Northern Territory Archives Service 1977–2003c) to fund a range of vocational training building projects by allocating nearly $6 million in the period 1981–83 to the Darwin Community College for design and documentation for a school of general studies and a school of business and management. Funds were also earmarked for the survey and design of stage one for the Community College of Central Australia at the Sadadeen site. The Northern Territory TAFE infrastructure priority list that had been submitted to the Commonwealth Tertiary Education Commission also included facilities for Batchelor College, the Katherine Rural Education Centre, a technical high school in Darwin and yet another group of buildings for both Darwin Community College and the Community College of Central Australia.

In other actions taken during 1980, Cabinet approved (decision number 1162) amending the *Industries Training Commission Act* to make provision for a member of the Commission to be appointed on the basis of residing outside of Darwin in order to represent regional interests (Northern
The intended tertiary educational future for the Alice Springs region was also reaffirmed when Cabinet accepted a recommendation of the Post-School Advisory Council that:

the Community College of Central Australia develop as an institution emphasising courses identified with the technical and further education (TAFE) sector rather than the advanced or university sectors of tertiary education, although there could be provision for marginal development through tutorials, library resources and associate diplomas (Northern Territory Archives Service 1980–1982b, pp. 20–22).

By the start of 1981, Syd Saville was in place as the Secretary of the Education Department, having replaced Jim Eedle who was appointed by Minister Robertson to head up the University Planning Authority. While government had not been able to act upon the Forrest Report’s specific recommendations on the future of vocational education and training, the ‘troubling complexity’ of the sector still occupied both bureaucratic and political considerations. Following normal protocol, Saville had circulated a proposed Cabinet submission on the ‘Administration of post-secondary education other than university’ to relevant government departments.

As one of those elite senior public servants who was trusted by Cabinet, the Coordinator-General of the Chief Minister’s Department, Ray McHenry, wrote back to Saville on 18 February 1981 commenting upon the proposal to establish a new statutory authority to guide vocational education and training in the Northern Territory:

Without questioning the fact that coordination may be necessary, this reads to me as an exercise in bureaucracy gone rampant. In my view the submission lacks any political sensitivity given the government has only recently established the Industries Training Commission as a statutory authority. Whilst it may not be my place to say so, I observe what I regard as a proliferation of agencies destructive to the long term interests of those needing post-secondary education in the Northern Territory (Northern Territory Archives Service 1981).
On 17 March 1981, Robertson wrote to Saville directing him to convene a meeting of the heads of the major organisations bickering over the control of TAFE on the basis that ‘I have long been concerned to the lack of coordination, and at times spirit of cooperation, in the area of post-school education’ (Northern Territory Archives Service 1981). As a result of the ministerial direction, Saville convened a meeting on 31 March 1981 and attendees included Jim Eedle from the University
Planning Authority; Geoff Chard representing the TAFE Division of the Education Department; Nan Giese in her role as the Darwin Community College Council chair; Joe Flint as Principal of the Darwin Community College; Harold Garner from the Post-School Advisory Council; and Bob Woodward on behalf of the Industries Training Commission. Minister Robertson approved most of the contents of Saville’s long written report and the list of numerous recommendations aimed at improving TAFE coordination, however, two items stand out in terms of improving public policy. The participants agreed that there:

is a real need to distinguish between the coordination role and the operational role within the TAFE area. It was felt that any unit involved with policy and planning matters should not be also involved in the delivery of TAFE programs.

The Secretary of the Education Department should provide you with coordinated advice on policy development and planning of TAFE in the Northern Territory (Northern Territory Archives Service 1981).

Additionally, to assist the Secretary in the provision of this policy advice, a TAFE Planning Committee was to be formed and chaired by the Education Department Director of TAFE and the membership would include the principals of the Darwin Community College; the Community College of Central Australia; Batchelor College; and the Katherine Rural Education Centre. Membership of this planning group would also include the Chair of the Industries Training Commission and the Education Department’s spokesman on ‘extra-mural programs’, which were mostly delivered by the adult educators located in Aboriginal communities. An important task for this committee would be to make recommendations for future funding priorities. In addition, the Planning Committee would take over responsibility for the accreditation of TAFE awards from the Post-School Advisory Council (Northern Territory Archives Service 1982d, p. 12).

As the year progressed, it became apparent that neither the recommendations from the March meeting that had been accepted by the minister or the existence of the TAFE Planning Committee had resolved the turf wars over vocational education and training. By August 1981, in his report to Robertson on the result of a review into TAFE functions in the Education Department, Saville (Northern Territory Archives Service 1981) proposes ‘the establishment of a powerful TAFE Policy and Planning Unit’ that ‘separates within the Education Department the operations of TAFE from the Policy Unit’. Saville goes on to make a claim
for dominance of the vocational education and training space when he states, ‘Finally, and most importantly, the TAFE reorganisation provides for the integration of TAFE activities in the Department’. In November 1981, Robertson endorsed the establishment of the TAFE Policy and Planning Unit in the Education Department (Northern Territory Archives Service 1981).

In June 1981, Director of TAFE Chard had commenced a demarcation dispute between his Education Department, the Department of Chief Minister and the Industries Training Commission. On the basis of the government’s integrated community development approach, he was seeking control of all Aboriginal training as a discrete function that would result in ‘industry training’ being the only role left for the Commission (Northern Territory Archives Service 1980–1982a). Chard was making a claim for his staff, adult educators that were in most of the larger Aboriginal communities, to coordinate all education and training at the community level. This was justified on the grounds that the Education Department was the only agency with staff already on location and that community development and education were inextricably bound together (Loveday & Young 1984, p. 4). In a 1982 response to yet another dispute over coordination and control over vocational education and training, the Chief Minister established the Aboriginal Training and Employment Board of Management consisting of the Director of Aboriginal Liaison from his department; the Secretary of the Department of Education; and the chair of the Industries Training Commission (Loveday & Young 1984, p. 4). There is no evidence that this board achieved any major outcomes and the creation of the Vocational Training Commission later in the same year apparently removed the need for this high-level coordinating body that eventually dropped out of existence.

In yet another example of the high levels of disputation, on 25 September 1981, Saville (Northern Territory Archives Service 1981) wrote to Robertson complaining about the Industries Training Commission’s propensity to ‘dictate to educational institutions as is now the case’ in regard to the educational planning for programs to be offered at the Katherine Rural Education Centre. Saville continued:

I recommend that you direct Mr Woodward to confine the objective of his seminar to the assessment of present and future requirements of the Primary Production Industries for skilled and semi-skilled labour with a view to making this information available to my academic planners.
While Cabinet had been strongly lobbied by a variety of groups to establish the Katherine Rural Education Centre on the basis of the 1976 Commonwealth report, not all parties were in agreement as to the need, capacity and programs that might eventuate. In response to these mixed messages, Robertson sought the assistance of Trevor Sterling from Queensland’s Ithaca College of TAFE to analyse the operations of the two-year-old rural college at Katherine. In response to the review, representatives of the Australian Institute of Agricultural Science wrote directly to Minister Robertson indicating the belief:

that the continuation and expansion of the Katherine Rural Education Centre (KREC) is not the appropriate course of action at this stage of the Territory’s development due to poor employment prospects, small student numbers, lack of new technologies, lack of practical experience and the high cost when compared to sending students to Queensland (Northern Territory Archives Service 1981).

In a briefing minute from the Education Department to the minister, Director of TAFE Chard provides Robertson with information to refute the major complaints from the Institute but also reinforces the philanthropic characteristics of vocational education and training: ‘The major benefit, however, on which the Northern Territory Government places high emphasis would not be available, namely, social stability and cohesiveness through local education provision’ (Northern Territory Archives Service 1981). In the end, further development of the rural college was endorsed by Cabinet in the meeting of 16 July 1981 when the government appointed two of the trustworthy senior public servants (Martyn Finger and Bryce Cameron) to the Advisory Council; approved the creation of four full-time positions including a farm manager; agreed to install demountable buildings for staff and students for accommodation; and continued investment in more infrastructure as resources became available to further develop the property situated some 16 kilometres to the north of Katherine.

Ministerial control and intentions regarding the future of the rural college were made clear to Saville in a memo dated 9 August 1981 from Robertson’s ministerial officer, Matti Urvett: ‘Would you please ensure that the appropriate action is taken to ensure that the Government’s wishes in this matter are carried out’ (Northern Territory Archives Service 1980–1982a).
In this same time period, similar skirmishes were also taking place in Robertson’s Alice Springs electorate over the development of a training facility at Gillen House. The intended outcome was the production of a skilled tourism and hospitality workforce that would support business operators responding to the government’s high economic priority accorded to the sector. The new government had made a massive investment of public funds to develop this industry in order to drive economic growth and had capitalised heavily in up-market Sheraton hotels in Alice Springs and Darwin in addition to the development of more hotels and a new Yulara township near Uluru. While some industry figures and the Darwin Community College had lobbied for the specialist training infrastructure to be built in Darwin, Cabinet decided to convert the former Baptist Hostel in Gillen on the basis that Alice Springs had a larger tourism market at the time. Local members of the Legislative Assembly were unmercifully lobbied by public servants, the Darwin Community College and tourism operators supporting either the Alice Springs or Darwin option. In his role as Director of TAFE, Chard wrote to Robertson seeking clarification about his intentions for the future operations of Gillen House in October of 1981:
At one stage it was on your mind that one of the accommodation blocks at Gillen House might be used by apprentices whilst on block release attending the Community College of Central Australia but you have since advised the Secretary that this is no longer your wish because you perceived problems associated with catering for the apprentices (Northern Territory Archives Service 1980–1982a).

