Since 1974, politics in the Northern Territory had been dominated by the implementation of self-government and moves to exert ministerial authority, while a series of parallel national events, initiated by the Kangan Review, had created a new Technical and Further Education (TAFE) sector that simultaneously grew and matured through what some refer to as its ‘golden age’ (Goozee 2001, p. 38). This rather nostalgic view reflects the impact of Commonwealth financial support upon chronically underfunded TAFE systems that allowed state and territory ministers to preside over the construction of new facilities and strong growth in student numbers in response to each jurisdiction’s idiosyncratic priorities. Whitelock (1974, p. 269) described the pre-1974 situation as a ‘confusion of institutional eccentricity’, totally unsuited to meeting the skills required for a contemporary labour force challenged by a more globally competitive economic environment and rapidly changing technologies in virtually every area of employment.

As a result of the National Training Reform Agenda and the linkage of vocational education and training to national economic and industrial imperatives, these publicly funded state TAFE systems lost their monopoly on the provision of formally recognised training in the new National Training System. Vocational education and training, universally shortened to VET, would be both the product and the service offered
by a range of registered public and private training providers guided by the Commonwealth Government’s domination of public policy and centralised priority-setting. The ostensible centralisation of policy formulation was the price paid by the states and territories in exchange for national funding. The reality has been more akin to a giant shell game in which state and territory bureaucracies and ministers use an ingenious range of techniques to reinterpret national agreements and retain as much local influence as possible. For example, the inability to achieve national recognition of occupational licensing and registration in the traditional trades stands as a monument to the strength of jurisdictional self-interest.

The introduction of vocational education and training into the Northern Territory was a relatively easy task for Cabinet given that the jurisdiction did not own and operate its own TAFE system, already outsourced delivery to a range of providers, was responsive to national agendas and was well-acquainted with the developing principles of new public management. The Northern Territory’s early buy-in to Dawkins’s national training system was facilitated by the local quasi-market in training that accommodated the liberal pragmatism and advantages of market-driven behaviours; the idiosyncrasies of Antipodean colonial socialism guarding against market failure; and the perceived benefits of retaining overall control in the hands of highly responsive and politically astute ministers.

By 1992, the Country Liberal Party had occupied the majority position in the Legislative Assembly for 18 years and it would be another 9 years before the Labor Party could finally break that stranglehold on ministerial power. At the national level, the Australian National Training Authority was created by the agreement of the Commonwealth, states and territories to give effect to the National Training Reform Agenda. This arm’s-length authority was the compromise when the states rebuffed the Keating Government’s offer to assume responsibility for vocational education and training as the Commonwealth had previously done with universities (Goozee 2013, pp. 353–359). Predating the establishment of the Australian National Training Authority, the complementary Northern Territory Employment and Training Authority marked the start of the next major phase in the history of vocational education and training, even if it would be accomplished by returning to the commission-style organisations that had been abandoned a decade earlier.
The endless bureaucratic battles over the control over TAFE policy and funding that characterised the first years of self-government had caused successive Northern Territory Government ministers to use a variety of institutional structures to give effect to their wishes. Training policy making and implementation commenced with the long-standing Apprenticeship Board in 1948. This influence was diluted and shared with a relatively powerful Darwin Community College Council in 1974. With self-government, the Industries Training Commission was established in 1979 and the powers of the Darwin Community College were made subject to ministerial direction resulting in a further dilution of control and an increase in the number of interested parties. In 1982, the next major body to emerge was the Vocational Training Commission—it would last for just over two years. In 1984, TAFE policy matters would be split between the Education Department—which had a mandate to focus upon delivery but an insatiable desire to take total control—and an equally ambitious sequence of three different government departments and ministers—representing business and industry sectors—who retained responsibility for employment and apprentice/trainee functions.

The period 1984–91 also saw the TAFE portfolio split between two different ministers who had their own agendas and views regarding best use of the sector to advance the development of the Territory and their own political interests. In addition, there had been numerous advisory committees and external reviews each of which had contributed to ministerial decision-making. In total, there had been eight government departments or commissions involved, five large advisory bodies and five publicly funded major training organisations active in the TAFE arena since self-government. Additionally, a host of councils, committees, reviews and other representative bodies had been sanctioned by the Northern Territory Government during that first period of self-government—and these do not include the unions, employer associations, professional organisations, registration and licensing boards and political parties that had also been active in the training policy space as well. When looking back along the path that has led to the contemporary vocational education and training system, organisational and institutional litter dominates the view. The next 20 years, by comparison, would be relatively stable in terms of organisational structures. The Northern Territory Employment and Training Authority would remain in place from 1992–2001 to be followed by another 10-year period where responsibility for employment and training was subsumed into the
broader Education Department. Progressively, however, both functions would again be separated from education and returned to an economic portfolio—the Department of Business.

When Shane Stone, Minister for the newly combined portfolio of Education and Training, rose to his feet in the Legislative Assembly on 26 February 1992 to give his ministerial statement, *A New Era in Vocational Education and Training*, the Northern Territory’s relationship with the Commonwealth and other states was very different from that immediately following self-government. The generous financial support given by the Fraser Coalition Government had been substantially withdrawn by the Hawke/Keating Labor governments for both political reasons and the realities of a very weak economy teetering on the edge of long-term recession. For very many purposes the Territory was treated as a state; this included allowing the Chief Minister to participate in the Special Premiers’ Meetings—the forerunner to the current Council of Australian Governments. In addition, the Commonwealth had embarked upon a massive program of macro and microeconomic reform that had positioned vocational education and training as a key policy and programmatic response as articulated in *Australia Reconstructed*. The drivers of the national debates and changes were well-understood by the government ministers of the newest and least populous jurisdiction: a desire to change society for the better guided by politically astute and electorally confident ministers. This nation-wide approach to vocational education and training resonated well inside the Northern Territory Cabinet and with the electorate in general. Both the left and the right of politics shared a common view as to how governments would deploy vocational education and training to improve society by having a strong, market-driven economy supporting a larger population. This situation and accompanying rhetoric remains substantially unchanged today.

Stone’s (1992) ministerial statement was both a philosophical and pragmatic justification for the shift from TAFE to vocational education and training. It would also establish many of the parameters that still characterise the sector some 20 years later. In the new policy environment, the Northern Territory Employment and Training Authority was charged with the task of ‘creating a new era for training in the Northern Territory’ in which the policy direction would be guided by employers, unions and community leaders and ‘both private providers of training and publicly funded but independent TAFE colleges will be empowered to exercise increased local governance in meeting the needs of the communities they
serve’ (Stone 1992, p. 1). In addition, the new authority structure was also intended to resolve the battles for control of vocational education that had been relentlessly waged inside the Northern Territory Public Service as well as positioning the Territory to best take financial advantage of the Commonwealth’s reform agenda.

Because of the Sue Bradley-led second review of the Employment and Training Act, Cabinet had decided to put a halt to the squabbling between senior public servants and their departments. When interviewed on the matter, Stone reported that he had been strongly lobbied by industry leaders to remove training from the government bureaucracy, ‘otherwise, it would wither on the vine’. He accepted the advice that the time required to ensure that energy and resources spent on demarcation disputes between the agencies would be better utilised on front-line delivery. In addition, Stone did not share the former Chief Minister Everingham’s disdain for statutory authorities. He found that if he made the right appointments, these volunteers enjoyed the chance to participate and ‘were mindful of giving sensible advice to me’. The four advisory groups attached to the Northern Territory Employment and Training Authority were also considered by Stone to be important as ‘they gave everyone a role and a chance to have their say’. In addition, he believed that better public policy is created when more people are involved. Although he did not specifically say so, having an organisational structure that facilitates this deep interaction with a wide range of interest groups also reflects the political necessity of Northern Territory ministers being seen to be listening to their constituents and acting upon their concerns.

In his capacity as the Commissioner for Public Employment, David Hawkes was a key participant in the creation of the Northern Territory Employment and Training Authority. This authority was built upon the former TAFE functions that had been progressively removed from the Education Department as well as those tasks undertaken by the Department of Labour and Administrative Services prior to its abolition. When asked in an interview about these changes some years later, he did not believe that it made much difference if government chose either a departmental structure or an authority to control training. Hawkes believed that the important thing was to have a formal body with a separate identity and clear role that was being carried out by talented staff using mechanisms to ‘keep up with’ what is going on in business and the economy. Otherwise, it is too easy for the responsible agency to become ‘just another processing bureaucracy’.
As an experienced public servant, it is unsurprising that Hawkes could easily accept either structure as this position gave him the best possible chance of being responsive to a constant change in ministers, each with their own skills and preferred working styles. Hawkes also described the importance of training to governments as a public policy tool and their reluctance to cede control to other interests. Training is ‘the only answer if people are not behaving as they ought to—you have to train them’. In addition, Hawkes stated in the interview that training is attractive to ministers because it is:

- easy to do;
- the answer sounds right;
- you can throw money at it; and
- government is seen to have done something.

The importance of training to achieving ministerial ambition was reiterated in Stone’s statement to the Legislative Assembly, ‘The Northern Territory Government maintains that vocational education and training must remain a state and territory responsibility’ (Stone 1992, p. 2). However, he also demonstrated an accommodating attitude when he went on to say that ‘the Northern Territory Government looks forward to working with the Commonwealth minister’. Stone then returned to familiar Territory dogma when he declared:

This government believes that a more competitive training environment will emerge from a new structure for the provision of vocational education and training in the Northern Territory and from the Government’s attitudes to federal cooperation. I am convinced that our procedures will become precedents for other States to follow. This Government is not about large bureaucracies and the centralisation of power whether this be in Commonwealth systems, union structures or a Territory-wide monopoly of public providers of training (Stone 1992, pp. 3–4).

In addition, Stone also presented the Northern Territory Government’s view as to how ‘equity’ in vocational education and training should be defined and made operational. Many in the broader community believed that access to training was the path to greater equity. However, the new Minister for Education and Training proposed that equity would be defined as a ‘right of choice’ on the part of each individual as to how much and what kind of training would advance their access to employment markets and that this choice would increasingly need
to be exercised throughout life as the nature of jobs changed (Stone 1992, p. 12). History has shown that implementing genuine individual student choice and a demand-driven training system remains an oft-stated intention, but a very elusive practice to implement. The risk of individual community members not choosing an ‘appropriate’ training pathway—not behaving as they ought to rationally do—poses a major threat to the exercise of ministerial philanthropy.

While it would take many months to complete the bureaucratic re-organisation, training policy and funding were once again under the control of a single minister in 1992. Over the next 10 years of its existence as a stand-alone body, the Northern Territory Employment and Training Authority would have to respond to the priorities and interests of each of the five ministerial successors to Stone. In this new arrangement both private and public providers of training were encouraged to operate in a quasi-market overseen by the authority that was directly responsible to the minister’s office.

Minister Stone was committed to an inclusive Northern Territory Employment and Training Authority that was representative of the various groups with an interest in training. More importantly, he also had the skills to work with the numerous advisory groups and boards that characterised the new authority. The Northern Territory Employment and Training Authority consisted of a 15-person board that had a full-time chairperson. Don Watts was the inaugural chair and he was joined by:

- the Secretary of the Education Department or nominee;
- four direct ministerial appointments;
- one Commonwealth Department of Employment, Education and Training official; and
- eight persons appointed by the minister drawn from unions, business, industry and the regions (Northern Territory Employment and Training Authority 1993, p. 2).

In effect, the minister either directly appointed or heavily influenced the appointment of all but one member of the Northern Territory Employment and Training Authority’s board.

In addition to the board, the new authority had four advisory councils, each convened by a member of the board, whose membership was drawn from those in the community with an interest in formal training. While
not being direct ministerial appointments, the members were vetted by the minister’s office before taking up their positions. These advisory councils included:

- Planning and Resource: 10 members;
- Aboriginal Programs, Employment and Training: 17 members;
- Employment and Training Needs Planning: seven members;
- Accreditation and Registration: eight members; and the
- Women’s Reference Group: six members.

In addition to the over 60 persons on the board and advisory councils, there were also a dozen Industry Training Advisory Boards that represented the major business and industry groupings operating in the Northern Territory. These boards each had their own full-time staff and a series of directors whose role was to provide the advisory councils and Northern Territory Employment and Training Authority board with industry specific information on employment trends, skills in demand and the related training plans required to develop the Territory’s labour market.

Minister Stone’s preferred working style was to directly engage as many people as possible in the training policy and funding arenas to guard against unintended outcomes and to minimise criticism of his decisions. Equally importantly, these formal boards and councils provided a direct conduit to the minister that ensured he had access to virtually every issue or problem that was being discussed or considered in the training system. As a result, the minister’s office could constantly be assessing potential political benefits or risks. In addition, this enormous advisory superstructure provided the means to enact the most important determinant of philanthropic behaviour—self-identification with the intended recipient. The broadly based authority structure allowed for a much greater level of direct contact between the minister and the electors in the community and bypassed the filtering that takes place when the main method of interaction is made through a government department populated with full-time technical experts and transactional bureaucrats.

During its first full year of operations in 1992, the Northern Territory Employment and Training Authority held nine board meetings that deliberated upon a wide range of training-related matters. According to Annual Report 1992 (Northern Territory Employment and Training Authority 1993, p. 10), major items for consideration included:
functions of Group Training Companies;
declaration of apprenticeships/traineeships in specific vocations;
capital planning for teaching facilities;
Commonwealth proposals to take over vocational education and training;
teaching TAFE courses in secondary schools;
the proposed merger of Sadadeen Secondary College and the Alice Springs College of TAFE;
a review of the Northern Territory Open College; and the
establishment of the Australian National Training Authority.

