



CHARLES DARWIN UNIVERSITY

Submission to: Australian Government Department of Education and
Training

Re: Higher Education Provider Category Standards Review

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Introduction

Charles Darwin University (CDU) welcomes the opportunity to respond to the Higher Education Provider Category Standards Review.

By way of context, CDU is unique among Australian universities. No other single Australian university serves such a large area of the continent, in such a remote and undeveloped location, or with such a small population to sustain it. While the Northern Territory (NT) covers more than seventeen percent of Australia, it is home to just over one percent of the population, thirty percent of whom are Indigenous, compared with around three percent of the general Australian population.

Charles Darwin University's predecessor institution, the Northern Territory University (NTU), was Australia's first dual sector university, providing, as the only university based in the Northern Territory, both Higher Education and Vocational Education and Training programs. NTU, and subsequently CDU, were conceived to support the economic, environmental, cultural and social development of the Northern Territory and as such have provided the knowledge and human capital that have sustained the development of the NT for almost 30 years. CDU is intimately connected to the Northern Territory and its future and will continue to deliver the education, skills and new knowledge, through research, needed to underpin the future prosperity of northern Australia more broadly.

Over the life of this University, the NT population has grown from around 160,000 to over 244,000 people. While significant, this growth has not been sufficient for the NT to sustain a comprehensive university in its own right. It was therefore recognised early on that to be sustainable, we needed to diversify our services and delivery beyond the Northern Territory and consequently CDU became one of the first universities in Australia to develop significant online learning programs, which are now accessed by around 70% of our Higher Education students, 60% of whom live outside the NT. Many of these online students are in regional areas around Australia and cannot access on campus learning environments. Many also work full or part time and online study allows them to meet these work and family commitments, which a full time on campus experience would challenge. Our national reach has enabled us to provide the comprehensive tertiary education service that the NT requires, while also connecting the University to people and communities across Australia.

Today CDU has around 12,000 Higher Education and 11,000 VET students who study through our campuses and centres in Darwin, Palmerston, Katherine, Alice Springs, Nhulunbuy, Tennant Creek and Jabiru in the NT, or our centres in Sydney, Melbourne, Adelaide or Cairns, as well as online. CDU also provides face-to-face training at over 100 regional and remote locations throughout the NT on a drive-in drive-out basis, where staff deliver short programs based on community needs.

Although CDU is a relatively young university, it has achieved excellence in many areas of teaching, learning and research and has been ranked 9th in the World Millennial Ranking of Young Universities and 43rd in the Top 50 Universities worldwide under 50 years old by the Times Higher Education World University Rankings.

Submission

1. What characteristics should define a 'higher education provider' and a 'university' in the PCS?

Australian universities should be characterised by their excellence in research and education. The current expectations of universities as outlined in the PCS, namely that universities "Must meet the requirements of the 'Higher Education Provider' category, be self-accrediting and deliver undergraduate and postgraduate courses of study that meet the Higher Education Standards Framework across a range of broad fields of study, including Masters Degrees (Research) and Doctoral Degrees (Research) in at least three of the broad fields of study it offers", are considered by CDU to be broadly adequate. There needs to be protection of the title 'university' in Australia and avoidance of dilution of the criteria for being a university, to ensure the highest standards of teaching quality are maintained and that world class research is performed that also underpins the teaching of a university's academic programs. Aligned with the Bradley Review, high standards of research and scholarship are what make a university. As a country we should see the university sector as our R&D arm, like any company, and we need to protect the quality, standards and criteria that surround the sector and invest in it.

There should be no confusion about whether an institution is a HE Provider or a university. The two should be very distinct and the name 'university' should only be used if an institution meets all of the PCS criteria for a university. The term HEP is very generic and since universities are also HEPs, perhaps there needs to be a different term or terms used for non-university HEPs to distinguish them from universities.

2. Are the PCS fit for purpose in terms of current and emerging needs? Why?

CDU considers the current PCS are fit for purpose in relation to HE Providers and universities but that some categories could be eliminated.

3. Should some categories be eliminated or new categories be introduced? What should be the features of any new categories?

CDU considers that some of the categories in the current PCS do not need to be continued. There are currently no Australian University Colleges or Overseas Universities of Specialisation and CDU does not see the need for these categories.

CDU considers there are currently sufficient universities to meet the needs of Australian and overseas students for many years to come. There does not appear to be a sound rationale for wanting to allow additional HE providers to call themselves universities or for an Australian University College category that would allow non- university providers to become universities within five years. CDU does not consider there is a need for new PCS categories, in fact there may be an argument for just two categories - 'university' and 'non-university' providers.

4. Do specific categories need to be revised? How?

CDU does not consider that specific PCS categories need to be revised if those identified in question 3 are eliminated.

5. How would the needs of providers, students, industry, regulator and broader public interest be served by your suggested changes to the PCS?

Simplification is always preferable to complication. A streamlined PCS that protects the outstanding university sector that Australia enjoys while allowing diversity and choice in providers to Australian and international consumers is preferable to one that complicates the system by accommodating categories that are too specific or that cause dilution of the criteria of what a university is and does. In order to provide the Australian public with outstanding education and research and in order to compete for international students, Australia needs to maintain a university sector of world class standard and to protect that 'brand'.