In his reply, which approved the development of a plan to accommodate apprentices as well as provide tourism and hospitality training at Gillen House, Robertson replied, ‘This was the result of your advice. I would still like to see full utilisation of the facility’ (Northern Territory Archives Service 1980–1982a).

In a rather succinct summary of events that took place throughout 1981, Saville wrote to Robertson complaining yet again over the lack of clarity and separation of education and training functions. He proposes that after meetings between the belligerent bodies ‘those matters where agreement cannot be reached will need to be brought before you for resolution and, in any case, some legislative change may prove necessary, subject to the Solicitor-General’s assessment’ (Northern Territory Archives Service 1980–1982a).
By the second half of 1982, the incessantly high levels of disputation over the command and operation of vocational education and training made ministerial intervention inevitable. The important decision-making role of the Minister for Education was reaffirmed in the effort to reduce the levels of conflict over vocational education and training. Geoff Chard had been appointed to chair the Industry Training Commission and was trying to go over Robertson’s head by involving the Chief Minister in discussions to introduce a new statutory authority to manage TAFE in the Northern Territory. On 25 August 1982, Chard wrote to Robertson suggesting the urgent need for a meeting between the Chief Minister, the Education Minister, the Secretary of the Education Department, the Chair of the Industries Training Commission and the Public Service Commissioner, to discuss what would eventually become the Vocational Training Commission. Robertson’s handwritten response in the margins of the memo states ‘No meeting if I can help it’ that was followed by an unsigned notation in another person’s handwriting ‘meeting cancelled’ (Northern Territory Archives Service 1980–1982a).

Once he had considered the political and organisational implications, Robertson took a submission to Cabinet on 22 September 1982 where the ministers:

approved the proposal to amend the Industries Training Act 1979 to create the Northern Territory Vocational Training Commission which combines the present functions of the Industries Training Commission and those concerned with TAFE policy formulation and planning (Northern Territory Archives Service 1982a).

The Vocational Training Commission would have 14 members comprised of:

- a public servant as the chair;
- another public servant as the deputy chair;
- three employer representatives;
- three employee representatives;
- the Secretary of the Education Department or nominee;
- a representative of the Darwin Community College;
- a representative of the Community College of Central Australia; and
- another three members appointed by the minister.
In describing the perceived shortcomings of the existing TAFE Planning Committee, Robertson’s submission states that its ‘membership is inappropriate as it comprises mainly operational people; industry and the community sectors are not adequately represented. Such representation ensures TAFE maintains its relevance to its consumers’ (Northern Territory Archives Service 1982a, p. 2). It is also noted that the minister had taken administrative action to implement the proposed new structure to rationalise existing functions and this included setting up an Interim Further Education Committee to replace the TAFE Planning Committee, effective from 31 August 1982. Cabinet finally endorsed the draft amendments to the Act on 12 November 1982 (Northern Territory Archives Service 1982c). By this time, the former Director of TAFE in the Education Department and (briefly) Chair of the Industries Training Commission, Geoff Chard, had been installed as the Chair of the Vocational Training Commission.

Ministerial choice also featured in the determination of the new commission’s membership. The government had decided that employer and employee organisations would submit lists of names to the minister who would then choose the member of the commission to represent those interests. The Northern Territory Teachers Federation’s Di Foggo complained to Minister Robertson about the process and expressed her belief that her union should be able to make the choice. On 26 November 1982, Robertson responded, ‘Surely common sense and common courtesy would dictate that such procedures are a matter for the minister concerned’ (Northern Territory Archives Service 1980–1982a). The Teachers Federation eventually and unhappily provided three names to the minister for his consideration. In a related flexing of ministerial muscle, Chard wrote to Robertson on 29 November 1982 to confirm the minister’s intention not to accept the Darwin Community College’s nominee for the Interim Further Education Committee. ‘In discussion with me you indicated your intention not to accept that nomination [of J Flint] and your preference for J Suitor’ (Northern Territory Archives Service 1980–1982a).

Chard’s unrelenting enthusiasm for battles over control emerged almost immediately in the form of his and Saville’s inability to agree on which positions and budget lines would be shifted from the Education Department to the Vocational Training Commission. In a minute to
the minister dated 24 November 1982, the Assistant Public Service Commissioner, PJ Bartholomew, supported Chard’s broad claim on the basis that the new commission would:

- formulate policy and planning advice on the coordination of TAFE in the Northern Territory;
- handle the preparation of coordinated funding proposals on TAFE to the minister; and
- provide advice to the minister on TAFE funding and building needs (Northern Territory Archives Service 1980-1982a).

In preparation for the election that was due to be held in 1983, Chief Minister Everingham reshuffled the Cabinet on 1 December 1983. With this change the Member for Fannie Bay, Marshall Perron, assumed responsibility for the education portfolio including vocational education and training. Coinciding with the change of minister, Chard temporarily vacated his position of Chair of the newly created Vocational Training Commission. He describes:

I spent the whole of 1983 as the Northern Territory (of Australia) Fellow of the Commonwealth Relations Trust at the University of London Institute of Education. I used the opportunity to study a selection of initiatives that have been, or are being taken in England and Wales directed towards preparing young people for employment, further education, or specialised training (Chard 1983, introduction).

Chard’s (1983) report, *Enhancing the vocational preparation of youth in the Northern Territory*, set the scene for increased policy interest in the use of vocational education and training in schools and other programs aimed at early school leavers. For example, his commentary (Chard 1983, p. 135) describes the intended outcome of the Participation and Equity Program in addressing youth unemployment by encouraging ‘young people to either complete secondary education or participate in other appropriate education or training’—otherwise known as ‘earn or learn’. This report was also his swansong to vocational education and training. While Chard briefly returned to the Vocational Training Commission following his time in the United Kingdom, the combination of a different minister, new senior staff in the Education Department and an effective abandonment of the community development process for Aboriginal communities had reduced his influence in the sector. The abolition of the Vocational Training Commission in late 1984 removed not only Chard’s
formal position it disbanded the arm’s-length statutory authority. This change also consolidated vocational education and training policy into the government departmental structure making it subject to even greater levels of ministerial decision-making.

From the end of 1982, an enthusiasm to use vocational training as a public policy response to problems in their portfolios had spread to other Cabinet members. In order to ameliorate a national contraction in the youth labour market and subsequent intense lobbying by local employers, Chief Minister Everingham took a submission to Cabinet that drew together the philanthropic capacity of vocational education and training, the popular desire for government action to solve problems, and the willingness of ministers to make decisions to improve social and economic outcomes for the Northern Territory. In writing his submission to improve ‘the employment prospects of Territory school leavers’, Everingham stated ‘without Government intervention there is likely, therefore, to be a shortfall of around 500 jobs for current and recent Territory school leavers’ (Northern Territory Archives Service 1982b). On 1 December 1982, coincidently Perron’s first day as Minister for Education, Cabinet agreed to establish a committee of senior public servants to report back on a range of measures to address the projected unemployment problem. Specific remedies to be examined included:

- a system of preferential tendering for major government contracts that would specify numbers of apprentices that must be employed by the successful bidders;
- establishment of a pool of apprentices for private contractors undertaking government projects; and
- preference for local school leavers in entry-level recruitment to the Northern Territory Public Service.

In an October 1983 ministerial statement to the Legislative Assembly, Everingham described his government’s planned interventions into the youth labour market, which not only included the original three activities but also added guaranteed employment after completion of higher level training in specific fields, competitive scholarships/cadetships and Northern Territory Public Service job reservation for school leavers (Northern Territory Archives Service 1983b).
The Minister for Housing, Nick Dondas, also envisaged vocational training as a useful response to concerns over a shortage of skilled labour that had been brought to his attention by the construction industry in Alice Springs. Dondas believed that his proposal for an apprenticeship scheme linked to building dwellings for the Housing Commission would align with the other government initiatives to increase school leaver employment prospects. In the Cabinet meeting of 1 March 1983, approval was given for an allocation of $320,000 to create a pool of 10 building trade apprentices and two supervisors to construct five houses each year over a four-year period. The project would be overseen by a Board of Management consisting of representatives from the Vocational Training Commission, the Housing Commission, the Master Builders Association (MBA) and the Community College of Central Australia.

In his submission to Cabinet, Dondas proposed:

It is anticipated that there will be a favourable reaction from the general public in Alice Springs to the news that a new Northern Territory Government initiative is to employ 10 of their school leavers (Northern Territory Archives Service 1983a, p. 6).

Both of these examples demonstrate the private sector’s willingness to go to government and seek resolution of their economic and labour market problems. This approach can be aligned with the willingness of Cabinet to use vocational education and training as the vehicle to deliver public funds after a careful calculation of the economic, social and political impact on both the community’s perceptions and their ministerial careers. Government intervention was required to address cases of labour market failure. The Chair of the Vocational Training Commission supported the need for the use of public funding by attributing blame for the labour and apprenticeship shortages when he reported that ‘the Master Builders Association has agonised over the construction industry’s poor training record in the Territory’ (Chard 1983, p. 142).