At the end of November 1992, a new minister gained responsibility for vocational education and training. Fred Finch served as the Minister for Education and Training until June 1995 and, after a year in other portfolios, spent June 1996 to July 1997 as the minister responsible for training. Finch resigned from the ministry in July 1997 and left politics following the August general election.

Like his predecessor, Finch’s preferred style of conducting his ministerial responsibilities found a comfortable place with the myriad advisory bodies and boards. Finch relied upon these bodies to provide him with information and direction from the ‘real world’ of industry and business rather than from career public servants. In addition, Finch no longer had to adjudicate over the running battles between the Education Department and everyone else responsible for some aspect of training because the Northern Territory had lost one of the major protagonists. In October 1992 the robust and highly assertive secretary of the Northern Territory Education Department, Geoff Spring, had moved on to become the Chief Executive of the Victorian Education Department. Spring had been hand-picked by the newly elected Premier of Victoria, Jeff Kennett, to close hundreds of schools and remove thousands of staff from that state’s education sector in a move that provoked strong reactions from both the union movement and the community. This was not a task for the faint-hearted and Spring’s proven pedigree as a highly valued strategist and unceasing responsiveness to his political masters’ priorities had served him well in the Territory and made him a natural choice for his promotion into Victoria and greater national prominence.
Figure 34. Ministers Fred Finch, Shane Stone and lecturer Kym Livesley celebrating the new course ‘Introduction to Mining Law’ at the Northern Territory University, April 1993.

Source: Creator Baz Ledwidge, Charles Darwin University Library.
Minister Finch oversaw the maturation of Northern Territory Employment and Training Authority as an organisation. Under the brief chairmanship of RA Cleary in 1993, ‘the first profile of the training needs in the Territory’ was produced as well as ‘the beginnings of a demand driven delivery system and the emergence of a training market’ (Northern Territory Employment and Training Authority 1994, p. i). The first Chief Executive Officer of the Northern Territory Employment and Training Authority was appointed in June 1993 when John Smyth, the former Principal of the Alice Springs College of TAFE, took up the position. During 1994, the Education Department transferred both the financial operations it had been conducting on behalf of the authority as well as the Post-School Division staff to the Northern Territory Employment and Training Authority. By the end of 1995, the authority had “increased staff levels from 47 in 1994 to 67” and they operated in four divisions that included the Training Network NT, also known as the NT Open Learning Network, which provided basic training facilities in more than a dozen remote locations for the use of both public and private registered training organisations (Northern Territory Employment and Training Authority 1996, p. 26).

Andrew Bruyn, the manager of Darwin’s first commercial television station, became chair of the Northern Territory Employment and Training Authority board during this time and would stay in that role until it was disbanded by the new Labor Government in 2001. The extensive advisory council structure remained in place under Finch. There were 98 declared vocations which required apprenticeships or traineeships to be formally registered and the 11 Industry Training Advisory Boards had each developed industry training plans to guide the use of public funds for training. From July 1995 to June 1996, Steve Hatton was the Minister for Education and Training and he did little to alter the existing operations and structures of the training authority prior to Finch’s return as minister for a further year.

In response to national training policy, and acting on advice from the Northern Territory Employment and Training Authority board and advisory councils, Finch had also been active in realigning the Northern Territory Government training providers on the grounds that change would drive greater efficiency and quality through the vocational education and training system. He undertook these actions believing ‘local ownership to be a critical element in successful delivery of any educational service’ (Finch 1993, p. 2).
In a statement delivered to the Legislative Assembly on 26 May 1993, Minister Finch (1993) previewed the progressive dismantling of the Northern Territory Open College prior to the start of the 1994 academic year. The Territory Training Centre in Stuart Park, the operations of the Adult Migrant Education Centre, the Top End regional operations of the Open College and its Palmerston Campus would all be transferred to the Northern Territory University Institute of TAFE. The funding for prisoner education that had previously been allocated to the Northern Territory Open College would be given directly to the Department of Correctional Services, and the Secondary Correspondence School would join the Schools Division of the Education Department. The Northern Territory Employment and Training Authority would be given an even greater role in quality control assurance, effective monitoring of outcomes and reporting outputs to the Northern Territory and Commonwealth governments.
Finch also presided over the merger of Sadadeen Senior College and the Alice Springs College of TAFE to create Centralian College from the start of 1993. This new organisation would continue the Northern Territory’s use of dual-sector education and training providers by catering for school students in years 11 and 12 as well as post-school vocational education and training students. Centralian College also provided a limited range of higher education courses under contract with the Northern Territory University. In 1994, Centralian College incorporated the Central Australian operations of the Northern Territory Open College as a result of the changes to delivery announced in Finch’s May ministerial statement. In keeping with Finch’s emphasis on local ownership, the Centralian College Council had considerable control over budget and operational issues and was, rather uniquely, even given the capacity to develop its own industrial award for lecturing staff. This distinctive award allowed for staff from school and TAFE backgrounds to be deployed both across programs and class times, making the college much more responsive to community and business priorities than traditional TAFE colleges or secondary schools had been.
Finch’s Ministerial statement: future organisation of vocational education and training services in the NT also reaffirmed the Northern Territory’s commitment to new public management principles. Responsibility for service delivery and all potential problems associated with dealing with the public, including the risk of failure, were contracted away from government and the minister. On the other hand, policy, funding and quality control were even more firmly centralised in executive government through the Northern Territory Employment and Training Authority which was directly responsible to the minister.

Despite a long-standing policy which separated relatively independent and responsive local delivery from centralised funding and policy considerations, Northern Territory ministers never seriously considered relinquishing their interests in the affairs of the colleges. The Education Act gave the minister considerable powers in relation to the conduct of the affairs of colleges, such as Centralian College or the Katherine Rural College. In particular, the minister had the power to appoint the chair of the college council as well as 10 of the 15 other members of council. In addition, the minister approved the appointment of the director of the college on the recommendation of the college council. Northern Territory Government ministers wanted to ensure that their philanthropy would be handled by people they knew and trusted to implement their express wishes: another example of self-identification. While provisions remain in the Education Act for the establishment of colleges, none have operated since 2003—the previous colleges have either been absorbed into Charles Darwin University as part of an ongoing consolidation of training provision starting with Finch’s May 1993 ministerial statement or have been made subject to their own legislation as in the case of the Batchelor Institute of Indigenous Tertiary Education.

The Minister for Education and Training also maintained a strong suite of powers in vocational education and training at the Northern Territory University. By 1989, the university had consolidated its non-higher education programs into the Institute of TAFE, with its own board. The minister appointed five of the 10 members of this board. The other positions were occupied by a nominee from the Department of Education, a student, a staff member and the Director of the Institute of TAFE and, according to Berzins and Loveday (1999, pp. 180–181), ‘the board was required to comply with the directives from the Minister for Education’ as well as being responsible to the university council. Unsurprisingly, senior leaders in the Institute of TAFE ‘found that this dual responsibility
was a source of tension and conflict’. The Northern Territory Employment and Training Authority continued to be developed, including the removal of a source of continual irritation when the Department of Education training functions were transferred to the authority, and the Institute of TAFE and its board were disbanded in 1994. As part of a broader restructuring program, the Northern Territory University absorbed the Institute’s administrative and academic functions, and leadership was provided through the appointment of Sabaratnam Prathapan as the Deputy Vice-Chancellor Vocational Education and Training—a role he would occupy from 1995 until May 1996.

By 1996, the Northern Territory Employment and Training Authority had overseen the implementation of the National Training Reform Agenda in the Northern Territory. The major reform initiatives included:

- the introduction and consolidation of a competency-based training system;
- national standards for vocational education and training qualifications;
- the creation of a market for training with public and private providers;
- new methods for the recognition of skills gained in Australia and overseas;
- the recognition of the National Training Board’s roles;
- enhancement of pathways in the transition to work from school; and
- the establishment of the Australian National Training Authority.

Like Saville and Chard in the previous decade, Prathapan proved adept at moving across the organisational boundaries when he left the university and became the Chief Executive Officer of the Northern Territory Employment and Training Authority on 27 May 1996. He eagerly took up the task of institutionalising the national reforms. The *Annual Report 1996* (Northern Territory Employment and Training Authority 1997) notes that there were 109 declared vocations in the Territory and a large amount of more general vocational education being serviced by four public providers and 93 private training organisations under quasi-market conditions. The Authority’s staffing had grown to 72 positions in five operational areas and they were supported by three Advisory Councils (the previous two planning functions had been consolidated into a single body), 12 Industry Training Advisory Boards and the Women’s Reference Group.
Prathapan, as Chief Executive Officer of the Northern Territory Employment and Training Authority, was able to advocate for and defend policy positions that led to antagonism with his former employer, the Northern Territory University. The 1996 McInnes Review of the Northern Territory vocational education and training sector advocated for increased privatisation of the training system by introducing greater competition into the market from interstate providers and reinforcing the view that the authority did not support the integration of vocational education and training into the Northern Territory University (Berzins & Loveday 1999, p. 197). In spite of Minister Finch offering assurances of the future of the dual-sector arrangement in the Legislative Assembly in early 1997, the ongoing skirmishes over who controlled vocational education and training continued. On the one side, the Prathapan-led Northern Territory Employment and Training Authority saw the need for a more industry directed and market-driven training system. On the other, the university Vice-Chancellor, Ron McKay, vigorously defended the institution’s independence and constantly raised the spectre of failure in the Territory’s notoriously thin markets if the University’s predominant share of vocational education and training was seriously diluted (Berzins & Loveday 1999, p. 198). Following the August 1997 election, the new minister, Peter Adamson, was able to reconcile the two parties to some extent. As will be shown later, by 1998 the Northern Territory Employment and Training Authority would be forced to give considerably more attention to its own future.

In spite of the continual debate over control of the training system and the importance of markets, each of the Authority’s organisational structures and advisory mechanisms were in place to give effect to its clearly articulated main function: ‘On behalf of the NT Government, NTETA purchases education and training services from registered providers to meet the needs of industry and the community’ (Northern Territory Employment and Training Authority 1997, p. 7). In other words, this organisation was the vehicle, like private foundations used by the wealthy, through which the minister could exercise public philanthropy by using taxpayers’ funds to serve a perceived public good. The authority structure also allowed the minister’s office to monitor the pulse of the electorate while simultaneously providing access to the minister, and vice versa, as required.
Although frequently debated, from 1996–98 the operations of the vocational education and training system in the Northern Territory were not subject to significant institutional change except for the formation of Group Training NT when the operations of the Central Australian and Top End companies were merged due to the economic difficulties experienced by the Alice Springs-based organisation. The election of the John Howard-led Coalition Government in 1996 and its decision to retain the Australian National Training Authority reaffirmed the bipartisan approach to the principles articulated in the National Training Reform Agenda. Northern Territory registered training providers and the Northern Territory Employment and Training Authority both found themselves thrust into a reactive state of affairs, responding to a re-energised Australian National Training Authority and a very strong-willed and ideologically-driven Commonwealth Government minister, David Kemp. All training organisations were being challenged by increased exercise of Federal Government policy muscle accompanied by decreased funding that was euphemistically labelled ‘growth through efficiency’ (Northern Territory Employment and Training Authority 1999, p. 2).

Unlike the other states and territory, the Northern Territory was structurally and operationally well-placed to deal with the continued reform agenda as it had a complementary authority structure that worked well with the Australian National Training Authority’s approach to policy and funding. With all of the registered training providers in the Northern Territory either from the private sector or operating at arm’s-length from government under legislative provisions, the Northern Territory Cabinet maintained its position of having greater public policy freedom than did the other jurisdictions that felt obliged to maintain their state-owned and operated TAFE systems. The Northern Territory was frequently the first to move on major reforms and this responsive capacity ‘paid handsome dividends for the Territory’ according to former Chief Minister Shane Stone (Martin & Dewar 2012, p. 95).

During much of this period Peter Adamson served as the Northern Territory minister with responsibility for training, having replaced Finch in July 1997. In one of life’s little ironies, Adamson was a former commercial television sports reporter who had worked at the then Channel 8 under the direction of Andrew Bruyn, the chairman of the Northern Territory Employment and Training Authority board; but now Adamson was the minister. Bruyn and the Authority’s board were required to respond to his former employee’s philanthropic priorities. During his nearly three years
as minister, Adamson did not deliver a single ministerial statement on vocational education and training. Compared with the previous ministers, Adamson was unofficially considered by many public servants to be ‘weak but nice’. He did not share either the capacity or desire to develop the reciprocal relationships with the various advisory councils and boards involved with training which the previous ministers had successfully used to advantage. Adamson’s profile had been developed through the television screen, not in the suburban streets and small businesses where the electors live, shop and work. While it turns out he did understand the part of the job that allowed him to hand out public funds, it appears that he did not consider the philanthropic obligations of that privilege. Following the loss of his seat of Casuarina in the 2001 Northern Territory general election, Adamson stood for and won the office of Darwin Lord Mayor in 2002. Due to misappropriating Darwin City Council funds intended to be used for charitable donations, Adamson was charged, found guilty, fined $5,000 and served two months in prison (Lee 2007).

