



Review of Secondary Education in the Northern Territory

Final report

Northern Territory Department of Education

December 2023

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The country we live, work, and travel on has been loved, celebrated, and cared for over many millennia by the people and their spiritual and physical ownership has never been ceded. We thank them and pay our respects to them, to their cultures, and to the Elders both past and present.

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Glossary

Acronym	Definition
ABS	Australian Bureau of Statistics
ACARA	Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority
AITSL	Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership
ALPA	Arnhem Land Progress Association
APO NT	Aboriginal Peak Organisations Northern Territory
ASSoA	Alice Springs School of the Air
ATAR	Australian Tertiary Admission Rank
ACSF	Australian Core Skills Framework
AQF	Australian Qualifications Framework
CDU	Charles Darwin University
CSIP	Children and Schooling Implementation Plan
DCMC	Department of Chief Minister and Cabinet
DITT	Department of Industry, Trade and Tourism
EMP	Education Management Program
FTE	Full time equivalent
HEAL	Health Education and Literacy Program
HIM	Headline Improvement Measure
HLC	Homeland Learning Centre
ICIP	Indigenous Cultural and Intellectual Property
ICSEA	Index of Community Socio-Educational Advantage
IES	Indigenous Education Strategy
ILC	Indigenous Languages and Cultures Curriculum
KSoA	Katherine School of the Air
LEaD	Local Engagement and Decision Making
LDM	Local Decision Making
LoC	Learning on Country (Program)
MTSS	Multi-Tiered System of Supports
NAPLAN	National Assessment Program – Literacy and Numeracy
NT	Northern Territory
NTBOS	Northern Territory Board of Studies
NTCET	Northern Territory Certificate of Education and Training
NTG	Northern Territory Government
NTRAI	Northern Territory Remote Aboriginal Investment
NTSDE	Northern Territory School of Distance Education
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
OLNA	Online Literacy and Numeracy Assessment
PLP	Personal Learning Plan

Acronym	Definition
PYSC	Palmerston Youth Skills Centre
QSF	Quality Standards Framework
RATE	Remote Aboriginal Teacher Education
RTO	Registered Training Organisation
SACE	South Australian Certificate of Education
SBAT	School Based Apprenticeships and Traineeship
SIDE	School of Isolated and Distance Education (WA)
SNBF	Student Needs-Based Funding
SRM	School Resourcing Model
SRS	Schooling Resource Standard
STEM	Science, Technology, Engineering, Mathematics
TSU	Transition Support Unit
TTC	Trade Training Centre
TAFE	Technical and Further Education
VET	Vocational Education and Training
VETiS	Vocational Education and Training in Schools
WETT	Warlpiri Education and Training Trust

Terminology when referring to First Nations people.

This report adopts the term 'Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander' when referring to First Nations people. There are some cases in the report where Aboriginal is used in isolation without Torres Strait Islander, when referring to observations by relevant peoples or communities or cultures that do not extend to both groups. There are also cases where the term '**Aboriginal**' is used, in line with NT Government conventions, when referencing data or documentation produced by the NT Government. While not always explicitly stated, this term is also taken to include Torres Strait Islander peoples living in the Northern Territory.

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Executive summary

Context, motivation and purpose

The Northern Territory Department of Education ('the Department') engaged Deloitte Access Economics, in collaboration with the Northern Institute at Charles Darwin University (CDU), to undertake a Review of Secondary Education in the Northern Territory ('the Secondary Review', 'the Review').

The Review is intended to support the Department's goal, as set out in the *Education NT Strategy 2021-25*, to be the most improving education system in Australia, and support its commitment to a strong and equitable public education system where every child has the opportunity to engage, grow and achieve. The goal is underpinned by the national vision and commitment of the Alice Springs (Mparntwe) Education Declaration to improve educational outcomes for all young Australians.

Delivery of secondary education in the NT education system occurs in a unique context. Schooling delivery needs to cater for high levels of geographic dispersion, significant social, economic and educational disadvantage, cultural diversity, and an educational gap between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students and non-Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students that is wider than anywhere else in Australia. This poses challenges and complexities for delivery that are more pronounced in the NT than other jurisdictions, impacting students' access to schooling, ability to engage in inclusive and high-quality learning experiences that meet their needs, and consequently, the trajectory of outcomes and transitions into further study, training, or work.

The Department, in support of achieving these education goals and ensuring that all children can grow and achieve, has committed to reviewing and strengthening delivery of secondary education. This includes a review of current policy settings implemented as part of the *Indigenous Education Strategy (2015-24)* which, among other things, resulted in a structural reform of moving away from provision of senior secondary education in remote communities, to a preference for delivery in urban areas and regional centres for these students, facilitated through boarding options.

The aim of the Review is to inform the design of a secondary education system that is responsive to the diverse delivery contexts in the NT, reflects the rich cultural diversity among learners, and provides a pathway for all students to achieve success in line with their aspirations post-schooling. The Review has a focus on secondary education in government schools in remote and very remote areas, however it considers delivery of secondary education in all contexts across the NT.

Approach and guiding principles

The Review was conducted between November 2022 and October 2023, with the majority of engagement and analysis occurring from February to July 2023. The Review adopted a multi-phase and mixed-methods approach. This involved a comprehensive desktop evidence review, research and analysis of policy documentation, analysis of data, as well as multiple rounds of stakeholder engagement with schools across all regions in the Northern Territory, policymakers, representatives of peak body organisations, other jurisdictions (nationally and internationally), and subject matter experts.

The Review objective, scope, and lines of enquiry were informed by initial stakeholder engagement which resulted in the development of a Review Framework (see Appendix D). The key lines of inquiry are grouped under five domains:

- Domain 1: Recognition of learning, exploring how the system can recognise and certify a range of student learning success and capabilities.
- Domain 2: Transitions between and beyond school, exploring the design and provision of **flexible and intentional pathways to enable students' success** in further study, employment or training.

- Domain 3: Learning access and design, exploring the provision of equitable and flexible access and delivery of learning through delivery modes and courses.
- Domain 4: Partnerships and engagement, exploring avenues to strengthen partnerships and engagement to enable successful delivery and student outcomes.
- Domain 5: System of supports, exploring the foundations of support required to enable successful delivery of secondary education, and ensuring culturally safe and supportive learning environments and experiences for students.

The Review Framework comprises of a set of guiding design principles, which are applied to appraise options and develop recommendations for change in the NT. The guiding principles are to ensure the recommendations are:

- strategically aligned: clearly aligned with the key priorities and goals of the NT Department of Education
- coherent: consistent and work in alignment to support the delivery and achievement of other system priorities
- sufficient: sufficient for supporting the provision of high-quality secondary education provision
- effective: calibrated to support the system to achieving its overarching objectives.
- efficient: cost-effective and achieve desired outcomes by optimising and utilises existing resources
- sustainable: support the sustainability of structures, systems, processes and relationships over time, and
- tailored to local context: appropriately tailored to the unique contexts across the NT.

The underpinning evidence base

The analysis and findings presented by the Review draw on a comprehensive evidence base, including Departmental system data on student outcomes, information on current and past approaches to secondary education delivery, previous reviews and other academic literature and research, and extensive stakeholder engagement.

A series of school site visits were held across all regions of the NT to gather a breadth of insights on the strengths, challenges, and opportunities for secondary education reform. Site visits included a range of stakeholders at each site, including school leaders, teachers, secondary students, School Council and/or Local Engagement and Decision Making (LEaD) Committee representatives.

In total, 25 site visits across all regions of the Northern Territory were conducted for the Review, with a total of 363 stakeholders consulted.

Site visits, and other engagement throughout the project, were supported by the Northern Institute at Charles Darwin University, with local community engagement led by Aboriginal researchers with deep expertise in education in the Northern Territory context. The evidence provided to the Review through this engagement and experience has been fundamental to the findings and recommendations in this report.

In addition to these school site visits, a series of interviews, workshops and other engagement activities occurred with education system stakeholders, including those internal and external to the Department. It is estimated that a total of 614 individuals were consulted with directly over the course of the Review (further detailed in Appendix A of this report). A discussion paper was also released to the general public, which received 30 written submissions and 60 survey questionnaire responses.

The case for equity and improvement

The need to provide equity of access and drive educational improvement for all learners across the Northern Territory, creates a case for change for the government secondary education system.

Responding to the unique delivery context

The Northern Territory is among the most complex systems in the world, with delivery of secondary education occurring in a unique context. To meet its goal to become the most improving

education system in Australia, schooling delivery in the NT needs to cater for the following attributes (as further explored in Appendix C):

- Cultural diversity: The Territory has the highest proportion of students identifying as Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander at 39 per cent - compared to 6.2 per cent nationally.¹ Additionally, The NT is linguistically diverse with over 100 Aboriginal languages and dialects and an estimated 87 other languages spoken.^{2,3}
- High levels of geographic dispersion: The distance to schools differs significantly for families, and there are small schools in very remote areas. As of 2021, there were approximately 30,500 student enrolments in 153 government schools (primary, secondary and comprehensive) across the NT, of which 17 per cent are enrolled in schools classified as being in remote and 23 per cent in very remote areas.^{4,5} Additionally, while 60 per cent of NT residents live in Greater Darwin, at least 66 per cent of NT government schools are in remote or very remote communities.⁶
- Student mobility: There is significant mobility of NT students, influencing **students'** ability to engage regularly with education. Student mobility refers to the movement of students from one educational institution to another, either within a region or between different regions or states. Student mobility is influenced by factors such as family circumstances, employment opportunities, housing stations, or cultural reasons.
- Significant levels of socio-economic and education disadvantage: There is significant intersectional disadvantage in some communities, influencing the extent to which students can engage, or are prepared to engage with secondary education. Young students in the Northern Territory show greater levels of developmental vulnerability.⁷

The NT landscape is complex, and families often occupy multiple disadvantaged demographic categories. The intersectionality of disadvantage may compound in a way that is not purely additive in its impact upon outcomes (i.e., educational need resulting from multiple disadvantages may be greater than a sum of its parts). Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families often reside in remote areas, experience inter-generational trauma, and speak English as a second language.

Overall, these cultural, demographic, and geographic attributes of the NT and its education system are a unique strength and opportunity and should be recognised as such. Nonetheless, they pose challenges and complexities for delivery that are more pronounced in the NT than other jurisdictions in Australia. For example, they **can impact students'** access to schooling, including their ability to engage in inclusive and high-quality learning experiences that meet their needs, and consequently, the trajectory of outcomes and transitions into further study, training, or work. These unique attributes should be considered in the context of the sections that follow.

Building on the existing strengths of the system

There is a strong spine of schools in the NT that currently deliver diverse pathways (including academic and vocational) and high-quality secondary education. These schools, located in the

¹ Australian Bureau of Statistics, *Schools* (2021) <<https://www.abs.gov.au/statistics/people/education/schools/latest-release#schools>>.

² Northern Territory Department of Education, *Aboriginal languages in NT* (2023) <<https://nt.gov.au/community/interpreting-and-translating-services/aboriginal-interpreter-service/aboriginal-languages-in-nt>>.

³ Northern Territory Department of Education, *English and an additional language/dialect* (2022) <<https://education.nt.gov.au/support-for-teachers/student-diversity/english-as-an-additional-language-dialect>>.

⁴ Deloitte Access Economics analysis of NT Student Census data (2021)

⁵ Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) categorises Remoteness Areas into five categories based on relative access to services as a measure. The five categories are; Major Cities, Inner Regional, Outer Regional, Remote and Very Remote. This is different to the terms used to describe schools in the NT, which are Urban (predominantly schools in Darwin and Palmerston), remote and very remote.

⁶ ABS, *Snapshot of Northern Territory* (2022) <<https://www.abs.gov.au/articles/snapshot-nt-2021>>; Northern Territory Government, *List of urban and remote schools*, <<https://nt.gov.au/learning/primary-and-secondary-students/list-of-urban-and-remote-schools>>.

⁷ Australian Early Development Census, *Australian Early Development Census National Report 2021* (2021).

outer regional and remote centres of the NT, have demonstrated high NTCET completion rates and achievement of Australian Tertiary Admission Rank (ATAR) in recent years.

Furthermore, there have been recent successes in remote areas. In 2022, two very remote schools recorded their first high school graduates between the period of 2010 to 2022, with one being dual enrolled in the NT School of Distance Education.

There is existing infrastructure and innovative models of delivery across the NT that are expanding students' **access to secondary education provision and contributing to rich learning**. Additionally, the three distance education schools (NT School of Distance Education, Katherine School of the Air, and Alice Springs School of the Air) are also widening access to secondary education across the NT (in the context of improvements to connectivity) and building workforce capability of the schools they support.

All of these strengths of infrastructure and delivery can be used as the basis for continued improvement and excellence in secondary education delivery, including through the identification of gaps and a case for investment to achieve an equivalent standard of access across the NT.

Striving for an excellent and equitable system, with high expectations for educational outcomes for all students

The Alice Springs (Mparntwe) Declaration sets out a goal for the Australian education system to promote excellence and equity. This means providing all learners with equality of opportunity that enables them to reach their potential and achieve their highest educational outcomes.⁸

Furthermore, international research suggests that the best education systems in the world achieve excellence and equity of outcomes, noting that these goals reinforce each other: equity of outcomes supports excellence, and excellence cannot be pursued in isolation from equity.⁹

In pursuit of these goals, the NT government system has a responsibility to ensure there is excellence and equity of outcomes for all learners. Evidence in the following sections demonstrates there are several key reasons why it is critical to work towards these goals.

Addressing inequity of access to secondary education

In many remote communities, secondary education is not locally available (particularly in the senior secondary years). Indeed, the majority of NT government schools with secondary-aged students, especially those in remote and very remote communities, do not offer a local program to support completion of the Northern Territory Certificate of Education and Training (NTCET) and have limited access to local pathways or other secondary education programs.

While boarding is an important option for many students in these communities, and is supported by many families and schools, the overwhelming evidence provided to the Review suggests that it is not an effective pathway for many students. Evidence also indicates that the design and implementation of the *Indigenous Education Strategy* (2015-24) has not been effective in supporting access and outcomes in secondary education for many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students across remote NT communities.

It was noted by a range of stakeholders that the attrition of students to boarding schools and the non-government schooling sector is partly based on the perception that these are the only high-quality options for secondary education available, leading to the subsequent residualisation of some schools and communities in the Northern Territory.¹⁰

⁸ Council of Australian Governments Education Council, *Alice Springs (Mparntwe) Education Declaration* (2019), <<https://www.education.gov.au/alice-springs-mparntwe-education-declaration/resources/alice-springs-mparntwe-education-declaration>>.

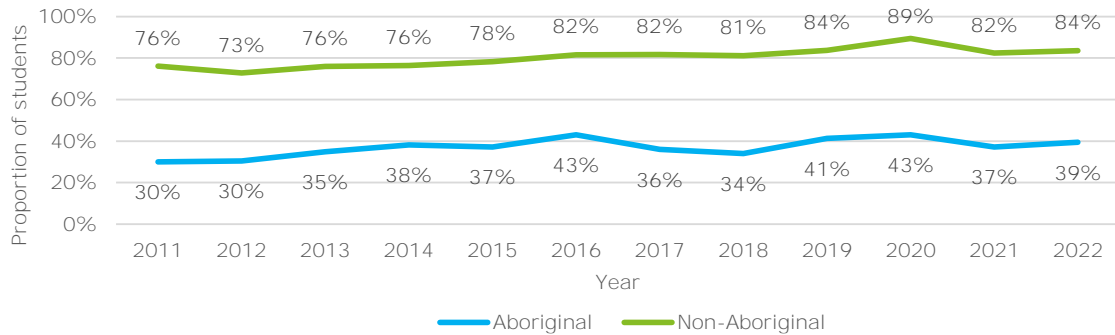
⁹ National Center on Education and the Economy, *Blueprint for a High-Performing Education System* (n.d) <<https://ncee.org/blueprint/>>.

¹⁰ Residualisation occurs when certain schools end up serving a disproportionately high number and concentration of socio-economically disadvantaged students. This can occur when more socio-economically advantaged students enter other schools or systems.

Addressing the lack of improvement on key educational outcomes, and an educational gap between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander and non-Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students that is wider than elsewhere in Australia

Despite previous investments and efforts to reform secondary education in the NT, including a shift to urban-centred delivery, the system is not observing improvement on its Headline Improvement Measures (HIM). In addition, the gap in educational outcomes between Aboriginal students and non-Aboriginal students is wider in the Northern Territory than any other jurisdiction in Australia. In 2022, the NTCET attainment rate in government schools was 84 per cent for non-Aboriginal students, and 39 per cent for Aboriginal students (Chart i).

Chart i: Proportion of Year 12 students that obtain an NTCET in government schools, by Aboriginal status

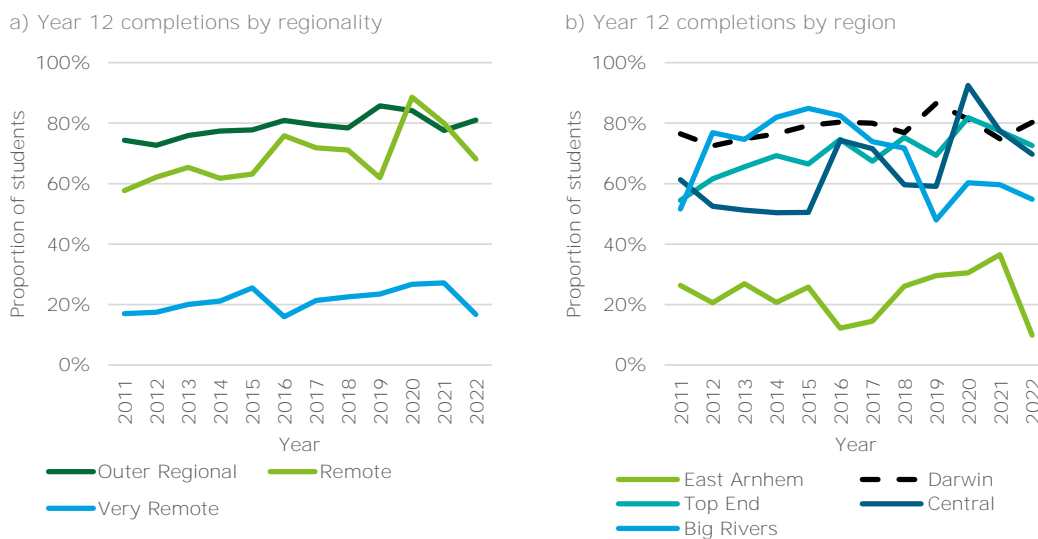


Source: Deloitte Access Economics (2023) analysis of NT student census data and NTCET completions data.

Notes: Calculated as the number of unique year 12 students that complete NTCET in a given year divided by the unique number of students enrolled in year 12 at the August Census of that year. This measure may differ from other reported measures of NTCET completion due to variations in the year 12 enrolment figure used. Due to a discrepancy in when NTCET completion and enrolments are recorded, the school that a student is enrolled in at the August Census may not match the school in which a student obtains NTCET.

Furthermore, students in very remote areas of NT have significantly lower rates of completion compared to those in remote and outer regional areas (Chart ii). Completion rates are lower in the East Arnhem and Big Rivers regions compared to other regions.

Chart ii: Proportion of Year 12 students that obtain an NTCET in government schools, by location and region



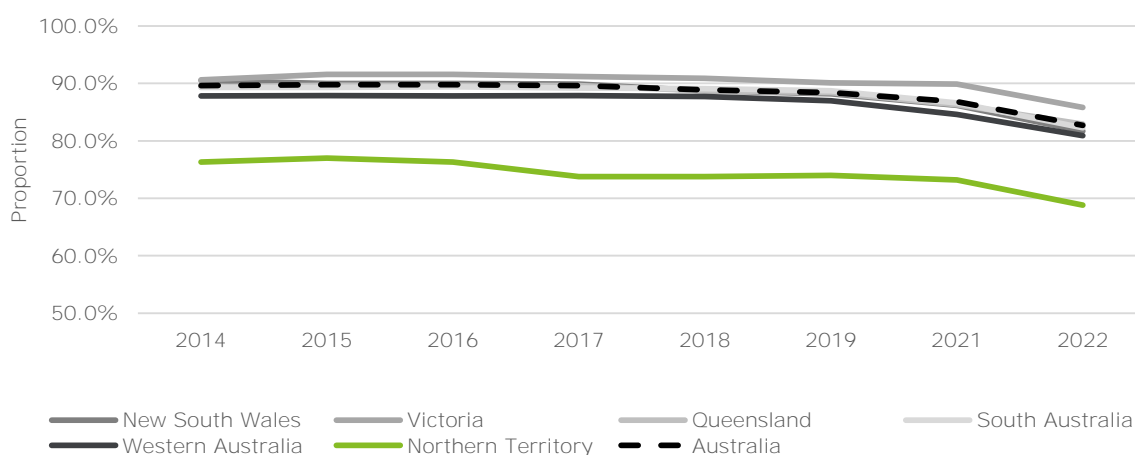
Source: Deloitte Access Economics (2023) analysis of NT student census data and NTCET completions data.

Notes: Calculated as the number of unique year 12 students that complete NTCET in a given year divided by the unique number of students enrolled in year 12 at the August Census. Barkly Region is removed from the analysis due to small number of completions per annum. This measure may differ from other reported measures of NTCET completion due to variations in

the year 12 enrolment figure used. Due to a discrepancy in when NTCET completion and enrolments are recorded, the school that a student is enrolled in at the August Census may not match the school in which a student obtains the NTCET.

Based on analysis of retention rates, student attendance is the biggest predictor of retention in schooling and completion. However, compared to other states and territories, the NT records the lowest student attendance rate (Chart iii).¹¹ Attendance is consistently lower in very remote areas of the NT compared with remote and outer regional areas. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students have consistently lower attendance rates than non-Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students, across all year levels.

Chart iii: Attendance rate of students in Years 7 to 10 in government schools, across Australia



Source: Deloitte Access Economics (2023) analysis of Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority (ACARA) 2022, Student attendance data.

Ensuring investment is targeted to need, and equitable

While the current student needs-based funding model (SNBF) for NT government schools allocates variable funding based on student need (which includes loadings associated with secondary education delivery) through the School Resourcing Model (SRM), the 'effective enrolment' methodology that underpins the core funding allocation model for schools in the NT results in disproportionately lower allocation of funding for secondary students in remote and very remote communities. This results in insufficient funding to underwrite a meaningful standard of delivery.¹²

Although the Northern Territory has made investments in supporting students to achieve outcomes in secondary education, evidence suggests that the totality of this investment has not been equitably or effectively allocated, nor aligned to need.

Specifically, and in line with the policy set out in the *Indigenous Education Strategy (2015-24)*, no targeted funding to support secondary student engagement is being allocated to very small remote communities that support secondary students.¹³ From 2017-2021, 90 per cent of funding with a specific focus on secondary student engagement and completion was allocated to schools located in remote population centres across the NT such as Katherine, Tennant Creek and Nhulunbuy (equating to just 10 per cent of schools that supported secondary students across the NT in 2022, and 45 per cent of secondary students).

¹¹ Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority, *Student attendance data (2022)*.

¹² Deloitte Access Economics, *Review of Effective Enrolment* (commissioned by the NT Department of Education, 2022), <<https://education.nt.gov.au/reviews-and-consultations/review-of-effective-enrolment>>.

¹³ This includes data on targeted programs and funded initiatives provided to the Review over recent years that were identified as having a specific focus on secondary education delivery, including those linked to the Indigenous Education Strategy. Recurrent SNBF funding, or other non-secondary specific funding, is not captured in this assessment.

The Review's key findings

The Review's key findings are organised under five chapters which correspond to the five key domains outlined above (Chapters 4 to 8). The key findings and resulting recommendations and considerations are directed to ensuring that secondary education in the NT supports improved student outcomes, through expanded options to deliver access to the curriculum and meaningful pathways for students through and beyond school.