The year 1983 proved to be a significant for several other reasons, including both Commonwealth and Northern Territory elections. Even though there was a massive vote to change the Federal Government with the return of the Labor Party to the treasury benches in March, Territorians again supported the Country Liberal Party’s actions with little change to the membership of the Legislative Assembly. After five years, self-government had been firmly established for the Northern Territory and the new Commonwealth Government believed that the ‘generous’
financial support for the jurisdiction should be reduced and, of course, this was a direct threat to the philanthropic capacities of the local members of the Legislative Assembly. Despite vigorous protests from the Northern Territory Government, the federal Labor Government commenced a program to reduce financial support that some commentators linked to the re-emergence of a general lack of interest in Territory affairs that had been the hallmark of the Commonwealth approach in the 1970s (Heatley 1990, p. 154).

When the Northern Territory achieved self-government, it also became eligible to benefit from the financial and social impact of the Kangan Report on Technical and Further Education and the Commonwealth’s generous response that had underpinned the redevelopment and growth of public training institutions right across the nation:

The period 1975–1982 could be summarised as being one of growth for TAFE as the Kangan committee recommendations were implemented and the TAFE Council continued to support the need for ongoing capital and recurrent funding for TAFE. In many ways, it could be seen to be the ‘golden age’ for TAFE as it continued to grow, was held in high esteem by governments and finally acquired an identifiable role in the education spectrum. It was also a period of increased Commonwealth intervention in TAFE policies and programs as succeeding government inquiries saw TAFE as a vehicle for implementing change (Goozee 2001, p. 38).

While it would take a few years to build momentum, the Hawke/Keating governments would increasingly come to use the Commonwealth’s funding for vocational education and training as a mechanism to both change the national economy and to harness the operations of the state-based TAFE systems to national policy. In order to keep federal TAFE funding flowing, in the face of less generous generic financial support than had accompanied the early days of self-government, the Northern Territory Government had to be very responsive to national economic restructuring, productivity improvements and social agendas. Unlike most of the other states, however, the Northern Territory was well-placed to respond to an activist federal government due to the early decisions not to establish a government-operated TAFE system in favour of new public management styles of contracting delivery to third parties. While the quantum of resources available to support the philanthropic behaviour of Northern Territory ministers was more tightly bound to national priorities, a continued interest in vocational education and training at the Commonwealth level provided an environment that was ripe with policy and program flexibility for the local political masters.
Even though the following TAFE historian’s comment is based upon the situation in New South Wales, it also accurately reflects Northern Territory events from 1983 onwards:

Public education and training was very much a tool of government. With any change of government (state or Commonwealth), came changes to the public sector in general and to technical and further education policies, in particular (Goozee 2013, p. 237).

In the Northern Territory during 1982–83, the bureaucratic and institutional struggles over the control of vocational education and training continued unabated, resulting in Cabinet receiving a continuous barrage of advice about how to best coordinate the sector. The creation of the Vocational Training Commission had removed yet another function from the Post-School Advisory Council whose main activity had become the development of funding submissions to the Commonwealth for advanced education courses being delivered by the Darwin Community College and ‘coordination across’ the three sectors of education (Northern Territory Archives Service 1983c). Government policy was for the Vocational Training Commission to ‘become the single accrediting authority for all technical and further education and training courses conducted in the Northern Territory’ in order to remove the ‘very considerable duplication of effort’ that was being expended in assessing and meeting the training needs of the Northern Territory community (Robertson 1982, p. 2997).

Even though the Northern Territory Government was very active in asserting its dominance over the training sector, Cabinet had to be on constant guard against those people and organisations who would seek to bypass local control by going directly to the Commonwealth. The recommendations put forward by the Alice Springs–based Tangentyere Council (1984) in Employment and training needs of Aboriginal town campers in Alice Springs provide a perfect example of this type of challenge to Northern Territory Government authority. This report was prepared for the First Assistant Secretary of the Commonwealth Department of Employment and Industrial Relations, Michael Keating, and handed over during his visit to Central Australia. While acknowledging that the various government training organisations had a role to play in ‘addressing the scandalous rate of unemployment in the Aboriginal population’ (Tangentyere Council 1984, p. 2), ‘the right kind of training will never be available unless an Aboriginal controlled organisation is at the centre of the development of training programs’
and the Institute for Aboriginal Development was singled out for the role (Tangentyere Council 1984, p. 9). In its bid to deal directly with the Commonwealth and establish Aboriginal control and direction of training programs, the report also suggested that 'the simple solution would be [for the Commonwealth] to recognise Tangentyere as a training institution and fund it accordingly' (Tangentyere Council 1984, Appendix II, p. iii). While there is little evidence of how the Commonwealth reacted to these suggestions, it does demonstrate that certain groups were willing to challenge Northern Territory ministerial control of vocational education and training by using the rhetoric of community development.

Another federal election was held on 1 December 1984 at which the Hawke Labor Government was returned. The most immediate political impact in the Northern Territory was the resignation of the first Chief Minister, Paul Everingham. He stood for the single House of Representatives seat and won the election for the Country Liberal Party. The member for Barkly, Ian Tuxworth, became the Northern Territory’s second Chief Minister and wasted no time in announcing sweeping changes to the post-school education landscape. On 20 December 1984, the Northern Territory Government made a surprise announcement concerning eight significant organisational changes with immediate effect:

- the Post-School Advisory Council was to be abolished;
- the Vocational Training Commission was to be abolished;
- the Darwin Community College Council was redesignated as the Northern Territory Council of Higher Education;
- the Darwin Community College was renamed the Darwin Institute of Technology;
- most functions of the University Planning Authority were given to the new Council of Higher Education;
- a TAFE Advisory Council, chaired by the Secretary of the Education Department, Geoff Spring, was created;
- the State Reference Library was transferred to the Education Department; and
- the Oral History programs were handed over to the Northern Territory Archives Service (Northern Territory Archives Service 1981–1988).

Those accreditation and other activities that had been carried out by the Post-School Advisory Council were given to the Higher Education Council while ‘[t]he powers and functions of the Vocational Training
Commission were delegated to the Department of Industry and Small Business on 20 December 1984’ (Northern Territory Vocational Training Commission 1984).

In Mather’s (1982, p. 11) Report on accreditation policy and practice for TAFE courses in the Northern Territory, the distinction was made between accreditation being used to meet industry needs for centralised quality control of training and so-called community needs that emphasised educational standards. The transfer of the Vocational Training Commission’s powers to an economic agency gave some indication of the government’s wish to see training more directly aligned with industry needs. However, the simultaneous establishment of a TAFE Advisory Council serviced by the Education Department ensured the community–industry distinction would become magnified. This duality served to keep alive the contested nature of vocational education and training policy and purpose. Crucially, it also legitimised the direct involvement of two ministers, one from the education portfolio and the other from an economic agency, with their own views on the philanthropic ambitions for the application of vocational education and training.

As with the government departments, 20 December was a drama-filled day for the newly anointed Darwin Institute of Technology and its renamed council. The Chief Minister pre-empted the Darwin Community College’s search for a new principal that had commenced following the departure of Joe Flint, by directly appointing long-serving education bureaucrat Kevin Davis to the role (Berzins & Loveday 1999, p. 94).

Furthermore, Davis had specific instructions from the Northern Territory Government to ensure that the new institute did not overspend its budget and to make sure there would be no impediments to the creation of a university emerging from the Darwin Institute of Technology. In the late February 1985 sittings of the Legislative Assembly, the Leader of the Opposition, Bob Collins, sought to censure Tuxworth over Davis’s appointment. In response, the Chief Minister gave a clear explanation of his understanding and intended use of ministerial powers and accountability for public funds:

Any department or arm of this government that receives $18 million of taxpayers’ money per annum is very much my interest and my responsibility and so is the appointment of its minister and its head (Tuxworth 1985, p. 96).
Tuxworth’s reply was only a contemporary manifestation of the wealthy philanthropist’s interest in using education and training to improve society that had been exhibited by Northern Territory Government ministers. In examining the ministerial correspondence from these first years of self-government, both the accessibility of the minister to constituents and the sheer volume of detailed decisions being made at that top level are standout features. In addition to the big-ticket items of government agency structures, capital expenditure and policy development, the Education Minister dealt with an extraordinary range of other matters. The wide scope of activities included approval for all interstate travel for public servants and student groups, responding to disgruntled unsuccessful tender applicants, calming upset parents, sympathising with unhappy employers of apprentices, approving equipment grants, listening to aggrieved teachers, approving early school leaver applications, adjudicating on the placement of special needs students, approving university researchers seeking access to public schools, and being lobbied by zealots wishing to pursue arcane issues and a significant number of highly motivated people and organisations promoting a diverse range of views as to what should be taught in Northern Territory educational institutions (Northern Territory Archives Service 1980–1982a).