As described previously, the absence of institutional restructuring in the period 1996–98 did not diminish the enthusiasm of various parties in seeking greater control over the vocational education and training sector in the Northern Territory. Behind the scenes the groundwork was being laid for the seemingly inevitable next round of bureaucratic reorganisation. Adamson’s disinterest and incapacity to make use of the vast advisory superstructure of the Northern Territory Employment and Training Authority opened the door for many to question the purpose and role for the various advisory councils and boards. In a case of unfortunate timing, the concerns about the cost, effectiveness and general operations of the Northern Territory Employment and Training Authority came to the attention of the Treasurer, Mike Reed, who was guiding a process to reduce Northern Territory Government expenditure that was called Planning for Growth (Personal communication, November 1998). Public servants readily euphemised Reed’s review of government functions and expenditure as ‘Pruning for Growth’. 
Planning for Growth took place in the second half of 1998 and examined the operations of every Northern Territory Government agency. The arguments about education and training being different from the rest of the public service that had been so prominently used in the period before and immediately after self-government some 20 years earlier were raised yet again. The political potency of the separate nature
of schooling and vocational education and training was not lost on the Treasurer. In September 1998, Reed completely bypassed Adamson and appointed a four-person task group to review the education system and to produce a report to Cabinet by 16 November. Walter Czernerzkyj, the former principal of Katherine High School in Reed’s electorate, was hand-picked by the Treasurer to be the chair of the task group. The future of the Northern Territory Employment and Training Authority was not included in the terms of reference given to the education review task group but considerable discussion took place behind the scenes nevertheless (Turnbull 1998).

The uncertainty created by Planning for Growth reignited the foundational arguments to do with the relationship between the Education Department and the vocational education and training sector—code for the control of staffing and budget. In addition, another long-standing debate over the merits of the alternative administrative structures for the management of training—an authority or a government department—resurfaced. As had happened with Minister Adamson, it appears that Prathapan, in his capacity as the Chief Executive Officer of the Northern Territory Employment and Training Authority, was pushed to the periphery of the government’s decision-making process. The future of the Northern Territory Employment and Training Authority was not included in the terms of reference for the education system review. However, it is clear that the Commissioner for Public Employment (David Hawkes), Prathapan’s deputy (Joyce Turnbull) and Czernerzkyj were actively considering a detailed proposal for the ‘transfer of NTETA functions to the Education Department’ right down to detailed staffing arrangements that would reduce numbers from 75.5 to 32 (Personal communication, November 1998). Unlike the education review that incorporated an extensive and exhaustive Northern Territory-wide consultation with every possible interest group, the fate of the Northern Territory Employment and Training Authority was not being canvassed publicly.

At a Cabinet meeting held in late November 1998, the near-term destiny of the Northern Territory Employment and Training Authority was determined based upon the following parameters:

- continue as a separate entity but to be completely reviewed and restrucured by the NTETA Board in a three-month time frame;
- retain current Chief Executive Officer;
- reduce staff from 78 to a maximum of 32;
• transfer property to the public service property management unit;
• retain the existing authority board;
• rationalise the Industry Training Advisory Boards;
• transfer corporate services to the Department of Corporate and Information Services;
• target budget savings of $4 million; and
• review the future of the organisation after a three-month period.

On 1 December, Reed (1998) presented Cabinet’s decision in a brutally brief statement to the Legislative Assembly:

The Northern Territory Employment and Training Authority is to be restructured so that it better reflects industry needs. Whilst it will remain autonomous it will be restructured, with roughly half the present staff and a correspondingly reduced budget.

During the Assembly debate that followed, Adamson reported that Cabinet had also decided to close Mataranka Station, operationally part of the Katherine Rural College, as a training facility and sell the property. As it turns out, this did not take place and the pastoral lease for this marginal cattle property was handed over to the Northern Territory University in 2001. Charles Darwin University announced that it would relinquish this lease in 2014 to consolidate operations at the renamed Katherine Rural Campus and increase delivery of agricultural training while students were on the job at cattle stations. The intention to divest training facilities that were part of the Northern Territory Training Network in 13 remote Indigenous communities as well as Katherine, Tennant Creek, Jabiru and Nhulunbuy was finally achieved in 2016. A number of options were canvassed such as transferring the facilities to the university, handing over responsibility to local councils in conjunction with Batchelor College or joining the training facilities with secondary schools. Up until 2016, the remote and regional town premises had remained with the training authority and direct government responsibility despite repeated approaches to the university and Batchelor Institute.

Prathapan’s tenure as the Chief Executive Officer of the Northern Territory Employment and Training Authority did not survive the three-month review ordered by Cabinet and in April 1999 he was transferred to the Department of Transport and Infrastructure Development and permanently out of the vocational education and training sector.
He would be temporarily replaced by David Hawkes who took on the Chief Executive’s role in addition to his main appointment as the Commissioner for Public Employment. Most of the day-to-day operations of the newly downsized authority were being guided by Joyce Turnbull during this period.

As part of the restructuring of the Northern Territory Employment and Training Authority, the principles of new public management through outsourcing were again in evidence. In May 1998, the Commonwealth Government opened its first New Apprenticeship Centre in the Northern Territory to support its training priorities as well as handling targeted national incentive and subsidy payments. This service was provided under contract by a consortium of seven Industry Training Advisory Boards: the Northern Territory Industry Training Bureau. In a unique partnership, and as part of the rationalisation of Northern Territory Employment and Training Authority operations, the legislated apprenticeship management functions that had been carried out by the authority were combined with the federal apprenticeship centre functions and put out to a second competitive tender. By December 1999, a ‘one-stop shop’ for apprentices throughout the Northern Territory was in operation due to a successful bid on the part of Group Training Northern Territory (Northern Territory Employment and Training Authority 2000, p. 13).

In a separate matter, the Northern Territory Government had decided to alter the status and name of Batchelor College with the support of the Labor Opposition. Having been established as a government agency in 1995, the moves to make it independent of the Northern Territory Public Service were initiated on 22 April 1999 with the introduction into the Legislative Assembly of the Batchelor Institute of Indigenous Tertiary Education Bill by Daryl Manzie on behalf of Adamson. The intention of the legislation, broadly based upon that of the Northern Territory University, was to make the new institute ‘the main provider of higher education, and vocational education and training programs, for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people from the Northern Territory and from other parts of Australia’ (Manzie 1999). It was also noted that this change of name was a further step in the pursuit of university status when postgraduate and academic research profiles allowed.

Adamson’s tenure as Minister for Tertiary Education and Training ended on 30 January 2000 and he was replaced by Chris Lugg. As with several other Northern Territory parliamentarians, Lugg’s journey into
a ministerial appointment had commenced with his active involvement as an official of the Country Liberal Party’s organisational wing (Heatley 1998, p. 123). He won preselection for the Darwin rural seat of Nelson, was elected in August of 1997 and moved into the ministry two years later. Unlike Adamson, whose path to politics was built upon his high-profile media exposure, Lugg had literally worked in the political trenches and had built a close relationship with his constituents. He instinctively understood the dual obligations of responsiveness to the electorate and philanthropic behaviour expected of a minister in the Northern Territory.

Figure 38. The second Burke ministry, 1 August 2000.
This photo includes three ministers for training: Darryl Manzie, seated far left; Peter Adamson, standing far right; and the final Country Liberal Party Minister for Training in their first long period in power since self-government in 1978, Chris Lugg, seated far right.
Source: Creator Northern Territory Government Photographer, PH0866/0001, Protocol Collection, Northern Territory Library.

As a result of the Planning for Growth Cabinet decisions, the board of the Northern Territory Employment and Training Authority, still chaired by Bruyn, had been very active in restructuring the organisation based on the Rolfe Report that had been delivered in March 1999 (Lugg 2000, p. 5). Compared to the education system task group, Rolfe’s study was much quicker, tightly focused and was never publicly or widely circulated. In response to recommendations contained in this review, new legislation was enacted in November 1999. The Northern Territory Employment and
Training Act 1999 provided Lugg with a considerably more streamlined organisation than that used by his ministerial predecessors. The previous three advisory councils had been eliminated from the new Act and the board membership reduced from 15 to 10 persons, each appointed by the minister. As before, there was no provision for the specific appointment of a person from a training provider to maintain a clear separation between policy/funding decisions and training delivery. The new Act required the board to consult with industry and to fund training as a result of that interaction. The downsized board was made subject to the direction of the minister. The chief executive officer, for legal purposes, was legislated to be ‘the authority’ and was also to take direction from the minister even when such actions contravened decisions that had been made by the board. Other sections of the legislation provided for recognition of national training packages/accredited courses, registration of training organisations, apprenticeship regulation (already outsourced), quality and compliance with the Act, as well providing for an Appeals Tribunal (Northern Territory of Australia 1999).

In May 2000, the Secretary of the Education Department, Walter Czernezkyj of the Education Review, was replaced by his mentor, the head of the Health Department, Peter Plummer. Shifting Czernezkyj from education into the position of the Chief Executive Officer of the Northern Territory Employment and Training Authority was seen as a serious demotion. The perceived inability to implement his own review’s recommendations saw him moved from heading up the second-largest agency in the Northern Territory Government to being in charge of the 43 staff left after the restructuring of the authority (Northern Territory Employment and Training Authority 2000, p. 54). As a direct result of the election of the Labor Government in August 2001, Czernezkyj resigned on 27 January 2002 and was not replaced. He consequently left the Northern Territory and became the principal at Urrbrae Agricultural High School in Adelaide.

However, during his tenure as Chief Executive Officer, Czernezkyj was very sensitive and responsive to every ministerial utterance made by Lugg and the Northern Territory Government’s plans for the ‘role and direction’ of the ‘restructured’ Northern Territory Employment and Training Authority (Lugg 2000, p. 1). The new minister resorted to a familiar tactic to place his stamp on the revamped authority by changing the words used in the system. He rejected the phrase vocational education and training
(and its universally accepted acronym VET) in favour of returning to TAFE. Lugg justified his position by returning to the Country Liberal Party populism that had characterised the actions of many ministers:

We have moved slightly away from the national trend to title the sector VET in the belief that the community is more comfortable with TAFE (Lugg 2000, p. 1).

When interviewed in 2012 about his time as the chair of the Northern Territory Employment and Training Authority Board, Andrew Bruyn also reinforced the significance of the preference for TAFE on the basis that small business and employers understood the simplicity of the term and the implication of attending ‘tech colleges’ for the off-the-job training component. Vocational education and training was seen to be yet another of the plethora of technical terms and acronyms that had become common in the training sector and served to alienate both employers and students. Minister Lugg was being responsive to both the electorate and advisory board that sat apart from and frequently proffered different views from those put forward by the technical experts of the public service.

The significantly leaner Northern Territory Employment and Training Authority continually adopted ever more practices associated with new public management during the period 2000 to 2001. The operations of the authority were recast along the lines of the ‘funder–purchaser–provider model’ that had come to dominate the delivery of health services in the Northern Territory. It seems likely that Czernezkyj’s relationship with Plummer facilitated the transfer of this style of operation into the training sector. In addition, this method of public sector management provided a bureaucratically rational structuring and understanding of ministerial philanthropic behaviour. The minister assumed the role of funder by supplying resources resulting from his or her success in Cabinet meetings. The Northern Territory Employment and Training Authority already occupied the role of purchaser of training in a quasi-market serviced by both public and private organisations (for example, Northern Territory Employment and Training Authority 1998, p. 7). Finally, the Northern Territory’s long-standing policy of separating delivery from policy ensured that there were a range of registered training organisations who would be the providers of program delivery by entering into resource agreements with the authority. By 2000, the concept of purchasing services from training providers had been extended beyond the apprenticeship services that were outsourced in the previous year to now include quality audit
services and the industry advisory bodies. Lugg (2000, p. 5) described the extension of funder–purchaser–provider mechanisms in his ministerial statement to the Legislative Assembly:

NTETA purchases advice about industry training from Industry Training Advisory Bodies or ITABS. In the future, NTETA will purchase advice in a more streamlined and focused manner, helping to improve the way in which training is directed.

The application of the funder–purchaser–provider model to the Industry Training Advisory Boards fundamentally changed their position in the training sector. They moved from being part of the vast advisory super-structure to now being a provider in some sort of marketplace. When implemented, the changes mooted by Lugg resulted in the winding up of the 11 Industry Training Advisory Boards. In the future, the Northern Territory Employment and Training Authority would only purchase industry advice from six Training Advisory Councils (Northern Territory Employment and Training Authority 2001, p. 3). As it turns out, there was only one funder and one purchaser in this ‘market’ for industry advice and only six providers were going to be supported.

After almost a decade of using an arm’s-length statutory authority that had deep roots into almost every aspect of the training system, the logic of new public management and the impact of four ministers for training had produced a very different organisation from that envisaged by Stone in 1991. While the distinct separation between policy formulation and delivery had remained in place, almost every other function of the Northern Territory Employment and Training Authority had either been outsourced, downsized or re-rationalised. Stone (1991, p. 1) saw distinct benefits in having ‘employer and employees all involved in making decisions’ and having industry making ‘the maximum possible input into policy development’. In order to remain in touch with the mood of the electorate, the vast advisory super-structure of the original Northern Territory Employment and Training Authority was carefully constructed by Stone (1991, p. 2) to ‘advise government on a range of issues’ and to ‘be advisory to myself’. For the first minister for education and training, this new authority was not envisaged as a stripped down and utilitarian ‘purchaser’ of vocational education and training services and industry advice, rather its role was:
to establish the playing field on which providers meet the needs of the community, to advise government on the equitable use of funds and establish systems of accountability which increase public awareness of the efficient use of public moneys in the provision of vocational education and training (Stone 1991, p. 3).