Recognition of learning

- Finding 1: Stakeholders described a range of desired outcomes that form the basis of an effective, high quality education system. Overall, there is a clear emphasis on the value and importance of completing school among students and communities across all parts of the NT.
- Finding 2: There is a need for the NT Government system to articulate and recognise a broader conception of success in secondary schooling.
- Finding 3: The current senior secondary certificate (NTCET), delivered through the South Australian Certificate of Education Board (SACE), is a key strength that offers significant opportunities for recognising learning and providing a pathway to school completion.

Transitions between and beyond school

- Finding 4: **The Northern Territory's unique model of middle and senior secondary schooling**, while motivated by student need, has not been effective and lacks the support of much of the education community. To-date, evidence suggests that middle schooling in the Northern Territory has not delivered on intended outcomes.
- Finding 5: Student transitions throughout schooling, and continuity of learning, are not occurring effectively. Enhancing these areas to support improved engagement and outcomes should be a key priority for the system.
- Finding 6: There are numerous pathways for students post-schooling. There is a need to ensure that pathways are meaningful, tailored to local context, and recognised as high quality, equal and complementary.
- Finding 7: A deliberate, coordinated approach to providing pathways is required in a resource constrained system, where not all pathways can or should be offered in every location. There is need to ensure that pathways are contextually relevant, and matched to the aspirations of students and local communities, and aligned with opportunities for further work, study or training.

Learning design

- Finding 8: Stakeholders hold aspirations for learning design to be meaningful, culturally responsive, provide a safe and supportive learning environment, and cater to the diverse needs of all students.
- Finding 9: There is a need to build upon the system guidance, resources and support for schools to ensure that learning design is meaningful, responsive to student needs, and supports achievement of core literacy and numeracy skills.
- Finding 10: Additional resourcing, support **and guidance, that builds on the Department's** implementation of the Quality Standards Framework, is required for schools to deliver flexible learning approaches for students with high levels of need and to meet literacy and numeracy outcomes.

- Finding 11: Key programs (e.g. Learning on Country) are gaining traction and have strong community support as they emphasise two-way learning, Aboriginal governance, ownership and authority, and culturally safe and appropriate approaches.

Learning access

- Finding 12: There is inequity of access and uneven previous investment in secondary education across the Northern Territory.
- Finding 13: Stakeholders consistently demonstrated a conviction and urgent desire to provide access to secondary education in remote contexts. High quality local secondary education delivery in all contexts, and through this, improved engagement and outcomes for students, is the key aspiration for schooling reform.
- Finding 14: Various regional delivery models are currently providing access to high quality secondary schooling, **in addition to what can be accessed in students' local communities**. These models can be expanded, particularly where there are currently no viable pathways to NT CET completion, through an increased regional delivery footprint.
- Finding 15: Greater coherence, coordination and support for small remote schools is required to provide access to secondary education and overcome delivery challenges in the NT, in addition to increased resourcing and capacity at all levels of the system.
- Finding 16: There are growing possibilities and strengths of blended and online delivery models in the Northern Territory (noting that it is not a universal solution for all students, in all contexts), with the opportunity to further embed and scale both delivery and system roles.
- Finding 17: While there are examples of success in boarding, it has not worked for all students.

Partnerships and engagement

- Finding 18: The NT government school system is on a path to strengthening partnerships and engagement, in line with its strategic priorities, with appetite from stakeholders for key programs and partnerships to be widened in support of student engagement and outcomes.
- Finding 19: While the NT system has unique strengths in partnerships and engagement, there are key risk factors that inhibit partnerships from being systematically established and with longevity, which require support from the system to overcome.
- Finding 20: Improving educational outcomes cannot be achieved through secondary education alone, and there is a need to strengthen and work in partnership with local communities, industry, government and non-government organisations.

System of supports

- Finding 21: Numerous supports (including workforce development, connectivity, infrastructure, and resourcing) are foundational to the secondary education system and must be in place to enable successful delivery.
- Finding 22: The current NT school funding model is not appropriate to support secondary education delivery in small, remote settings, and could be modified to consider additional resources required for delivery.

The Review's vision for the future

The Review sets out an overarching vision for the NT secondary schooling system, based on the case for equity and improvement, and motivating its recommendations. The vision sets out what the Review considers should be the overarching direction of reform to the NT Government secondary education system, which would be achieved when recommendations from the Review are implemented. The vision is brought to life by a Delivery Model of secondary education (set out below), **which provides a vehicle for the implementation of the Review's recommendations and**, ultimately, the overarching goal to ensure that there is a guaranteed standard of local secondary school provision in all locations that can drive improved engagement and outcomes for all students.

The Review's vision is for a system that is built on:

- An excellent and equitable secondary education system that supports all students to achieve
 - By building on a base of existing best practice and innovative delivery in the NT, and its inherent strengths of language, knowledge and culture, and the agility that comes from being a relatively small system.
- A guaranteed standard of local secondary school provision for all students, regardless of geographic location
 - This would see the NT Government *move away from the current policy, set out through the Indigenous Education Strategy (2015-24), that relies on boarding as the primary means for students in remote and very remote communities to access senior secondary education.*
 - The model of delivery to achieve this standard is flexible, supporting students to pursue the pathway options that are most meaningful to them, based on their needs and aspirations for secondary schooling and beyond. This includes academic, vocational and cultural pathways to NTCET completion, that are built on core literacy and numeracy attainment.
 - Under this model, there is a continued role to play in facilitating boarding pathways. However, the system should place the weight of further investment towards strengthening access to high quality local secondary education provision (including through regionalised supports) rather than traditional boarding options.
- An approach to learning design that is engaging and drives improvements in student outcomes through ensuring continuity of learning, effective transitions and meaningful curriculum and pedagogy
 - Culturally responsive and meaningful learning design can be a distinguishing feature of the NT education system.
 - The system also has an opportunity to support transitions throughout secondary schooling, by moving away from the current model of middle schooling towards more comprehensive models over time. Where implemented successfully and through close consultation with local school communities, this will support students to effectively transition throughout secondary schooling and break down silos between existing middle and senior secondary schools.
- A model of delivery that is differentiated and needs-based, supporting schools to deliver meaningful and flexible pathways to completion
 - The context of the NT calls for an approach that is designed from the top down (identifying local industry and skills needs, and providing guided choice to schools), while building from the ground up (ensuring community aspirations are reflected in the design of pathways, and equipping students with the skills, knowledge and capabilities to take the next step beyond schooling).
 - This vision is brought to life through the proposed Delivery Model outlined below, which provides a vehicle for the implementation of the **Review's recommendations and**, ultimately, to ensure that all students, regardless of geographic location, have access to high-quality secondary school provision and tailored and meaningful pathway options that support improved engagement and outcomes, and contribute towards NTCET completion.

- An approach to realising change that emphasises stability, continuity and sustained focus
 - The history of policy reform in the NT is characterised by significant change. It is not unsurprising that there have been historic and ongoing implementation challenges, and that the benefits of change are still to be fully identified and realised. In this environment, there are risks associated with moving too rapidly from current areas of focus and investment, particularly where there is growing momentum and emerging evidence of uptake and positive outcomes being achieved. However, the Review does not suggest that there should be no change.
 - The opportunity in the next phase of reform is to ensure continuity and longevity of initiatives and programs that are starting to gain traction in the system (e.g., Learning on Country), ensure coordination and coherence of delivery, while also taking an intentional approach to grow capability to implement, develop and assure programs, and plan for their sustainability. Building on the strengths, preserving the progress, relationships and work that has been undertaken over past decades will be a necessary base upon which future reform in the Northern Territory can be pursued.

Proposed secondary education Delivery Model

To achieve the vision outlined above, the Review sets out a proposed Delivery Model for secondary education (Figure i). The Delivery Model provides a framework for how the system can strengthen provision, and provide differentiated and needs-based support for schools to deliver secondary education to a guaranteed standard set out in the vision (high quality pathway options that contribute towards achievement of the NTCET). It works to support the implementation of the recommendations of the Review detailed further below (and summarised in Figure ii).

Overview of school types

The Delivery Model comprises four different types of delivery that are observed within the Northern Territory (developed through findings of the Review), and is presented in Figure i. This is based on a set of school contextual factors and delivery criteria that influence delivery in each context, as outlined below.

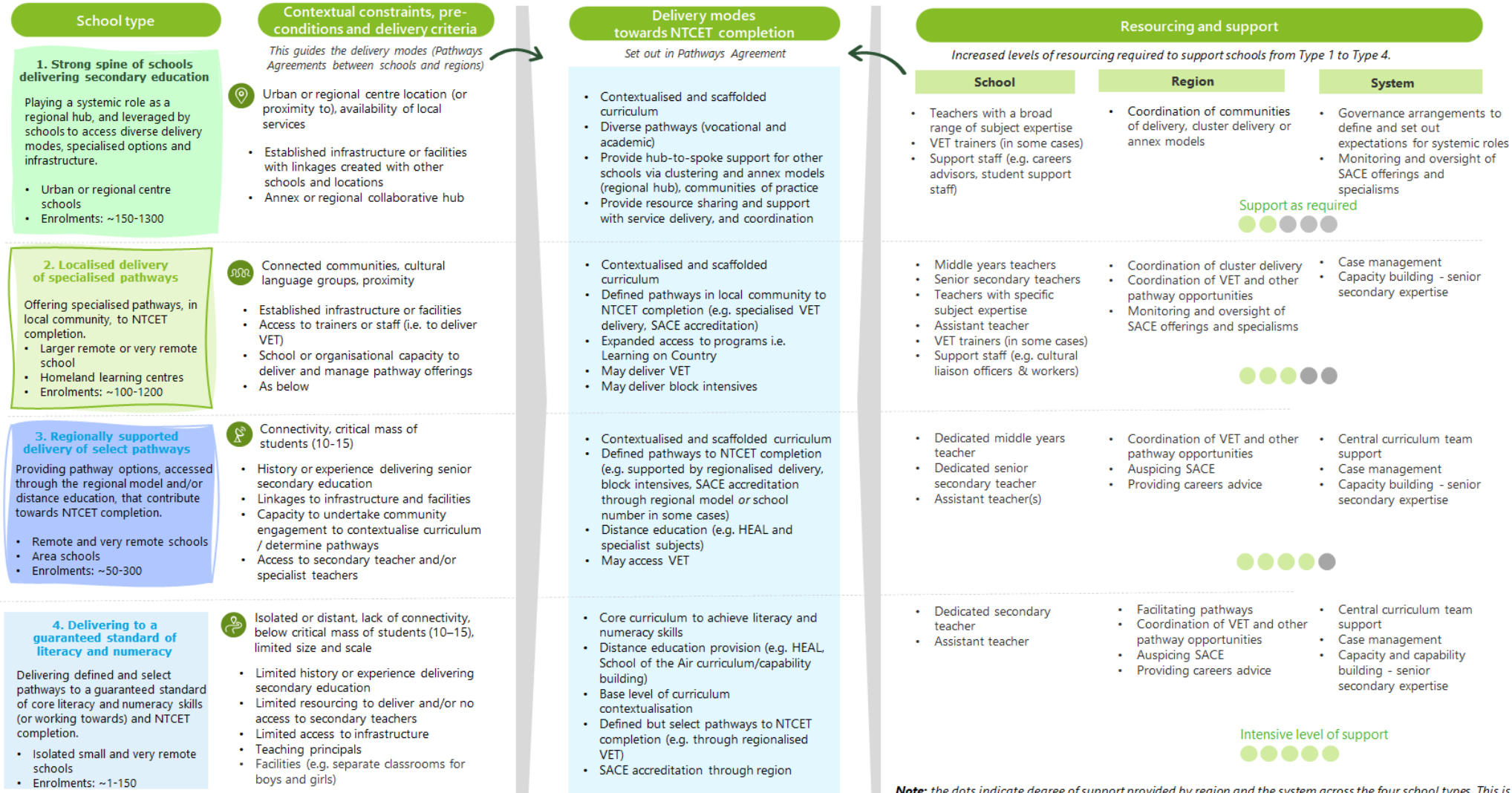
The Delivery Model first builds on the current strengths in the system through a strong spine of schools located in the regional centres of the NT (Type 1). These schools are the largest settings of the system, have established infrastructure and facilities, and currently deliver diverse and high-quality pathways to the NTCET.

There are also schools in the system that deliver specialised pathways in their local community (Type 2). These schools are typically larger remote schools, or homeland learning centres. These schools have established infrastructure or facilities, access to trainers or staff (i.e. to deliver VET), and may deliver specialised VET.

There are schools in remote and very remote areas (including area schools) that provide pathway options towards the NTCET, as enabled by connectivity and critical mass of students (Type 3). These schools access pathways through distance education and/or the regional model (e.g. block intensives, and may be accredited to deliver SACE through the regional model, or a school number in select cases).

The Delivery Model also sets out how to strengthen secondary education provision in small and very remote schools, to achieve core literacy and numeracy outcomes and enable access to pathways that contribute towards NTCET attainment (Type 4). These schools are characterised by some fixed contextual factors (i.e. distance from neighbouring schools, or ability to reach a critical mass of students). This will require different solutions and resourcing to enable delivery to the guaranteed standard (through defined and select pathways). Over time, these schools should be supported to progress in terms of maturity where there are improvements in connectivity that allow for delivery of multiple modes, akin to Type 3 schools.

Figure 1: Delivery model of secondary education

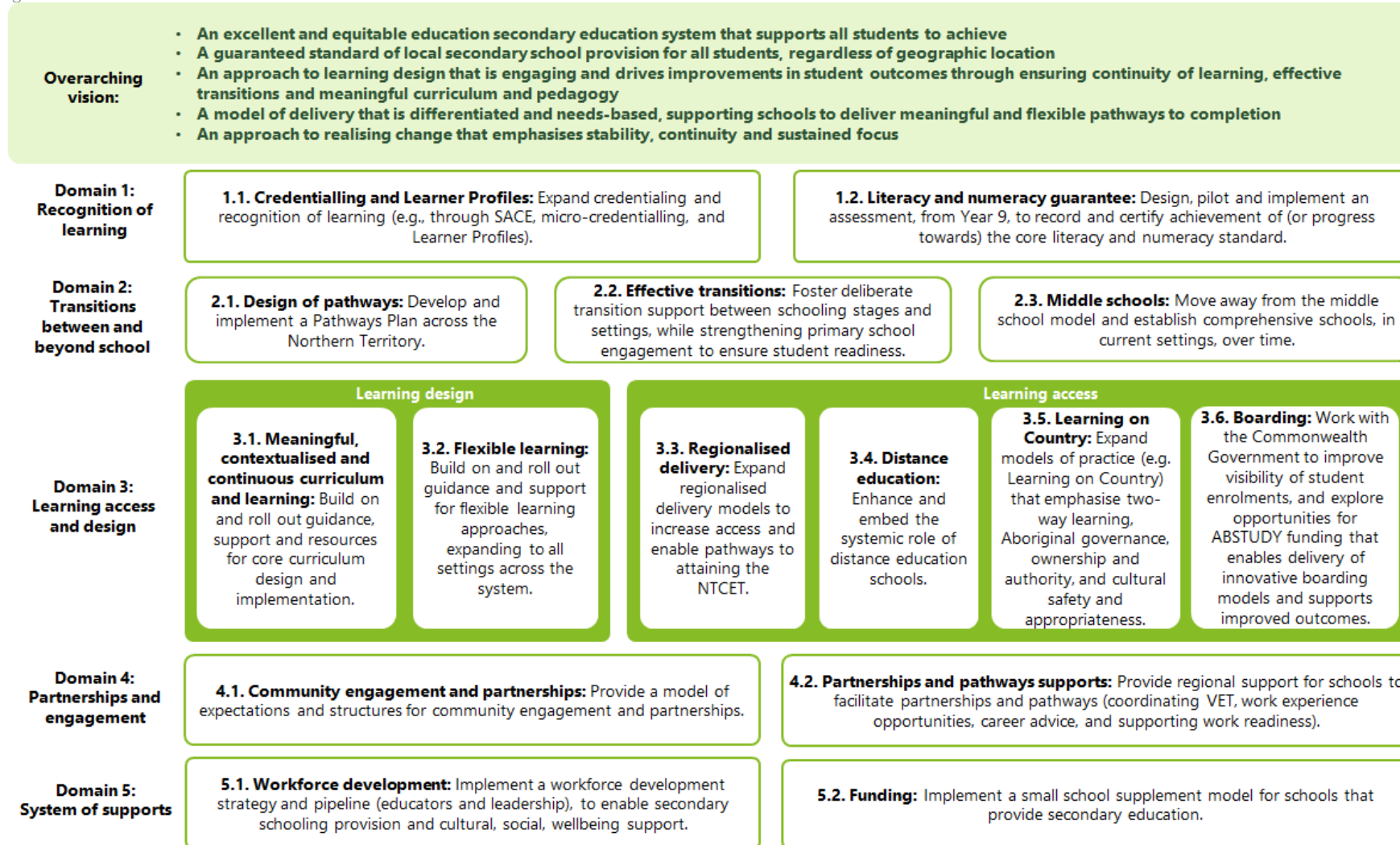


Note: the dots indicate degree of support provided by region and the system across the four school types. This is intended to be illustrative and highlight points of emphasis for support. It is not comprehensive of all the types of support that may be provided.

Source: Deloitte Access Economics.

An overview of the Review recommendations is presented in Figure ii below, and explored in further detail in the following section.

Figure ii: Overview of Review recommendations



Source: Deloitte Access Economics.

The Review's recommendations

A summary of the recommendations for each Review domain, that are designed to address the Review's findings and realise the vision for the system, are outlined below.

Recognition of learning

These recommendations reflect the significant opportunity for the system to recognise and certify learning of students, including through credentialling Aboriginal cultural learning, knowledge and competencies, and the broader skills, capabilities and attributes that students require to be successful in their pathways post-schooling.

The Review acknowledges that credentialling and assessment are not the sole solutions to achieving recognition of learning. A first order consideration is ensuring that the design of learning and curriculum is aligned with student interests and aspirations, culturally responsive and relevant to context, and furthermore that it is appropriately supported by a workforce with knowledge and expertise of Aboriginal language, culture and knowledge. This is explored further in related domains.

Recommendation 1.1

Expand credentialling and recognition of learning (e.g., through SACE, micro-credentialling, and Learner Profiles).

The Review recommends expanding current systems of credentialling and recognition of learning in the NT. This includes expanding current pilots recognising Aboriginal culture and language to other regions and schools, expanding micro-credential offerings that can contribute towards completion, and designing a Learner Profile approach to recognise **students' attributes**, abilities, capabilities and experiences.

Rather than representing a wholesale change for the system, it reinforces the current best practices and piloting occurring across the NT.

This recommendation also encompasses expanding and fully realising the opportunities available through the NTCET, including through capability building for schools to ensure the flexibility can be leveraged. However, while flexibility is a key strength of the certificate, it is also important to not over broaden the NTCET, and to ensure it is also implemented with fidelity across contexts.

Pursuing this recommendation will require working in partnership with other jurisdictions, including the SACE Board and Commonwealth Government through the implementation of the 2020 *Looking to the future: Review of senior secondary pathways report*.

Recommendation 1.2

Design, pilot and implement an assessment, from Year 9, to record and certify achievement of (or progress towards) the core literacy and numeracy standard.

The Review recommends implementing a literacy and numeracy guarantee for all NT Government school students. This would include the design, piloting and implementation of a mechanism to record achievement of, or progress towards, the core literacy and numeracy standard from Year 9. In the near term, this should be set at Level 3 of the Australian Core Skills Framework (ACSF) which is the standard required for attainment of the NTCET and consistent with other jurisdictions such as WA and NSW.

The Department should consider ways that achievement of the standard could be assessed (i.e., through Year 9 NAPLAN or a bespoke assessment either developed in NT or another jurisdiction). Importantly, there should be flexibility in the manner in which students are able to demonstrate proficiency, both in terms of the timing and frequency of attempts of the assessment (while ensuring that its rigour is not unnecessarily compromised).

Transitions between and beyond school

These recommendations reflect the significant opportunity for the system to provide pathways for all students that are tailored, meaningful and relevant to context, and meet their aspirations for their next steps beyond school. These set out to address key strategic priorities of the system and improve student outcomes, including effective transitions, continuity of learning and student retention. Furthermore, these pathways should contribute towards guaranteed literacy and numeracy outcomes, and NTCET completion (as explored in further detail in the learning access and design domain).

These recommendations also provide direction for the system to take critical steps towards ensuring greater coordination, oversight and consistency of pathway options, a key need highlighted by the findings of the Review.

Recommendations within this domain, in particular Recommendation 2.1 (Pathways Plan), are critical to the overall design of the system, have close interdependencies with the implementation of recommendations within other domains, and provide the architecture for the proposed Delivery Model and a guaranteed standard of delivery for the system.

Recommendation 2.1

Develop and implement a Pathways Plan across the Northern Territory.

The Review recommends designing pathways through a system-wide Pathways Plan. This encompasses both a top-down and bottom-up approach to ensuring deliberate provision of contextually relevant pathways that are tailored to school and community aspirations, and provide meaningful opportunities for students that are aligned with employment opportunities. The Pathways Plan would encompass **individual schools' agreements** with regions and the system (Pathways Agreements).

In implementing the Pathways Plan, the Department has a role in systematising pathways, **identifying schools' existing pathways**, mapping availability of existing infrastructure and linkages to communities, collaborating with agencies, and providing top-down advice to regions and schools on pathway options.

The **system's** regional offices have a key role in establishing Pathways Agreements with schools, **which will then aggregate to the system's overall Pathways Plan. Regions would support schools to work with local community to identify desired pathways, and ensure coordination, consistency and oversight of schools' Pathways Agreements at a regional level, including enabling collaboration between networks.**

To support the implementation of this recommendation, the Review recommends redesigning and significantly expanding the role of its regional workforce to have a remit for managing and implementing the Pathways Plan and Agreements within the regional operating model. Existing functions and intended outcomes would be widened to provide access to viable high-quality pathways for all students. This would be a significant change to the current state and would likely require dedicated efforts by the Department to identify and attract a suitably qualified and capable workforce to lead this critical work across the NT.

The implementation of the Pathways Plan, and supporting schools to deliver on agreed delivery modes, will also require increased resourcing for schools. This is set out in the above Delivery Model for secondary education.

Recommendation 2.2

Foster deliberate transition support between schooling stages and settings, while strengthening primary school engagement to ensure student readiness.

The Review recommends supporting effective transitions by fostering deliberate transition support between schooling stages and settings. This includes enhancing bridging and transition support, provision of career advice, **and improving oversight and visibility of students' transitions** throughout schooling and post-school destinations (including understanding achievements that could contribute towards the NTCET) by leveraging national development of the Unique Student Identifier (USI) **and the Department's Education Management Program (EMP)**.

The Review recommends strengthening engagement with primary schools to ensure student readiness, recognising this is critical to supporting **students' success in secondary schooling**.

The Review also suggests designing and piloting a pre-completion certificate in the middle years. This certificate would be designed to assist students to consider their learning achievements and milestones, readiness to transition to the next stage of schooling and pathways, and act as a scaffold for senior secondary schooling. This would be linked to the certificates that record achievement of, or progress towards, the core literacy and numeracy standard (Recommendation 1.2). It is suggested that implementation should not be prescriptive and there should be discretion for schools to define what comprises the certificate beyond certain core components.

Recommendation 2.3

Move away from the middle school model and establish comprehensive schools, in current settings, over time.

In response to findings relating to middle schools in the Northern Territory, the Review recommends moving away from the current model of middle schooling, towards comprehensive secondary schools over time.

This change will require close collaboration and consultation with local school communities, and both structural and cultural changes. This change has the potential to be disruptive to some communities, and will require careful and dedicated implementation effort, including through community engagement and considering more than just merging school campuses (which may necessitate new infrastructure investment in discrete instances), to ensure it is implemented successfully. In the near term, efforts should be made to break down silos between existing middle and senior secondary schools, with the transition to comprehensive secondary schools across the NT to occur over the medium to long term.