The University Planning Authority Advisory Committee met at the University of Queensland on 11 and 12 December 1984, the week before their announcement on post-school education changes. In his role as Planning Vice-Chancellor, Jim Eedle, presented a set of proposed actions to establish a University College of the Northern Territory as a ‘first step towards the eventual development of a free-standing Northern Territory University’ (Northern Territory Archives Service 1981–1988). In August 1985, the newly appointed Minister for Education delivered The establishment of a Northern Territory University – a statement issued by the Hon. Tom Harris, MLA to the Legislative Assembly in which he indicated that ‘for us, it is of the highest priority and essential to our constitutional, economic and social development’ (Northern Territory Archives Service 1981–1988).
In spite of the Commonwealth’s absolute lack of interest accompanied by a point-blank refusal to provide funding for the move into higher education, the University College of the Northern Territory Act was passed by the Legislative Assembly in late 1985. Closely aligned with University of Queensland coursework and assessment procedures, the University College officially opened in the premises of the Old Darwin Hospital on the edge of the Darwin central business district on 4 March 1987. The Warden of the University College, Jim Thompson, has also made
reference to ministerial power, but in a way that reflects its use in other states rather than in the Northern Territory context. In discussing the difficulties in establishing a totally new institution in the face of open federal hostility and doubts about the sustainability of higher education in the Northern Territory, Thompson (1999, p. 118) states:

I appreciated too the confidence of Tom Harris as Minister for Education, especially in consistently supporting me when some people, used to the patronage system endemic in the Territory, lobbied him to overturn my decisions.

In response to the surprise reorganisation of post-school arrangements late in the previous year, the Northern Territory Department of Education conducted a review of its operations (Northern Territory Department of Education 1985). As a result, a Division of TAFE was created in the agency that took over program and policy control of the various colleges and centres that delivered training across the Northern Territory as well as responsibility for the Aboriginal community–based adult educators. The TAFE Division had three branches: Library; Adult Education; and Training for remote and regional Aboriginal residents. There was also the TAFE Policy and Planning Branch in addition to an Executive Support Unit. This latter group provided support services to the newly formed TAFE Advisory Council whose functions included:

• providing advice to the Minister for Education;
• TAFE funding;
• course and award accreditation;
• conduct of training for industry at the rebadged Territory Training Centre in Stuart Park; and
• training of Aboriginals for employment (Northern Territory Department of Education 1985).

The Darwin Institute of Technology retained its relatively independent relationship as the largest provider of training and its Council was renamed yet again—this time as the Northern Territory Council of Advanced Education. The Department of Industry and Small Business had its responsibilities, including the administration of apprenticeships, clarified in 1985 through the passage of the *Industry and Employment Training Act*. The department also established a body to serve as a conduit from industry to the Minister for Industry and Small Business—the Industry and Employment Training Advisory Council, which formally came into
existence on 30 April 1986. The minister appointed its membership in July of the same year (Industry and Employment Advisory Council 1986). This council also served another important bureaucratic purpose: it would provide the mechanism to keep in check the ever-growing ambitions of the Education Department’s TAFE Advisory Council. In addition, five Industry Training Committees were also made operational in 1985. Reporting through the council, their task was to better identify the training required to meet the labour market needs of Territory industry and business.

At the national level during this period, the Commonwealth Government was also taking major steps to deploy vocational education and training as part of a response to high levels of youth unemployment and the ineffectiveness of both employment incentives and public job creation based upon wage subsidies. The Report of the Committee of Inquiry into Labour Market Programs (Kirby 1985) made several recommendations that generally called for a greater emphasis upon education and training for individuals to prepare them for a variety of labour market conditions. Possibly the longest lasting recommendation to be taken up by the Commonwealth Government was the creation of a new category of formal training. The Australian Traineeship System would combine broad-based vocational training with employment in a related occupation. In its submission to the inquiry, the Northern Territory Government offered support for the existing federally funded programs and wage subsidies for apprenticeships such as the Group One Year Apprenticeships and the Commonwealth Rebate for Full Time Training, which had been used to support the operations of the Skills Training Centre in Stuart Park. It was also noted that because ‘population growth is expected to remain central to the process of economic development in the Northern Territory’ and ‘to the end of the decade, we can expect industry to require an increasingly skilled workforce’ that increased federal funding would be welcomed (Northern Territory Government 1984, pp. 5–6).

The Northern Territory Government agencies impacted by the Kirby Report put in a large amount of effort to estimate the benefits, costs and consequences of implementing the new training system. In February 1985, departmental officer Dennis Sutton recommended to the Secretary of the Department of Industry and Small Business that the main findings of the Kirby Report should be accepted by the Northern Territory Government. Sutton cautioned that some political considerations would be required to explain the simultaneous existence
of high rates of unemployment and the undersupply of skilled labour (Northern Territory Archives Service 1984–1991d). In a letter dated 14 March 1985, Bill Grimster, the Assistant Secretary of TAFE in the Northern Territory Education Department, also indicated his agency’s support for the introduction of traineeships (Northern Territory Archives Service 1984–1991d). In response to a letter from Prime Minister Hawke that had been written on 11 March 1985, Chief Minister Tuxworth replied a month later endorsing ‘the concept of a traineeship system’ and offering facilitation in the Northern Territory through ‘cooperative arrangements within my Government which are parallel to those you have in place’ (Northern Territory Archives Service 1984–1991d). At a seminar about the proposed traineeship system on 30 April 1985, views were solicited of the peak Northern Territory organisations with an interest in the area. Participants gave qualified support, although a note of caution was sounded by the Education Department’s Bill Grimster on the 550 traineeships that were projected for the Northern Territory, ‘I doubt the capacity of NT industry to offer this many traineeships, at this stage’ (Department of Industry and Small Business 1985).

In August 1985, the Federal Minister for Employment and Industrial Relations, Ralph Willis MP, officially announced a new Youth Traineeships System that would assist with the transition from school to work and ‘ensure Australia has a better educated and more adaptable workforce’ (Northern Territory Archives Service 1984–1991d). While there was ongoing discussion between Northern Territory and Commonwealth public servants over levels of funding and the elusive search for national consistency, traineeships were successfully introduced and accepted by local Territory businesses. Nationally, the number of students undertaking traineeships surpassed those in traditional apprenticeships in 2000, but with changes to government incentives and policies the number in each category had returned to parity in 2013 at about 206,000 (National Centre for Vocational Education Research 2013b).

The implementation of the Kirby Report is significant for another reason. In the future, Northern Territory Government ministers would be treated much more like their state counterparts by the Commonwealth Government. Because of its superior financial resources, the national parliament was becoming more constitutionally bold in demanding nationally consistent policies for vocational education and training that would be enforced by monetary carrots and sticks. Because of its small size, distance from the main population centres and a single vote in the
House of Representatives, Northern Territory ministers would be more frequently put in a position of having to respond to, instead of set, policy in the training arena. When interviewed about the power discrepancy, the former Minister for Education and Training and Chief Minister, Shane Stone, recounted that Northern Territory ministers had to be better prepared than all the other participants in national forums, received good background advice from its cadre of faithful senior public servants, and were not constrained by the potential conflict of interest of having a state-type TAFE system to consider at national policy level when they attended ministerial meetings convened by the Commonwealth.

Another reason why Northern Territory ministers were so well-placed is related to legislative changes rushed through the Legislative Assembly by the Tuxworth Government in a three-hour time span on 6 June 1985. As the then Public Service Commissioner Ken Pope describes, ‘the Act effectively passes control of the administration of the Public Service and the statutory (prescribed) authorities into the hands of the minister’ (Pope 1986, p. 6). In reflecting upon the Northern Territory ministers’ desire for control over senior level public service appointments and the power to transfer public servants between agencies, Pope goes on to state:

It can only be surmised that the Tuxworth Government has seen the independence of the [Public Service] Commissioner as a threat to the introduction of new management and staffing practices which the Government is anxious to implement. It is unfortunate, but true, that the Country Liberal Party which has been in office since the grant of self-government in the Northern Territory has a marked characteristic — it has an inherent dislike of public servants, which often appears to amount to an obsession. There is a belief, almost an instinct, held by many politicians that autocratic and dictatorial approaches to problems must yield the best solutions (Pope 1986, pp. 8–9).

Certainly Pope was witnessing yet another, even though extreme, exercise that positioned ministers of the Northern Territory Government as the ultimate authority, allowing them to act philanthropically when they wished to do so. It also formalised the introduction of new public management into government agencies. The so-called ‘dislike’ of public servants was only a current manifestation of a long-standing suspicion of public service–driven government that dates back to the behaviour of the official members of the Legislative Council and the general feeling of benign neglect exercised by the Commonwealth Government throughout its period of control. In addition, traditional bureaucratic and rule-bound
governance conflicted with what Heatley (1998, p. 77) describes as the Country Liberal Party’s ‘populist and pragmatic approach to politics, its political adroitness and its capture of the dominant symbols and values of the Territory’.

Heatley (1998, pp. 102–109) believes that the Country Liberal Party moved further in the direction of poll-driven and populist electoralism than other Australian parties because of the ‘newness of the polity and the party’ and ‘the particular political culture and voting behaviour of Territorians’. In other words, ministers wanted to be seen to be in charge of the activities of their portfolios because they wished to be responsive to their identification with the needs of the electorate. As we have shown, the voters expect their elected members to take action and it is the minister who is held accountable at the next election, not public servants. In his typically straightforward manner, former Chief Minister Shane Stone has reflected on the relative roles of public servants and politicians, ‘to indirectly quote and paraphrase Paul Keating, you are either in government or in power’ (Martin & Dewar 2012, p. 117).