In other words, the employment and training authority’s purpose was to ensure that the minister understood the priorities of the industry and the community to guarantee that ministerial philanthropy was carefully targeted, not wasted, and that the public was well aware of the minister’s responsiveness and largesse.

The changes to both the roles and functions of the Northern Territory Employment and Training Authority sanctioned by Reed, Adamson and Lugg produced exactly the type of ‘processing bureaucracy’ that the Commissioner for Public Employment, David Hawkes, had previously warned against. In place of the deep-seated involvement of nearly 200 industry-based individuals, a small band of policy and procurement experts interpreted the minister’s needs. Quality assurance, apprenticeship support, training provision and industry advice were being purchased on behalf of the minister who was simultaneously being deprived of the mutually beneficial direct interaction with industry and the perceived kudos that flow from ministerial philanthropic behaviour. As described by Hawkes when interviewed, the Northern Territory Employment and Training Authority had become ‘just another processing agency’ which destroyed the capacity for ministers to keep in touch with the intimate political machinations of the miniscule Northern Territory electorates and to reap the rewards of electoral success.

The quasi-market that had been created for the provision of training had somewhat stabilised in the final two years of the Country Liberal Party’s long dominance of government. There were four public providers and around 100 private providers, including a variety of not-for-profit and non-government organisations that were nevertheless reliant upon public funding. The role of the Northern Territory Employment and Training Authority was ‘to purchase and fund training services delivered by providers in the Northern Territory’ with about 75 per cent of the funding going to the public providers and 25 per cent to private providers (Northern Territory Employment and Training Authority 2001, pp. 27–31).
The former Katherine Rural College, now known as the Northern Territory Rural College, had always struggled to attract a critical mass of students or programs to be a viable concern, as the initial review had predicted at its inception. The inability to get out of Mataranka Station also contributed to the Northern Territory Government’s decision to hand over responsibility for the operations of both the cattle station and the rural campus to the Northern Territory University commencing on 1 January 2001 (Northern Territory University 2001a, p. ii). This process of consolidation would be continued in 2003 with the creation of Charles Darwin University.

In the meantime, Batchelor Institute of Indigenous Tertiary Education, having received the Commonwealth’s recognition as a higher education provider in 1988, continued its push towards achieving university status but found little overt support from either the Commonwealth Government or the Northern Territory University. The Commonwealth Government’s financial contribution towards higher education offerings and the Northern Territory Government’s support for vocational education and training were equally balanced, allowing for the dual-sector institute’s operations to take place in many remote communities across the Northern Territory as well as interstate (Batchelor Institute of Indigenous Tertiary Education 2001).

Even with financial support from the Northern Territory Government, the Territory’s largest provider of vocational education and training found itself in a precarious financial position in 1999. To plan a way forward, the Northern Territory University received funding from both the Territory and Commonwealth governments to commission an external consultancy conducted by KPMG (Webb 2014, pp. 27–28). In addition, the Northern Territory Government and the University Council formed a joint working party to make recommendations to council to bolster the institution’s viability. “The issues of resources for the university and stakeholder perceptions of the university lie at the heart of the strategic positioning project” (Northern Territory University 2001b, p. 3). The strategic positioning project and its nearly 50 recommendations would guide the university’s direction through the final days of the Country Liberal Party’s political domination in the Legislative Assembly.

In Central Australia, the turn of the century Centraniel College’s operation as the major regionally based provider of training was bolstered by easy access for secondary school students due to the dual-sector structure of the college. As had been the case since 1974, the competitive nature
of the relationship with the Territory’s largest training provider guided much of the planning and resource allocation conducted in Alice Springs. Centralian College had actively made steps to take training business away from the Northern Territory University by opening a branch of Training Solutions in the Darwin suburb of Parap. In particular, the college administration believed they had the full support of government ministers to target apprentices in the electrical and air-conditioning industries on the basis that increased competition would improve responsiveness to industry and increase the quality of program delivery. By the early 2000s, Centralian College and Training Solutions had taken over the provision of training for these vocations throughout the Northern Territory.

On the other hand, Centralian College and the Northern Territory University had entered into a contractual agreement for the provision of a limited range of higher education courses on the Alice Springs campus. The major offerings were in accounting and business in addition to a smaller effort in education. Otherwise, vocational education and training offerings by the two largest public providers remained geographically split, north and south, with the meeting point being in Tennant Creek where both organisations had staff operating out of the Northern Territory Employment and Training Authority training centre situated in the former Kargaru Primary School.

Figure 39. Former Kargaru School, November 1996.
Source: Creator Unknown, PH0705/0003, Batchelor College Annexe Collection, Northern Territory Library.
The Centre for Appropriate Technology had evolved into a non-government organisation with its own board and priorities, all but severing its ties with Centralian College as the two organisations moved in very different directions. The centre built and maintained its own relationships with both the ministerial offices and the Northern Territory Employment and Training Authority. It also astutely positioned itself to bid for major national contracts, established a separate trading company (CAT Projects) and became intimately aligned with the emerging Desert Knowledge movement.

The Institute of Aboriginal Development was embroiled in an impasse with the Country Liberal Party ministers and the Commonwealth Government that would only be resolved after Labor came to power in August 2001, and a delay of nearly five years. The institute had made a successful application to the Australian National Training Authority for capital works funding to upgrade older facilities and build a new library and teaching rooms on its Alice Springs campus located in South Terrace. Under direct instructions from the various ministers, the Northern Territory Employment and Training Authority would not release these funds unless the Institute for Aboriginal Development used them to build new facilities on the Sadadeen campus of Centralian College. The Northern Territory Government had decided that the future of the institute would be better guaranteed if it was co-located with the major public provider and did not duplicate an existing library, and that the new infrastructure would be better protected from the likely flooding at the Institute’s current campus adjacent to the Todd River. In addition, the Commonwealth progressively developed the view that the money would be best spent by supporting the infrastructure needs of a proposed Desert Peoples Centre.

The serial changes to the Northern Territory Employment and Training Authority had also sown the seeds of its own demise. As with the Vocational Training Commission two decades before, the momentum to bring training policy back into a Northern Territory public service department had become irresistible, even to the Country Liberal Party. The authority’s final annual report mooted the creation of a new government agency in the 2001–02 financial year: a department of employment and training. This organisation was to be created through the merger of the Northern Territory Employment and Training Authority and the Office of the Commissioner for Public Employment (Northern Territory Employment and Training Authority 2001, p. 2). However, with the installation of the
Northern Territory’s first Labor Government as a result of the August 2001 general election, that plan was not implemented. Labor’s initial minister with responsibility for vocational education and training was nevertheless also looking to the past to plan and structure the future.

Syd Stirling, a former teacher and employee of the Commonwealth Department of Employment, Education and Training, served as the Northern Territory minister responsible for training for five years until August 2006. When interviewed about the Labor Government’s views on the merits of a departmental or authority structure for the control of vocational education and training in the Northern Territory, Stirling was direct and to the point:

In relation to structural reform we had developed serious policy in the years 1999–2000. We had good educator and training experience in the caucus so we regarded ourselves as well equipped to overhaul what we considered a tired system that had virtually run itself with no strategic input from government and no accountability to anyone for results or lack thereof.

I was very keen to get the previous NTETA, in operation when we were elected, integrated into a new Department of Employment, Education and Training.

We had long held a view that NTETA lacked any strategic vision and was not as subject to Government policy direction as we would want given we had serious plans for growth in apprenticeship numbers and serious intent to do whatever was necessary to achieve the change and accountability required.

We were seriously driven by what we saw as years of policy neglect. There was no focus from the Country Liberal Party and no view as to how things should work let alone be improved so we felt certain there was pretty much a blank canvas for us to imprint our plans upon. We were strongly supported by the Leader of the Opposition, Clare Martin, to bring these plans on.

The final point was transferring Education to me from [Peter] Toyne once elected so that Education and Training sat with the Deputy Chief Minister — a deliberate elevation in the view of the community to underline its importance to the new Government.
In November 2001, the new Labor Government began implementing its policies with the transfer of the management of the Northern Territory Employment and Training Authority to the newly created Department of Education, Employment and Training—an organisation that mirrored the Commonwealth agency established by the Federal Labor Government minister, John Dawkins, two decades earlier to promote the reform of vocational education and training. Using exactly the same arguments that had guided the now opposition Country Liberal Party’s rationale for spending public funds on TAFE, Stirling linked vocational education and training to the economic and social development of the Northern Territory. In a quite common display of bipartisanship that has come to define the training sector, human capital theory guided the policies and programs that justified Labor’s allocation of public monies to train workers needed for the Northern Territory’s growing economy and to promote social stability.

In August 2002, Stirling announced his government’s intention to create a Ministerial Advisory Board for Employment and Training to replace the Northern Territory Employment and Training Authority Board. This new 13-member board would provide advice to the minister on the Territory’s
training profile and the related levels of compliance, promotion and expenditure used to achieve this profile. The composition of this advisory board would start to break down the strong separation of policy and service delivery that had been the hallmark of the previous employment and training authority. Membership would be subject to ministerial acceptance and would include:

- the chairperson;
- the chief executive officer;
- the chief executive officer of the agency with responsibility for industrial development;
- a vocational education practitioner;
- a nominee of the Commonwealth Government;
- three persons from outside the greater Darwin area;
- two chairs of training advisory councils;
- a nominee of the Aboriginal and Torres Straits Islander Commission;
- a nominee of the Trades and Labour Council; and
- a nominee of the Chamber of Commerce and Industry.

In addition, Labor decided to retain the six Training Advisory Councils to provide industry-specific advice but enhance their input through the use of labour market data provided by economists and other expert professional analysts. Lugg’s attempts to rebadge the sector with the old term TAFE disappeared without a trace. However, that did not mean that Stirling readily accepted the technical jargon that had come to dominate the vocational education and training sector. When interviewed about his time as Minister for Employment, Education and Training, Stirling (2002) indicated that he ‘never understood the language and acronyms associated with VET; these were tools of obfuscation’.

In addition to sharing with the previous government the reasons why the public should fund vocational education and training, the fresh Labor Cabinet also understood the beneficial nature of ministerial philanthropy. The composition of the ministerial advisory board represented the new government’s constituency and provided the crucial direct relationship between the public and the minister, while promoting the greatest determinant of philanthropic behaviour: self-identification. The new Labor Cabinet consisted of people who had spent most of their recent working lives in the public and not-for-profit sectors. As a result, the
novice ministers knew and understood how government bureaucracies operated and how to use them to achieve the desired social and economic agendas. In addition to the Chief Minister's high profile position as a television and radio presenter for the ABC, five of the other Cabinet members had been public servants and the final member had been a senior leader in non-government Indigenous organisations in the Northern Territory. The publicly funded bureaucracies and their methods of operating provided a comfortable and supportive environment for the newly elected government to exercise the mandate they had been given by the electorate after a quarter of a century in opposition. Unlike the Country Liberal Party, whose organisational roots and linkages lay in the small and medium-sized businesses of the Territory, the Labor Ministry was deeply connected to both the trade union movement and the public service bureaucracies.

As part of the planning that had taken place prior to the 2001 election, the Labor Party had been meeting with key individuals and organisations in every portfolio according to Stirling’s interview in 2012. By drawing upon both his and Peter Toyne’s educational expertise and contacts in training systems, they had decided that an independent statutory authority to direct vocational education and training was not going to meet the economic and social needs of the Territory as the new century dawned. According to Stirling:

The best way to achieve and implement policy seemed to be to put it directly under the Department. We also had a view that the one Department should oversee education and training from preschool through to university and post-secondary VET programs.

The establishment of a portfolio of education, employment and training (changed to employment, education and training in November 2001) served a number of purposes. In addition to providing a familiar mechanism that fitted the minister’s personal style and allowed for the necessary level of self-identification that would support philanthropic behaviour, there was also the more traditionally cited reason for organisational change: by having a different department structure the minister and government could be seen to be taking action and exerting their authority over the training system.

To accommodate the Territory’s access to Commonwealth recurrent funding and capital resources, and to participate at the Ministerial Council as provided for in the Australian National Training Authority Agreement,
Northern Territory legislation had to be altered with the demise of the previous authority. The ‘authority’ for training in the jurisdiction was designated to be the Chief Executive Officer of the legislation’s controlling agency (Northern Territory of Australia 2013, p. 11). Even more oddly, the current Act still retains references to the Australian National Training Authority even though it was unilaterally disbanded by the Commonwealth Government in 2005. For a variety of reasons, the final official separation of the employment and training functions from the Northern Territory Employment and Training Authority and their incorporation into the departmental structure did not occur until July 2003 (Northern Territory Department of Employment 2003, p. 5).

As an indication of the differing priorities for the deployment of vocational education and training held by the Labor Government, the combined agency was given a much broader remit than that accorded to the Northern Territory Employment and Training Authority by the previous government. The former overriding priority given to the provision of training for industry’s needs was replaced by two key principles (Northern Territory Department of Employment 2003, p. 15):

- training for employment builds individual, community and industry capability; and
- equity in access stimulates opportunity and greater participation in the workforce.