Learning design

The Review has identified two recommendations in response to the consistent findings of the Review, which highlight a need for the NT to strengthen the cultural responsiveness of its learning design, and reflect the diversity and richness of Aboriginal culture, knowledge, and languages in its curriculum.

There is also a clear imperative for the system to respond to the need for support in delivering a core and contextualised curriculum, and in ensuring appropriate learning environments and experiences for students through flexible approaches.

In large part, these recommendations are aligned with current strategic priorities and reforms that are, at the time of writing, in the process of being designed and implemented by the central teams within the Department. Increased flexibility is also expected to be enabled by the implementation of version 9 of the Australian Curriculum.

Implementing these recommendations will require further work, dedicated support for schools through centralised curriculum teams, and a process of community engagement and local decision-making to inform contextually relevant approaches across the NT.

Recommendation 3.1

Build on and roll out guidance, support and resources for core curriculum design and implementation.

The Review recommends building on **the Department's existing curriculum reforms**, and rolling out meaningful, contextualised and continuous curriculum, with a focus on the middle years of schooling. This includes developing and communicating a core curriculum to schools, setting expectations for and supporting schools to work towards core literacy and numeracy attainment and a contextualised curriculum (with community input), and supporting the rollout by building **schools' awareness of curriculum supports, providing resources and professional development**, and facilitate sharing of resources and expertise.

This recommendation is intended to support continuity of learning, declutter the curriculum for schools, and enable a stronger focus on core content that supports achievement of core literacy and numeracy skills to the standard required to complete Year 12 (and facilitated through the implementation of version 9 of the Australian Curriculum).

Achieving this objective will require the system to continue to provide supports for schools to contextualise the core curriculum and ensure meaningful and tailored learning opportunities for students. The Review emphasises the objective for the system is not to create a two-speed system with different levels of expectation or quality of curriculum for students in urban or remote areas. Rather, the system should work towards, and message accordingly, that the purpose of the core curriculum is to support all students to achieve, regardless of their location.

Recommendation 3.2

Build on and roll out guidance and support for flexible learning approaches, expanding to all settings across the system.

The Review recommends building on the implementation of its Quality Standards Framework (QSF) and rolling out guidance and support for flexible learning approaches. This includes driving capability in all settings across the system, including in the use of the multi-tiered system of supports (MTSS) to meet the learning needs of students (including developing foundational literacy and numeracy skills).

Setting expectations for delivery of flexible learning environments and driving capability of schools to implement effective practices, is critical to ensuring effective learning design and outcomes for students. This encompasses approaches to flexible learning centres, as well as practices for mainstream schools, which include professional development and supports for schools to deliver evidence-based, trauma-informed practices and support students to achieve.

Learning access

These recommendations are core to the Review and proposed reforms, in that they acknowledge and respond to the clear aspiration that stakeholders hold for access to high-quality secondary education provided in local communities. They are designed to operationalise the overarching goal for the NT Government move away from current policy, set out through the *Indigenous Education Strategy (2015-24)*, that relies on boarding as the primary means for students in remote and very remote communities to access senior secondary education.

Recommendation 3.3

Expand regionalised delivery models to increase access and enable pathways to attaining the NTCET.

The Review recommends expanding regionalised delivery to increase access to high quality secondary **schooling provision in addition to what can be accessed in students' local communities**, particularly where there are currently no viable pathways to NTCET completion. Regionalised delivery models include delivery of block intensives, short-stay regional boarding models, **auspicing schools' delivery of NTCET subjects through accrediting regional offices with a SACE** registration number, supporting hub-to-spoke models, clustering, and more.

Regionalised delivery models should be guided by the system-wide Pathways Agreement (Recommendation 2.1) to ensure a coordinated approach that is tailored and responsive to local context and needs.

Implementing this recommendation will require an expanded regional footprint; the regional operating model (with increased capacity and capability) is viewed as a key avenue to support provision across regions and is necessary to ensure coherence across what is set to become an increasingly sophisticated delivery model.

Recommendation 3.4

Enhance and embed the systemic role of distance education schools.

The Review recommends enhancing and embedding the systemic role of distance education schools. This includes strategically considering how distance education schools can enable greater access to specialist subjects, provide workforce capacity building for schools, provide curriculum expertise and resources, enhance case management support, and play a role in catering for student needs (i.e., isolated and distant students, and a growing cohort of students with additional needs).

This will require the Department to work closely with the distance education schools to agree upon and demarcate system roles.

The Review also suggests the Department could consider moving towards more comprehensive offerings in distance education, while maintaining the roles of the Schools of the Air.

It is also recommended that the Department review and adjust the funding model of distance education to establish alternative funding models to support cost-effective delivery. This would involve the design of a funding model that supports the expansion of capability building activities that distance education schools undertake with other schools.

Recommendation 3.5

Expand models of practice (e.g. Learning on Country) that emphasise two-way learning, Aboriginal governance, ownership and authority, and cultural safety and appropriateness.

The Review recommends developing a process to expand, in a contextually appropriate manner, successful models and programs, such as the Learning on Country program, that support access to secondary education and pathways in remote and regional communities. Expansion of programs should be prioritised where they are aligned with key system objectives, serve the place-based aspirations of community, are aligned with core curriculum delivery (i.e., Australian Curriculum), and are underpinned by teaching and learning rigour.

The Department could consider a process for expanding where there are currently gaps, or community aspiration, readiness and capacity (e.g., workforce) to adopt the models.

Recommendation 3.6

Work with the Commonwealth Government to improve visibility of student enrolments, and explore opportunities for ABSTUDY funding that enables delivery of innovative boarding models and supports improved outcomes.

In relation to boarding, the Review recommends working with the Commonwealth to improve visibility of student enrolments, and explore opportunities for ABSTUDY funding for boarding (including for both traditional and innovative boarding models) to support improved outcomes, and where there is community aspiration.

The Review identifies that there is still a continued role for the system to play in facilitating boarding pathways and ensuring that a meaningful choice is available to students and families. This is important as there will always be students who benefit from accessing mainstream education in urban settings and traditional boarding models either within the NT or interstate, as well successful partnerships between school communities and boarding providers, some of which have resulted in successful boarding outcomes.

However, the Review recommends that the weight of investment in secondary education should be placed in strengthening access to high quality local provision rather than traditional boarding options. In doing so, the system can work towards creating meaningful choice of pathways for students and families, and reduce its reliance on boarding pathways.

Partnerships and engagement

The recommendations within this domain are intended to work in support of achieving the **foundations, goals, and actions within the Northern Territory's current *Engagement Strategy* (2022-31)**. As such, there are key interdependencies between the implementation of the *Engagement Strategy* and the recommendations set forward in the Review.

These recommendations are a key enabler of the success of secondary education and implementation of other recommendations for change, given the importance of working in partnership to achieving improved delivery and outcomes for students.

Recommendation 4.1

Provide a model of expectations and structures for community engagement and partnerships.

The Review recommends a model of expectations for partnerships and engagement. This includes providing a model of expectations for schools with consideration given to context (including, for instance, where there are Teaching Principals), strengthening the structure of community engagement, strengthening the role of the regional workforce to facilitate this, and ensure a mechanism to monitor and respond to evidence of partnerships and engagement across the NT.

This recommendation **leverages the Department's current work and progress in implementing the *Engagement Strategy* (2022-31)**.

While findings from the Review suggest that the Northern Territory is on a path to achieving strong relationships and partnerships, particularly with the strong partnerships created with other jurisdictions, industry, and organisations, and through the implementation of Local Engagement and Decision-Making (LEaD) Committees to-date, this is not consistently occurring across all settings.

Recommendation 4.2

Provide regional support for schools to facilitate partnerships and pathways (coordinating VET, work experience opportunities, career advice, and supporting work readiness).

The Review recommends supports for partnerships and pathways. This includes establishing a role within regional offices, to work with schools (or where appropriate, schools in sub-regions) to facilitate partnerships and pathways, which includes coordinating VET, work experience opportunities, and supporting work readiness. The role would also encompass the provision of career advice to schools (particularly small schools in remote locations).

This aims to provide further systematisation and support for schools to facilitate partnerships and engagement, and pathway opportunities for all students. The Review suggests that this is coordinated through the regional operating model, with the role of the central layer being to set expectations of schools for practices in community engagement and partnerships and how this may vary across school types and settings.

Implementation of this recommendation will require collaboration with other agencies: this includes the Department of Industry, Trade and Tourism (DITT) in each region through its regional offices, workforce training coordinators, regional managers and small business officers, as well as regional development officers at the Department of Chief Minister and Cabinet (DCMC).

System of supports

These recommendations are informed by guiding principles of effectiveness and sustainability and are driven by an overall model of change and system reform that is built around developing enduring supports and services for schools to support delivery. This approach, rather than a model oriented around implementation of programmatic supports (as has been observed in the past), is key to driving the intended sustainability of improvement. As a result, the recommendations identify several foundational supports for the system.

It is important to acknowledge that this domain encompasses broader considerations than just those recommendations outlined below. Given that these foundations are necessary to support all areas of provision of secondary education, there are related considerations set out across several other domains, as well as in the implementation considerations for the Department (this relates to infrastructure, connectivity, and more).

Related recommendations in other domains include the workforce required to support recognition of learning (domain 1), supporting effective transitions (domain 2), and system guidance, support and resources required for curriculum implementation and flexible learning approaches (domain 3), and facilitating partnerships in a more systematic manner (domain 4). These recommendations should be considered alongside the system of supports recommendations that follow.

Recommendation 5.1

Implement a workforce development strategy and pipeline (educators and leadership), to enable secondary schooling provision and cultural, social, wellbeing support.

The Review recommends a focus on workforce development and capability building at all levels of the system. This includes professional development opportunities and supports for schools, cultural induction and onboarding programs for non-Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander **staff and new school staff, communicating and promoting criteria for 'authority to teach'** to school leaders, through regulatory authorities, to support buy-in, and building secondary education expertise and understanding of the NTCET.

This recommendation is key to delivering on a vision of a schooling system set out in the Review – one that delivers high quality local provision of secondary education, is culturally responsive, and caters to the diverse needs of students.

This also recognises the system is implementing related and interdependent actions through its *Education NT Strategy (2021-25)*, for example the key action to “**develop and implement a plan to ensure we build an expert education workforce**”, as well as the implementation of recommendations from other reviews including the *Review of Effective Enrolment* (Deloitte Access Economics, 2022).

Recommendation 5.2

Implement a small school supplement model for schools that provide secondary education.

The Review recommends implementing a model of school resourcing that considers the additional resources required to deliver secondary education in remote settings.

This recommendation is made in the context of the need for a minimum floor of guaranteed resourcing to address the diverse needs of students and support high quality provision in the Northern Territory. The modelling is set out in more detail in Appendix D.

Implementation considerations

Fully positioning the Northern Territory’s schooling system to deliver the vision set out in the Review, and through this, its *Education Strategy 2021-25*, will require wide-scale reform and a deliberate process of planning and implementation over the long-term.

It will be necessary to strike a balance between two competing needs: stopping the constant changes in direction that characterises past decades of education delivery in the Northern Territory, while seeking to change the status quo of access to secondary education, given the variety of ways in which this currently falls short in remote areas and as a critical lever in driving improvement in engagement and outcomes for students.

It is also necessary to overcome the challenges of implementation within the control of government. This includes the ad hoc nature of delivery and an absence of broader coherence and consistency, that have been observed throughout the Review.

The Review explores these considerations and how these should underpin the successful implementation of the Review recommendations.

Preconditions for realising the vision

The proposed reforms require an implementation approach that departs significantly from approaches taken in the past in order to bring about the intended outcomes. Drawing upon and responding to lessons learned, the implementation strategy should be underpinned by the following approaches:

- a model of change built around developing enduring supports and services for schools to support delivery, rather than being oriented around the implementation of programmatic supports or interventions
- an increased level of investment in the capacity at all levels of the system
- an intentional approach to growing capability at all levels of the system
- a deliberate plan to ensure ongoing sustainability and longevity of approaches and reform.

Greater investment in specialist capability within the central and regional layers of the system is necessary to drive successful implementation of these reforms, and to ensure the sufficient support, coordination and coherence across what is set to become an increasingly sophisticated model of delivery with expanded options and modes that will need to be tailored to local context. This is particularly critical given that effectiveness of change and longevity of outcomes may be limited where certain resources or expertise are school based.

In addition to these investments, it is particularly critical to engage with and build local capability on the ground, through empowering communities through local decision-making.

Considerations for sequencing

The full journey of reform outlined by the Review will take time to implement, following a path whereby the prerequisites to the success of future stages are progressively established in advance.

In the first instance, there is work to be done in support of implementing the overall vision of the Review to ensure that all students, regardless of geographic location, have access to high-quality secondary school provision and tailored and meaningful pathway options that support improved engagement and outcomes, and contribute towards achievement of the NTCET.

This will require adopting and implementing the guaranteed standard of delivery, and operationalising the proposed Delivery Model to deliberately map, and provide, the supports and resourcing schools require to achieve to this standard. The process set out within the Pathways Plan is integral to the overall planning and coherence of this work and should be established to support more deliberate and systematic provisioning around delivery models while ensuring that the agreed pathways are appropriately place-based and tailored to context. The Pathways Plan will also encompass a process for leveraging access and use of infrastructure and revealing gaps, as well as the coordination of regionalised delivery approaches across the NT.

Another key step for the system in the initial stages of implementation is to develop and assure models of their appropriateness and effectiveness for students in the NT, prior to expansion. This may involve reviewing programs or initiatives to ensure teaching and learning rigour and alignment with standards set by the Department.

A key implementation enabler is to establish a process for leveraging existing infrastructure in the NT, while identifying gaps and areas of investment to create additional capacity to support delivery.

Furthermore, as detailed within the respective recommendations, piloting of key reforms within select regions (through the regional operating model) and drawing on learnings and evidence of success for students, will be critical prior to seeking to expand across the NT.

Further detail on the time horizons for when the recommendations could be implemented is outlined in Section 9.1.2 of this report.

The cost of reform

Many of the recommendations outlined in this Review will require additional resourcing, both human and physical. The case for equity and improvement for the system clearly establishes a case for investment in the system, at all levels: communities, schools, regions and centrally.

Importantly, the Review acknowledges that the costs of meeting the vision outlined in this report would likely be substantially met through the commitment made by the NT Government to move **away from the current 'effective enrolment' model of funding for schools**, to a model based on enrolment. Depending on the level of investment associated with implementing this reform, it has the potential to significantly increase the resources available to small, remote and very remote schools across the NT, **and therefore will significantly contribute to the system's capacity to provide a guaranteed standard of local secondary school provision for all students, regardless of geographic location.**

Implementing for success

There are several implementation actions required to drive the reform efforts. These include:

- System messaging around secondary education provision: stakeholders strongly asserted that the Northern Territory should provide enhanced messaging to the broader community regarding its provision of high-quality secondary education provision, particularly in remote areas, in complementing its broader reform in driving access. This is particularly important in addressing perceptions that high quality secondary education is not available locally, which in part leads to the movement of students to non-government sectors and boarding pathways, and subsequent residualisation of government schooling system.

- Clarification of roles and expectations in delivery and clear governance structures: this is necessary to achieve the systematisation and coordination of delivery necessary to drive improved access and outcomes. This is particularly important given the proposed reforms and key roles for various system actors at all levels. There is a real risk that the responsibility for implementation is diffused across the system such that it is the responsibility of everyone and no-one in particular. In this regard, a dedicated implementation team may be required to be stood-up to hold overall accountability for implementation across the system.
- Systems of monitoring and accountability: it will be necessary to monitor the progress that is being made, track evidence of success in outcomes and what works, and ensure that piloting of reform amounts to learning and an ongoing agenda of continuous improvement across the NT.

While the report outlines recommendations and implementation considerations in more detail, these are not intended to represent a detailed roadmap or operational plan for implementation in each community or context of the Northern Territory. It will be important to establish processes to enable community engagement and local decision-making, which are necessary to understand the needs and aspirations of communities and drive the place-based actions necessary to support successful delivery.

Achieving a strong and equitable public education system in the NT, where *every child has the opportunity to engage, grow and achieve*, will require wide-scale reform. Other reviews currently being conducted will aid in building out a comprehensive vision and directions for the system.

Conclusion

The recommendations presented in this report represent a significant departure from the current policy settings that have been in place in the NT for a decade or more. It is clear that continuation of the status quo is untenable, and the benefits that can be achieved through these reforms will be significant and necessary.

The benefits will arise from a more equitable system of access and support for students and communities across the NT, which **will be necessary to meet the Government's** strategy to improve student attendance, engagement in learning and learning outcomes, and **to become Australia's** most improving education system.

Nonetheless, realising these benefits will require further dedicated implementation efforts over a sustained period of time and a significant level of investment, across all layers of the system. Reforms to funding that will see a move away from current effective enrolment measures will contribute significantly to the required local resourcing needed to meet the aspirations of remote NT communities to provide greater access to secondary education, but further investments, including in the enabling functions and services provided to schools across the NT, will also be required.

Deloitte Access Economics

1 Introduction

1.1 Context and purpose of the Review

The Northern Territory Department of Education ('the Department') has engaged Deloitte Access Economics in collaboration with the Northern Institute at Charles Darwin University to undertake a **Review of Secondary Education in the Northern Territory** ('the Secondary Review', 'the Review').

The Review is intended to support the Department's goal to be the most improving education system in Australia and support its commitment to a strong and equitable public education system where every child has the opportunity to engage, grow and achieve.¹⁴

The *Education NT Strategy* (2021-2025) outlines seven system priorities (refer to Appendix B) that put the "child and the student at the centre" and ensure, among other things, that the system "engage(s) every child and student in learning".¹⁵

The goal is underpinned by the national vision and commitment of the Alice Springs (Mparntwe) Education Declaration (the Declaration) to improve educational outcomes for all young Australians. The Declaration has two distinct and interconnected goals: to promote excellence and equity of outcomes, and to enable all Australians to become confident and creative individuals, successful learners, and active and informed community members.¹⁶

The Northern Territory Government is committed to providing flexible secondary schooling to increase access, outcomes and successful transitions for all students. The *Education NT Strategy* outlines the following strategic actions:

- review and strengthen secondary education (Years 7-12) with a focus on increased participation, retention and completion, particularly in remote areas
- expand options (including both courses and mode of delivery) to deliver equitable and flexible access to the curriculum, particularly for remote secondary students
- strengthen support for each student, including boarding school students and those with additional needs, through the implementation of learner profiles for students working towards Year 12 completion (or equivalent)
- follow and support the transition of students into secondary schooling and beyond into further education, employment or training, in partnership with local communities, industry, government and non-government organisation.

The purpose of this Review is to independently assess and develop reform options for secondary education delivery in the Northern Territory that improve engagement and outcomes for all secondary students for the coming decade and beyond, corresponding with the ambition and actions set out in the *Education NT Strategy*.

This includes a review of current policy settings implemented as part of the *Indigenous Education Strategy* (2015-24). The Strategy was developed in response to recommendations from the 2014 *A Share in the Future: Review of Indigenous Education in the Northern Territory* ('the Wilson Review'), and currently comprises the Department's long-term approach to improving outcomes of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students. One of the structural reforms arising from the Wilson Review was the move away from attempts to provide access to senior secondary education in remote and very remote areas, to a model of delivery in urban or regional areas for remote students, facilitated through boarding.

¹⁴ Northern Territory Government, *Education NT Strategy 2021-2025* (2021).

<https://education.nt.gov.au/__data/assets/pdf_file/0007/1061386/education-NT-strategy-2021-2025.pdf>.

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Council of Australian Governments Education Council, *Alice Springs (Mparntwe) Education Declaration* (2019) <<https://www.education.gov.au/alice-springs-mparntwe-education-declaration/resources/alice-springs-mparntwe-education-declaration>>.

Broadly, the Review aims to develop a suite of options that are appropriate for the diverse student cohorts and delivery contexts in the NT, ensuring every student has a pathway and can achieve success. The Review considers education provision across the secondary stage of schooling (Years 7 - 12) and is geared towards supporting improved engagement and outcomes in the Northern Territory, and through this, the realisation of the *Education NT Strategy*.

1.2 Policy background

The review of any education system should be conducted with reference to the system's objectives, and applicable policy and legislative frameworks. In Australia, a young person's right to secondary education is enshrined in the *International Covenant on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights* (ratified by Australia in 1975):

"Secondary education in its different forms, including technical and vocational secondary education, shall be made generally available and accessible to all by every appropriate means, and in particular by the progressive introduction of free education."¹⁷

Under the Commonwealth Constitution, state and territory governments are responsible for most aspects of secondary education, including the provision of schooling and most of the funding. Additionally, state and territory governments regulate school policies and programs, and determine curricula, course accreditation, student assessment, and awards for both government and non-government schools. State and territory governments are also responsible for the administration and majority funding of vocational education and training (VET) and legislation relating to the establishment and accreditation of certain higher education courses.¹⁸

An overview of key Commonwealth Government policies, Northern Territory Government legislation and policies, *Education NT Strategy*, *Indigenous Education Strategy*, and the *Engagement Strategy* is provided in Appendix F.

1.2.1 Key previous reviews

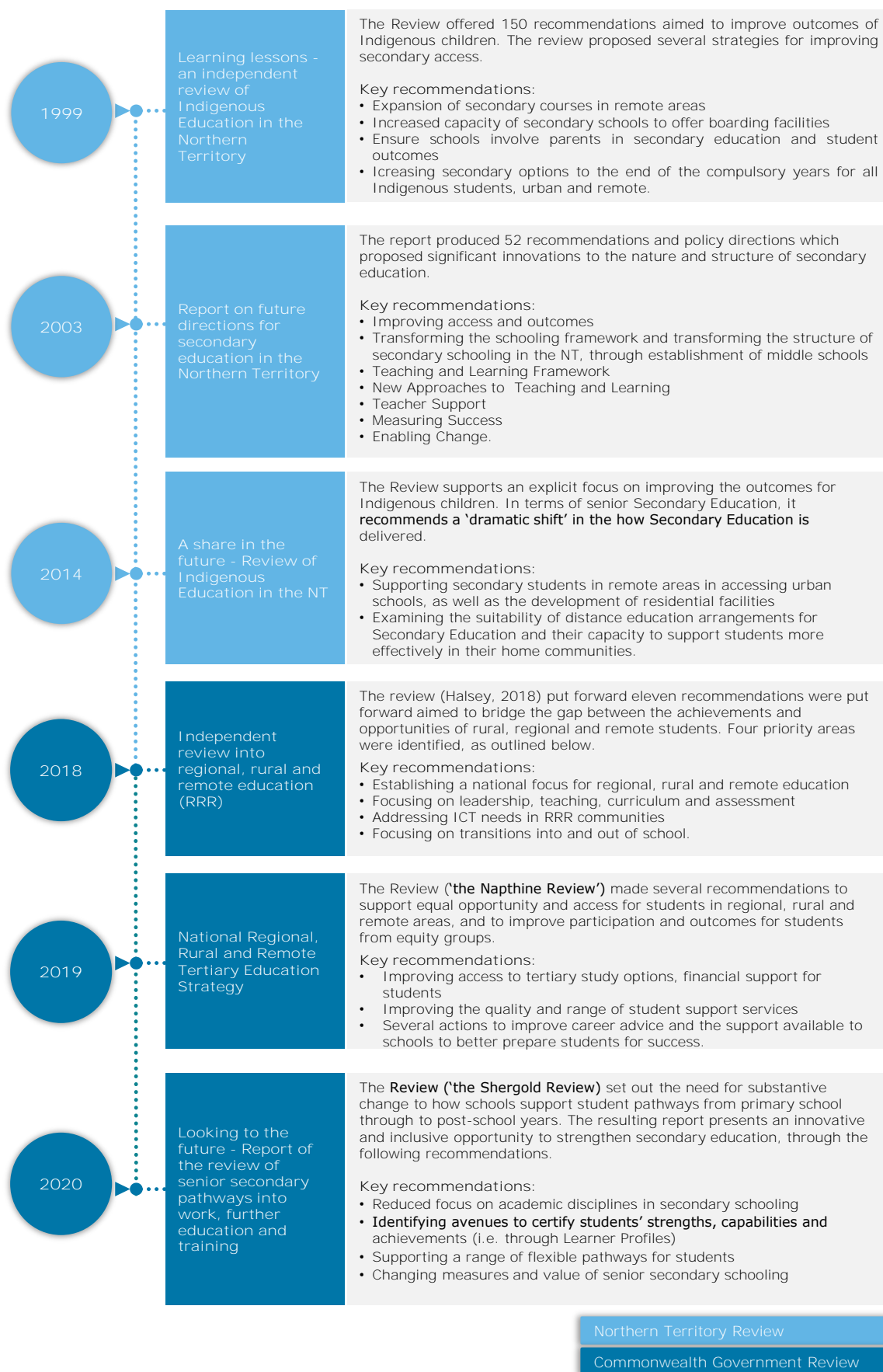
In the past 25 years, several reviews relevant to the secondary education system have been undertaken in the Northern Territory and at the federal level (including those previously outlined in this report). These reviews provide the background to existing policy settings and current secondary education delivery, which are considered within the Review.