The year 1986 saw the Northern Territory Cabinet approve further reorganisations of both advisory arrangements and in the institutions undertaking delivery of vocational education and training. The Secretary of the Department of Education, Geoff Spring, was put in charge of a new Northern Territory Tertiary Education Council. This group was to advise the minister on funding matters for the sector and handle the relationship with the Commonwealth Tertiary Education Council. The other members were the chairs of the Northern Territory Council of Advanced Education (Darwin Institute of Technology’s former council), the TAFE Advisory Council and the University College Northern Territory Council (Berzins & Loveday 1999, p. 101).

The agency with responsibility for apprenticeship training and its advisory council, the Department of Industry and Small Business, were not represented on the Tertiary Education Council. This resulted in the responsible minister, Nick Dondas, having reduced influence over the future development of the dual-sector institutions that provided the off-the-job training component for the 1,300 apprentices that were in declared trades (Northern Territory of Australia 1987b).
As it turns out, the Department of Industry and Small Business was only in existence for 16 months (December 1984 to April 1986) when it was replaced by a new agency, the Department of Business, Technology and Communications. This revamped department took over responsibility for apprenticeship training that had previously resided with the former Vocational Training Commission. This change also brought a new minister into the mix, Ray Hanrahan. On 27 August 1986, one of the first actions taken by the new departmental head of Business, Technology and Communications, Col Fuller, was to appoint Ian Cummin, the group manager of employee resources in the Northern Territory Electricity Commission, to undertake a review of the Northern
Territory apprenticeship system. In the introduction to his findings, Cummin (1986, p. 3) provided the ‘populist and pragmatic’ content to which the minister, in particular, and Cabinet, in general, could respond: ‘The employer is the key participant in the apprenticeship system. It is the employer who voluntarily provides, at considerable cost, the means for the apprenticeship system to operate’. Cummin also picked up on the never-ending bureaucratic demarcation disputes by suggesting that Fuller’s new agency wholly administer training, the need for better coordination and more streamlined government support for employers. He also continued with populism in his recommendations on the need for ‘theoretical’ trainers to be more in touch with industrial environments, the inadequacy of practical skills of apprentices; the low apprenticeship completion rate, and the need to not allow apprentices to participate in industrial action (Cummin 1986).

However, Cummin was only tapping into a much older set of concerns about the shortcomings of Northern Territory apprentices. The Department of Industry and Small Business had published a report on areas requiring improvement in the previous year. One of the recommendations contained in the overview stated:

That the Secretary, NT Department of Education, be notified of the general dissatisfaction expressed by apprentice employers, regarding inadequate literacy and numeracy skills of school-leavers to cope with apprentice training (Recommendation 17, Sri-Pathimanathan 1985, p. xi).

These two reports were only the mid-1980s version of concerns that were expressed almost 10 years earlier in the period immediately prior to self-government. In his address at the Apprentices’ Presentation Night in February 1977, the Executive Officer of the Master Builders Association, Barry Whyatt (1977), made sweeping criticisms of Northern Territory schools, the Education Department, the behaviour of apprentices and the inadequacy of Commonwealth funding. In particular, he advocated for the elimination of bureaucratic government procedures and a much more streamlined administration of training. In response to this type of criticism, the Northern Territory Division of the Commonwealth Education Department had appointed one of its most experienced educators in the Territory, Charles Beresford, to survey employer sentiments on their pre-employment requirements with a view to updating course content at the Darwin Community College and in years 11 and 12 at school. Employers
expressed concern about low levels of generic employability skills, high rates of staff turnover, the ‘poor’ attitudes of young people in general and the inferior nature/standard of apprentices ‘today’; less than 4 per cent of employers interviewed were happy with the Northern Territory education system (Beresford 1977).

In a demonstration of how certain simple concepts can be carried forward, the issues from two decades before remained alive and well into 1997. Yet another report was produced, Apprenticeships at the crossroads, which opened with a sense of crisis that demanded government action: ‘apprenticeship numbers in the Northern Territory were lower in 1996 than they were in 1984’ (Trade Training Working Group 1997, p. 1). The many now familiar problems addressed in this report are summarised by the following need for ‘recognition that, practically, at least, the available vocational educational and training products are not meeting the needs of industry and the workforce’ (Trade Training Working Group 1997, pp. 17–18).

Returning to 1986, the Northern Territory Open College of TAFE was brought into existence through the amalgamation of disparate government operational units. With its head office located in Darwin, the Open College had regional campuses in Alice Springs, Tennant Creek, Katherine, Palmerston and Nhulunbuy as well as numerous adult educators that were still based in remote Aboriginal communities. In addition, the Secondary Correspondence School, the Adult Migrant English Program and the Territory Training Centre (originally the Industry Skills Centre that had been set up by the Industry Training Commission in Stuart Park) operated as functional units in the organisational structure (Northern Territory Department of Education 1992, p. 33). In common with the other colleges that operated under the Education Department umbrella, the Northern Territory Open College had a large council (17 members) representing a wide range of stakeholders and with significant levels of independence and local decision-making in college internal matters.

The Department of Business, Technology and Communications used the Cummin Review to guide its responsibilities for employment, apprenticeships, manpower and labour market through the provision of ‘factual, objective and timely policy advice and to carry out the Government’s policies in a professional and efficient manner’ and in the belief that the current apprenticeship training arrangements did
not meet anyone’s needs (Northern Territory of Australia 1988b, p. 2). This department was only in existence for 13 months before the next departmental structure was put in place under a new Chief Minister.

Figure 32. The Honourable Terry McCarthy.
Source: Creator Bert Wiedemann, PH0730/1367, Northern Territory Government Photographer Slide Collection, Northern Territory Library.

Following considerable leadership turmoil in the parliamentary wing of the Country Liberal Party, Tuxworth resigned from the office of Chief Minister on 16 May 1986 and was replaced by the member for Nightcliff,
Steve Hatton. In Hatton’s second ministry, commencing 19 March 1987, the apprenticeship and employment functions were transferred to a new Department of Labour and Administrative Services with Terry McCarthy serving as the minister. Local Government would be added to the name of the department in February 1988. The secretary of this new agency was Syd Saville, the former head of the Department of Education, who had fought many battles with the two training commissions over the ‘ownership’ and coordination of vocational education and training policy and operations.

Throughout the almost five-year existence of the latest incarnation of the Apprenticeship Board, the inter-agency conflict that had been created by the original decision to separate apprenticeship functions from other educational operations that had been made during self-government negotiations would not diminish. Like Geoff Chard before him, Saville would find no problem with changing sides whilst still vigorously fighting for control of the agenda. As a result of the public sector management changes made by the Tuxworth Government, senior public servants clearly understood that the highest priority was to marshal as many resources as possible to put towards the task of meeting ‘their’ minister’s views of how to best pursue the social and economic improvement of the Northern Territory.

In Central Australia, 1987 also saw the renaming of the Community College of Central Australia to the Alice Springs College of TAFE, which immediately was reduced to ASCOT. The local community college had been progressively redeveloped in response to Pattinson's (1980) educational specification and Cabinet approval of building design and construction on a site on the east side of the town, adjacent to the Sadadeen High School (Northern Territory Archives Service 1977–2003c). The change in name also served several much more symbolic purposes. The title ‘community college’ had not been taken up by the various state-based education systems and with the changes mooted for the advanced and higher education sectors that would lead to the unified national system of universities, the term was no longer viable in terms of the connotations it carried. In addition, the Northern Territory Government wanted to make sure that its bid to establish a university was not side-tracked by ambit claims or speculation about the offering of advanced or higher education in Alice Springs—the focus was to be firmly on Darwin. Inside the Northern Territory, steps were also being taken to change the structure of secondary schooling to include senior secondary
colleges for year 11 and year 12 students. In Alice Springs, the designated senior campus would commence in 1987 at Sadadeen High School and a clear demonstration of the linkage to pre-employment training and a sense of shared facilities were used to help promote the concept to the local voters (High schools and secondary colleges working party 1985). The designation of the Alice Springs College of TAFE suited a number of political agendas that were being pursued by the Northern Territory Cabinet at that time.