These would be used to guide the operations of the new Department of Employment, Education and Training and left no doubt as to the significance, and related political advantage, assigned to vocational education and training by the Labor Government. ‘We have put employment, education and training at the top of our agenda; we are prepared to stake the success of this government on how well we achieve in this area’ (Stirling 2002, p. 27). The change in emphasis returned to envisaging equity as having access to training (rather than Stone’s emphasis upon choice) and repositioned vocational education and training as having a much broader remit than being principally focused upon industrial skills production.

These two key principles allowed vocational education and training to be used as part of the solution to almost any problem the government wanted to address. In addition to the priority that had been previously accorded to industry, individuals and communities could now be singled out for improvement through the provision of training on the basis of
increased equity and access. Framing the problems facing the Northern Territory in a manner that makes training an inevitable part of the solution also increases the groups in the electorate that could now be targeted for ministerial philanthropy. For example, Stirling (2002, pp. 2–5) cited some of the following groups as the intended beneficiaries of the public munificence that he controlled:

• the expansion of driver training and licensing to include youth in remote communities, trainees and other youth no longer at school;
• the extension of vocational education and training into rural and remote schools down to year 9 level through the Training for Remote Youth program;
• higher level vocational qualifications being obtained by Indigenous Territorians;
• the extension of the Northern Territory Futures Expo into regional centres;
• requiring major contractors on government projects to meet specified employment and training provisions on substantial projects;
• requiring the Northern Territory public service to increase local training and employment;
• encouraging Group Training Companies; and
• reducing the chances of exploitation of apprentices whilst on the job.

In addition to making its mark on the policy and bureaucratic arrangements for vocational education and training, the ambitious Labor Government was also very active in altering the delivery of training. While accepting the broad structure of a quasi-market, the public sector logics of better coordination, reducing duplication, breaking down silos and increased efficiency inevitably led to an examination of three public providers of vocational education and training. For such a small population, the logic and perceived advantages of having a single public training provider gained traction with the former public servants and not-for-profit employees who occupied the ministerial offices.

Cabinet directed Peter Plummer, the Chief Executive of the Department of Employment, Education and Training, to determine the potential for, and the best mechanisms to concentrate the public provision of, vocational education, higher education and research at the dual-sector university. Plummer had served on the Northern Territory University strategic positioning working group and was intimately acquainted
with the operations of the university. Following the retirement of the Northern Territory University Vice-Chancellor, Ron McKay, due to ill health in 2002, Plummer’s former mentor from Papua New Guinea, Ken McKinnon, was appointed to the position (Webb 2014, p. 31).

As was described at the time, McKinnon was in the Northern Territory to quickly accomplish a specific set of tasks without creating political waves. The process of consolidation of training that had commenced with Minister Finch’s dismantling of the Northern Territory Open College in 1993 was to be continued by the Labor Government. As described by Webb (2014, p. 33), a reinvigorated university would be a partner in the Territory’s social, cultural and economic development and:

> the formation of the new university was also aimed at remediating the existing fragmentation of education, training and research over a number of institutions and realising desired economies of scale and sustainability.

Stirling’s venture into vocational education and training policy put an end to one very long-running debate and reinvigorated at least two others. The creation of Charles Darwin University in November 2003 lay to rest the question of the suitability of a university operating simultaneously as
a major vocational training provider. For many in the Country Liberal Party and for the board members of the Northern Territory Employment and Training Authority, the status given to the sector in the university and the ability to influence its leadership as to the direction of vocational education and training were prime indicators of the university’s capacity to respond to the needs of industry in the Northern Territory (Berzins & Loveday 1999, pp. 190–198). Arguments for and against the concept of a dual-sector tertiary education and training provider dated back to the establishment of the hybrid Darwin Community College, the refusal to countenance the expansion of advanced education courses at Alice Springs, and the only very recent renaming of the former Batchelor College in recognition of that organisation’s ambitions in higher education. Nevertheless, the merger of Centralian College and the formal annexation of the Northern Territory Rural College with the Northern Territory University put an end to that particular debate, with only two public providers, both dual-sector, left in the jurisdiction. As described in recommendation three of the University’s Strategic Positioning Project: ‘In serving the people of the Northern Territory, the NTU will maintain a dual focus upon their intellectual and vocational needs’ (Northern Territory University 2001b, p. 8).

On the other hand, the creation of a single Northern Territory Government department with responsibility for all policy and funding matters to do with education and vocational training immediately reignited debates over the relationship between the two sectors. The former board members of the Northern Territory Employment and Training Authority took every opportunity to speak against the absorption of training into the new department on the basis that training and employment functions of government were more effective when linked directly to industry and through a business-oriented department.

During his interview some 10 years after the abolition of the authority he chaired, Andrew Bruyn remained scathing of the decision because he believed that Labor’s training policy was being set by the public service instead of ministers. In addition, Bruyn was of the view that the former close working relationship between the industry-dominated advisory bodies and the minister had been eliminated and that business people had to seek invitations to the minister’s office in Parliament House through his or her advisors who carefully controlled access. Stirling confirmed the role of advisors when interviewed:
At the NT level after I had driven what we considered the major changes in structural terms I was reliant on advisers for further policy refinement in terms of resources, incentives and packages designed to increase trade training numbers.

In addition, even very senior and experienced public servants saw the amalgamation as problematic. The former Commissioner for Public Employment, David Hawkes, opined when interviewed years later that ‘there was not a lot of congruence between education and training’ because ‘it just confuses issues’ and that such efforts ‘are based upon political misunderstandings’. As will be shown, by the end of 2011 that debate continued throughout the entire period of Labor Government eventually resulting in the return of both employment and training functions to the Department of Business and Employment (Knight 2011).

The second argument resurfaced as part of the discussions being held in 2002–03 that would lead to the creation of two very different training organisations: the Desert Peoples Centre in Alice Springs and the Charles Darwin University. The gradual consolidation and reduction of the number of public providers that had taken place during the Country Liberal Party’s time in government would continue during the Labor years. Given his former position as the principal at the then Batchelor College, as well as his deep knowledge of the university as a council member and through the strategic positioning project, Peter Plummer guided discussions to formally amalgamate training, higher education and research into a single new university structure. It was hoped to bring together the two institutions that still operated under the Education Act (Centralian College and the Northern Territory Rural College); Batchelor Institute; and the Menzies School of Health Research to create Charles Darwin University. For a variety of reasons, Plummer and the Northern Territory Government ministers could not persuade the council of Batchelor Institute of Indigenous Tertiary Education to become part of the new university. The major obstacle to amalgamation was the rekindled philosophical question of Aboriginal self-determination and self-management.

Some two decades after its policy dominance in the early 1980s (Northern Territory Archives Service 1980c), the reality was that the self-realisation, self-determination and self-management that had underpinned the planned community development approach to improve the lot of remote and regional Indigenous Territorians had not delivered the
anticipated high levels of Aboriginal participation in the local workforces. In particular, neither the government departments of the 1980s nor the Northern Territory Employment and Training Authority relinquished responsibility for vocational training to the communities as envisaged. Those government agencies ensured that ministerial control of vocational education and training funding remained unchallenged. Cabinet’s decision to create an environment where ‘eventually all training would be contracted by communities’ (Northern Territory Archives Service 1980c, p. 4) was never given a chance to succeed. In citing the Vocational Training Commission, Loveday and Young (1984, p. 13) reported that:

If education and training are powerful tools determining how the community develops then responsibility for determining the training to go on in the community must rest with the people affected by it.

As history has shown, while the Northern Territory Government may have had a quite specific policy of ‘Aboriginalising’ both the workforce and decision-making at the local level, the ability to exercise ministerial philanthropy was just too important a tool to be relinquished to the sometimes capricious and/or politically motivated local councils. Arnott (2003, p. 55) laments the demise of community-based adult educators and the lack of Indigenous input and describes the post-Employment and Training Authority vocational training system thus: ‘It is a centralised education and training process that keeps control of the funding and, to a large degree, the training outcomes’. Confirming the gulf that had opened between the policy intention of the 1980s and the training system’s operations at the end of the century, the then director of the Northern Territory Employment and Training Authority, Joyce Turnbull (1999, p. 8), described how:

the voice of industry and business at times seem (sic) stronger in the Territory than elsewhere. There is a clear tension between these goals [of statehood and economic development] and the needs of learners in remote areas, for whom conventional employment and lifestyle are neither likely nor desired.

However, the rhetoric associated with this approach to community development was firmly engrained in the planning and thinking of the Indigenous-controlled training organisations. In spite of the lack of employment outcomes and economic development in remote communities, a senior researcher at Batchelor College maintained that ‘the aims of self-determination and self-management should be the basis
of planning for education and training programs for Aboriginal people’ (Coles 1993). A decade later these themes also dominated the discussions that eventually resulted in the establishment of the Desert Peoples Centre in Alice Springs. As noted in the early planning documents, ‘the ultimate goal is driven by self-determination and self-management in order to achieve the best health and living conditions for Aboriginal Desert Peoples’ (Ramsey 2002, p. 4).

During its final year of existence in 2001, the Northern Territory Employment and Training Authority made a grant of $300,000 to a consortium of the three key Aboriginal-controlled education and training providers in Central Australia (the Centre for Appropriate Technology, the Institute for Aboriginal Development and the Batchelor Institute of Indigenous Tertiary Education) for preliminary planning and feasibility studies for a Desert Peoples Centre that would be built in the new Desert Knowledge Precinct to the south of Alice Springs (Ramsey 2002, p. 12). The consortium had formally come into existence in 2000 following two years of discussions. In the words of the Northern Territory Employment and Training Authority (2001, p. 29):

> The main catalysts for the Centre have been the need to work together for scarce resources, the poor conditions of facilities and the need for a joint approach to Indigenous people’s education and training.

As with the public providers, the Aboriginal-controlled organisations were being forced into consolidated bodies by the Northern Territory Government in the pursuit of increased efficiency and reduced duplication of capital infrastructure and training programs that would be funded from the public purse. The feasibility and scoping studies produced a comprehensive three-volume report that had one clear outcome in mind: ‘the purpose of this document is to seek financial support for the establishment of a Desert Peoples Centre’ (Ramsey 2002, p. 4). Of course, the purpose of such requests is to influence the philanthropic behaviour of the minister with responsibility for training. As will be shown, the comprehensive process of developing their funding proposal and the tenacity of the supporters of the new centre were highly successful. However, their approach was unequivocal in its commitment to the self-determination discussion that had been reopened. The possibility of joining with the other major training providers in the Northern Territory was explicitly rejected in all its forms including co-location:
A consortium which included Centralian [College] as an equal partner would complicate and confuse the nature of the Desert Peoples Centre ownership and its educational environment. Ownership and governance would neither rest nor be seen to rest unequivocally with Aboriginal peoples (Ramsey 2002, pp. 19–20).

This question of ownership of the Desert Peoples Centre would have two immediate consequences. The first is that discussions around the amalgamation of the Northern Territory public providers to create a new university would come to exclude the Batchelor Institute, despite major efforts on the part of both the Australian and Northern Territory governments. The second effect had a much more immediate impact upon the creation of the Desert Peoples Centre itself.

As previously described, the Institute for Aboriginal Development, established by the Uniting Church in 1969 with the aid of Commonwealth Government funding, had been under the control of an Aboriginal Board of Management since 1971 and represented the longest history of self-management of the three consortium members (Loveday & Young 1984, p. 128). Having only recently won its years-long battle with the two governments over the release of capital infrastructure funds to redevelop its current campus, the Institute did not accept the logic of redirecting that money in support of the development of the Desert Peoples Centre at the greenfields site to the south of Alice Springs. In 2003, the Institute for Aboriginal Development was in a relatively strong position financially and organisationally. There were about 70 staff members employed in a wide range of education and training initiatives (including higher education offerings in conjunction with Latrobe University) and an income of some $5.4 million (Institute for Aboriginal Development 2004, pp. 17–19).

In order to protect its self-described role ‘as the principal Aboriginal community-controlled education and training provider in Central Australia’ the Board commissioned Marcia Langton and Zane Ma Rhea to undertake a review of the Institute’s ‘operations and more specifically, to examine its options about remaining in the Desert Peoples Consortium with the Centre for Appropriate Technology and the Batchelor Institute of Indigenous Tertiary Education’ (Institute for Aboriginal Development 2004, p. 5). After extensive deliberations, the Institute for Aboriginal Development withdrew from the Desert Peoples Centre consortium and the annual reports from 2004 onwards make no mention of either the centre or any previous work done with the consortium. Quite simply,
the board and staff of the institute were not willing to risk being drawn into partnership arrangements that might reduce or threaten their independence in the future—yet another example of the battles that have been fought over control of vocational education and training.

Unfortunately for the Institute for Aboriginal Development, the various funding streams that had traditionally supported community-based training organisations were progressively drawn more tightly into meeting the specified needs of industry or expanding vocational education and training into Northern Territory secondary schools, which had become a high priority for Minister Stirling. In a purposeful policy decision, the Northern Territory Government also decided to progressively reduce the funding of training for Adult and Community Education providers from 2007 onwards. The number of students that received public funding in this sector dropped from 822 in 2007 to zero in 2010 and no public funding has been allocated since (National Centre for Vocational Education Research 2011, Northern Territory Table 11; 2014, NT Tables). Along with other national changes to funding priorities, the Institute for Aboriginal Development suffered a precipitous decline in revenue; by 2013 it listed a staff of nine persons and no longer published financial statements in its annual reports (Institute for Aboriginal Development 2013). The chairperson of the Board of Management, Patricia Turner, stated: ‘I am pleased to confirm that IAD is not insolvent, which means we can continue to trade, but we must secure ongoing funding to remain viable’ (Institute for Aboriginal Development 2013).

