

Mr Malcolm Roberts  
Commissioner  
Productivity Commission  
4 National Circuit  
Barton ACT 2600, Australia

Dear Commissioner Roberts,

**Re: Batchelor Institute of Indigenous Tertiary Education (Batchelor Institute) Submission to the Productivity Commission Skills and Workforce Agreement Review**

Thank you for you and your team's time last week to meet with Professor Steve Larkin, Chief Executive of the Batchelor Institute, and the invitation to provide a formal submission to the Commission on the Productivity Commission's Skills and Workforce Agreement Review.

*Background*

The Institute has a 45-year long and proud history of providing education and training to one of the most disadvantaged sections of the Australian population. Our organisation began by providing vocational education and training, and from these strong foundations we expanded into the provision of higher education courses.

Today Batchelor Institute is the only Table A Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Higher Education Provider in Australia. We deliver into every corner of the Northern Territory and provide training and education in environments that are often extremely challenging. These environments are not experienced by other tertiary institutions including VET Registered Training Organisations (RTOs), Universities or Higher Education Providers in Australia.

As a dual sector provider, the Institute currently provides:

- Vocational Education and Training programs (primarily to regional and remote NT Aboriginal students).
- a Batchelor-delivered set of units into enabling undergraduate courses of Charles Darwin University (CDU). However, it is Batchelor Institute's intent to offer select undergraduate courses in our own right from 2022.
- Higher Degree by Research (HDR) training through Masters by Research and PhD programmes.

*Vocational Education and Training*

In making this submission we note that Australia's states and territories are substantially different in footprint, population, industry sectors and ethnicity. In addition, each jurisdiction has different training priorities and approaches to the commissioning of training and education. As such is very difficult to establish a 'one size fits all' funding model, even as a base rate.

Currently public provider subsidies allow public RTOs to provide a comprehensive suite of training products and manage large complex infrastructure. Removal of public provider subsidies would jeopardise thin markets, courses with social outcomes and student support services. We also note that the fully contestable model that was implemented in Victoria in 2012 failed. Finally, we note that in the apprenticeship/traineeship (user choice) market, the retention of employer incentives has been proven to assist in engagement of new employment opportunities.

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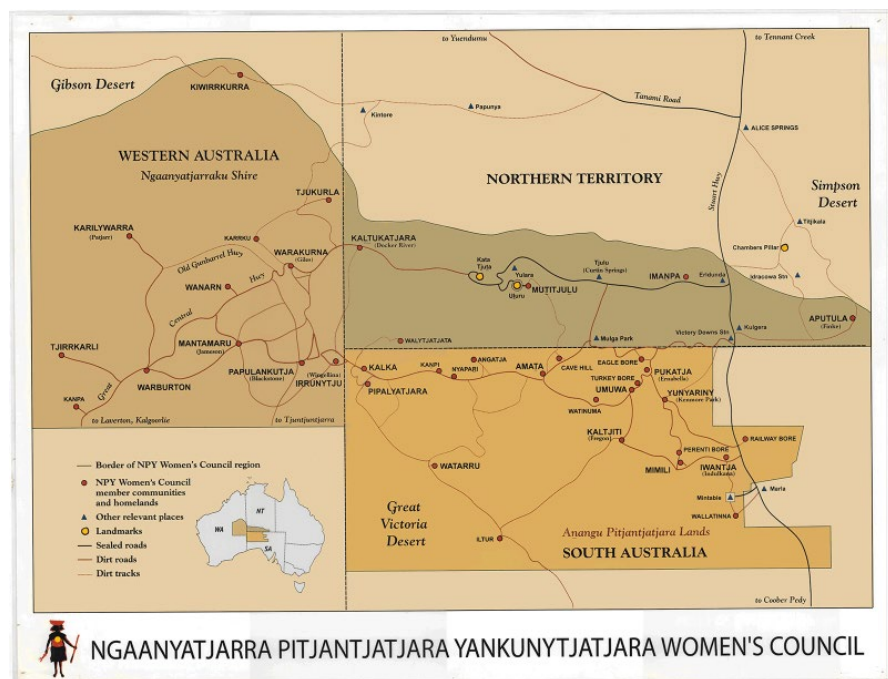
**Batchelor  
Institute**

The VET sector has long been identified as a potential pathway into Higher Education. However, VET can also provide practical applications and micro-credentials for Higher Education students to give genuine industry exposure / experience prior to entering the workforce at a professional level. Equally we note that Higher Education can provide VET students with micro-credentials in concepts and research within their industry sector (for example Engineering).

### VET Financing

An efficient and effective VET sector is critical to both mainstream Australia and the achievement of First Nations' goals, targets and aspirations. The Institute believes that VET programs will be crucial in the achievement of 'Closing the Gap' targets, however, the achievement of these targets could be adversely affected by alterations or 'efficiencies' in state & territory VET funding models.

While noting the above, there is the opportunity for refinement of current funding models to resolve some challenges and unintended consequences. For example, at times Batchelor Institute gets caught in funding gaps where it is unclear if a matter is an Australian Government or Northern Territory funding responsibility with both jurisdictions insisting that it is the others' responsibility. Further, as a result of funding limitations for most courses, Batchelor Institute can only draw students from the Northern Territory. This means that students from towns just outside the NT – for example Kununurra in Western Australia or Camooweal in Queensland cannot be students. More importantly, we note that state borders do not take into account Aboriginal clan groups' estates. This means that groups with historical linkages (such as the Ngaanyatjarra Pitjantjatjara and Yankunytjatjara lands - see map below) - may not be able to undertake training together and this reduces the potential benefits of some training. For example, there is clear benefit if some courses – for example family wellbeing, construction and engineering, resources and infrastructure course – can be delivered within cross-border groupings.



We note that at present funding from the NT Government is a simple purchasing of training arrangement. This model doesn't cater to the 'whole of person' supports that our learners require. While wrap around supports such as mentoring and pastoral care services have benefits at all levels of student participation, these services have particular benefit in pre-vocational & enabling programs and we support their inclusion in any future alterations to vocational education and training funding models. These benefits include:

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- Improved work readiness prior to being engaged in the workforce;
- addressing social, health, access & equity issues prior to employment and assist in overall employability; and
- contextualised LLN programs for specific industry sectors, particularly identified skills shortage areas.

#### *Supports to Training and Education – Away From Base*

The current National Indigenous Australians Agency funding model of a “one EPUC rate fits all” is not appropriate for students who need to travel from remote communities to undertake education. In our experience, sometimes the full EPUC annual amount of \$6.7k is spent on travelling a single student to attend one workshop particularly when travel costs include chartering flights. The Institute believes that at present Batchelor Institute’s students, and our organisation, are financially disadvantaged due to our student profile. The appropriate funding model should be student centric and address the travel needs of each student no matter where they live.

Yours sincerely

 Professor Gareth Allison  
A/Chief Executive Officer  
Batchelor Institute of Indigenous Tertiary Education

17 November 2020

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