In remote and regional Aboriginal communities, 1987 came with a new organisational structure for the delivery of post–primary school education including vocational education and training. Many of the larger remote schools were to be rebadged as Community Education Centres operating as part of the Northern Territory Open College’s responsibilities. This move would also incorporate the work of the adult educators into the mainstream operations of the Department of Education (Northern Territory Open College 1987, p. 1). The integration of post-primary and adult education into the Community Education Centres would be trialled in eight larger communities in 1988 and eventually rolled out to 20 sites over the next couple of years. The ‘innovative programs’ on offer were to be ‘strongly linked to training and employment outcomes’ and were ‘endorsed by the NT Minister for Education, Daryl Manzie’ (Northern Territory Open College 1987, p. 1). The minister appears to have been a supporter of the Duke of Edinburgh’s Award scheme because the Community Education Centres would incorporate the ethos of the award program’s emphasis upon ‘high personal commitment, community service and identification with the program’ (Northern Territory Open College 1987, p. 14). The new organisational structures did not produce the intended outcomes and Arnott’s (2003) retrospective analysis puts this down to two factors. The former adult educators had two bosses: the locally based principal of the Community Education Centre (a school teacher) and a senior person located in the head office of the Northern Territory Open College. Inevitably, school-based leaders and bureaucrats frequently had different agendas and priorities driven by dissimilar perceptions of what was important. He also attributes the gradual reduction in human and other resources allocated to adult education in remote areas to the more centralised and managerial elements of new public management (Arnott 2003, p. 52).
By the end of 1987, substantial changes had been made to the vocational education and training landscape in the Northern Territory. The two government departments with the most direct interest and responsibility oversaw a plethora of advisory bodies designed to ensure that every possible interest group was given an opportunity, albeit once removed, to have input to the ministers. These advisory councils served two important political functions in addition to their operational responsibilities. They provided a venue that allowed the minister to be represented as listening and responsive, but also protected the minister from being directly linked to potentially unpopular or damaging decisions. Of course, the minister always made the final decision and may or may not have followed any advice that came out of these bodies or the government agencies. Students wishing to undertake studies in the various streams of Technical and Further Education could attend the Darwin Institute of Technology, the Alice Springs College of TAFE, Batchelor College, the Northern Territory Open College or the Katherine Rural Education Centre. Higher education students were limited to correspondence courses from interstate universities or attending the University College of the Northern Territory in Darwin.

Two other events on the national scene took place in 1987 and these would guide the development of the training sector for the next quarter of a century. As mentioned previously, one reality of self-government was that Northern Territory Government ministers were placed in the position of being policy responders, rather than setters, when the Commonwealth Government made decisions. While the implementation of vocational education and training policies, such as the introduction of traineeships or provision of capital infrastructure, could be negotiated to suit the peculiarities of this remote jurisdiction, ministerial attention in the Northern Territory was frequently focused on how to get the best deal rather than on the substance of the policy direction. The first of the major policy shifts on the part of the Commonwealth, to which the Northern Territory would have to respond, was promulgated through the release of *Australia Reconstructed* (Department of Trade, Australian Council of Trade Unions (ACTU) & Trade Development Council (TDC) 1987).

This report had been commissioned by the then Federal Minister for Trade and Minister assisting the Prime Minister on Youth Affairs, John Dawkins, and reported on the findings of a joint mission that had extensively consulted in a number of European countries about how Australia might address the emerging global economy, improve human
capital and ensure social and economic prosperity could be achieved in the country’s medium- to long-term future. The complex and interrelated set of recommendations called for no less than a radical overhaul of labour markets and social welfare—both underpinned by a much more responsive training system and a commitment to lifelong learning to ensure that workforce participation became the primary obligation of Australian citizens. While there is little evidence to suggest that the report itself had a major impact upon any particular activity in the Northern Territory, the development of human capital as an input into economic and social development fit well with local ambitions. *Australia Reconstructed* placed major emphasis upon the pivotal role that would be played by trade unions in revamping the nation’s economic future and labour force. As events unfolded, the place of unions became less central in the renovated Australia, but almost every other major policy element concerning vocational education and training is still clearly visible in the contemporary national training system.

A second national policy action arose out of *Australia Reconstructed*. In order to implement many of the major findings contained in the seminal report, the Hawke Labor Government undertook a major program of macroeconomic reform. To harness the activities for the improvement of Australia’s human capital, Dawkins advocated for and won federal Cabinet support for the creation of a ‘super-department’ of Employment, Education and Training in 1987. This was the very first time that ‘training’ had appeared in the name of a Commonwealth department. In his characteristically no-nonsense style, the minister set out in *Skills for Australia* (Dawkins & Holding 1987) the beginnings of the reform agenda that was about to sweep over the state-operated TAFE systems. This document outlined a highly interventionist and activist policy agenda that would use the Commonwealth Government’s superior financial power to set priorities in order to achieve national outcomes.

While *Australia Reconstructed* set out the rationale for what would happen in the training arena, *Skills for Australia* introduced the specific programs and actions that would be used by the Commonwealth Government to achieve its goals. The Northern Territory Government had no option but to respond favourably in this space to protect revenue streams and to progress the establishment of a full university in the face of Commonwealth opposition. Some of the specific impacts upon the Northern Territory that were contained in *Skills for Australia* implementation actions included the need to sign a submission-based resource agreement with
the Commonwealth (instead of historically untied per capita funding), bringing the Northern Territory’s own expenditure on TAFE into alignment with national priorities and a threat to redirect funding from the Northern Territory Government to industry or training institutions if Commonwealth objectives were not met. In advising Minister Manzie on how to best deal with Dawkins’s interventions, the Secretary of the Education Department, Geoff Spring, articulated the reality of a Northern Territory minister’s options, ‘It is clear from the TAFE document that the NT will need quick reaction procedures to respond to these new requests for submissions’ (Northern Territory Archives Service 1 June 1987–26 October 1987). Dawkins wrote to the new Minister for Education, Ray Hanrahan, on 18 January 1988 confirming that the Commonwealth would provide $7.17 million for TAFE in that year based upon the Northern Territory meeting negotiated targets in the areas leading to:

- increased TAFE workforce productivity to do with class sizes, wages and operating hours;
- budget restraint;
- implementation of the Australian Traineeship System;
- increased tourism and hospitality training;
- increased enrolments at the Katherine Rural College; and
- increased Aboriginal training (Northern Territory Archives Service 1 June 1987–26 October 1987).

Dawkins would continue to dominate the vocational education and training agenda for the next two years. His government’s policies and priorities were further elaborated in three more papers: *Industry training in Australia: the need for change; A changing workforce; and Improving Australia’s training system* (Dawkins 1988a, 1988b, 1989). With the consolidation of employment, training and education functions in the one agency, Dawkins was also able to drive his comprehensive agenda for labour force development over these two years. The Commonwealth’s single entity and aligned policy positions continuously exposed the bureaucratic rivalries between the two Northern Territory Government agencies: the University College and the Darwin Institute of Technology. In yet another attempt to reduce the friction, Cabinet decided to conduct a review of the *Employment and Training Act* in late 1988. Seeking to take advantage of Saville’s resignation from the Department of Labour, Administrative Services and Local Government, Spring constantly attempted to exert his department’s domination of vocational education
and training policy with the reinstated Minister for Education, Tom Harris (Northern Territory Archives Service 20 May 1988–28 November 1988). This eventually resulted in Minister Harris writing to Minister McCarthy requesting that the Department of Labour, Administrative Services and Local Government improve its performance and become better at communication and coordination between the two departments (Northern Territory Archives Service 2 November 1988–30 December 1988). There is no record of McCarthy’s response.

In the vocational education and training sector, the period 1989 to 1991 was characterised by the continuation of the types of government behaviour that has been described in the preceding section. The Commonwealth Minister Dawkins was driving what became known as the National Training Reform Agenda while the two Northern Territory departments and ministers squabbled over control but somehow cobbled together responses to the national policy environment. In summarising the overall relationship in education and training between the states, territories and Commonwealth Government, Geoff Spring wrote to the Secretary of the Chief Minister’s Department:

> The Commonwealth is quite blatantly using its financial power to bludgeon states into accepting these resource agreements or risk funding being given to other states and territories. It seems likely that this process will continue unless there is a concerted action by all states/territories to resist. The trend will continue if states compete against each other and the Commonwealth is able to play one off against the other (Northern Territory Archives Service 1985–1990).

By late 1990, the national reform agenda had become much more refined as a result of the Training costs of award restructuring: Report of the Training Costs Review Committee (Deveson 1990). In preparation for the first meeting of the newly established Vocational Education, Employment and Training Advisory Committee, Dawkins wrote on 18 October 1990 to the members and the ministers with responsibility for training in each state and territory, giving his initial reaction to the committee’s findings.

> ‘I regard the Deveson Report as a significant milestone on the path of reform along which we have been moving over the last three years’ (Northern Territory Archives Service 1985–1990). As a result of the ministers’ meeting held in Melbourne on 22 November 1990, the major policy parameters suggested in the Deveson Report were agreed and they have substantially underpinned vocational education and training policy ever since. These reforms to training were intended to complement a range of other changes to industrial awards, the introduction of enterprise
bargaining at work unit levels and other labour market and social welfare initiatives designed to improve the participation and productivity of Australia’s workforce that had been imported as a result of *Australia Reconstructed*.

Minister Dawkins also believed that the training workforce itself needed to improve the way it operated. ‘TAFE must lose its monopoly position in respect of many aspects of training’, Dawkins wrote to the ministers before the November meeting (Northern Territory Archives Service 1985–1990). He signalled the Commonwealth’s intention to establish an ‘open training market’ that would be serviced by both public and private providers who met registration standards. In return, the Commonwealth would remove its ban on the state TAFE systems being able to charge student fees, expand the Austudy program of financial assistance to the disadvantaged and provide capital funding for more skill centres. Future Commonwealth TAFE funding would be tied to demonstrable efforts on the part of the states to improve the efficiency of their training systems and programs that gave priority to national goals in entry-level training (to address youth unemployment), literacy, numeracy and English as a second language.