With the benefit of hindsight, it appears that the Board of the Institute for Aboriginal Development misunderstood the real purpose of the Desert Peoples Centre. The newly incorporated association provided the bureaucratic mechanism to give effect to ministerial philanthropy in a way that was seen to protect the public’s investment and reduce the political liabilities associated with handing over public money to community controlled organisations. While the minister still had significant control over Batchelor Institute, and the other three public providers of the time, by virtue of Northern Territory legislation, both the Centre for Appropriate Technology and the Institute for Aboriginal Development were incorporated associations operating independently of Northern Territory Government ministers. The bruising, multiyear battle over the release of the $2.6 million for the refurbishment of the Institute for Aboriginal Development campus had taught bureaucrats and ministers a very clear lesson on what can go wrong when control of funding decisions
is lost. What should have been a strong political plus—following the well-rehearsed formula associated with repeated announcements of funding; handing over the cheque in front of the recipients; turning the first sod; and eventually unveiling the plaque on new building—was turned into a long-running series of negative media articles and public complaints made by the intended beneficiaries whose lives had been singled out for improvement. In addition, the new Institute for Aboriginal Development’s publicly funded facilities now stood on land that was outside the control of the government.

The Northern Territory Employment and Training Authority did not provide the feasibility and scoping grant of $300,000 to the Desert Peoples Centre Consortium out of a deep felt endorsement of Aboriginal self-management. Rather, the real significance of creating yet another training organisation and increased complexity was to provide a structure that would allow ministerial philanthropy to be extended to these independent organisations. The proposed Desert Peoples Centre was an apparatus to safe-guard the public funds from the potentially unpredictable nature of decisions made by community-controlled organisations and ensure the government could still manipulate the use of government-funded infrastructure in a worst-case scenario. It is a matter of serendipity and political calculation that the proposed arrangement had the added advantage of being aligned with the long-running themes of self-management and community development. The Desert Peoples Centre consortium also ensured that the minister would be distanced from disagreements between individuals and organisations and provided a single point of reference for government officers to conduct negotiations or obtain feedback.

With the withdrawal of the Institute for Aboriginal Development from the consortium, the other two organisations proceeded with the project by submitting a revised business case for funding to the Northern Territory Government in 2003. In 2006, following the allocation of several years worth of vocational education and training capital infrastructure funding to construct other capital works for the broader Desert Knowledge Precinct, plans were made for erecting the first of what has now grown to more than 15 buildings that comprise the Desert Peoples Centre. Construction started in 2008 with the Desert Peoples Centre being officially opened by the Deputy Prime Minister, Julia Gillard, in 2010. The training programs currently on offer through the centre are provided by the Centre for Appropriate Technology and the Batchelor Institute,
which have each retained their separate registered training organisation status. Batchelor Institute has moved most of its on-campus training to the Desert Knowledge Precinct, although library and accommodation services have remained at its Bloomfield Street site pending further funding being made available to transfer these functions. The Centre for Appropriate Technology has also retained its old Priest Street site as well as moving into the former CSIRO laboratories adjacent to the Desert Knowledge Precinct: the result of a $3 million gift from the Indigenous Land Corporation.

The Desert Peoples Centre had fulfilled its intended role. A succession of Northern Territory and Commonwealth Government ministers were able to furnish new capital training infrastructure to Indigenous-controlled organisations while protecting the long-term future of the public investment. On the other hand, neither of the two Indigenous-controlled organisations had to relinquish ownership of their existing assets on externally dictated terms or conditions.

The original proposal to have the Desert Peoples Centre operate as a registered training provider (Ramsey 2002, p. 3) did not materialise, partly because that was never the purpose intended for this incorporation. The centre provided a single point of contact for ministerial officers and bureaucrats to negotiate the terms and conditions that would open the doors to the public’s largesse. Differences between various Indigenous interest groups had to be resolved before their proposals could go forward to the minister and, as evidenced by the fate of the Institute for Aboriginal Development, those who chose not to work inside the new structure lost access. In addition, the many millions of dollars that would eventually be spent on construction were not going to be just idly placed into the hands of independent organisations. The Northern Territory and Commonwealth Governments’ insistence upon building at the new Desert Knowledge Precinct site, based upon the experiences with the Institute for Aboriginal Development stoush, meant that no party to the Desert Peoples Centre agreement could take control of the buildings either overtly or by de facto presence on their land. The Desert Knowledge Precinct occupies land leased to a Northern Territory Government statutory authority, Desert Knowledge Australia, and is subject to an Indigenous Land Use Agreement. In an act designed to ensure no loss of influence, the Northern Territory Government insisted that the Desert Peoples Centre be built on both a sub- and under-lease held by the Northern Territory Department of Employment, Education and Training in return for a peppercorn rent
(Zoellner 2014, p. 26). In other words, retaining control of the land upon which the Desert Peoples Centre sits ensures that the minister can not only justify the allocation of public funding, but regulate access if necessary.

As events have unfolded since the establishment of the Desert Peoples Centre, this seems to have been a prudent move. The Chair of the Centre for Appropriate Technology Board, Peter Renehan, described 2013 as follows: “This has been a tumultuous year for CAT” due to the lack of certainty around its core funding, the loss of a major contract in Western Australia and the death of the Chief Executive Officer (Centre for Appropriate Technology 2014, p. 6). The 2013 income of $14.5 million for the organisation had dropped by over $11 million from $25.6 million in 2012, resulting in a deficit for the year of some $2.1 million (Centre for Appropriate Technology 2014, p. 36). The Centre for Appropriate Technology had steadily transitioned from a small and highly focused training organisation addressing the unmet needs of Indigenous people in Central Australia in 1980 to an association possessing high levels of knowledge on how to meet the complex needs of governments in the world of new public management. The Centre found that its expertise and skills were in demand right across Northern Australia and opened offices in Darwin, the Kimberley and far north Queensland to handle the contracting out of public service delivery aimed at social and lifestyle improvements in remote Indigenous communities. The movement into this arena of other non-government organisations and the private sector has had a serious impact upon the business model used by the Centre for Appropriate Technology, as has the withdrawal of Northern Territory vocational education and training funding for the adult and community education sector.

Similarly, Batchelor Institute of Indigenous Tertiary Education, the other partner in the Desert Peoples Centre, has also described how it faces an unsustainable trend in its fiscal future. Batchelor Institute (2014, p. 44) continues to rely upon the Northern Territory and Australian governments for over three-quarters of its income. As noted by the Director, Adrian Mitchell:

However, with the high costs of delivering remote training and the ever increasing burden of maintaining ageing infrastructure, the biggest challenge facing the Institute is still its long term financial viability and in 2013 expenditure on Vocational and Education and Training exceeded funding provided by the Northern Territory Government by over $2 million (Batchelor Institute of Indigenous Tertiary Education 2014, p. 3).
By early 2003, the powerful emotional attraction of the reignited debate over self-determination expressed through an unambiguously Aboriginal-controlled education and training organisation, when combined with the long-established goal of becoming Australia’s first Indigenous University, precluded the Batchelor Institute of Indigenous Tertiary Education from ever seriously considering the many approaches made for it to become part of Charles Darwin University. Furthermore, the Northern Territory University’s historic perceived lack of responsiveness to Indigenous self-determination (Berzins & Loveday 1999, pp. 201–203) and its low profile in Central Australia also contributed towards Batchelor Institute’s efforts to develop the Desert Peoples Centre instead of pursuing the offers of both the Commonwealth and Northern Territory Governments to join the other public providers in the new, amalgamated university. Similarly, the matter of Indigenous self-determination ensured that neither the Institute for Aboriginal Development or the Centre for Appropriate Technology were ever considered for inclusion in the mergers required to consolidate vocational training, higher education and research in a novel and contemporary post-school organisation.

Regardless, the same rationale of consolidation and efficiency that had spawned the Desert Peoples Centre as a benevolent apparatus was also driving much of the activity that resulted in the creation of Charles Darwin University in the early 2000s. The increasing level of open competition between Centralian College, Batchelor Institute and the Northern Territory University in the quasi-market for training presented both the Northern Territory Employment and Training Authority and its minister with a seemingly endless set of problems. Every allocation of funding or buildings would be met by a chorus of criticism from the other two institutions that had missed out. Instead of reaping political and community rewards for philanthropic behaviour, ministers were having to constantly defend their decisions, while those in receipt of the public munificence treated this as ‘only getting our fair share’ or even being ‘short-changed’. By creating a single institution with a Territory-wide remit, the arguments over relative priorities and consultation with the community and industry would fall back upon the university and the minister would be freed to make final choices with a focus upon the best political perceptions of any particular decision. In addition, the single institution made negotiations over resource agreements a much simpler activity for the newly created Department of Employment, Education and Training.
As with Indigenous self-determination the proposal to amalgamate all of the public providers into a single institution headquartered in Darwin reopened the debate over the so-called ‘Berrimah Line’. This fictional boundary at Darwin’s former southern outskirts represented the bureaucrats’ perceived lack of understanding of the real needs and aspirations of Territorians who resided outside the capital city. While not hotly contested in 2002–03, all of the previous arguments were brought out—dating all the way back to the Darwin Adult Education Centre handing back control of Adult Education in Alice Springs to the South Australian Education Department in the days prior to self-government. In late 2002, the Centralian College council was cognisant of the long-running debates over local decision-making and the counter arguments of economies of scale associated with being part of a much larger entity, when it considered Minister Stirling’s invitation—relayed through the Chief Executive of the Department of Employment, Education and Training, Peter Plummer—to amalgamate with the Northern Territory University, the Menzies School of Health Research and the Northern Territory Rural College to form a new university.

During the previous year, the council had commissioned David Rolfe, who had previously reviewed the Northern Territory Employment and Training Authority, to assist with an exercise in scenario planning regarding the future viability of Centralian College in the face of emerging financial and operational pressures and a stagnant training market. The final report made for rather grim reading: in three years time, college operations would be about the same but stretched to the limit; in five years there would be severe financial, information technology systems and staffing difficulties; and within 10 years the college would be broke. Several ways forward were suggested including amalgamation with other providers either in the Northern Territory or even interstate. In the end, council decided that the Central Australian community would be best served by having a formal university presence in Alice Springs and Tennant Creek.

As a result of the amalgamation and the agreement of both parties, the Centralian senior secondary school was progressively returned to the Department of Employment, Education and Training while the ownership of the entire Sadadeen campus was eventually transferred to Charles Darwin University. The newly created university had staff permanently based in Yulara in the far southwest of the Territory, Alice Springs, Tennant Creek, Mataranka Station, Katherine township, the rural college campus just north of Katherine, Jabiru, Nhulunbuy, Palmerston and at Casuarina.
The three Mobile Adult Learning Units that had been operated by Centralian College were now also capable of being deployed throughout the Territory when and where climatic and road conditions allowed.

As a salutary side note and vindication of Centralian College's previously mentioned fiscal scenario planning exercise, the financial fate of Batchelor Institute of Indigenous Tertiary Education provided a timely example of the limitations of small specialist training providers. Centralian College and Batchelor Institute had a similar scale of income and expenditure—quite modest when compared to that of the Northern Territory University. Batchelor Institute's decision to reject the opportunity to be a part of the new university eventually led to its near bankruptcy (Ravens 2009) in the time frame predicted in Rolfe's report to the Centralian College Council. By October 2009 the Northern Territory and Commonwealth Governments had to provide some $6.4 million to Batchelor Institute to support continued operations (Masters 2009). As noted previously, the institute continues to struggle with financial viability, while its higher education joint venture with Charles Darwin University—the Australian Centre for Indigenous Knowledges and Education—has put even further pressure on its ability to maintain a positive fiscal environment.

After 12 months of extensive consultations, negotiations and relationship building, the legislation to create Charles Darwin University was passed by the Northern Territory Legislative Assembly in November 2003. In spite of the consistent reluctance of Batchelor Institute's council to take any action that would be seen to undermine the principle of Aboriginal self-determination, there have been concerted attempts to bring the only other public provider into the university. For example, in the face of persistent rumours that he was considering the removal of the institute’s higher education provider status, the Commonwealth Minister for Education, Brendan Nelson, made available a $3 million grant in 2006 to fund the development of a formal partnership agreement between Charles Darwin University and Batchelor Institute of Indigenous Tertiary Education. The partnership compact was carefully negotiated over many months and operated from 2007–09. The externally financed relationship did not result in the marriage that had been hoped for, despite the institute’s parlous financial state. The core matter of Indigenous control and the mixed messages being sent through the actions of both the Northern Territory and Commonwealth Governments dumping millions of dollars into the Desert Peoples Centre buildings ensured that there would be no change from the long-standing public policy position of having
a specialist Indigenous tertiary education and training provider operating alongside a dual-sector ‘mainstream’ institution catering for the entire Northern Territory population.

As a consequence of Minister Stirling’s efforts to shepherd through the consolidation of vocational education and training at Charles Darwin University and Batchelor Institute, ministerial philanthropic ambition has a rather streamlined mechanism for the delivery of training that has ostensibly met the needs of the next seven ministers following in the role. With one or two minor exceptions that will be described later, the basic structure of the quasi-market in 2014 consisted of the two public providers (with their quite distinct missions), a highly variable number of interstate providers and 46 Northern Territory-based enterprise and private registered training organisations (Department of Industry 2014). The principal–agent contractual relationship inherent in new public management still operates and allows the Northern Territory Government to dominate policy and funding decisions. By contracting away the messiness of dealing with service delivery and the risk of failure, ministers can carry out their philanthropic activity guided by their close relationship to the voters, their political acumen and the calculation of electoral success that comes from handing out public funds.