Figure 1.1 outlines the key recommendations from the previous reviews, specifically those relating to the provision of secondary education. A further summary of past reviews and reports, and their relevance and interdependencies with this Review, is provided in Appendix C.

¹⁷ *International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights Article 13* (1966).

¹⁸ NT Department of Education, *'How schools are funded'*, (2023)
<<https://www.education.gov.au/schooling/how-schools-are-funded>>.

Figure 1.1: Overview and timeline of past reviews at the Northern Territory and federal level



Source: Deloitte Access Economics.

This Review is also taking place alongside several other critical reviews of the Northern Territory and Australian education systems. In particular, the 2022 *Review of Effective Enrolment* and concurrent *Review of Disability Funding* in the Northern Territory, undertaken by Deloitte Access Economics, have critical links to the Review and its recommendations for reform, especially on matters of school funding. More broadly, the 2023 Australian Government *Review to Inform a Better and Fairer Education System* is also expected to make a range of recommendations that will influence and interact with the reform directions set out in this report.

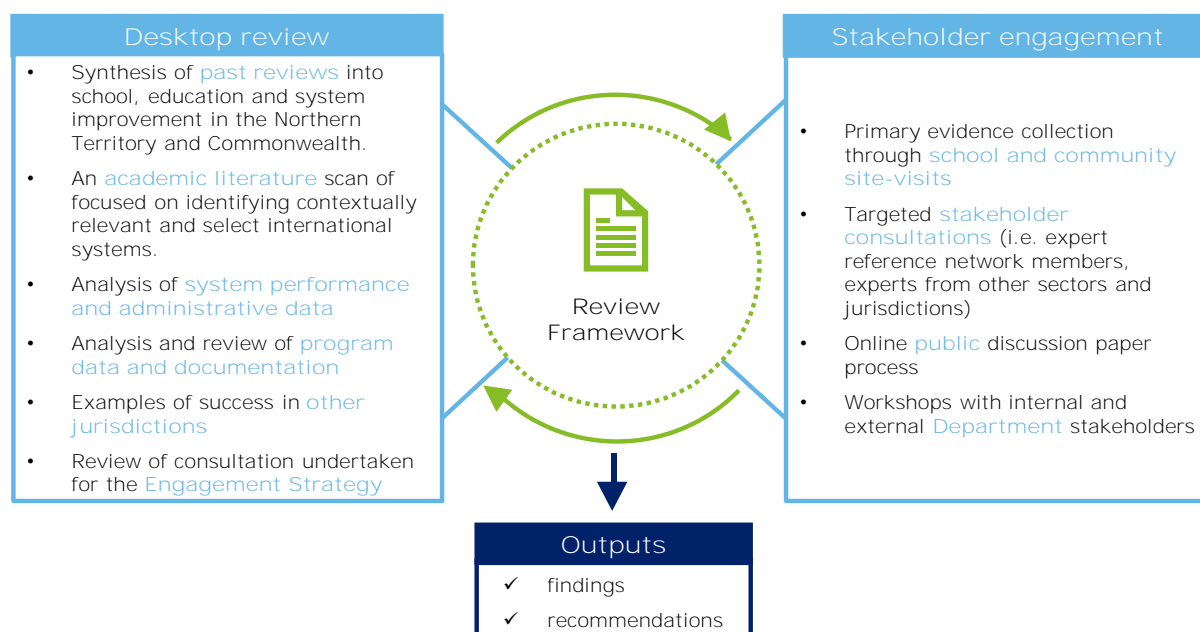
1.3 Review approach and structure of this report

Deloitte Access Economics, in partnership with the Northern Institute at Charles Darwin University, conducted the Review between November 2022 and October 2023, with the majority of engagement and analysis occurring from February to July 2023.

The Review followed a multi-phase and mixed-methods approach. This involved a comprehensive desktop evidence review, research and analysis of policy documentation, analysis of secondary data, as well as multiple rounds of stakeholder engagement with schools, policymakers, representatives of peak body organisations, other jurisdictions and subject matter experts.

The Review’s approach was undertaken in several substantive activities and phases, as outlined in Figure 1.2 and in Appendix F. The approach was guided by an overall Review Framework setting out the scope and focus for the Review, as described below.

Figure 1.2: Overview of methodological approach



Source: Deloitte Access Economics.

1.3.2 Review Framework

A Review Framework was developed to guide the scope and key lines of enquiry for the Review. The Review is anchored to the key strategic directions set out by the Northern Territory Government, and the key outcomes it seeks to achieve.¹⁹ Further detail on the Review Framework is provided in Appendix F.

¹⁹ Key outcomes, as set out in the *Education NT Strategy (2021-25)*, include: Year 12 completion, effective transitions into and beyond secondary schooling, and student engagement. This also includes an action to review and strengthen senior secondary education and expand options to deliver equitable and flexible access to curriculum, particularly for remote secondary students.

The Review Framework comprises five domains that set out the key lines of enquiry for the Review. These domains provide a structured framework for analysis, finding and recommendations. The five domains with the subsequent lines of enquiry underpinning the Review are outlined below in Table 1.1.

Table 1.1: Five Review domains and lines of enquiry

Domain	Key lines of enquiry
Domain 1: Recognition of learning Recognising and certifying a range of student learning success and capabilities.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • definition of success • Learner Profiles • credentialing of learning
Domain 2: Transitions between and beyond school Supporting effective transitions to ensure students' success in further study, employment, or training.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • design of academic, vocational and cultural pathways • middle school and senior secondary delivery
Domain 3: Learning access and design Driving equitable and flexible access and delivery of learning through delivery modes and courses.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • blended and online learning • regionalised delivery • boarding • flexible and specialised learning options • school programs
Domain 4: Partnerships and engagement Ensuring the success of students, in partnership and through engagement.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • school and community engagement • partnerships with local industry and community organisations
Domain 5: System of supports Providing a foundation of support to enable successful delivery of secondary education, and ensuring flexible, culturally safe, and supportive learning environments and experiences for students.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • people and processes • technology and infrastructure • system-wide guidance and supports • funding

1.3.3 Stakeholder engagement

Stakeholder consultations

The project team conducted a series of consultations with key Department, government, university, and school education stakeholders over the course of the Review.

A series of school site visits were held across all regions of the NT to gather a breadth of insights on the strengths, challenges, and opportunities for secondary education reform. Site visits included a range of stakeholders at each site, including school leaders, teachers, secondary students, School Council and/or Local Engagement and Decision Making (LEaD) Committee representatives.

In total, 25 site visits across all regions of the Northern Territory were conducted for the Review, with a total of 363 school stakeholders consulted.

These site visits, and other engagement throughout the Review, were supported by the Northern Institute at Charles Darwin University, with local community engagement led by Aboriginal researchers with deep expertise in education in the Northern Territory context. The evidence provided to the Review through this engagement and experience, has been fundamental to the findings and recommendations set out in this report.

In addition to the school site visits, a series of interviews, workshops and other engagement activities occurred with education system stakeholders, including those internal and external to the Department of Education. It is estimated that a total of at least 600 individuals were consulted with directly over the course of the Review.

The details and sampling approach to the school site visits can be found in Appendix A, along with details of consultations with school leaders, and other key stakeholder groups including experts, sector stakeholders, Aboriginal community-controlled organisations, and peak bodies.

Public consultation process

A public consultation process was conducted to support consultation with external stakeholders. The process involved preparation of a discussion paper which was released through a **public 'have your say' process**. The discussion paper provided an overview of emerging key themes from stakeholder consultations that had been undertaken in the earlier phases of the Review. It included several discussion questions to seek views from the general public, including students, parents, families, educators, school staff, communities, and non-government organisations to inform the Review.

Members of the public were able to respond via an online questionnaire or through a written submission. A total of 60 responses were received through the online questionnaire, and 30 written submissions were received (further details are provided in Appendix B).

1.3.4 Structure of this report

The remainder of this report is structured as follows:

- Section 1 (this section) describes the policy background, past reviews, and current delivery context.
- Section 2 presents the case for improving secondary schooling in the Northern Territory.
- Section 3 sets out **the Review's overarching vision for the future of secondary education** delivery in the NT, including a proposed Delivery Model of secondary education.
- Section 4 details findings and recommendations for the recognition of learning domain.
- Section 5 details findings and recommendations for the transitions between and beyond school domain.
- Section 6 details findings and recommendations for the learning access and design domain.
- Section 7 details findings and recommendations for the partnerships and engagement domain.
- Section 8 details findings and recommendations for the system of supports domain.
- Section 9 sets out the considerations for implementing the recommendations and concludes the report.

2 The case for equity and improvement

The need to provide equity of access and drive educational improvement creates a case for change for the Northern Territory secondary education system. This section provides a summary of the case for equity and improvement that is detailed further in subsequent sections of this report.

2.1 Responding to the unique delivery context

The Northern Territory is among the most complex systems in the world, with delivery of secondary education occurring in a unique context. To meet its goal to become the most improving education system in Australia, schooling delivery in the NT needs to cater for the following attributes (as further explored in Appendix C):

Cultural diversity: There are diverse values, attitudes, beliefs, and norms within communities, that shape how families and their children engage in education. The Territory has the highest proportion of students identifying as Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander at 39 per cent – compared to 6.2 per cent nationally.²⁰ Additionally, the NT is linguistically diverse, with over 100 Aboriginal languages and dialects and an estimated 87 foreign languages spoken.^{21,22}

High levels of geographic dispersion: The distance to schools differs significantly for families, and there are small schools in very remote areas. Dispersed over 1.35 million square kilometres, the NT population of 250,600 is among the most dispersed in the world, comparable to Greenland and parts of the Arctic Circle.^{23,24}

As of 2021, there were approximately 30,500 students enrolled in 153 government schools (primary, secondary and comprehensive) across the NT, of which 17 per cent were enrolled in schools classified as being in remote and 23 per cent in very remote areas.²⁵ Additionally, while 60 per cent of NT residents live in Greater Darwin, at least 66 per cent of NT government schools are in remote or very remote communities.²⁶

Small schools: the Northern Territory system is characterised by a large number of very small schools with fewer than 52 enrolments.

Student mobility: There is significant mobility of NT students, influencing **students'** ability to engage regularly with education. Student mobility refers to the movement of students from one educational institution to another, either within a region or between different regions or states. Student mobility is influenced by factors such as family circumstances, employment opportunities, housing stations, or cultural reasons. The significant student mobility experienced by school aged children in the NT is particularly prevalent for students living in small remote areas or regions who

²⁰ Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS), *Schools* (2021) <<https://www.abs.gov.au/statistics/people/education/schools/latest-release#schools>>.

²¹ Northern Territory Department of Education, *Aboriginal languages in NT* (2023) <<https://nt.gov.au/community/interpreting-and-translating-services/aboriginal-interpreter-service/aboriginal-languages-in-nt>>.

²² Northern Territory Department of Education, *English and an additional language/dialect* (2022) <<https://education.nt.gov.au/support-for-teachers/student-diversity/english-as-an-additional-language-dialect>>.

²³ ABS, *National, state and territory population* (2022) Accessed 15 March 2023 <<https://www.abs.gov.au/statistics/people/population/national-state-and-territory-population/latest-release>>

²⁴ Karacsonyi & Taylor, *Understanding demographic and economic patterns in sparsely populated areas – a global typology approach* (2022) Geografiska Annaler: Series B, Human Geography.

²⁵ Deloitte Access Economics analysis of NT Student Census data (2021)

²⁶ ABS, *Snapshot of Northern Territory, 2022* <<https://www.abs.gov.au/articles/snapshot-nt-2021>>; Northern Territory Government, *List of urban and remote schools*, <<https://nt.gov.au/learning/primary-and-secondary-students/list-of-urban-and-remote-schools>>.

relocate to urban areas or interstate. Student mobility often results in extended period of non-attendance at school, or in some cases, leads to disengagement from education for period of time. This presents as a challenge for students, educators, and the education system in supporting engagement and continuity of learning. The *Engagement Strategy (2022-2031)* acknowledges the need to develop a cross-sector approach to address the educational needs of students with high levels of mobility and absenteeism.²⁷

Significant levels of socio-economic and education disadvantage: There is significant intersectional disadvantage in some communities, influencing the extent to which students can engage, or are prepared to engage with secondary education. Young students in the Northern Territory show greater levels of developmental vulnerability. For example, the 2021 Australian Early Development Census found that:

- Less than one in two (38.6 per cent) Northern Territory students were developmentally ready to commence school compared to 54.8 per cent nationally
- approximately one-third (34.3 per cent) of all Aboriginal children were developmentally ready to commence school
- a quarter (25.7 per cent) of Northern Territory children are developmentally vulnerable on two or more early childhood domains, compared to 11.4 per cent nationally.²⁸

Further, analysis of the Index of Community Socio-Educational Advantage (ICSEA) data reveals a significant proportion of Northern Territory students and families have lower levels of educational advantage. ICSEA is a scale of socio-educational advantage that is computed for each school, with a score of 1000 being the median. The majority of NT schools (approximately 70 per cent) have an ICSEA score below 900²⁹ (indicating significantly lower levels of socio-educational advantage), compared to approximately one in ten schools nationally (as of 2021).³⁰

There is a complex landscape in the Northern Territory where families often occupy multiple disadvantaged demographic categories. The intersectionality of disadvantage may compound in a way that is not purely additive in its impact upon outcomes (i.e., educational need resulting from multiple disadvantages may be greater than a sum of its parts). Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families often reside in remote areas, experience inter-generational trauma, and speak English as a second language.

Overall, these cultural, demographic, and geographic attributes of the NT and its education system is a unique strength and opportunity, and should be recognised as such. Nonetheless, they pose challenges and complexities for delivery that are more pronounced in the NT than other jurisdictions in Australia. For example, they **can impact students'** access to schooling, including their ability to engage in inclusive and high-quality learning experiences that meet their needs, and consequently, the trajectory of outcomes and transitions into further study, training, or work. These unique attributes should be considered in the context of the sections that follow.

2.2 Building on the existing strengths of the system

There are schools in the Northern Territory currently delivering diverse pathways and high-quality secondary education outcomes.

There is a strong spine of schools in the Northern Territory that currently deliver diverse pathways (including academic and vocational) and high-quality secondary education. These schools, located in the outer regional and remote centres of the NT, have demonstrated high NTCET completion rates and achievement of Australian Tertiary Admission Rank (ATAR). These schools are senior colleges (Year 10-12) and comprehensive high schools (Year 7-12), as shown in Table 2.1.

²⁷ Northern Territory Government, *Northern Territory Education Engagement Strategy 2022-2031* <https://education.nt.gov.au/__data/assets/pdf_file/0003/1058421/northern-territory-education-engagement-strategy-2022-2031.pdf>.

²⁸ Australian Early Development Census, *Australian Early Development Census National Report 2021* (2021).

²⁹ Source: NT Department of Education data.

³⁰ Australian Curriculum Assessment and Reporting Authority, *Index of Community Socio-educational Advantage* (2022).

Table 2.1: NT schools demonstrating high NTCET completion rates and ATAR attainment, 2011 to 2021

School	Remoteness	NTCET completion rate	Highest ATAR achieved	No. students achieving >95 ATAR
Darwin High School	Outer Regional	84%	99.95	196
Casuarina Senior College	Outer Regional	77%	99.5	64
Katherine High School	Remote	82%	99.3	8
Taminmin College	Outer Regional	81%	99	7
Nhulunbuy High School	Very Remote	76%	97.65	3
Centralian Senior College	Remote	64%	99.9	9
Tennant Creek High School	Very Remote	74%	95.75	1
Palmerston College	Outer Regional	69%	98.8	8

Source: Deloitte Access Economics analysis using NT Department of Education student census data and school data.

Notes: NTCET completion rate is calculated as the number of unique year 12 students that complete NTCET in a given year divided by the unique number of students enrolled in year 12 at the August Census of that year. This measure may differ from other reported measures of NTCET completion due to variations in the year 12 enrolment figure used. Due to a discrepancy in when NTCET completion and enrolments are recorded, the school that a student is enrolled in at the August Census may not match the school in which a student obtains NTCET.

Further, there have been recent successes in very remote areas. In 2022, very remote two schools recorded their first high school graduates between the period of 2010 to 2022 (Table 2.2), with the student at Mataranka School also dual enrolled at the NT School of Distance Education.

Table 2.2: Very remote schools with NTCET completions in 2022

School	Remoteness	School type	Year of NTCET completion
Mataranka School	Very Remote	Small School	2022
Laynhapuy Homelands School	Very Remote	Combined	2022

Source: Deloitte Access Economics analysis using NT Department of Education data.

This is enabled by strengths of the senior secondary certificate, and the flexibility of the system, which allows students to pursue various pathway options and can be tailored to local school context (as explored further in Section 4.1.3).

There is existing infrastructure and innovative models of delivery occurring across the Northern Territory **that are expanding students' access to secondary education provision, and contributing to rich learning.**

Across the NT, there is existing infrastructure that supports the delivery of vocational education and training, and innovative regional models of delivery that are currently expanding **students'** access to secondary provision in remote areas. This includes the Juno Centre which is used for block training in the Barkly region, the Ti Tree VET hub in the Central region, flexible delivery of practical life skills and work-readiness training at Palmerston Youth Skills Centre, and the Learning on Country program in the Top End region, which provides a model of practice and principles for learning design in the Northern Territory and contributes credits towards NTCET attainment.

The three distance education schools (NT School of Distance Education [NTSDE], Katherine School of the Air (KSoA), and Alice Springs School of the Air (ASSoA) are also widening access to secondary education across the NT (in the context of improvements to connectivity), and are

building workforce capability of the schools they support. As of 2023, approximately 967 students are accessing distance education services in the Northern Territory.³¹

All of these strengths of infrastructure and delivery can be used as the basis for continued improvement and excellence in secondary education delivery, including through the identification of gaps and a case for investment to achieve an equivalent standard of access across the NT.

The Northern Territory can strive to be both an excellent and equitable system, with high expectations for educational outcomes for all students.

The Alice Springs (Mparntwe) Declaration sets out a goal for the Australian education system to promote excellence and equity. This means providing all learners with equality of opportunity that enables them to reach their potential and achieve their highest educational outcomes.³²

“For Australia’s education system to promote excellence and equity, governments and the education community must improve outcomes for educationally disadvantaged young Australians. We must also encourage them, their families and their communities to hold high expectations for their future... This means tailoring to the needs of individuals across a system that prioritises equity of opportunity and that supports achievement.” – Alice Springs (Mparntwe) Education Declaration

Furthermore, international research suggests that the best education systems in the world achieve excellence and equity of outcomes, noting that these goals reinforce each other: equity of outcomes supports excellence, and excellence cannot be pursued in isolation from equity.³³

In pursuit of these goals, the Northern Territory government system has a responsibility to ensure there is excellence and equity of outcomes for all learners. Evidence in the following sections demonstrates several key reasons why it is critical to work towards these goals for secondary education in the Northern Territory.

2.3 Addressing inequity of access to secondary education In many remote and very remote contexts, secondary education is not available (particularly in the senior secondary years).

The majority of NT government schools with secondary aged students, especially those in remote and very remote communities, do not offer a local program to support completion of the NTCET, and have limited access to local pathways or other secondary education programs. This is in line with the provision policy that has been in place for the past decade, arising from the *Indigenous Education Strategy (2015-24)*.

Where there are examples of local provision and pathways in remote communities, these are generally ad hoc in nature and enabled through programs or initiatives that are not universally available across the NT. For example, there is unequal access to programs such as Learning on Country, which is currently delivered across 15 remote communities in the Top End.³⁴

While some government boarding facilities exist and are offered in Nhulunbuy (Dawurr Boarding) and Katherine (Callistemon House), these have limited capacity and places for students, and facilities are not available in other NT regions, despite the focus set out in the *Indigenous Education Strategy* to provide access to such options universally across the NT. However, it should

³¹ Source: NT Department of Education data: Secondary Students Age Grade Enrolment Data - Katherine School of The Air, Northern Territory School of Distance Education & Alice Springs School of the Air. 1. Age Grade Census enrolment numbers for secondary students at Katherine School of The Air by student suburb, year level, and school year (2010 to 2022)."

³² Council of Australian Governments Education Council, *Alice Springs (Mparntwe) Education Declaration (2019)*, <<https://www.education.gov.au/alice-springs-mparntwe-education-declaration/resources/alice-springs-mparntwe-education-declaration>>.

³³ National Center on Education and the Economy, *'Blueprint for a High-Performing Education System'*, (n.d) <<https://ncee.org/blueprint/>>.

³⁴ The Learning on Country program is administered by the Northern Land Council. It is funded by the National Indigenous Australians Agency.

be noted there are plans to build, and budget allocated to, a new boarding facility in Tennant Creek.

While boarding (including with non-government schools in the NT and elsewhere in Australia) is an important option for many students in these communities, and is supported by many families and schools, the overwhelming evidence provided to the Review suggests that it is not an effective pathway for many students, and that the *Indigenous Education Strategy* policy and its implementation has not been effective in supporting access to quality secondary experiences for many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students across remote NT communities (as explored in Section 6.3).

It was noted by a range of stakeholders that the attrition of students to boarding schools and the non-government schooling sector, is partly based on a perception that these are the only high-quality options for secondary education available locally, leading to the subsequent residualisation³⁵ of schools and communities in the Northern Territory.

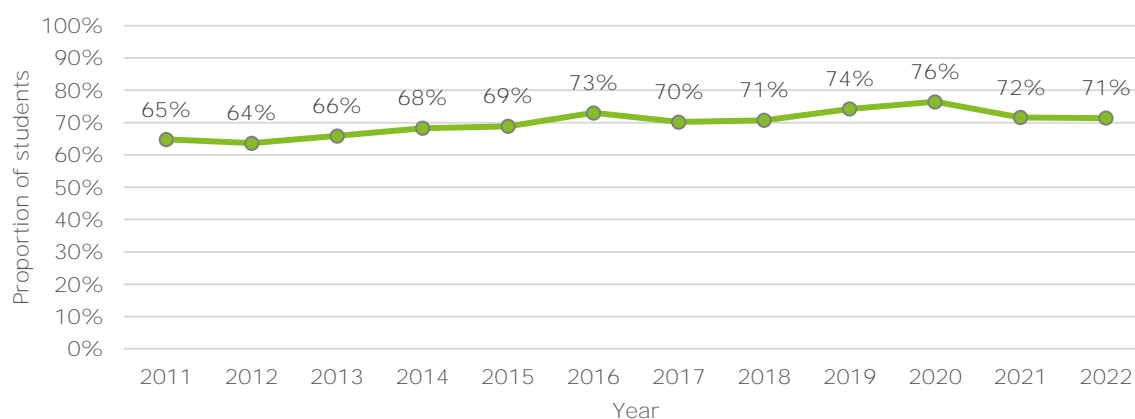
2.4 Addressing lack of improvement on key educational outcomes

2.4.1 The system is not observing improvement on its Headline Improvement Measures

Completion rates in the Northern Territory have not materially improved over the past decade, and a large disparity exists by location, with rates of completion in very remote locations far lower than in urban areas.