All of this activity would have to conform to and use nationally consistent mechanisms for setting skill competencies, curriculum, accreditation, certification and articulation into other education sectors. In order to monitor the progress of these sweeping changes there would be efficiency and equity audits, a new national managerial information system and the publication of key performance indicators. Dawkins also noted that the private sector had a role to play and demanded a ‘substantial sustained increase in training provided by industry’ and this was backed up the threat of introducing a training guarantee levy on large enterprises (Northern Territory Archives Service 1985–1990). For the Federal Government, the envisaged relationship between the two governments resulting from the implementation of the Deveson Report recommendations saw that ‘state and territory authorities would continue to exercise their statutory functions but within an agreed national framework and lateral reciprocal framework’ (Northern Territory Archives Service 1985–1990). In other words, the Commonwealth would exercise policy control enforced by their ‘financial bludgeon’, while the states and territories would be responsible for delivery and reporting.
In what must have been a very busy meeting on 22 November 1990, the various state, territory and federal ministers also agreed to support further progress on the introduction of competency-based training, the future funding for group training schemes, national training excellence awards, and national processes for the recognition of skills acquired overseas (Northern Territory Archives Service 1985–1990).

The Northern Territory Government was well placed to respond to the National Training Reform Agenda partly because, unlike the states, it did not operate its own TAFE system (Zoellner 2013a). The delivery of training was being undertaken by arm’s-length organisations whose governance was provided by relatively autonomous college or institute councils. In fact, throughout 1988 and 1989 a number of steps were taken by government that would allow the Northern Territory to act favourably to the centralisation of policy and reporting at the Commonwealth level in ways that would become operationalised through the yet to be delivered Deveson recommendations. During 1988, the final decisions were being taken by the Northern Territory Government on how to best go about establishing the Northern Territory University. As with the handover of the education function from the Commonwealth a decade earlier, noisy interest groups were active in their efforts to lobby Cabinet ministers for an outcome they thought would be most beneficial to their own well-being. One of the key matters revolved around the future position and control of the TAFE functions of the Darwin Institute of Technology. Options ranged from returning training to the Education Department to the establishment of a new and completely independent institution.

In his capacity as Secretary of the Education Department, Geoff Spring chaired a Higher Education Planning Group that had its first meeting on 28 April 1988 where the controversial idea of creating the new university through a merger of the University College and the Darwin Institute of Technology was canvassed:

In this option it was stressed that the role of TAFE must not be compromised by being placed in an autonomous higher education institution and that the Northern Territory Government must be able to give direction in response to training requirements. The proposed place of TAFE is recommended as a key part of the University of the Northern Territory but with recognition that the Northern Territory Government has a responsibility to decide on policy matters and to determine priorities for funding and facilities for education and training in the TAFE sector on the basis of the Northern Territory Government providing 85 per cent
of the funding as opposed to 15 per cent Commonwealth funding which is subject to a resource agreement (Higher Education Planning Group 1988, p. 12).

The final recommendation to Cabinet was to have an Institute of TAFE within the new university structure. Two now familiar themes were reinforced with this recommendation. Cabinet ministers will have ultimate authority over vocational education and training and there would be no return to the original broad range of powers of the Darwin Community College that had been ‘curtailed’ immediately following self-government. After considerable further discussion, the Northern Territory University came into being on 1 January 1989 through the amalgamation of the University College and the Darwin Institute of Technology. The Institute of TAFE was also established as part of the new institution’s structure. In his report to the Education Department on the results of a request from the university to the Commonwealth for an establishment grant in line with other higher education start-ups, the now Deputy Vice-Chancellor of the Northern Territory University, Jim Thompson, cites a letter from the federal minister dated 10 January 1989:

Mr Dawkins concludes: The Commonwealth considers that the NT Government should continue to carry the costs of those diseconomies which are a direct consequence of its decision on this matter (Northern Territory Archives Service 1985–1989).

Accompanying the various activities being taken to establish the nation’s first truly dual-sector university, the Northern Territory Cabinet was making other changes to its own agencies and their responsibilities for vocational education and training. Syd Saville had been shifted into the position of Public Service Commissioner and from 19 March 1987 his office ‘also gained the employment and training functions formerly undertaken by the Department of Business, Technology and Communications’ (Northern Territory of Australia 1987a, pp. 1–2). The annual report for 1986–87 shows that there were 1,361 apprentices in training at 30 June 1986 in 51 declared trades.

By the following year, the operations of the Department of Labour and Administrative Services had also been annexed to the Office of the Public Service Commissioner. The agency was busy across a range of research and policy issues including providing representation on no less than 13 Territory and national advisory committees, promoting training for women, publishing a labour market report, supporting local employment
activities and developing trade training guidelines. In addition, support was being given to the introduction of the Australian Traineeship System and there were seven Industry Training Committees providing input into training priorities and content in the areas of:

- Fishing
- Building and Construction
- Tourism
- Local Government
- Retail
- Automotive
- Road Transport (Northern Territory of Australia 1988a).

By mid-way through 1989, David Hawkes had been appointed to the position of Public Service Commissioner and also served as the secretary of the Department of Labour and Administrative Services as well as the Northern Territory Teaching Service Commissioner. All three of these roles insured that he would inevitably end up in conflict with the ambitious and hard-working Geoff Spring, who continued his persistent efforts to increase the range and reach of power and influence exercised by the Department of Education. In the Annual Report 1988/89 of the Public Service Commissioner and the Department of Labour and Administrative Services (Northern Territory of Australia 1989), the Employment and Training Division reported on a variety of activities and outputs that were being achieved by the three branches of Research and Development, Aboriginal Development and Training Development.

Highlights included having 541 participants in the public sector School Leavers Program; 15 occupations had been declared suitable for the formal employment of trainees as part of the new national system; there were eight industry training committees operating; and three Group Training Companies had been established to serve as the employer for apprentices who could be moved to different work situations/sites/companies in order to complete their apprenticeship. These group schemes were the Housing Industry Associates, Top End Group Training and Central Australia Group Training. Their activities were jointly supported by both Commonwealth and Northern Territory resources and could trace their origins back to the ideas of ‘pools’ of housing and construction apprentices that had been created in Darwin and Alice Springs soon after self-government. The latter two companies mentioned above combined
about a decade later to form GTNT, which celebrated its 25th birthday in 2014. There were 116 trainees and 1,299 apprentices in training at 30 June 1989 (Northern Territory of Australia 1989, pp. 84–86). The growth area for formal training was in traineeships as apprentice numbers in training had flatlined in the second half of the 1980s given that there were 1,290 apprentices at the same date in 1985. It was also reported that due to ‘the limited range of course [sic] available from tertiary institutions’ some 200 Northern Territory apprentices were funded by the Northern Territory Government to attend interstate TAFE colleges for their off-the-job training components during 1988 (Northern Territory Archives Service 1984–1991g, folio 72).

The activism of the Commonwealth Government and the responsive position assumed by Northern Territory Government ministers created an imperative to get the best possible advice to Cabinet to minimise federally driven financial reductions to the vocational education and training system in the Northern Territory while retaining the maximum amount of ministerial discretion. Clearly the Northern Territory politicians believed that the costs of continual bickering between its agencies and statutory authorities over TAFE were worth the political benefit. Various interest groups, who continually sought ministerial intervention, were enabled to be legitimate contributors to policy decisions, and ministerial responsiveness to the local electorates could be exerted through several mechanisms. On 8 February 1989, Chief Minister Marshall Perron wrote to Education Minister Tom Harris and the Minister for Labour, Administrative Services and Local Government, Terry McCarthy. He instructed them to pull their respective department secretaries into line and stated that he had no intention of joining training with education due to the need for ‘providing an independent link with industry through the labour portfolio’ (Northern Territory Archives Service 1984–1991g). Perron goes on to instruct both ministers to reassess the roles of advisory councils to avoid duplication and to clarify ‘grey areas’. Perron’s refusal to combine the roles is yet another example of the influence exerted by the Country Liberal Party’s generalised distrust of public servants and the electoral imperative of being able to calculate and apply the political responsiveness expected of the Northern Territory ministers. Having two distinct methods of interacting with the public and using public sector expertise protected the minister from ‘group think’ and ensured that a wide variety of options were being actively canvassed by senior public servants and ministerial advisors prior to the minister having to make a decision.
Minister Harris wrote back to the Chief Minister on 22 May 1989 to describe the actions that had been taken to follow his instructions to better manage tensions between the two government departments. These included better agenda coordination, combined meetings, joint committee membership where possible and that both ministers were awaiting the results of the review into the Employment and Training Act (Northern Territory Archives Service 1984–1991g). Regardless of the bureaucratic battles for control over policy and funding, Territory residents experienced significantly increased access to a more varied range of training services during this period. The widely scattered colleges, community education centres and institutes had developed a range of programs to meet the diverse needs of the Territory’s multicultural and widespread population. These included the remotely based adult educators, Mobile Adult Learning Units, itinerant lecturers and residential short courses. In fact, in its review of the contribution of the vocational education and training sector to national microeconomic reform, the Industry Commission (1998, pp. 133–139) describes the Northern Territory as a pioneer in flexible alternative delivery strategies designed to improve access to training and the programs it had in place in 1989. During 1989–90, this focus upon access was also enhanced by Batchelor College planning for and opening its Alice Springs campus, using the former Ansett Motel accommodation in Gillen, to extend training to a larger number of Aboriginal Territorians.