Figure 42. Batchelor Institute of Indigenous Tertiary Education, 2011.
Source: Creator Darren Clark, PH0875/0038, Darren Clark Collection, Northern Territory Library.
Chief Minister and Minister for Education and Training, Paul Henderson’s response to the financial crisis at Batchelor Institute in 2009 is a classic example of the benefits of this philanthropic mechanism. In a demonstration of ‘all care but no responsibility’, Henderson is reported to have stated (Ravens 2009):

We’ve been working very closely with Batchelor and the Australian Government in terms of a way forward. A financial audit has been carried out, a management team has been appointed and certainly we are discussing with the board of Batchelor about a business plan.

The NT government does not have the capacity to enforce an administrator on the institute. It is an independent board and it manages its own affairs. Closure is not an option. My absolute drive (is) to improve secondary education in remote communities and Batchelor needs to be a key part of that. Certainly, I will continue to work with (federal Education Minister) Julia Gillard to that effect. Batchelor is an important institution and it has to stay.

Of course, after carefully setting the scene, Henderson was able to demonstrate the power and benefits of ministerial philanthropy by ‘working with’ the Commonwealth minister to find nearly $6.5 million to save this organisation with which he had self-identified (by wishing to improve the lives of remote Indigenous people) but had also distanced himself from direct ministerial responsibility for its financial problems. When interviewed about his principal motivation for becoming Chief Minister, Henderson replied, ‘[I] really felt like I could take the Territory forward’ (Martin & Dewar 2012, p. 171). And being able to use a minister’s public philanthropy associated with the vocational education and training system provided a powerful tool to realise his vision for an improved society.

As we have seen, the vocational education and training public policy tool has two interacting parts—centralised policy/funding and dispersed delivery. The stabilisation of delivery that accompanied the establishment of Charles Darwin University and the Peoples Desert Centre returned attention to the Northern Territory Government’s policy and funding arrangements. Stirling’s Ministerial Advisory Board for Employment and Training commenced in 2002–03 and met nine times in the 2003–04 financial year. This advisory board then met less frequently in each of the following two years (six and four times respectively) and finally ceased operating in February 2006 (Department of Employment 2006, p. 91)
although provision for the board remained in the relevant legislation. Unlike the Northern Territory Employment and Training Authority, the Ministerial Advisory Board did not have control over expenditure or public policy as these roles had been carried out by professional experts in the Department of Employment, Education and Training. The steady decline in the number of meetings and eventual winding up of this advisory committee suggests that its contribution was decreasingly relevant to the minister’s preferred method of working within government bureaucracies and his own capacity to identify the groups that would produce the most benefit from public philanthropy.

In order to bring the processes of government back into alignment with the determinants of ministerial philanthropy, particularly direct relationships and self-identification, the Northern Territory Government and Minister Henderson developed a new training advisory mechanism to replace the previous board—Employment and Training round tables:

The round tables provide an opportunity for industry stakeholders to engage in dialogue directly with government on employment and training issues affecting the Northern Territory (Department of Employment 2006, p. 91).

The round tables were to meet six times a year in the major population centres of the Northern Territory. As with the ministerial advisory board, over a period of several years the round table meetings slowly ground to a halt and were quietly discontinued. In the final years of the Labor Government in the Northern Territory, there was no formal advisory mechanism or structured relationship between government ministers and those involved in the vocational education and training; thus distancing the minister from employers, students and training providers.

Following Stirling’s departure from the ministry in 2007, three different persons held the training portfolio—Marion Scrymgour, Paul Henderson (twice) and Chris Burns. When interviewed and asked about the role of ministerial advisors, Syd Stirling stated that their role was to ‘help guide the minister to ensure that public servants achieve implementation of our policies’. In the absence of a direct relationship with the training community, the Labor Government became almost totally reliant upon their ministerial advisors and the department to guide policy and funding. The bringing ‘in-house’ of vocational education and training policy had two major impacts. The first was the reduction in electoral advantages that can be had from the exercise of ministerial philanthropy. In yet another
display of the bipartisanship which has been repeatedly demonstrated in vocational education and training, the Labor Government’s attention to the area mirrored that of the Country Liberal Party when they were coming to the end of their period in power. As with Fred Finch’s departure a decade earlier, the ministers that followed Syd Stirling did not exhibit the same intuitive understanding and capacity to operate as a ministerial philanthropist. While the technique would not be abandoned, as evidenced by the lifeline Henderson threw to Batchelor Institute, the use of vocational education and training as a form of public philanthropy was not being used to full advantage.

The second effect was to revitalise the public service battles over budgets and personnel associated with departmental structures and responsibilities. In Labor’s final term of government, the ‘super-department’ of employment, education and training would be progressively dismantled. In 2008, the employment function was removed from the ‘super-department’ and re-integrated into the Department of Business with Kon Vatskalis serving as the minister and returning to a similar situation that had existed in the years prior to the establishment of the Northern Territory Employment and Training Authority in 1992. The final dissolution was announced by the Minister for Business and Employment in September 2011. In a media release, Rob Knight (2011) told the public of ‘changes to adult training in the Territory to ensure the best employment outcomes for industry and individuals’ by combining ‘adult training with the employment function of the Department of Business and Employment’. Knight also indicated that vocational education and training for school students would remain with the Department of Education and Training. Labor’s excursion through a 1980s-style super-department and its consequent dismantlement provides support for the interview observations of the former Commissioner for Public Employment, David Hawkes. He believed that vocational education and training was an uncomfortable fit with the broader education portfolio. Those charged with the responsibility for running schools are seldom seen to possess a deep knowledge of the overarching needs of the economy or how to best gather and use views of business to support ministerial ambition.

The separation of employment and training functions from the broader education portfolio came about because one of the principal concerns of both industry and the training sector actually came to fruition. The major objection to Stirling creating the ‘super-department’ was
that the vocational education and training function would become
subordinated to the needs of the school system. While Stirling had been
able to manage that potential problem, his successors were to find the
task impossible. As with most of the Labor members of the Legislative
Assembly, Marion Scrymgour and Chris Burns had professional
backgrounds in academia and not-for-profit organisations (ABC News
2012). Scrymgour also had worked in local government, at the Northern
Land Council and in Indigenous health delivery programs. Yet, again,
these ministers had little in common with industry and business interests
and were much more comfortable with a trusted band of advisors and
working within the confines of the various bureaucratic organisations.
There is little evidence to demonstrate that either had any formal and
sustained vocational training advisory mechanisms or relationships with
industry. It seems likely that these characteristics severely limited their
capacity to behave like wealthy philanthropists and reap the electoral
rewards. Both would retire from politics at the August 2012 election.

Scrymgour had been elected as part of the Clare Martin-led sweep
into government in 2001 and served in a number of ministerial roles.
As part of the internal party power play that saw Paul Henderson topple
Martin from the chief ministership, Scrymgour replaced Stirling as both
the Deputy Chief Minister and Minister for Education and Training in
November 2007. In the 15 months that Scrymgour served as minister,
vocational education and training was considered to have been treated
with benign neglect by her office. She made little reference to the sector
in the Legislative Assembly and this was in passing when discussing the
NT Jobs Plan or vocational training being used in secondary schools.
Her time was totally consumed by school education matters that included
a long-running, bitter industrial dispute with teachers, an unfriendly
media, some rather crucial mistaken statements/actions and impatience
with the education bureaucracy. In October 2008, almost a year after
becoming minister, Scrymgour was the subject of an extraordinary attack
in the Legislative Assembly launched by the Leader of the Opposition,
Terry Mills, when he moved ‘that this Assembly express a want
of confidence in the Minister for Education and Training’ (Department
of the Legislative Assembly 2008, p. 1).
Figure 43. Marion Scrymgour (left) being sworn in as a member of the ninth Northern Territory Legislative Assembly on 16 October 2001. Also being sworn in is Jodeen Carney, Member for Araluen, and seated, to the far right, is the first Labor Party Chief Minister of the Northern Territory, Clare Martin.
Source: Creator unknown, PH0753/0011, 9th Assembly Collection, Northern Territory Library.
While Mills used the full range of confected political outrage that is frequently on display in this venue, his major complaints seemed to revolve around three issues: the minister delving into operational issues to deal with individual teachers; teachers’ strike action over enterprise bargaining matters; and the sacking of Margaret Banks, the Chief Executive Officer of the Department of Education and Training. Scrymgour (Department of the Legislative Assembly 2008, pp. 9–11) launched a spirited defence of her actions by admitting her mistake of referring in the media to Banks having ‘retired’ rather than ‘resigned’. She then confirmed that the Chief Executive Officer had been sacked: ‘simply put, she was advised her services were no longer required. I simply felt that there was no appropriate sense of urgency being generated at the top level’ to address the poor educational outcomes being achieved in remote Indigenous community schools. The Labor Government had allocated quite significant resources to the Education Department and the minister was not seeing the sorts of results she felt ought to be visible.

Figure 44. Margaret Banks, the Chief Executive of the Department of Employment, Education and Training, introducing Minister Scrymgour, at the far left, during the January 2006 scholarships and bursaries awards ceremony held at Parliament House.
Source: Creator Patrick Nelson.
The minister’s urgent focus upon remote schools produced the predicted outcome of merging education and training—vocational education and training was given low or minimal political priority; became disconnected from industry; and was effectively being driven by employment policy. While Scrymgour survived the want of confidence motion, she was seriously damaged. Chief Minister Henderson acted in February 2009 by giving her a demotion in Cabinet, which resulted in her resignation from the ministry in June of that year.

Henderson resumed the education and training portfolio following Scrymgour’s departure. He immediately attempted to raise the profile of training by recommencing the ministerial round tables and promoting the various ‘investments’ in vocational education and training being made by his government as a way of harnessing the benefits of ministerial philanthropy that he better understood and used when compared to Scrymgour and Burns. One of his first actions was to make a ministerial statement to the Legislative Assembly on 10 February 2009 to try to limit the damage done to the government’s reputation because of the
previous minister’s disengagement with the training sector and the subsequent leadership vacuum created (Henderson 2009). In outlining his government’s achievements, Henderson reported to Parliament that the Northern Territory had the highest vocational education and training participation rate in the nation, which had been achieved through a number of initiatives including:

- Work Wear and Work Gear assistance to apprentices to buy tools and equipment;
- 1,700 incentives paid to employers of apprentices and trainees;
- Work Ready program for secondary school students;
- 600 Territorians adding new skills through the $1.5 million Build Skills program;
- a variety of Indigenous pre-employment programs operating around the Territory;
- training for the emerging oil and gas industry and planned developments;
- a Productivity Places Program Pilot for higher level qualifications; and
- Vocational Education and Training Program for remote schools costing $500,000.

Henderson would remain Minister for Education and Training until December 2009, when Chris Burns assumed the role. As with Scrymgour before him, there is little evidence that Burns had an affinity with the training sector or those employers who would benefit from the public investment directed at building the Northern Territory’s skill base. During the almost two years that Burns had responsibility for vocational training, he was totally reliant upon his ministerial advisors and departmental advice. There was no formal industry-led advisory body in place and a number of observers at the time believed that Burns was isolated from the sector and its major issues. He made no major ministerial statements dedicated to vocational education and training to the Legislative Assembly while giving the sector brief mention in relation to growth in jobs and school-based vocational programs.
The overall workload expected of Burns would have significantly contributed to this lack of attention to vocational education and training's philanthropic potential. In addition to the two other ministerial portfolios held by Burns, he was also the Leader of Government Business in the Legislative Assembly. Scrymgour’s quitting the ministry in February was followed by her resignation from the Australian Labor Party in June of 2009. She was joined by Allison Anderson who resigned from the ministry and the party in August. This left the party without sufficient seats to form government. Scrymgour was lured back into the Labor Party leaving the numbers on the floor of the Legislative Assembly equally balanced and the fate of government in the hands of the Darwin rural area independent, Gerry Woods. He negotiated a complex deal to support Labor’s tenuous hold on power in return for the establishment of the Council of Territory Cooperation as a committee of the Legislative Assembly with wide-ranging powers to examine most any issue of interest and a promise of leadership stability; and high levels of consultation on the legislative program. As the Leader of Government Business, Burns had to manage every detail of the operations of parliament to avoid any possibility of...
being forced to an early election by an emboldened Country Liberal Party. Burns was simply too busy fending off political disaster to actually take advantage of the benefits of philanthropic behaviour.

One other significant action was undertaken by the Northern Territory Government in 2011 when it delegated its powers to register and regulate training organisations to the national regulator, the Australian Skills and Quality Authority. This removed the final major potential point of political pain that would face a philanthropically-minded minister. Acting under the authority of Northern Territory legislation, the minister makes the ultimate decision about the future operations of registered training organisations that are accused of not meeting the required standards. While the public understands, sometimes even demands, the theoretical basis for the enforcement of regulations, the final decision to close down a provider, putting trainers out of work and disrupting students’ study, seldom receives positive publicity for the minister. Again, through the application of new public management, government and the minister can contract away operational responsibility for failure, the drudgery of quality audits and the potential for electoral damage. Northern Territory ministers have been given almost total freedom to act philanthropically with the one exception that will be described shortly.