The proportion of students attaining the NTCET is not improving materially over time (Chart 2.1).

Chart 2.1: Proportion of Year 12 students that obtain an NTCET in a NT government school



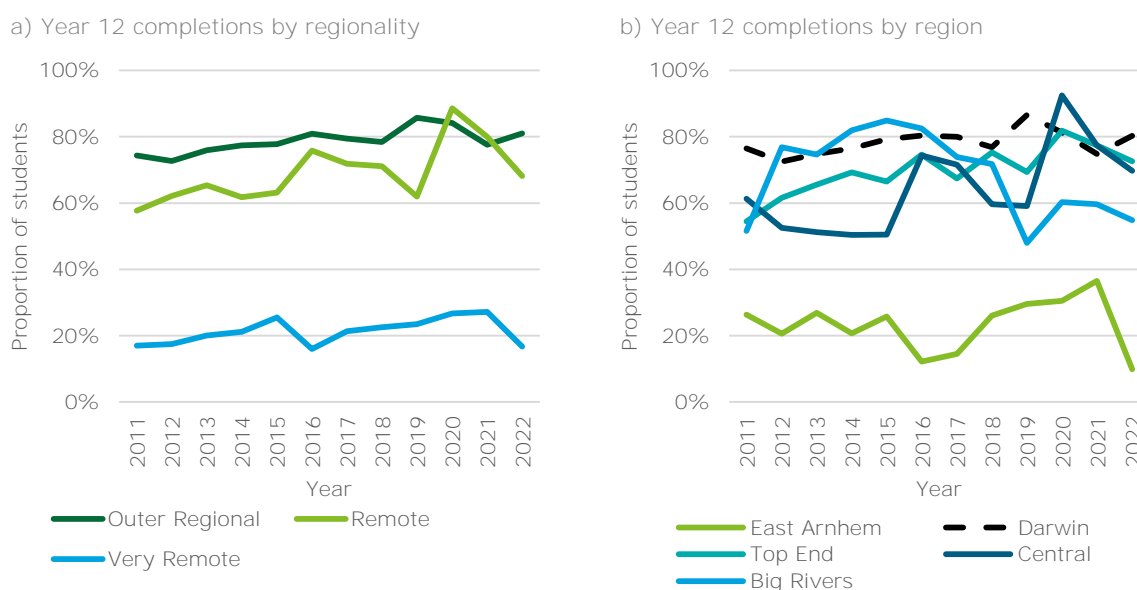
Source: Deloitte Access Economics (2023) analysis of NT student census data and NTCET completions data.

Notes: NTCET completion rate is calculated as the number of unique year 12 students that complete NTCET in a given year divided by the unique number of students enrolled in year 12 at the August Census of that year. This measure may differ from other reported measures of NTCET completion due to variations in the year 12 enrolment figure used. Due to a discrepancy in when NTCET completion and enrolments are recorded, the school that a student is enrolled in at the August Census may not match the school in which a student obtains NTCET.

Year 12 completion rates vary by remoteness, and across regions of the Northern Territory (Chart 2.2). The proportion of students obtaining an NTCET in remote areas is lower than in outer regional locations, and this is substantially lower in very remote areas. Completion rates are lowest in the East Arnhem region, and highest in Darwin and the Top End regions. Over time, the Big Rivers region has observed a decline in NTCET completions.

³⁵ Residualisation occurs when certain schools end up serving a disproportionately high number and concentration of socio-economically disadvantaged students. This can occur when more socio-economically advantaged students enter other schools or systems.

Chart 2.2: Proportion of Year 12 students that obtain an NTCET in government schools, by location and region



Source: Deloitte Access Economics (2023) analysis of NT student census data and NTCET completions data.

Notes: NTCET completion rate is calculated as the number of unique year 12 students that complete NTCET in a given year divided by the unique number of students enrolled in year 12 at the August Census of that year. This measure may differ from other reported measures of NTCET completion due to variations in the year 12 enrolment figure used. Due to a discrepancy in when NTCET completion and enrolments are recorded, the school that a student is enrolled in at the August Census may not match the school in which a student obtains NTCET.

It should also be noted that different delivery modes have increased in uptake over time and are increasingly contributing towards completion of the NTCET. For example, VET is a key driver of the slight increase in NTCET completion over time, and is becoming an increasingly important part of the system, as demonstrated in analysis set out in Sections 5.2.1 and 6.1.2.

Compared to other states and territories, the Northern Territory records the lowest share of students at or above national minimum standards for all NAPLAN years (Year 3, 5, 7 and 9) and domains (reading, writing, spelling, grammar and punctuation, and numeracy).³⁶

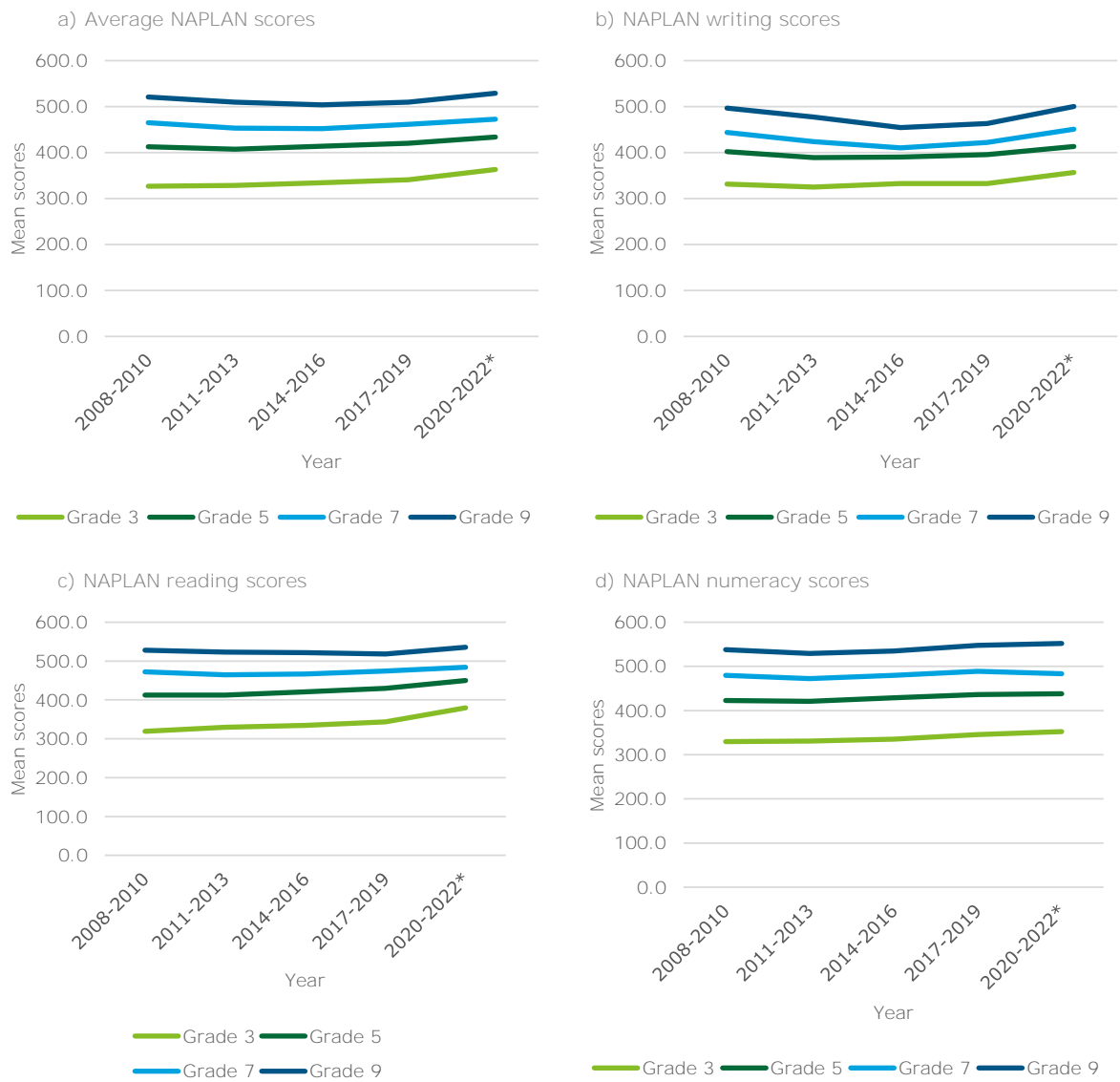
NAPLAN scores across all domains throughout secondary schooling (Year 7 and Year 9) have not improved materially over time, as shown in Chart 2.3.

However, when interpreting these results, it is important to consider the NT context in order to enable fair comparisons of NAPLAN results. The NT has high levels of socioeconomic disadvantage and the lowest average score on the ICSEA of any jurisdiction in Australia (see Appendix C).³⁷

³⁶ Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority, *NAPLAN Results (2022)*.

³⁷ ICSEA considers students' family backgrounds (which refers to parents' occupation, their school education and non-school education), which influences students' educational outcomes.

Chart 2.3: Overall NAPLAN scores for students in the NT

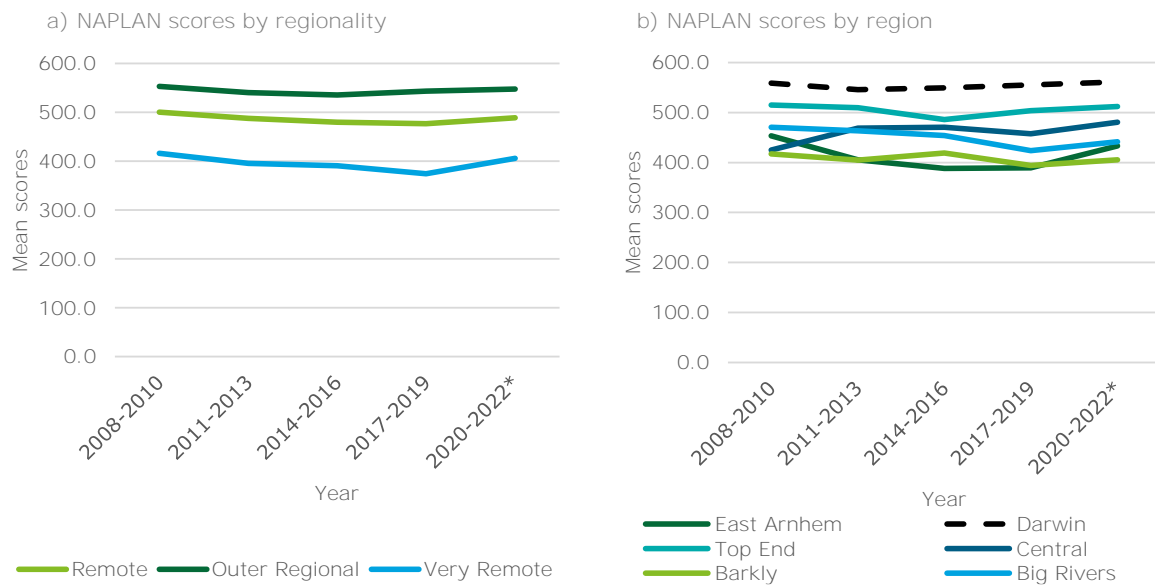


Source: Deloitte Access Economics (2023) analysis of NT NAPLAN data.

Note: *NAPLAN was not undertaken in 2020. Overall NAPLAN score is calculated as an average of NAPLAN score across all subject areas. Overall NAPLAN score is calculated as an average of NAPLAN score across all subject areas.

Furthermore, consistent with previous analysis on the Year 12 completion headline improvement measure, a disparity in NAPLAN scores also exists across regions and geolocation. Students in very remote locations in the NT have lower achievement on Year 9 NAPLAN than their peers in remote and outer regional areas, while students in the Darwin region consistently achieve higher NAPLAN scores across all domains (Chart 2.4).

Chart 2.4: Average NAPLAN (Year 9) scores across regions and remoteness

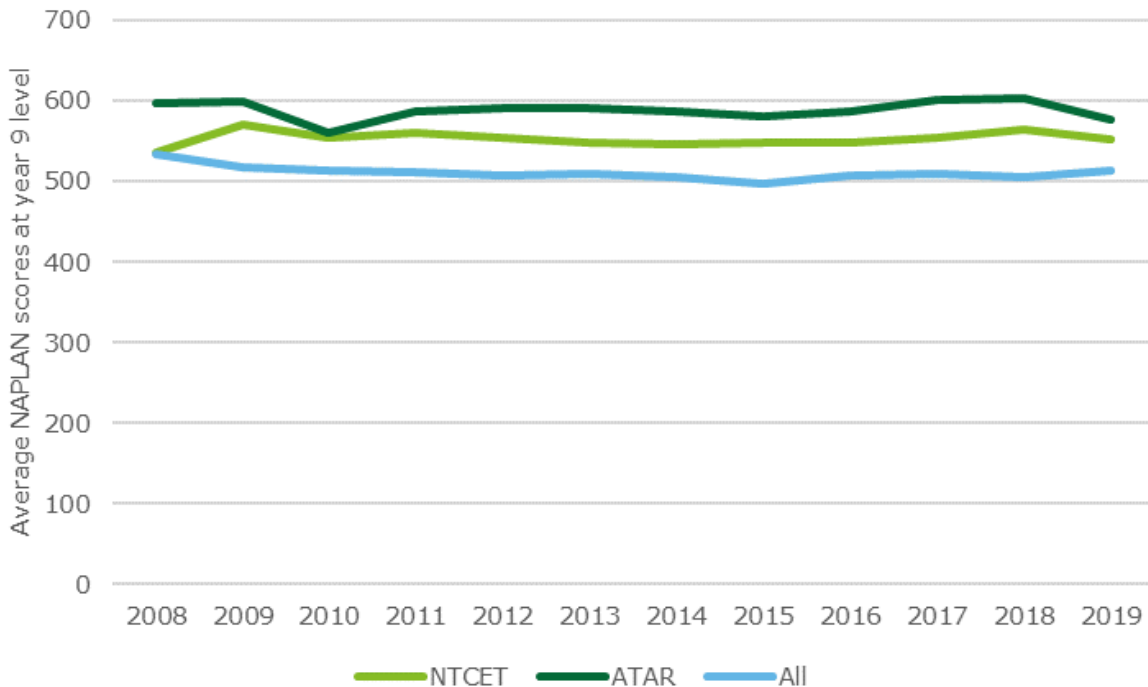


Source: Deloitte Access Economics (2023) analysis of NT NAPLAN data.

Note: *NAPLAN was not undertaken in 2020. The 2020-2022 average only includes scores for 2021 and 2022. Overall NAPLAN score is calculated as an average of scores across all domains. This chart shows the overall NAPLAN scores at Year 9 level.

NAPLAN achievement is a consistently statistically significant predictor of Year 12 completion. The following chart demonstrates that better performance on the Year 9 NAPLAN tests tend to be associated with being more likely to attain NTCET and achieving an ATAR score (Chart 2.5).

Chart 2.5: Overall NAPLAN scores (Year 9) for students with different levels of attainment



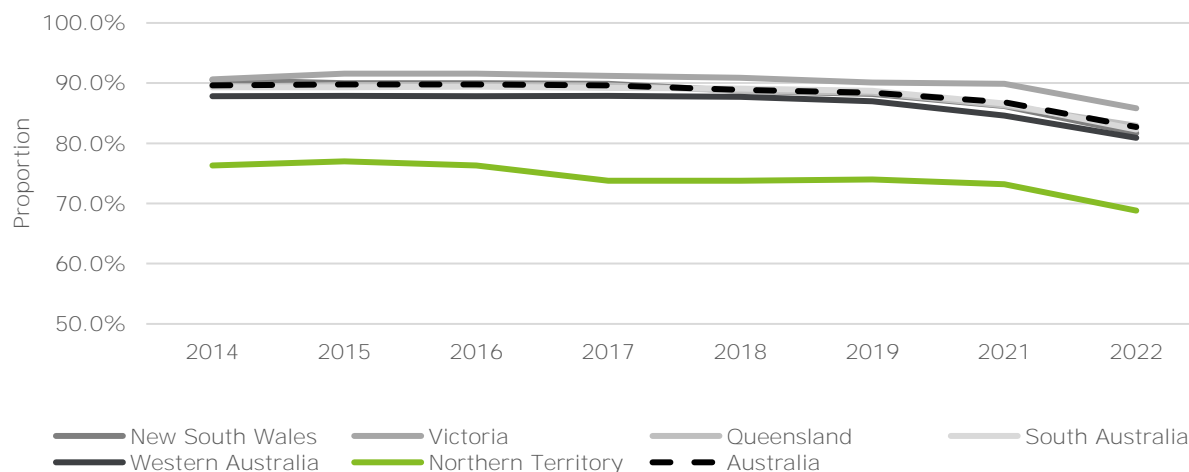
Source: Deloitte Access Economics (2023) analysis of NT student census data, NT NAPLAN data and NTCET completions data.

Note: Overall NAPLAN score is calculated as an average of NAPLAN score across all subject areas. This chart shows the overall NAPLAN scores at Year 9 level.

Student attendance is the biggest predictor of retention in schooling, and completion. However, compared to other states and territories, the Northern Territory records the lowest student attendance rate.³⁸

Student attendance rates in the Northern Territory, across Years 7 to 10, are consistently lower than any other jurisdiction (Chart 2.6).

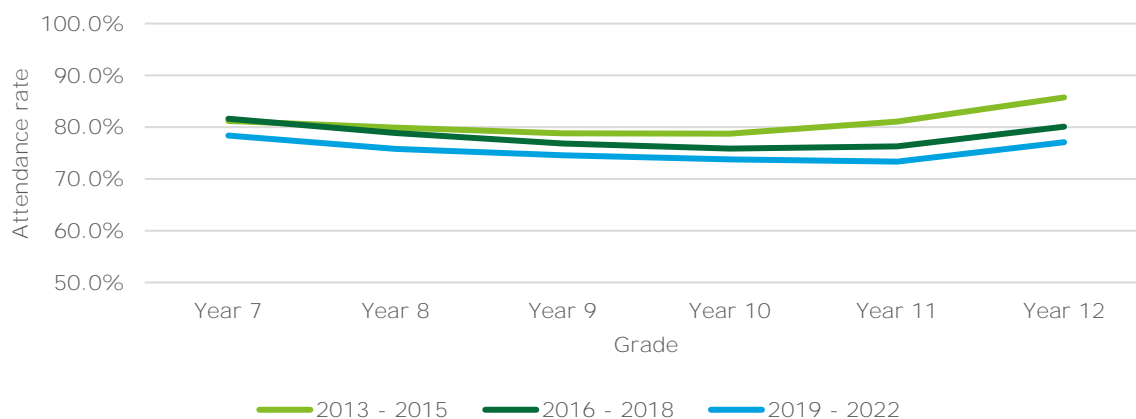
Chart 2.6: Attendance rate of students in Years 7 to 10 in government schools, across Australia



Source: Deloitte Access Economics using ACARA (2022), Student attendance data.

Analysis of NT student attendance data also shows that attendance over the 2019-2022 period is lower than previous time periods, across all years of secondary schooling (Chart 2.7). Attendance rates increase slightly post-Year 10, as overall enrolments decrease and the students remaining in schooling are more engaged in schooling post-compulsory age. This should also be considered alongside overall enrolment numbers, which show a trend of increase between 2013 and 2021.

Chart 2.7: Attendance rate of students in NT government schools by grade and time period



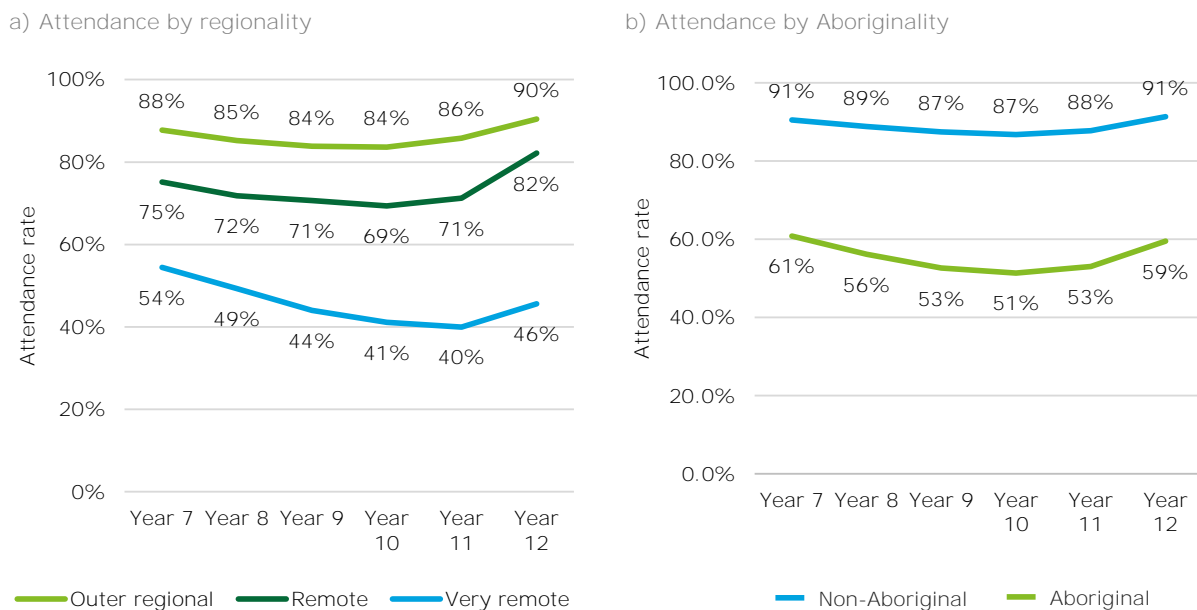
Source: Deloitte Access Economics (2023) analysis of NT enrolment and attendance data available on education.nt.gov.au.

There are stark differences in student attendance across different settings and contexts. Student attendance is consistently lower in very remote areas of the NT compared with remote and outer regional areas, and among Aboriginal students (Chart 2.8). A range of factors have been attributed to lower attendance rates among specific NT student cohorts, including student mobility (due to social, cultural and economic reasons), community resources, and schooling resources to engage students.³⁹

³⁸ Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority, *Student attendance data* (2022).

³⁹ Deloitte Access Economics, *Review of Effective Enrolment* (commissioned by the NT Department of Education, 2022) <<https://education.nt.gov.au/reviews-and-consultations/review-of-effective-enrolment>>.

Chart 2.8: Attendance rate in government schools, by student characteristics, average over 2014-2021

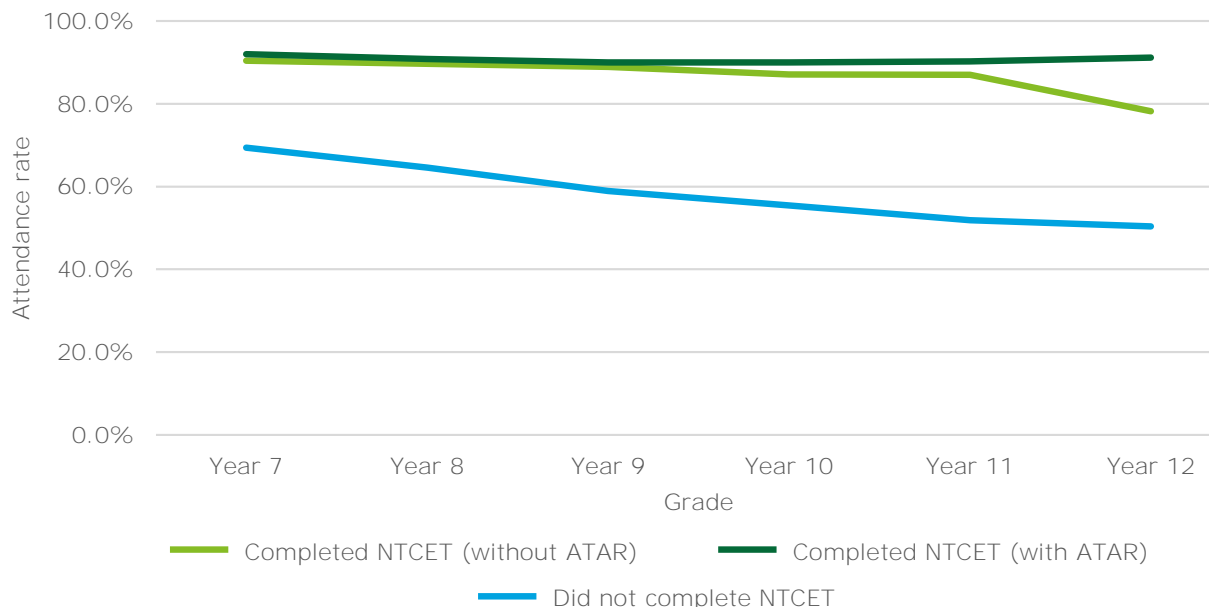


Source: Deloitte Access Economics (2023) analysis of NT attendance data.