The review into the provisions of the Act that governed many aspects of vocational education and training, anticipated by Harris’s comments above, was done under the instructions of the Secretary of the Department of Chief Minister, Alan Morris, and was to be completed by June 1989 (Northern Territory Archives Service 1984–1991f). Due to the high levels of contestation between the public service departments, Kent Maddoch of Network Australia provided an external consultancy service to conduct the review for a fixed fee of just over $16,000. His major recommendation was that training policy and the coordination of TAFE should be managed by a single ministry (Northern Territory Archives Service 1984–1991f). The results of the review supplied Minister McCarthy with an action plan to go against the express wishes of the Chief Minister for joint responsibility. The battles for control raged in mid-1989. The high levels of antagonism were exemplified by Spring’s memo to Harris giving his initial impression of proposed changes to the Employment and Training Act that would remove
TAFE from the Education Department. Spring advised his minister that ‘[i]t is a very poorly researched, biased and inaccurate report’ (Northern Territory Archives Service 2 November 1988–30 December 1988).

On 21 July 1989, the Public Service Commissioner, David Hawkes, wrote to Minister McCarthy requesting that another consultant and prominent Territory identity, Sue Bradley, be brought in to chair a joint working party on the Employment and Training Act that would have membership from the Industry and Employment and TAFE Advisory Councils ‘given the sensitive nature of the task’ (Northern Territory Archives Service 1984–1991f, folio 110)—this was approved just three days later. The original consultant’s suggestions had given rise to a sustained and strong reaction from a wide variety of industry groups with the vast majority writing to the various ministers expressing their strong objection to employment and training functions being handed over to the Department of Education. This review of the review would take many months to complete and apparently had little public profile. On 1 May 1990, Hawkes sent a memo to Minister McCarthy indicating that the Bradley deliberations had produced a ‘near final’ product that would give the Northern Territory Government a clear policy direction:

The principal thrust of the Working Party’s Report is to involve industry to a much larger extent in the identification of issues and the formulation of advice to Government. I think it is a direction which Government should support (Northern Territory Archives Service 1984–1991e, folio 432).

Minister McCarthy signed off on the proposal with a handwritten note: ‘Please proceed as discussed’. The need to get business and industry interests in the Northern Territory more closely involved with the emerging national agenda was becoming a major issue for the local ministers. One of the key national reforms was to introduce a range of registered providers into a training marketplace. This was to expose TAFE institutes, including the Northern Territory University and other local college providers, to competition so as to make the system more responsive to economic and industrial needs in a rapidly restructured economy entering a sustained period of economic downturn. However, major industry groups did not necessarily agree with the mechanisms that would be used to ensure the quality of training provision in this new quasi-market. On 25 July 1990, the Executive Director of the Northern Territory Master Builders Association wrote a letter to Chief Minister
Perron headed ‘Bureaucratic Empire Building’. Merv Elliott (Northern Territory Archives Service 1984–1991c) started by complaining that he had not received a reply from Education Minister Harris when he had written to him on the topic and then went on to attack the proposed registration of training providers:

Regarding the exercise in empire building being undertaken by the Education Department in seeking registration of all non-Education Department training providers — I seek your immediate intervention to put a stop to this exercise in stupidity, as there is no way that the private sector will accept this exercise as a valid activity of Government.

There is no record of the Chief Minister’s response, but as events unfolded, the creation of the Northern Territory Employment and Training Authority, which implemented the Bradley recommendations for greater industry control, ensured that this type of dissension and its threat to the flow of Commonwealth funding was ameliorated. In fact, by 1991, the Northern Territory was again recognised for leading the nation in the implementation of training reform by passing legislation, which introduced competency-based training into apprenticeships and traineeships while also allowing for the recognition of skills demonstrated on the job rather than a strictly time-served basis to more rapidly progress participants through the training process (Industry Commission 1998). Indeed, the change in Chief Minister that took place in 1988 when Marshall Perron replaced Steve Hatton only served to support the more rapid adoption of training reform into the jurisdiction based upon Perron’s previous experience as the Minister for Education.

The general election held in October 1990 saw a return of the Perron Government and introduced a new and highly ambitious member for Port Darwin, Shane Stone, directly into the ministry. Towards the end of 1991, Stone became the Minister for Education and Training in order to remove the division of ministerial responsibility that had resulted in conflicting views on training policy being continually aired in Cabinet. It also allowed Stone to engage fully with Dawkins’s ambitious and hard-driven national reform agenda. When interviewed about this period of time, Stone recalls that he and Dawkins, despite their differing political party affiliations, got on well at a personal level and shared much common philosophical ground on the role that should be played by vocational education and training in social and economic development. Characterised by sometimes ‘robust’ negotiating exchanges between himself and the
federal minister, Stone believes that his support for national reform and the Territory’s capacity to respond rapidly resulted in highly favourable financial and policy considerations from the Commonwealth.

Several other bureaucratic reorganisations took place during the Bradley-led deliberations over changes to the Employment and Training Act. Along with the introduction of the new minister, the separate Department of Labour and Administrative Services was abolished in October 1990; the Employment and Training Division was also briefly transferred into the Education Department Post-School Education and Training Division for the six-month period leading up to the creation of the Northern Territory Employment and Training Authority on 1 January 1992 (Northern Territory of Australia 1992). Out in the community, apprentice numbers had fallen to 1,190 by 30 June 1991 and there were 156 trainees. Of this total group, 119 apprentices and trainees were employed by four group training companies.

By 1992, the introduction of the National Training System had reached somewhat of an impasse with the states and territories seeking higher levels of funding, which the Commonwealth agreed to provide in exchange for greater centralisation of policy and operational control. In a typically bold move, Prime Minister Keating’s February 1992 economic
statement, One Nation, proposed that the Commonwealth would agree to take full funding responsibility for vocational education and training from the states much as it had done in higher education. Goozee (2013, pp. 353–354) reports that the bilateral negotiations between the state, territory and federal governments broke down over broader concerns about Commonwealth–state funding agreements. Given that the Northern Territory had only relatively recently gained responsibility for vocational education and training as part of self-government processes, there was little enthusiasm for handing back a function. In addition, there were just too many bitter memories of the Commonwealth agreeing to one level of funding for a particular function and then several years later reducing the amount or even unilaterally dispensing with a previously negotiated agreement. The Northern Territory Government also realised that, in addition to the justice system, training was one of the very few public policy tools that maximised local policy control and financial discretion.

In late May 1992, Keating upped the stakes (Goozee 2013, pp. 353–55). If the states and territories refused to agree to the Commonwealth takeover of funding and control of TAFE, the Prime Minister threatened to establish his own vocational training system. However, a combination of constitutional reality and political pragmatism intervened and, following both a Premiers’ Conference and a Youth Summit in the middle of the year, a compromise agreement was reached that allowed for both increased federal funding and retention of state and territory influence over training delivery. The settlement involved the creation of a tri-partite body of industry, state and Commonwealth representatives to direct the introduction of the national training system that would be jointly funded by both levels of government: new money from the Commonwealth combined with the states maintaining their current financial support for the sector to avoid cost shifting. Thus was born the Australian National Training Authority. This statutory authority would be established by Commonwealth legislation and be responsible to a Ministerial Council that consisted of the ministers with responsibility for training from state, territory and the federal governments.

The start of 1992, the creation of the Australian National Training Authority and the establishment of an industry-dominated Northern Territory Employment and Training Authority marks the end of this chapter. Ministers of the Northern Territory Government still retained control over vocational education and training and the ability to use it as a mechanism to give expression to their philanthropically inspired
visions for the future. In an organisational sense, the demise of both the Department of Labour and Administrative Services and the TAFE Advisory Council (and related Department of Education responsibilities) marked the temporary end of using departmental structures as the ‘foundations’ that would give effect to ministerial directives. However, the contested nature of vocational education and training would not be altered, just the locus of disputation would change to arguments between various federal agencies as well as between the states/territories and the Commonwealth. In addition, major industrial and employer groups would seek to protect their interests through controlling the emerging training agenda. These contests would be played out in the Northern Territory microcosm driven by two opposing considerations: a bipartisan belief in the desirability of introducing market mechanisms into the sector to increase efficiency and responsiveness, juxtaposed with the necessary political goals of protecting against market failure and allowing for maximal ministerial judgement and choice.

In addition, the previous two decades had seen the birth and coming of age of Technical and Further Education. In the next period, TAFE would no longer be able to be used interchangeably with training to describe this non-school, non-university sector of education; it would be reserved to describe the large state-operated and publicly funded training systems. Vocational education and training operating inside a series of national standards would represent the future of the sector. The Northern Territory was again leading the way by returning to the use of an arm’s-length statutory authority that resembled the two commissions of the late 1970s and early 1980s. This new body would implement and report upon the success of ministerial philanthropy designed to economically and socially improve and control this still-frontier jurisdiction using vocational education and training.