The Northern Territory Government also had taken a series of decisions in 2010 to defund the adult and community education sector while consolidating its support for the delivery of vocational education and training through a historically stable set of recurrent resource agreements with:

- Charles Darwin University;
- Batchelor Institute of Indigenous Tertiary Education;
- the Centre for Appropriate Technology;
- the Institute for Aboriginal Development;
- Seafood and Maritime Industries Training; and
- Nungalinya College.

Private and enterprise providers have to negotiate access to both user choice funding for apprentice and trainee training with the Department of Business. They can also bargain for access to a range of other specialised programs that are normally carefully targeted at regional areas or specific groups of residents that have been identified for special treatment—frequently described as disadvantaged.
In addition, three government agencies have a long history of being registered training providers to meet specialist enterprise needs:

- Police, Fire and Emergency Services provide their own entry level and advanced training for firefighters and those who will undertake policing duties;
- The Department of Health and Community Services provides dedicated training programs in a narrow range of community health areas; and
- The Department of Correctional Services both provides training for its own staff to become corrections officers and for prisoners in a limited number of lower level qualifications that can be provided in the prison environment.

The rather purist separation of delivery functions from policy, regulation and funding also meant that the potential for conflict of interest in the Department of Education (in all of its incarnations) was best avoided if it was not a registered training organisation. For those schools that wished to access contestable public vocational education and training monies in addition to their normal government grants, the option has always been open to become a registered training provider since the early 1990s when that mechanism was established. The special relationship between the Alice Springs town schools and the dual-sector Centralian College meant that developing a partnership agreement was a much simpler and less onerous means to access formally recognised vocational education and training for secondary-aged students. On the other hand, most secondary schools in the Top End became registered training organisations either directly or by association with the Catholic Education Office or Northern Territory Christian Schools Limited.

As time has gone by, only the Christian Schools Limited, Nhulunbuy High School and Taminmin High School have maintained their status as a registered training organisations. With the transfer of the training function to the Department of Business and Employment in 2011, the major sources of conflict were somewhat mediated. However, in 2014, the Department of Education and Training established a small registered training organisation offering three low level qualifications aimed at remote school students. The rationale for the department being a training provider is based upon arguments of market failure in remote areas. The public policy advantages associated with a funder–purchaser–provider model have been dissipated due to the fact that the
same departmental officers who operate the registered training provider are also the administrators of vocational education and training funding allocations that provide for school-based training. In other words, the very existence of the departmental training organisation makes the same agency both a purchaser and provider with the potential to move into other training areas relatively easily. By definition, this also makes the minister responsible for outcomes, problems, failures and managing conflicts of interest associated with the delivery of services. The benefits of both new public management and ministerial philanthropy are dissipated because the minister is simultaneously responsible for all three roles—funder, purchaser and provider—when his department takes on the role of registered training provider.

In 2005, the issue of vocational education and training in secondary schools also furnished the setting for a constitutionally bold move on the part of the Commonwealth Government. Although the Commonwealth had operated schools in its territories prior to self-government, by following the principles of new public management, it had gradually divested itself of direct ownership of schools and made much greater use of carefully targeted funding interventions through state and territory governments to achieve national public policy outcomes. The Howard Coalition Government had determined through an extensive polling campaign that many voters were nostalgic about the days when the state education systems had technical high schools, and sensed an opportunity for electoral advantage as it entered its fifth term in office.

State-owned specialist technical schools had been progressively converted to comprehensive high schools and/or senior colleges in most states and territories throughout the 1970s and 1980s. The Federal Coalition Government went to the October 2004 general election with a commitment to open 24 Australian Technical Colleges around Australia, if elected. Once returned to office, the Australian Government proceeded to pass legislation to finance this policy in 2005 and subsequently identified another four geographical areas that would receive such a college. In defending the need for the colleges, the Federal Minister for Vocational and Further Education, Andrew Robb, described these new institutions and the Commonwealth’s intervention into state affairs as an important step because ‘it does mean that we are getting back to where the technical high schools that were closed 20 and 30 years ago, the one huge mistake in education around the country, is being corrected’ (*The World Today* 2007).
Darwin was identified by the Commonwealth as one of the areas that would benefit from the operations of an Australian Technical College and the initiative was warmly received by the Northern Territory minister, Syd Stirling. The entire process of establishing these Commonwealth-funded colleges provides a textbook example of ministerial philanthropy. Local industry-dominated consortia from each identified area were ‘invited’ to apply to the Department of Education, Science and Training to establish and operate the college either using existing facilities or overseeing the building of a new college using Commonwealth funds. The task of justifying the need for secondary school-aged training, developing the business case, devising risk mitigation strategies, forming operational budgets and forward planning were all left to the local community groups. If their application was successful, these local consortia would take responsibility for running a secondary school. The principal–agent contractual arrangement at the core of new public management remained a cornerstone of this scheme. This freed the Commonwealth minister to hand out the public’s money on the basis of an electorally safe, self-described need guided by a process that forced potential competitors to actually come together and present a united front that was less likely to find fault with the final funding decisions. This example of Commonwealth ministerial philanthropic activity, mirroring the technique used to such great electoral advantage in the Northern Territory, is described as follows:

The department assessed the proposals and advised the minister on the ratings of proposals for each region. The selection of successful applicants was a decision of the Government. On 15 July 2005, the minister announced the first 12 successful applicants to establish colleges. Applicants from regions where two proposals were rated as ‘suitable and best’ were asked by DEST to combine their proposals to provide a single, strong proposal for the region (The Auditor-General 2007, p. 71).

Not surprisingly, there were complaints that the vast majority of regions targeted to receive an Australian Technical College coincided with marginal federal electorates (The World Today 2007). The exercise of ministerial philanthropy seeks to both direct society in a particular direction and seek electoral advantage. This was certainly the case for Darwin, which had been identified as a potential site in July 2005. After extensive negotiations that included the personal interventions of the local federal member and the then Commonwealth minister, a funding agreement was signed on 26 September 2006. The Australian
Technical College Darwin commenced operations as both a registered training organisation and school in 2007 with a few dozen students in a limited range of industry areas.

The local Member of the House of Representatives, Dave Tollner, took a very high level of personal interest in bringing the college to fruition as he was intended to be a major electoral beneficiary. The Darwin bid for the operating rights for the college had been subject to proposals from several groups and the process to negotiate ‘a single, strong proposal’ was perceived by the politicians to be taking too long. Tollner enlisted the help of the federal minister, Gary Hardgrave, to come to Darwin and give the locals some encouragement. The minister’s robust and hard-line approach was not all that well received. However, his actions did assist moves forward when he unilaterally eliminated any possibility of approving a proposal that included Charles Darwin University, the largest provider of vocational education and training in the Northern Territory and experienced provider of secondary school training, as either a partner of the consortium or as a site for college buildings. Many commentators at the time attributed the minister’s position to an ideological predisposition against the word ‘university’. Hardgrave’s other major claim to fame, before being sacked from ministerial duties by Prime Minister Howard in January 2007, was his failed attempt to change the name of the sector. In seeking to exert his authority over the vocational education and training sector, the minister decided that ‘vocational and technical education’ would be used. As with Northern Territory Minister Lugg’s attempt to revert to TAFE, Hardgrave misunderstood the implications of reordering the simple sequence of words for literally millions of voters and the impact upon hundreds of thousands of web pages, application forms, official documents and reporting formats.

Hardgrave’s ambition to exert control over the sector badly miscalculated the political risks of rebadging the entire sector and unintentionally served to limit the political advantages associated with the massively expensive program to revise technical high schools. His ministerial career was yet another casualty of the skirmishes waged over the control of vocational education and training. For the period 2005–09, the total funding for Australian Technical Colleges was estimated to be some $585 million with about $473 million coming directly from Commonwealth appropriations that would be spent on a projected 8,400 students spending the full-time equivalent of two years at the colleges (The Auditor-General 2007, p. 77). This works out to about $35,000 per
student per year, which was more than double the $16,000 per student spent in the Northern Territory—Australia’s most expensive jurisdiction (Department of Employment 2006, p. 55). When asked in a personal conversation about this cost differential, Hardgrave’s successor, Andrew Robb, rationalised that the cost was never about the delivery of training but about forcing the states and territories to reintroduce technical education into secondary schools and that the strategy had been successful with South Australia, for example, re-establishing vocational secondary schools. Unfortunately for the Federal Coalition Government, their attempt to tap the public’s favourable memories and turn it to electoral advantage miscarried. Dave Tollner lost his seat and the Coalition failed in its bid for re-election in 2007.

The Australian Technical College Darwin was developed as a cooperative hybrid model in anticipation of low numbers of senior students who would be prepared to move to a completely separate school and away from their local secondary college or school. Extensive training infrastructure in several existing public and private schools was either upgraded or purpose-built using funds from the Australian Technical College’s program. A head office and some generic training facilities were established in Stuart Park, somewhat ironically, within view of the very first Northern Territory Government training establishment dedicated to preparing young people for traditional trades employment—the Skills Training Centre. With the election of the Rudd Labor Federal Government in 2007, the funding for the Australian Technical Colleges was diverted to a program known as Trade Training Centres in Schools and the operations were progressively handed over to state and territory education providers. The Australian Technical College Darwin headquarters was closed as the Department of Education and Training assumed responsibility in late 2009, while the infrastructure that had been provided was quietly absorbed into the individual schools.

The dismantling of the Australian Technical Colleges program by the Rudd Labor Government did not detract from the positive political calculations associated with the provision of vocational training facilities for secondary school-aged students. The Labor Opposition had taken a more flexible policy to the 2007 election—it could potentially include each and every secondary school in the nation. Ministerial philanthropy from the federal minister could be targeted at individual post codes and even particular suburbs through the Trade Training Centres in Schools program. Under this program, the Northern Territory received six grants, each of which was
in the expansive rural and remote safe Labor seat of Lingiari that occupies the entire jurisdiction except Darwin. With the defeat of Labor in 2013, the Abbott Coalition Government still sensed the potential benefits of such a funding source and performed the politically irresistible relabelling of the program to allow for the provision of Trades Skills Centres in both clusters of or at individual secondary schools.

When describing what her government did well, former Chief Minister Clare Martin replied that she was the ‘proudest of what we did in growing jobs and training’ (Martin & Dewar 2012, p. 163). Her Labor successors continued with this theme by stating ‘training is a hallmark of the Territory Government’ (Department of Business and Employment 2012, p. 10). A retrospective account of the 11 years of Labor Government paints a rather less rosy picture. The number of people in training and the expenditure on training flatlined in the Labor years (Zoellner 2012). The four Labor ministers repeated the journey of the previous Country Liberal Party following self-government by changing the administrative arrangements from an authority to a department and eventually separating training from the education function. Their focus was more on restructuring agencies and providers, less on the advantages of philanthropic behaviour. In the end, they paid the ultimate electoral price.

In August 2012, the Country Liberals once again tasted success at the ballot box after 11 years in opposition. Their campaign was constructed upon a mix of the ‘it’s time’ factor, a focus upon taking previously ‘unwinnable’ bush seats from Labor and a return to the Country Liberal’s own concoction of populism and liberalism. Members of the so-called ‘old guard’ of the party such as Graeme Lewis and Col Fuller—who would go on to become Cabinet Secretary after the election—made major strategic contributions before and after the campaign. While the Country Liberals went to the election with the pledge to re-establish an employment and training authority, they have yet again demonstrated the same bipartisan comfort by retaining similar policy settings in vocational education and training. The Country Liberals inherited a department of business and employment from the Labor Government which was rebadged as the Department of Business post-election. The employment and training functions were left in this economic agency by the new government. Some progress has been made towards the pre-election commitment to re-establish a ‘training authority’ with the appointment of several senior business and industry figures to an interim Northern Territory Employment and Training
Authority Advisory Board in September 2014. This group was headed up, again, by Andrew Bruyn, the board chair of the former Northern Territory Employment and Training Authority.

After several changes in the early Cabinets following the 2012 election, Dave Tollner—the former federal member who had demonstrated such a keen interest in the Australian Technical College—became the Minister for Business and gained responsibility for vocational education and training as well as Desert Knowledge Australia and its precinct containing the Desert Peoples Centre. Tollner is much more aligned with the private sector than public service bureaucracies—a characteristic of the previous Country Liberal Party Government and ministers that had overseen a near doubling of the resources allocated to vocational education and training for the two decades following self-government (Zoellner 2012).

At the time of writing, Tollner was having a rest from his relationship with vocational education and training. Having made some very injudicious comments about a Country Liberal staff member, he returned to the back bench in response to the adverse public reaction and the immediate impact such events make in the Territory’s intimate political environment. The business, training and employment ministerial duties were taken on for several months by the Chief Minister, Adam Giles, in addition to the other 10 ministries he took over when Tollner resigned his Cabinet duties. Clearly, by allocating this huge workload to a single individual as in the case of Minister Burns, the possibility of managing the personal relationships and self-identification that will allow a minister to take advantage of philanthropic opportunities is severely limited.

In December 2014, ministerial responsibilities were reassigned with yet another repetition of earlier Country Liberal Party approaches. Alice Springs-based Robyn Lambley was made the Minister for Education as well as Employment and Training. This mirrors the early 1990s arrangements exercised by Shane Stone. It also placed the responsibilities for business and industry in a different portfolio, repeating the structures used by the Northern Territory Government 25 years earlier.