Note: Student attendance rate is measured as the number of days attended divided by the number of days expected to attend.

Inequities in attendance, even from an early grade, can lead to inequities in student outcomes. Analysis of student attendance patterns across secondary school and student outcomes shows that higher attendance rates (from Year 7 through to Year 12) are associated with ATAR attainment and NTCET completion (Chart 2.9, and Section 6.1.2).

Chart 2.9: Attendance rate of students with different levels of achievement



Source: Deloitte Access Economics (2023) analysis of NT attendance data.

Note: Student attendance rate is measured as the number of days attended divided by the number of days expected to attend.

Data by grade is estimated across years 2013 to 2021.

This highlights the importance of school attendance. Attendance should continue to be a key policy priority for the system from the earlier secondary schooling grades. This is supported by research shows that engagement in schooling, and regular attendance, is fundamental in achieving educational outcomes, with a cumulative effect over time. Disengagement from school and

absences have a negative impact on achievement, retention, and social outcomes, including engagement with peers and emotional and behavioural outcomes.⁴⁰

2.4.2 The educational gap between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal students is wider in the NT than anywhere else in Australia.

Data shows that the gap between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal student outcomes has remained constant since 2010.

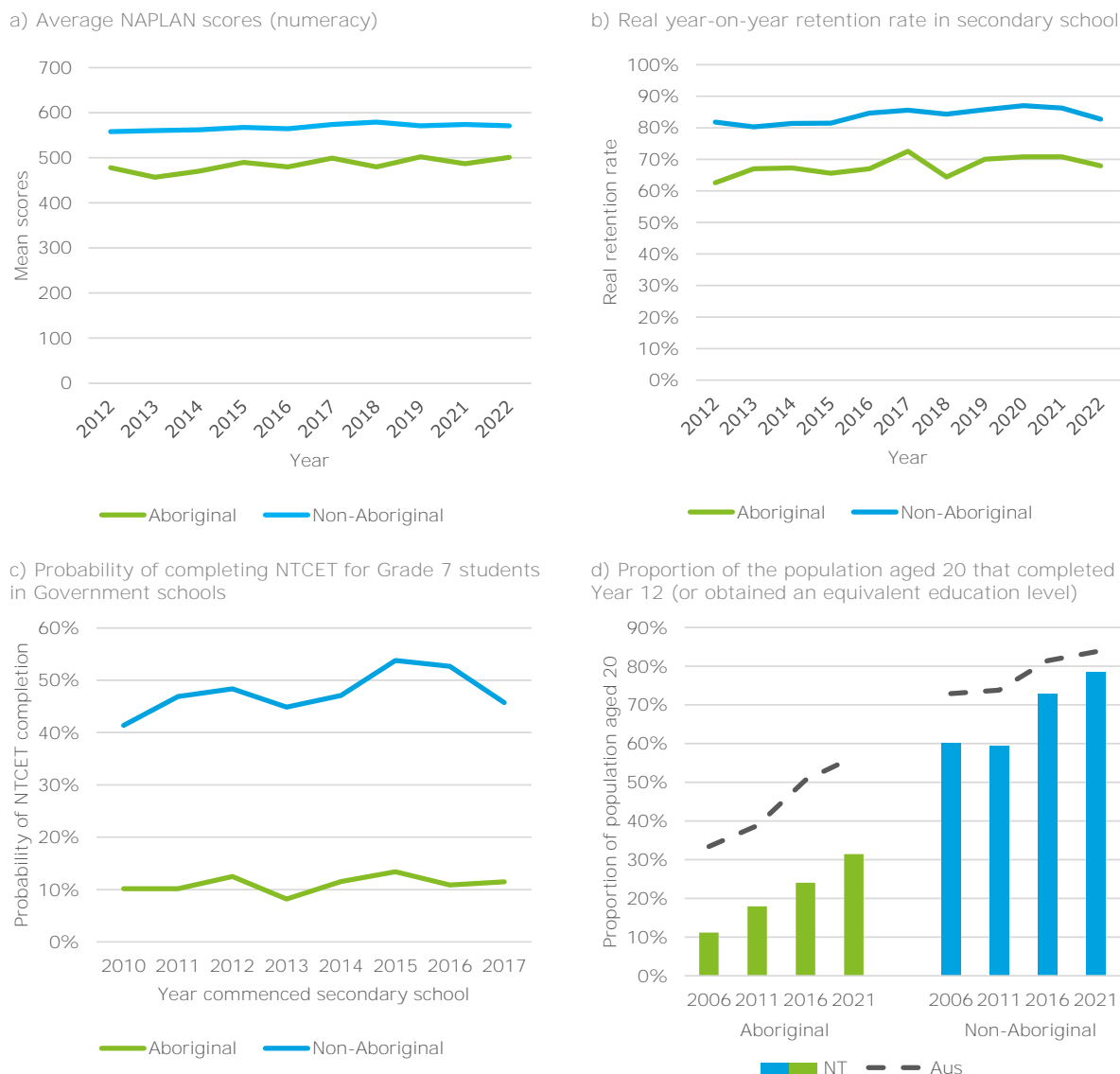
Overall, in the NT, Aboriginal students are far less likely than non-Aboriginal students to attend school, have higher NAPLAN score results, and continue and complete schooling (Chart 2.10, a). There is little evidence to suggest that these gaps have declined since 2012.

Further, despite improvements in educational attainment of Aboriginal students, the gap between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal students remains greater than experienced in other states and territories across Australia. For example, Aboriginal people aged 20 years are 2.5 times less likely to complete an education level equivalent of year 12 completion than non-Aboriginal students, compared to 1.5 times less likely across Australia (Chart 2.10, d).⁴¹

⁴⁰ K Hancock, C Shepherd, D Lawrence, S Zubrick, (2013). *Student attendance and educational outcomes: Every day counts*. <<https://doi.org/10.13140/2.1.4956.6728>>.

⁴¹ This was calculated using ABS Census data, across the 2006 to 2021 time period.

Chart 2.10: Comparison of educational outcomes for Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal students in the NT



Source: Deloitte Access Economics (2023) analysis using: a) NAPLAN NT NAPLAN data; b) NT Census data; c) NT Census data & NTCET completions data; d) ABS Census data.

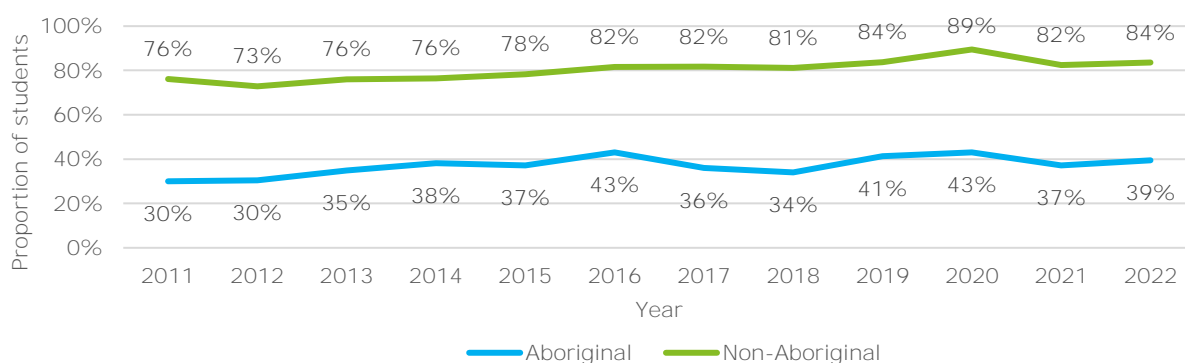
Notes: b) Determined through statistical analysis, measuring the probability that someone in a government school between grade 7-11 will be enrolled in a government school in the following year, over the period 2012 to 2022. Data does not capture movement to and from other sectors or other states. c) Calculated as the probability that a student enrolled in year 7 in a government school between 2010 and 2017 will go on to complete the NTCET over the period 2011 to 2022. Data does not capture migration to and from other sectors or other states. d) Calculated as the proportion of people aged 20 that had completed year 12 (or an equivalent education level).

The educational gap between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander and non-Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students is driven largely by poorer educational outcomes in remote communities in the NT, relative to Australia.

Educational outcomes for Aboriginal students in the NT are consistently worse compared to their peers throughout the rest of Australia. A smaller proportion of students are at or above national minimum standards, with 43 per cent of Aboriginal students meeting the national minimum standard for Year 3 reading, compared to 80 per cent of Aboriginal students throughout

Australia.⁴² The NTCET attainment rate in government schools was 84 per cent for non-Aboriginal students and 39 per cent for Aboriginal students in 2022 (Chart 2.11).

Chart 2.11: Proportion of Year 12 students that obtain an NTCET in government schools, by Aboriginal status



Source: Deloitte Access Economics (2023) analysis of NT student census data and NTCET completions data.

Notes: NTCET completion rate is calculated as the number of unique year 12 students that complete NTCET in a given year divided by the unique number of students enrolled in year 12 at the August Census of that year. This measure may differ from other reported measures of NTCET completion due to variations in the year 12 enrolment figure used. Due to a discrepancy in when NTCET completion and enrolments are recorded, the school that a student is enrolled in at the August Census may not match the school in which a student obtains NTCET.

These gaps reflect the complex nature of the NT landscape where families often occupy multiple disadvantaged demographic categories. The intersectionality of disadvantage may compound in a way that is not purely additive in its impact upon outcomes (i.e., educational need resulting from multiple disadvantages may be greater than a sum of its parts). Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families often reside in remote areas, experience inter-generational trauma, and speak English as an additional language.

Box 2.1: Limitations of data

The Review considered a range of data for the government school sector. It was not within the scope of the Review to access data for non-government sectors.

Due to a range of factors pertaining to legislative requirements, data privacy and the fact that students are enrolled interstate for boarding, the NT Department of Education has limited visibility of the extent to which students are enrolled or disengage in boarding, or leave the system (i.e., to enrol in independent or Catholic sectors, or via scholarship schemes). Boarding data for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander and non-Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students was not available at a school level or available with granularity, and was not accessed for the Review.

2.5 Ensuring investment is targeted to need and equitable

The effective enrolment model of school funding in the NT has a disproportionate impact on remote and very remote schools, and is a barrier to delivery of secondary education and pathways in these communities. Further, while the NT has invested in supporting improved student outcomes, outside of core recurrent school funding, there is limited evidence that the totality of this investment has been effectively allocated and aligned to student need.

An audit of investment was undertaken as part of the Review to identify the historic and current investments in secondary provision, and the extent to which these investments have been allocated equitably in supporting delivery, and improved student outcomes. The analysis in this section considers investments in initiatives and programs to support the delivery of secondary

⁴² Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority, *NAPLAN Results* (2022).

education through targeted funding allocations, which are in addition to the core school funding provided through the current student needs-based funding model.

Evidence available to the Review indicates that investment to support the delivery of secondary education in the NT has had mixed results. Recurrent needs-based funding is generally not sufficient for secondary education provision, in part due to the impact of the effective enrolment methodology of school funding. Non-SRM investments and programs supporting student engagement, retention and completion through targeted funding have been ineffective and are not aligned to student need, partly due to constrained resources and historical strategies in allocating investments (in line with the *Indigenous Education Strategy*). Furthermore, there has been little growth in investment of programs to support language development in secondary year levels.

2.5.1 Recurrent needs-based funding

The current SNBF model is designed to allocate funding to align with student needs. This includes secondary year-level specific loadings that allocate proportionally more funding to secondary year levels, relative to the later years of primary school.⁴³

Notwithstanding these loadings, the effective enrolment mechanism tends to dilute the ability of the SRM to adequately allocate resources to support secondary education delivery in small remote settings, as explored within this section.

[Compared to similar schools in other jurisdictions, small standalone secondary and combined schools in the Northern Territory tend to receive less funding.](#)

The Review analysed the degree to which funding is sufficient to support secondary education in the NT, by comparing funding per enrolment for NT schools against a benchmark.⁴⁴

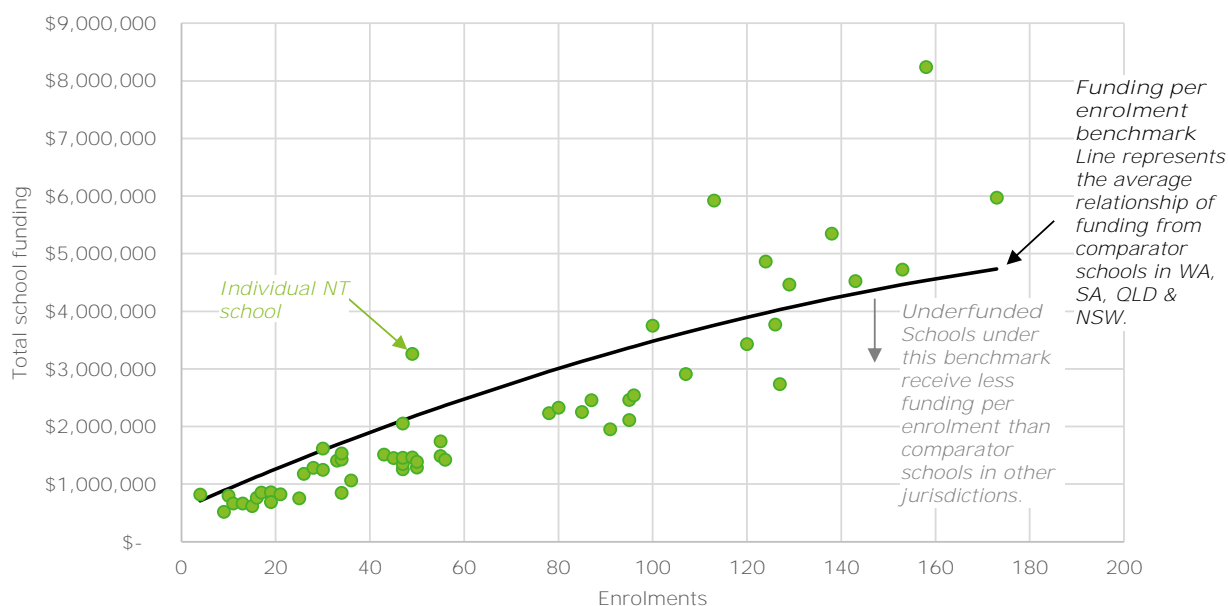
Findings from this analysis show that small secondary or combined schools in the NT (schools with less than approximately 125 enrolments) tend to receive less funding than similar schools in other jurisdictions (Chart 2.12).

However, NT schools with enrolments above approximately 125 students tended to receive more funding than similar schools in other jurisdictions. This analysis indicates that there may be an opportunity to improve funding for small schools in the NT to ensure that they are adequately resourced, as per benchmarks in other jurisdictions.

⁴³ Overall, the secondary loadings in the SNBF are relatively lower than other jurisdictions in Australia; however, this arises from the evidence-based design of the SRM which allocates significant loadings to the early years of primary school, in response to the benefits of early intervention on long term student outcomes. It has not been the focus of this Review to assess the efficacy of the precise loadings that comprise the design of the SNBF.

⁴⁴ A comparative analysis was conducted using financial data from 56 schools in remote South Australia, Western Australia, Queensland and NSW. Comparator schools in these jurisdictions were identified by the degree to which they shared similar remoteness, demographic and attendance characteristics as smaller secondary and combined schools in the NT. Then the average funding per enrolment level for these comparator schools was identified to determine a benchmark of funding per enrolment for small secondary schools in other jurisdictions. Funding for small secondary schools in the NT was compared against this benchmark to understand the degree to which schools in the NT are over- or underfunded compared to other jurisdictions.

Chart 2.12: Comparison of total school funding for small combined and secondary schools in the NT and the average of similar schools in other jurisdictions



Source: Deloitte Access Economics (2023) using MySchool data.

Notes: Benchmarked funding is the average relationship between enrolments and funding for comparator schools in South Australia, Western Australia, Queensland, and NSW.

The current NT school funding model is not appropriate to support secondary education delivery in small, remote settings.

The current school funding model does not have the appropriate mechanisms to allocate adequate resources to support secondary education delivery in small remote settings. As highlighted in the 2022 *Review of Effective Enrolment*, attendance in secondary grades (and particularly secondary schools in remote areas) tends to be lower than other grades. This contributes to schools that deliver secondary education receiving less funding per enrolled student than primary schools (holding all else constant). The movement to average enrolment as a measure of student counts (instead of effective enrolment) will solve some of these issues, as it will reduce the impact of attendance rates on school funding.⁴⁵

In addition, the small school subsidy, which is based on a primary school delivery model, does not adequately consider the additional resources required to support secondary education delivery. Findings from consultations highlighted challenges with funding and resourcing, as well as the importance of dedicated secondary educators to support the delivery of secondary education to students, whether it is delivered in the classroom or through blended or online delivery.

“We lost some staff with the funding model, based on effective enrolment funding formula. That has been difficult... If we had the funding for two secondary teachers, we’d absolutely have them. But it’s very tricky.” – School leader, very remote combined school

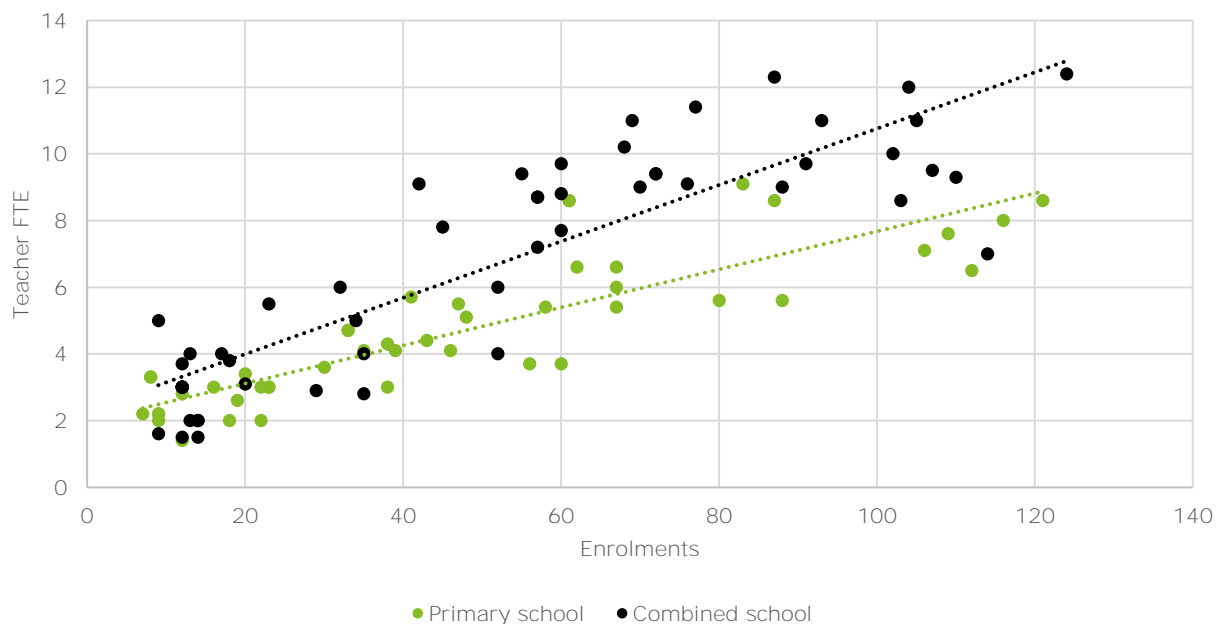
“We haven’t had secondary for over 10 years now. We don’t have the provision here to run secondary, we don’t have housing and funding.” – LEaD committee members, very remote primary school

This finding is further supported through analysis of how other jurisdictions resource smaller combined schools compared to primary schools in regional and remote settings (Chart 2.13). Analysis shows that combined schools tend to require additional full time equivalent (FTE) per enrolment to support secondary education delivery (this difference is statistically significant at the

⁴⁵ Deloitte Access Economics, *Review of Effective Enrolment* (commissioned by the NT Department of Education, 2022) <<https://education.nt.gov.au/reviews-and-consultations/review-of-effective-enrolment>>.

95 per cent confidence level). It should be noted that this has further implications, including challenges of providing teacher housing.

Chart 2.13: Relationship between enrolments and teacher FTE for smaller primary and combined schools



Source: Deloitte Access Economics (2023) using MySchool data.

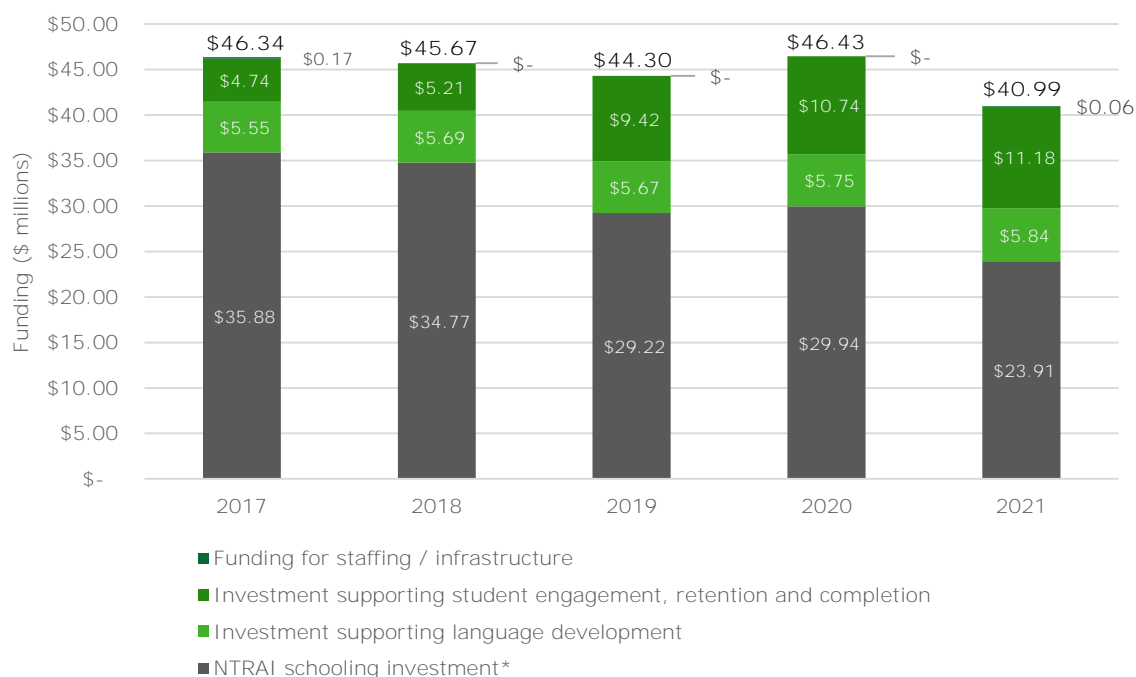
Note: Analysis of over 100 primary schools. Schools are selected from outer regional and remote areas across SA, WA, Queensland and NSW.

2.5.2 Distribution of targeted funding (non-SRM investment)

The NT Department of Education directly invests in initiatives and programs to support secondary education delivery through targeted funding allocations (which are in addition to the core school funding provided through the SNBF model). Over the five years from 2017 to 2021, the Department has invested approximately \$44.7 million per annum in education-related supports and programs that impact secondary students, equating to approximately \$3,564 per secondary student (Chart 2.14).⁴⁶

⁴⁶ Secondary education supports refers to funding allocated to support the delivery of education in schools that provide secondary education. Funding that is out-of-scope for this analysis includes disability-related funding; and homeland school funding.

Chart 2.14: Recent targeted investment in secondary education



Source: Deloitte Access Economics (2023) using NT student needs-based funding model data.

Notes: Only targeted investment related to the delivery of secondary education has been included in this analysis. Disability-related funding and homeland learning funding have been excluded from this analysis. All investment allocated towards NTRAI schooling supports have been included in this analysis.

For the purposes of the Review, targeted investment in secondary education has been divided into four categories:

- investment supporting language development: Targeted funding for supports to develop English language, such as Intensive English Units
- investment supporting student engagement, retention and completion: Targeted funding that aims to support students to engage in, and complete secondary education, such as alternative pathways and training centres and alternative pathways
- funding for staffing / infrastructure: Funding that supports schools to staff specific positions, or investment in school infrastructure, and
- NTRAI schooling investment: Investment via the NTRAI is distributed through the Children and Schooling Implementation Plan (CISP). This supports the implementation of the **Department’s Indigenous Education Strategy (2015-24)** in driving improved outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students including school readiness, attendance, attainment, engagement and educational achievement.

The appropriateness and effectiveness of investment across the first three categories mentioned are discussed in more detail in following sections.⁴⁷ It is important to note that there are other investment channels through which funding is distributed to secondary schools, namely VET investment and distance education. These are discussed throughout the report.

2.5.3 Supports for language development

Language programs aim to support the **development of students’** English language, and to support improved educational outcomes in secondary education. The NT government education system has historically funded two language support programs in secondary schools:

- intensive English Unit programs: Programs delivered in the Darwin region to support the development of **a child’s listening, speaking, reading and writing skills in English language**

⁴⁷ Investment in staffing and infrastructure is not assessed in this section.

across all subject areas for students arriving from overseas.⁴⁸ This accounts for approximately 52% of investment in language programs over the period 2017-2021.

- bilingual education programs: Education delivered in two languages; English and an Australian Aboriginal language spoken within a given region. The program aims to improve English language attainment and educational outcomes by improving the access of education to Aboriginal children that speak English as a second language.⁴⁹ This accounts for approximately 48% of investment in language programs over the period 2017-2021.

Over the period 2017 to 2021, the Department has invested approximately \$28.5 million in language supports. This investment has occurred in ten schools with secondary education students across the period 2017 to 2021. Analysis demonstrates that while historical targeted investment to support language development and funding of bilingual programs has been somewhat aligned with need, there are some regional gaps (as explored further in Section 6).

2.5.4 Supports for student engagement, retention and completion

Over the period 2017 to 2021, the NT government system has invested approximately \$31.9 million across 14 programs aimed at improving student engagement, retention and completions of secondary school students. This investment has occurred in 11 schools with secondary school students across the period (see Section 6.3.1 for further detail).⁵⁰

Targeted investment to support secondary student engagement and completion is heavily concentrated in a small number of schools. Investment has historically aligned to the *Indigenous Education Strategy*, which seeks to develop secondary education offerings in remote and regional population centres, rather than small, remote and very remote communities.⁵¹

Furthermore, targeted investment to support secondary student engagement, retention and completion has not been effectively aligned with need, with analysis demonstrating that just 9 per cent of students with high needs attended a school with access to targeted programs, while 83 per cent of students with the lowest need had access to these programs (see Section 6.3.1).

2.5.5 Aboriginal education supports (NTRAI)

The NTRAI is an agreement between the Commonwealth and NT Governments on Commonwealth funding allocations to improve outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families in remote areas.⁵² The NTRAI supports the implementation of the *Indigenous Education Strategy* (2015-24).

Over the period 2017 to 2021, the Commonwealth Government provided \$224 million to be allocated across the NT to improve schooling outcomes (supporting secondary schooling, including through funding the Transition Support Unit). This funding through this agreement was allocated through Children and Schooling Implementation Plans (CSIP), and focused on improving the school readiness, attendance, attainment, engagement and educational achievement of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students from remote and very remote communities. This agreement is due to cease and is in the process of being renewed in 2023.⁵³

⁴⁸ 'English as a second language', *Northern Territory Government*, (April 2022) <<https://nt.gov.au/learning/primary-and-secondary-students/english-as-a-second-language/intensive-english-unit-program>>.

⁴⁹ 'Bilingual education – guidelines', *Northern Territory Government* (November 2022) <https://education.nt.gov.au/__data/assets/pdf_file/0007/1108699/bilingual-education-guidelines.pdf>.

⁵⁰ This includes investments in government boarding schools, Tivendale Learning Connections, Taminmin Farm, Katherine Flexible Learning Centre, Barkly Juno Centre, Alice Outcomes at Risk Youth Program, Outdoor Education Unit, Palmerston Re-Engagement Centre, and Centres for Excellence.

⁵¹ B Wilson, *A share in the future - Review of Indigenous Education in the Northern Territory* (commissioned by the Northern Territory Department of Education, 2014).

⁵² Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, *Northern Territory Remote Aboriginal Investment* (2015-2016 to 2021-2022).

⁵³ *Ibid.*

The End of Term Review of the NTRAI (undertaken in 2022, building on the Mid Term Review) identified that it has been successful in:⁵⁴

- supporting students to access secondary education (through boarding). Approximately 400 students were supported to access boarding schools through the Transition Support Unit in 2022. These students had a Year 7 retention rate of above 78 per cent (above target).
- improving supply of Aboriginal educators. Approximately 145 Aboriginal Assistant Teachers were supported to obtain further accreditation in 2022, accounting for 77 per cent or all Aboriginal Assistant Teachers employed in NT Government funded schools (above target).

Evidence to-date suggests progress to-date against other key outcomes under the CISPs is mixed. For example, attendance rates for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students have not improved since 2015 and remains below target.⁵⁵ However, it is important to note that more time is needed to appropriately evaluate the effectiveness of the NTRAI on outcomes, as engagement and outcomes is impacted by a range of factors, such as health and community safety, which will take time to improve through the partnership.

However, the End of Term Review highlighted the efficiency of Implementation Plans due to the alignment with existing NT and Australian Government strategies, and with agreed evidence-based **priorities for both governments. The Review found that "by complementing and strengthening existing areas of focus, it allowed the pooling of resources towards common goals and used existing evidence bases."**⁵⁶ This suggests that future funding agreements should take a similar approach, and be used as a mechanism to achieve best practice in service delivery and drive continued improvement where there is evidence of positive progress for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students, and close the gap in achievement.

2.6 Overcoming challenges of delivery and implementation

There are ongoing implementation challenges, and the benefits of change from past policy reform are still to be realised. A different model of implementation and change is required to support achievement of desired outcomes into the future.

The investment and policy reform over past decades have resulted in limited improvement in key educational outcomes. These efforts have been impacted by, among other things, the unique and pronounced challenges of the delivery context, and the fidelity of implementation and delivery.

For instance, the separation of middle and senior school in urban areas, stemming from the 2003 *Report on future directions for secondary education* had intended to provide safe and supportive learning environments, deliver pastoral care and wellbeing support. However, these benefits are still to be realised, and stakeholders consulted with for the Review consistently share a perception that this has not been effectively implemented (explored further in Section 5.1).

Challenges have also been observed in relation to infrastructure across the NT, for example VET facilities and Trade Training Centres (TTC). Stakeholders note that, despite infrastructure investment, these have not been fully leveraged or utilised, nor have sufficient linkages been created to enable widened access.

Finally, while system reforms are an ongoing exercise, stakeholder consultations undertaken throughout the Review revealed a sense of fatigue relating to past changes and scepticism towards further change. Many stakeholders referenced past delivery modes that made a difference in their context yet no longer exist or have evolved in unproductive ways, the introduction and standing down of programs over time, and to some extent, Departmental restructures, which were consistently raised as examples of historic challenges in implementation and delivery that have limited the progress that can be made.

⁵⁴ Data is not available to exclusively report the extent of funding allocated to support secondary student outcomes through the Children and Schooling Implementation Plan. Further, the Review is unable to assess the equity or sufficiency of investment to achieve outcomes.

⁵⁵ The National Partnership on Northern Territory Remote Aboriginal Investment, *End of Term Review* (2022).

⁵⁶ *Ibid*.

Despite these challenges, it is important to acknowledge that there are sites of best practice where innovative delivery is occurring across the NT. Identifying what drives these outcomes (including the necessary services and supports), and the conditions in which implementation has been successful, is a key next step in scaling and embedding across the NT. Considerations for implementation are further outlined in Section 9.

3 The Review's vision for the future

3.1 Vision for the system

This section sets out **the Review's vision for the NT secondary schooling system**, based on the case for equity for improvement, and motivates its recommendations. The vision sets out what the Review considers should be the overarching direction of reform to the NT Government secondary education system, which would be achieved when recommendations from the Review are implemented.

The vision is brought to life by a Delivery Model of secondary education (see Section 3.2), which **provides a vehicle for the implementation of the Review's recommendations and, ultimately**, the overarching goal to ensure that there is a guaranteed standard of local secondary school provision in all locations that can drive improved engagement and outcomes for all students.

The Review's vision is for a system that is built on:

An excellent and equitable system that supports all students to achieve

The Northern Territory's *Education Strategy* sets a course to becoming the most improving education system in Australia; a strong and equitable public education system where every child has the opportunity to engage, grow and achieve. Underpinning this is the Alice Springs (Mparntwe) Declaration, which sets out a goal for the Australian education system to promote excellence and equity, providing all learners with equality of opportunity that enables them to reach their potential and achieve their highest educational outcomes.

The Northern Territory can build on three key existing and inherent strengths as a basis for secondary education delivery that realises this outcome and achieves excellence and equity for all students.

Firstly, the Review identifies that there is a strong spine of schools that currently delivering diverse and high-quality pathways to the NTCET that can be the base for future delivery.

Secondly, there are sites of best practice, where innovative delivery is occurring to achieve outcomes for young people. There are models of practice starting to deliver positive indications of increased engagement and outcomes in schooling, that emphasise two-way learning, Aboriginal governance, ownership and authority, and culturally safe and appropriate approaches (with Learning on Country being a key example). The Northern Territory is well poised to identify a path forward to sustain momentum, expand and scale these successes effectively across varying contexts, where there are conditions and community readiness and aspiration to implement (Recommendations 3.3 and 3.6).

Thirdly, there are several aspects in which the Northern Territory can establish itself as nation-leading, building on its inherent strengths and the agility that comes from being a relatively small system (in terms of population size). For instance, through the flexibility of its senior secondary certificate (and the learning opportunities this generates for students), the strength of its distance education models, its relationality and working in partnership, and First Nations education, the Northern Territory can build on its assets of language, knowledge and culture. There are notable opportunities to further recognise and accredit Aboriginal cultural learning, knowledge and competencies (Recommendation 1.1).

Although it will take significant work, the recommendations and vision set out for the system have the potential to change the paradigm in secondary education, ensuring that learning design is relevant and can engage young people, and that their learning success can be recognised.

A guaranteed standard of local secondary school provision for all students, regardless of geographic location

A guaranteed standard of provision means that all students will have a pathway in their local community to complete the NTCET and achieve core literacy and numeracy skills, which forms the foundation of success beyond school. Achieving this goal would see the NT Government *move away from the current policy, set out through the Indigenous Education Strategy, that relies on boarding as the primary means for students in remote and very remote communities to access senior secondary education.*

The model of delivery to achieve this standard is flexible (as defined by the SACE Board and NT Board of Studies, where there are numerous options that contribute towards the NTCET), supporting students to pursue the pathway options that are most meaningful to them, based on their needs and aspirations for secondary schooling and beyond. This includes academic, vocational and cultural pathways to NTCET completion that are built on core literacy and numeracy attainment to the standard required to complete Year 12 (i.e., Level 3 of the Australian Core Skills Framework), which is fundamental to schooling achievement and, more broadly, meaningful participation in the economic, social, and cultural domains of contemporary life.

Local secondary education will be supported by additional modes of delivery accessed through the regional model and/or distance education, to provide choice of high-quality options that are tailored to and meet the needs of individual local communities (see Recommendation 3.3 and 3.4).

The Northern Territory can provide choice to students and families through offering diverse pathways. As such, there is a continued role for the system to play in facilitating boarding pathways (as there will always be students who benefit from accessing mainstream education and traditional models of boarding, either within the NT or interstate, as well as communities with long histories of successful boarding experiences and outcomes).

However, the system should place the weight of further investment towards strengthening access to high quality local secondary education provision rather than traditional boarding options. In doing so, the system can work towards creating meaningful choice of pathways for students and families, and reduce its reliance on boarding pathways (Recommendation 3.3 and 3.6).

Communities that prefer boarding pathways should also be supported by the system to plan for and provide options that allow students to engage with secondary provision, where they return to community from boarding. There should be additional accountability measures in place to ensure this occurs.

Delivery will be enabled by a resourcing and staffing model that is adequate and supports every school to provide secondary education, along with critical enablers and supports such as connectivity, technology solutions and workforce development (Recommendations 5.1 and 5.2).

A learning design that is engaging and drives student outcomes through ensuring continuity of learning, effective transitions and meaningful learning

Culturally responsive and meaningful learning design can be a distinguishing feature of the NT education system. The NT can be a leading jurisdiction in terms of innovating and adapting the Australian Curriculum to be flexible, culturally responsive, and engaging for students (Recommendation 3.1 and 3.2).

The system also has an opportunity to support transitions throughout secondary schooling, by moving away from the current model of middle schooling towards more comprehensive models over time. Where implemented successfully and through close consultation with local school communities, this will support students to effectively transition throughout secondary schooling and break down silos between existing middle and senior secondary schools (Recommendation 2.2).

A model of delivery that is differentiated and needs-based, supporting schools to deliver meaningful and flexible pathways to completion

The Northern Territory can aspire to be a schooling system that, as a whole, offers universal possibilities for pathways, equality of access for young people in all contexts, and flexibility of pathways to suit their aspirations for life beyond school. However, it is clear these pathways cannot be delivered in the same way in all locations and should not be the same in every context and every school.

The context of the Northern Territory calls for an approach that is designed from the top down (identifying local industry and skills needs, and providing guided choice to schools), while building from the ground up (ensuring community aspirations are reflected in the design of pathways, and equipping students with the skills, knowledge and capabilities to take the next step beyond schooling). This place-based approach is brought to life through the proposed Delivery Model **outlined below, which provides a vehicle for the implementation of the Review's recommendations.**

An approach to realising change that emphasises stability, continuity and sustained focus

The history of policy reform in the NT is characterised by significant change. It is not unsurprising that there have been historic and ongoing implementation challenges, and that the benefits of change are still to be fully identified and realised. In this environment, there are risks associated with moving too rapidly from current areas of focus and investment, particularly where there is growing momentum and emerging evidence of uptake and positive outcomes being achieved. However, the Review does not suggest that there should be no change.

While it is clear that improvements can be made within the existing envelope of funding for the system, the greatest likelihood of success and impact will come with additional investment. Indeed, the recommendations for change, set out in the Review to strengthen provision across the NT, will require significant additional resourcing directly in schools and communities, the central and regional layers of the system, and in empowering communities and increasing local decision-making and capacity to deliver. Driving the intended improvement in educational engagement and outcomes for young people will also require working in partnership across multiple sectors, government, community organisations and other key stakeholders.

The opportunity in the next phase of reform is to ensure continuity and longevity of initiatives and programs that are starting to gain traction in the system (e.g., Learning on Country), ensure coordination and coherence of delivery, while also taking an intentional approach to grow capability to implement, develop and assure programs, and plan for their sustainability. Building on the strengths, preserving the progress, relationships and work that has been undertaken over past decades will be a necessary base upon which future reform in the Northern Territory can be pursued.

3.2 Proposed Delivery Model of secondary education

To achieve the vision outlined above, the Review sets out a proposed Delivery Model for secondary education (Figure 3.2). The Delivery Model provides a framework for how the system can strengthen provision and provide differentiated and needs-based support for schools to deliver secondary education to a guaranteed standard set out in the vision (high quality pathway options that contribute towards achievement of the NTCET). It works to support the implementation of the recommendations of the Review detailed further below (and summarised in Figure 3.3).

The Delivery Model sets out a systematic approach that also enables place-based delivery, as set out in the vision for secondary education delivery. This reflects the strong conviction heard across the stakeholder consultations that secondary education delivery needs to be aligned with local context, tailored to community aspirations and local skills needs and employment opportunities, and school capacity to deliver.

It recognises and builds upon the strengths of the system for secondary education delivery, while also acknowledging the preconditions and constraints to delivery, and setting out a path forward with appropriate resourcing and support required to enable access to pathways across diverse contexts.

Overview of school types

The Delivery Model comprises four different types of delivery that are observed within the Northern Territory (developed through findings of the Review), and which are presented in Figure 3.2. These types of delivery are based on a set of school contextual factors and delivery criteria that influence delivery in each context, as outlined below.

The Delivery Model first builds on the current strengths in the system through a strong spine of schools located in the regional centres of the NT (Type 1). These schools are the largest settings of the system, have established infrastructure and facilities, and currently deliver diverse and high-quality pathways to the NTCET. This Delivery Model sets out that these schools can play a more systemic role in delivering secondary education, and can be leveraged by regional offices to **expand neighbouring schools' access to delivery modes, form communities of practice, and support** with service delivery and coordination, i.e., through annex models. This will require clear expectations of delivery, and a clear governance model that defines the role of the school and regional offices.

There are also schools in the system that deliver specialised pathways in their local community (Type 2). These schools are typically larger remote schools, or homeland learning centres. These schools have established infrastructure or facilities, access to trainers or staff (i.e., to deliver VET), and may deliver specialised programs that align with the specific vocational opportunities in their local community.

There are smaller schools in remote and very remote areas (including area schools) that provide a number of pathway options towards the NTCET, as enabled by connectivity and critical mass of students (Type 3). These schools access pathways through the regional model (e.g., block intensives, and may be accredited to deliver SACE through the regional model, or a school number in select cases).

The Delivery Model also sets out how to strengthen secondary education provision in very small and very remote schools, to achieve core literacy and numeracy outcomes and have access to pathways that contribute towards NTCET attainment (Type 4). These schools are characterised by some challenging, and relatively fixed, contextual factors (i.e., distance from neighbouring schools, or ability to reach a critical mass of students). This will require different solutions and resourcing to enable delivery to the guaranteed standard (through defined and select pathways). Over time, these schools should be supported to progress in terms of maturity where there are improvements in connectivity that allow for delivery of multiple modes, akin to Type 3 schools.

Context informs the design of delivery modes and support for schools

The above context of each school type, including a series of contextual factors, capacity to deliver, and local community aspirations, subsequently inform the:

- delivery modes, or options and pathways that contribute towards NTCET completion (i.e., VET, NTCET Stage I and Stage II subjects, distance education, etc)
- resourcing needs: including staffing and other supports (at the school, regional and central levels of the system) that are required to enable delivery. There will be increased levels of resourcing required to support schools from Type 1 to Type 4.

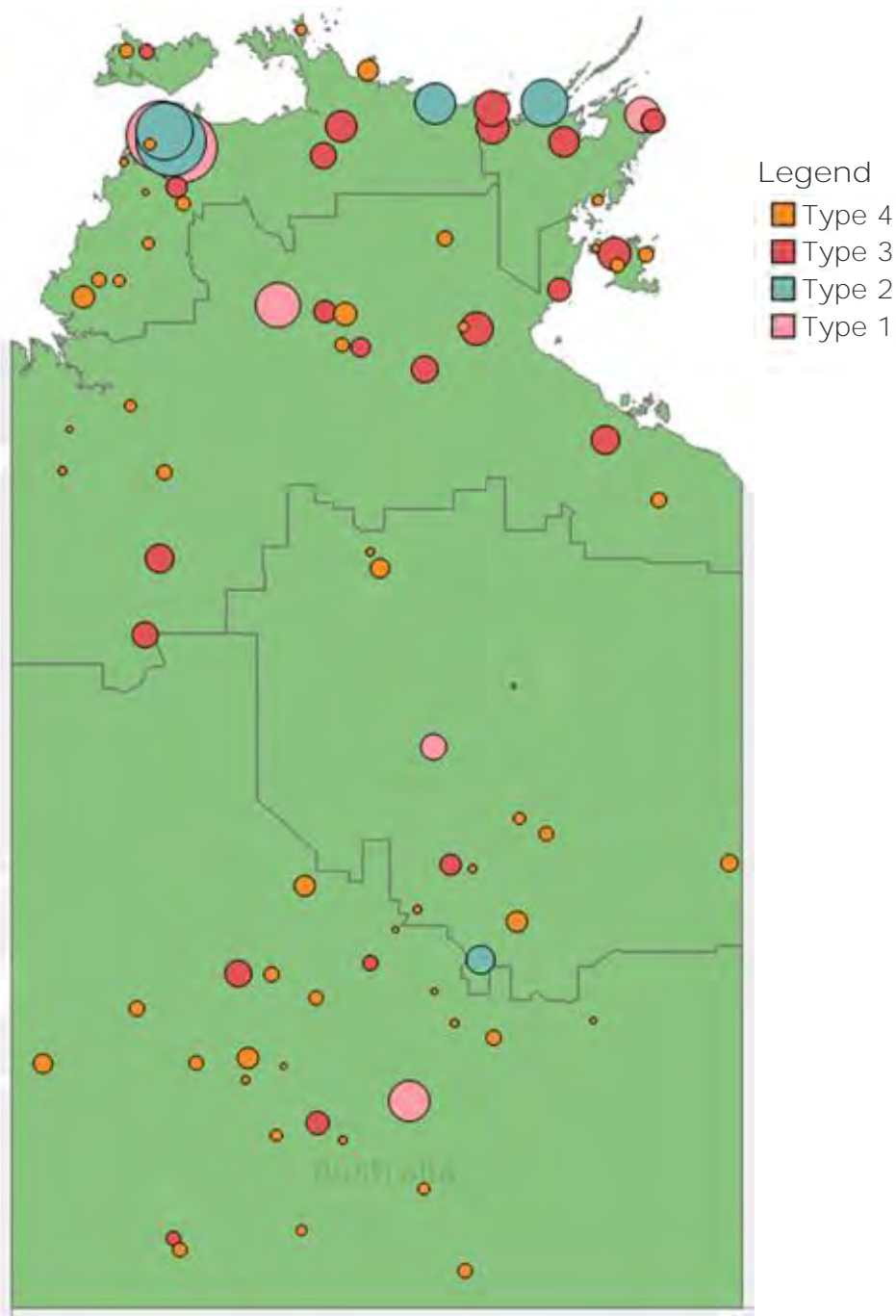
Implementation considerations

It is envisaged that the Delivery Model would be **used to guide the system's approach to** identifying school types and contextual factors, and subsequently, the indicative delivery modes. As such, this will ultimately govern the modes of delivery across regions and the NT as part of a broader, coordinated plan and overall design of provision and plan for pathways (later explored in Recommendation 2.1).

This enables a more coordinated, coherent and consistent approach to delivery that ensures schools are supported to deliver to the guaranteed standard and provide pathways to NTCET completion, while also ensuring pathways in individual contexts are sufficiently tailored and place-based with sufficient support from both the regional and central layers of the system.

A preliminary mapping of school types, based on the delivery model criteria, was undertaken (illustrated in Figure 3.1 below).⁵⁷

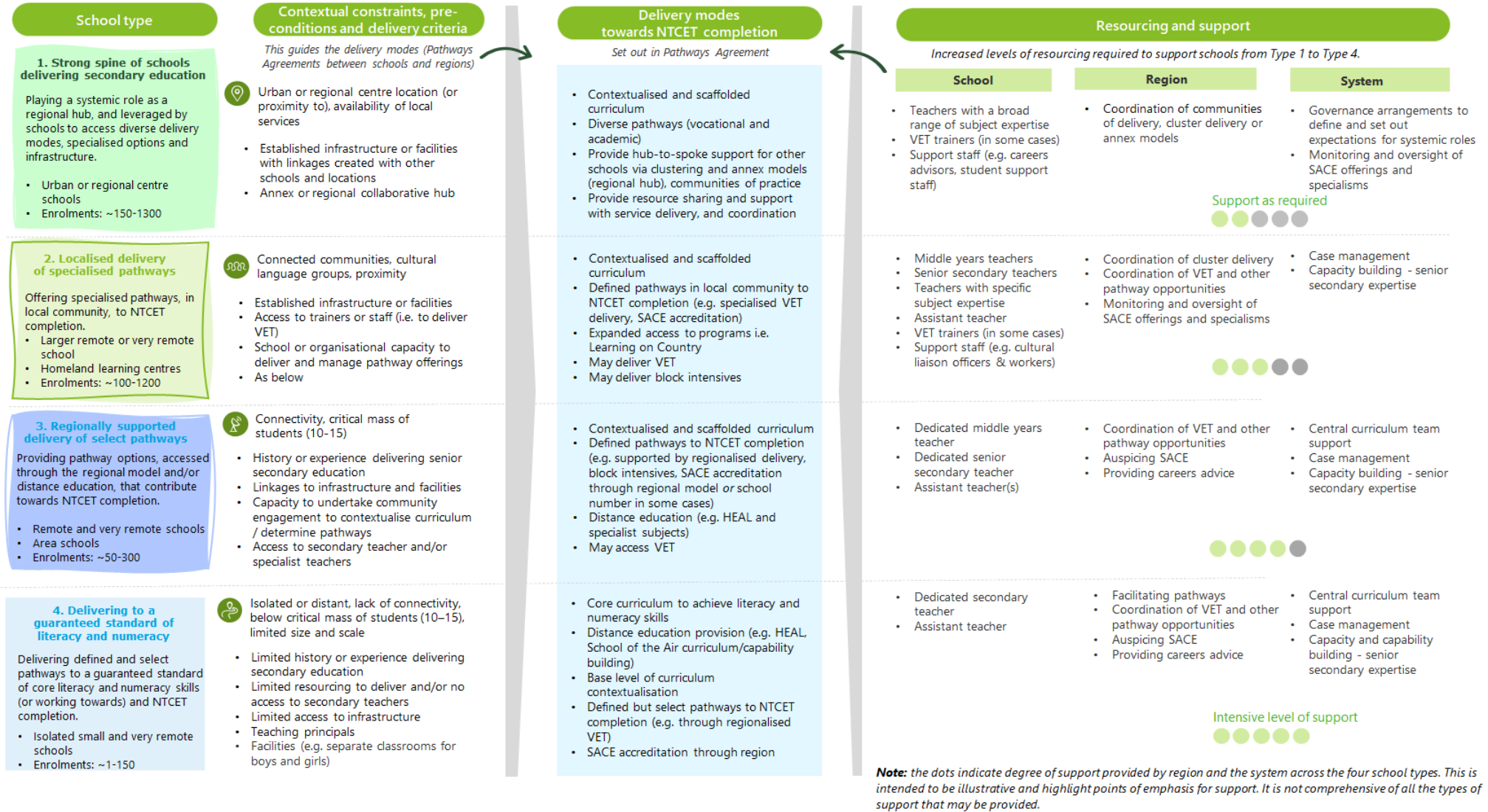
Figure 3.1: Mapping of school types based on delivery model criteria



Source: Deloitte Access Economics (2023).

⁵⁷ Based on initial analysis of system administrative data and consultation findings, point-in-time estimates for numbers of schools that fall within each school type are as follows: Type 4 (n=58), Type 3 (n=27), Type 2 (n=6) and Type 1 (n=6). It is envisaged that these numbers may fluctuate due to the nature of the school types, i.e. through changes in contextual factors, or changes in delivery over time.

Figure 3.2: Proposed Delivery Model of secondary education

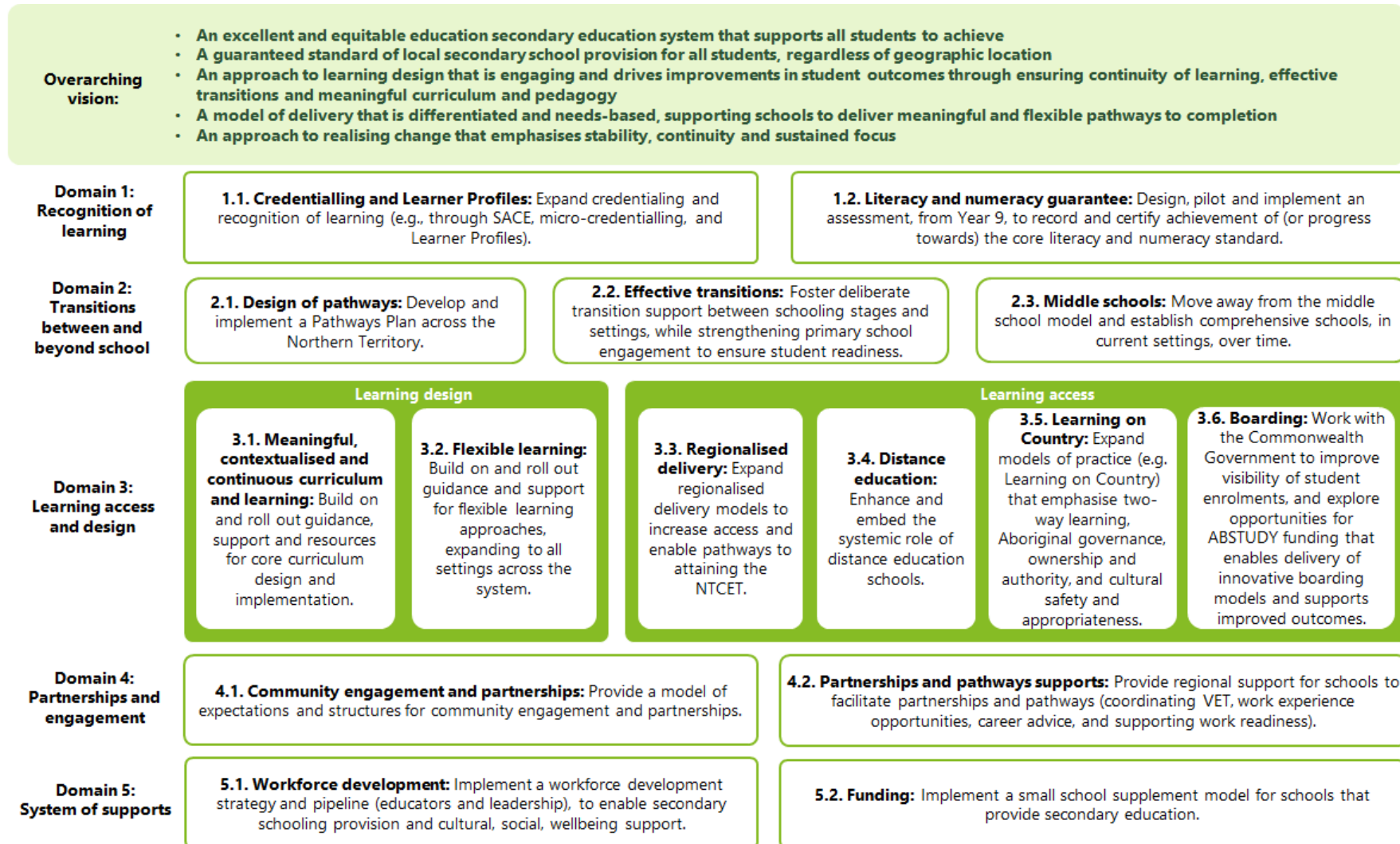


Note: the dots indicate degree of support provided by region and the system across the four school types. This is intended to be illustrative and highlight points of emphasis for support. It is not comprehensive of all the types of support that may be provided.

Source: Deloitte Access Economics.

An overview of the Review recommendations is provided in Figure 3.3 below.

Figure 3.3: Overview of Review recommendations



Source: Deloitte Access Economics.

4 Recognition of learning

Key findings: Recognition of learning

- Finding 1: Stakeholders described a range of desired outcomes that form the basis of an effective, high quality education system. Overall, there is a clear emphasis on the value and importance of completing school among students and communities across all parts of the NT. The outcomes described by stakeholders include:
 - Student retention and engagement throughout schooling
 - NTCET attainment, and raising the level of attainment over time
 - Meaningful pathways for students to employment, apprenticeships or training, which may occur at the end of Year 10 and Year 11
 - Students achieving core literacy and numeracy outcomes at point of exit or completion of schooling
 - Developing learner agency and the learner as a whole person
 - Embedding recognition and expectation of First Nations knowledge.
- Finding 2: There is a need for the NT government system to articulate, and recognise a broader conception of success in secondary schooling.
 - Students should be able to demonstrate learning success in ways that are not currently **recognised by the system’s traditional academic metrics.**
 - Rich learning, experiences and successes are occurring across the NT, with growing opportunities for these to be formally recognised and contribute towards completion.
 - **Learner Profiles are an opportunity to recognise students’ attributes, achievements, capabilities, and cultural knowledge and experiences that reflect their aspirations for learning.**
- Finding 3: The current senior secondary certificate (NTCET), delivered through the South Australian Certificate of Education Board (SACE), is a key strength that offers significant opportunities for recognising learning and providing a pathway to school completion.
 - The system is on a path to recognising and accrediting Aboriginal cultural learning and knowledge, with opportunities to further expand this.
 - There are opportunities for the system to ensure that all students are registered and on a pathway to NTCET completion.
 - Despite the flexibility and opportunities offered within the NTCET, there is a disconnect between the intended flexibility of what schools could offer, and what they are offering in practice.
 - In the absence of Year 12 completion, students do not typically have any certification of what they have achieved through schooling. Recognising these achievements could have several benefits, for example assisting students to consider their learning milestones (including literacy and numeracy skills), pathways through school, and acting as a scaffold for senior secondary schooling.

4.1 Recognising a wide definition of success for students and the system

This section explores key outcomes for the NT government system **associated with the system's** Headline Improvement Measures, and broader conceptions of success that were widely articulated by stakeholders.

4.1.1 Key outcomes for the NT government system

Stakeholders described a broad set of outcomes that the Northern Territory educational system should strive to achieve. These outcomes aligned with the key outcomes in the *Education NT Strategy (2021-25)*, in particular Year 12 completion, effective transitions into and beyond secondary schooling, and student engagement. However, broader outcomes for the secondary schooling system, and for students, were consistently raised through the Review. All of the desired outcomes were noted as important, and form the basis of an effective, high quality education system (and are explored in this section).

Student retention and engagement throughout schooling is the key outcome for the system.

The Review heard consistent agreement among stakeholders that a key outcome for the system is to ensure students can progress towards completion of schooling, with their skills credentialed appropriately to move into appropriate pathways post-schooling (whether it is further education, training or work). Stakeholders consistently noted that, while engaging students in learning is a critical outcome for the system, students remain engaged only if they see a clear purpose to their learning, that helps them to progress throughout schooling and towards desired pathways.

"I think we need to keep people engaged as long as possible in school by whatever means. Part of that is giving them subjects to do that they find interesting, for example short courses." – Expert Reference Network stakeholder

This outcome has important implications for ensuring that learning design in the Northern Territory system is meaningful, keeps students engaged, and equips them with the knowledge, skills and capabilities they need for their aspirations post-schooling (as explored in Section 6.1).

Many stakeholders hold the view that NTCET attainment, and raising the level of attainment over time, is an outcome to work towards.

The importance of finishing Year 12 and attaining the NTCET was widely recognised by stakeholder groups across all locations of the NT. Students who participated in consultations for the Review described how they aspire to complete the NTCET, as it leads to key outcomes including employment opportunities:

"I'm aiming to get back into school for Year 11 and 12. I'm aiming to pass the NTCET as it helps with employment." – Student, outer regional training centre

"It [NTCET] allows other things to flourish." – School stakeholder

"A better job, going from school to work." – Student, very remote comprehensive school

In remote communities, students also described the importance of seeing other students finishing Year 12 and attaining the NTCET, and having this success celebrated by community and through school graduation ceremonies. This helps students see that school completion is possible, and that it is an outcome that they too can achieve.

On the other hand, the purpose and benefits of NTCET completion (including the pathways it provides for students post-schooling) is not always well understood by stakeholders, including students. Some stakeholders may hold the belief that the certificate is not necessary in certain contexts, and that it is possible to transition to desired pathways without the NTCET (for example, training or employment).

As a result, there is a need for the purpose of the NTCET to be clearly defined and communicated to students and their families. The rationale for this is clear; the benefits that would result from

improved communications include greater clarity and understanding for students regarding how they can progress to this goal, and knowledge of the purpose and outcomes of attaining the NTCET, including the post-schooling pathways to which this could lead. This would also include articulating how the NTCET could lead to wider access to training, allow them to take on a different role in community, or set them up for further education, training or work. More generally, this can **support students' aspiration and** increased awareness of career possibilities.

The provision of career advice early in secondary schooling and throughout is important for supporting this objective. Career advice (which can encompass careers counsellors, or resources on careers websites, etc) is critical in the Northern Territory context, particularly in remote areas, as there are fewer opportunities for students to gain exposure to a wide range of industries, employers and resources. The Review heard a strong message of **"students can't be what they can't see"**, and importance of careers advice was continually reinforced by stakeholders as a key success factor in supporting effective transitions throughout schooling.

A further consideration for the system is that supporting NTCET attainment also requires deliberate learning design that keeps students engaged, and that equips students with the skills, knowledge and capabilities required to take their next steps (see Section 6).

Stakeholders expressed that success is also when students leave to pursue a pathway to employment, apprenticeships or training, which may be prior to Year 12 completion.

While school completion is a key outcome of focus for the system, stakeholders also noted that success is also achieved when students continue on a pathway to employment or training, which may occur before they complete Year 12. Stakeholders described that, for example, a student gaining an apprenticeship should also be viewed as success, and celebrated as such. Specifically, some stakeholders explored the possibility of SBATs being utilised to contribute towards the NTCET, noting that data and systems would need to be connected for this to occur.

However, it is important to note that research consistently underscores that Year 12 qualifications⁵⁸ and additional time in school, whether academic or vocational pathways are pursued, can provide significant benefits in terms of employment prospects, readiness and higher earnings over the long run.⁵⁹ As such, the aim for the system should be geared towards supporting students to complete, ensuring that schooling is appropriately designed to be meaningful, relevant and engaging to students (regardless of desired post-schooling pathways), who must ultimately see the purpose and end goal of remaining in school to complete Year 12.

Stakeholders also expressed that it is important for the system to have greater visibility and relationships to students who leave schooling. **Currently, the system has little visibility of students' post-school destinations, limited mechanisms to monitor the career pathway taken, and therefore little oversight of their pathways.** As a result, the system is limited in its ability to provide students with support as they transition into the workforce, and to support students to continue on their pathway to achieving the NTCET over time (which can occur through a variety of ways after leaving school).

As outlined in the **Review's** vision, the goal for the NT secondary schooling system is to provide pathways, in all contexts, that can contribute towards school completion. The links to the legislation are discussed in Section 6.3 and 6.4.

The schooling system must support students to achieve core literacy and numeracy outcomes at point of exit and/or school completion.

Stakeholders noted the underlying need for students to achieve core literacy and numeracy skills at point of exit and/or completion of schooling, and also pointed to the importance of ensuring students are equipped with digital literacy skills. The literacy and numeracy benchmarks in the

⁵⁸ S Lamb and S Huo, 'Counting the costs of lost opportunity in Australian education' (2017), *Mitchell Institute Report*.

⁵⁹ A Leigh, 'Returns to Education in Australia' (2008), *Economic Papers: A Journal of Applied Economics and Policy*.

NTCET is currently set at the Australian Core Skills Framework (ACSF)'s **Level 3** descriptions in reading, writing and numeracy, consistent with the standard used in senior secondary qualifications across the country.

The need for core literacy and numeracy skills was underscored by findings and recommendations of the **Australian Government's** *Report of the review of senior secondary pathways into work, further education and training (2020)*, which stated that "all students should expect that they will be supported to meet the minimum literacy, numeracy and digital literacy proficiency standards **which form the foundation for success beyond school**".

There is extensive evidence demonstrating how literacy and numeracy skills are fundamental to schooling achievement, and more broadly, meaningful participation in the economic, social and cultural domains of contemporary life. Literacy and numeracy outcomes have flow-on positive outcomes for students in the application of subject knowledge, and development of higher-order skills, and improved achievement and attainment. Furthermore, at an individual level, research has shown that small gains in literacy can have long-lasting impacts.⁶⁰ There is also a relationship between foundation skills and labour force participation, and can also impact on health and social outcomes.⁶¹ There is evidence to suggest that foundation skills impact employment opportunities, and that low skill levels may further exacerbate employment challenges experienced by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and those living in remote areas. Low literacy can mean more contact with the justice system, and is considered one of many factors contributing to inequalities in health and social outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, including in crime and justice.⁶²

The weight of evidence and stakeholder views indicates an imperative and core role for the schooling system to ensure that students are completing school with the literacy and numeracy skills that will support them to succeed post-school in any pathway of their choosing (including further vocational pathways, which require literacy and numeracy skills), and to contribute and fully participate in society. It is also important that this objective is not pursued in isolation through secondary schooling only, as there is an important role for primary schools in developing, and being accountable for, **students' ability and readiness** to engage in secondary education.

Box 4.1: Online Literacy and Numeracy Assessment (OLNA), Western Australia⁶³

In 2016, Western Australia introduced the Online Literacy and Numeracy Assessment (OLNA) designed to enable students to successfully demonstrate the Western Australian Certificate of Education (WACE) minimum standard of literacy and numeracy. This is set at Level 3 of the Australian Core Skills Framework.

Students can demonstrate that they possess the minimum standard of literacy and numeracy either by completing the OLNA, or by achieving a Band 8 or higher in reading, writing and numeracy in the Year 9 NAPLAN tests. The assessment occurs each year in March and September for young people in Years 10, 11 and 12. Once participants have passed the minimum standard, they are no longer required to sit the assessment again. There are six opportunities to pass this assessment.

Some have linked improved Year 9 NAPLAN results for WA to the introduction of the OLNA testing requirement, as students who achieve highly in NAPLAN can use these results to satisfy the OLNA assessment (rather than having to sit a further assessment in Year 10), although others have highlighted declining rates of students graduating with a WACE following the **standard's introduction**.

⁶⁰ L Condelli, 'Changing the Odds: Informing Policy with Research on How Adult Learners Succeed' (2010).

⁶¹ Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development 2013b, OECD Skills Outlook 2013: First Results from the Survey of Adult Skills <https://www.oecd-ilibrary.org/education/oecd-skills-outlook-2013_9789264204256-en>.

⁶² Australian Government Institute of Criminology, *Trends and issues in crime and criminal justice* (2018) <https://www.aic.gov.au/sites/default/files/2020-05/ti_yes_i_can_031218.pdf>.

⁶³ School Curriculum and Standards Authority, *OLNA*. (n.d) <<https://senior-secondary.scsa.wa.edu.au/assessment/olna>>.

A successful system is one that embeds recognition and expectation of First Nations knowledge, language and culture.

Embedding recognition and expectation of Aboriginal knowledge, language and culture was a significant and consistent theme throughout the Review. In particular, this includes ensuring that Aboriginal culture, knowledge and culture is seen as a strength that can be built upon in schooling, and supporting students to maintain their connections to community, land and culture as part of a true 'two-way' education approach.

As described in the following submissions to the Review:

"In remote Australia, approximately two-thirds of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children speak an Australian Indigenous language.⁶⁴ The Territory is home to this rich and vibrant cultural diversity. We strongly encourage a shift where schools and teachers embrace an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander viewpoint to build on students' strengths, including their home language skills." – *Submission from the Indigenous Education Consultative Meeting Members*

"Better recognition and learning must start with embedding strengths-based, high-expectations approaches, which provide First Nations students the opportunity to thrive throughout their schooling. It must also provide options for students to access quality schooling while maintaining their connection with community, land and culture. More effort is required to ensure First Nations students' multilingual backgrounds are seen as a strength, including through further exploration of community aspirations for bilingual and two-way learning education approaches." – *Submission from the National Indigenous Australians Agency*

In embedding Aboriginal knowledge, language and culture into the schooling system, it is important to acknowledge that the system must uphold cultural protocols or customary laws of the language owners and their intellectual property in relation to teaching and learning materials. As such, a path to recognition would need to be negotiated in each individual community. In other jurisdictions, for example, the Queensland government schooling system has an Indigenous Cultural and Intellectual Property protocol (ICIP) for this process, primarily covering languages, but also other ICIP such as stories, songs, artwork or cultural knowledge.

Furthermore, in expanding recognition and expectation of First Nations knowledge, language and culture, it will be important for the NT Department to understand the effectiveness of targeted funding and bilingual education (explored further throughout Section 6.1).

Stakeholders described various conceptions of a successful schooling system, including one that develops learner agency and the learner as a whole person with the skills, capabilities and mindsets for the future.

Stakeholders held the view that traditional knowledge and skills are no longer sufficient for students to achieve knowledge, skills and learning success through their schooling. This is an increasingly held view both nationally and internationally, and was noted in Review consultations and seen by stakeholders as being highly applicable to the Northern Territory context.

⁶⁴ Australian Bureau of Statistics, *National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Survey, 2014-15* (Catalogue No. 4714.0, 2016).

Box 4.2: Skills, capabilities and mindsets for the future

The OECD's 2023 Recommendation of the Council on Creating Better Opportunities for Young People sets out the skills, capabilities and mindsets that young people need to develop, with implications for the role of secondary education systems, and the way these are recognised. This includes:⁶⁵

- ensure all young people of all backgrounds and in all circumstances acquire relevant knowledge and develop appropriate skills and competencies.
 - this includes basic skills (literacy, numeracy and problem-solving), and social, civic, emotional, entrepreneurial, financial, communication, creativity and language skills.
- promote wellbeing in education and training institutions, including by equipping young people with socioemotional skills and coping strategies to protect against stress and the impacts of adversity on wellbeing.
- enable all young people to participate in an increasingly digitalised world.
 - equip young people with digital skills and problem-solving skills for the digital environment
 - empower young people to engage safely, healthily and responsibly in the digital environment

Members of the Expert Reference Network consulted with for the Review described learner agency as a key outcome for the system to strive towards. The aim is to help students develop skills such as critical thinking, problem solving, and self-regulation, which are crucial for lifelong learning and success in schooling and beyond. Resulting implications for design of learning and models of delivery in secondary schooling include prioritising **learners'** interests, experiences, and motivations for learning. This also includes supporting students to understand themselves as learners, determining the areas of learning where they can succeed, and feeling as though there are opportunities for learning success.

In a classroom setting, learner agency might be demonstrated through activities such as self-directed study, project-based learning, or the use of personal learning plans, which currently make up components of the senior secondary certificate.

"We need students to get depth in areas of interest to them, and we also need them to come away with attitudes, values, skills and dispositions about who they are, what they're learning, where they're going, and how to get there." – *Expert Reference Network member*

Overall, there are questions, outside the scope of the Review, that get to the purpose of secondary education in society. Further work in defining this will help to articulate what impact looks like, measures of success, and how to design a system that meets the learning aspirations of students.

Box 4.3: Case study on learning success and agency

Big Picture Learning (BPL) represents an innovative approach to representing success. BPL **focuses on learner agency, with students' learning recognised through exhibitions of learning or achievement** instead of standardised tests.

The Big Picture Network consists of over 275 schools in the United States of America. Big Picture Learning International focuses on schools outside of the USA, including over 40 schools in Australia (and Taminmin College in the NT). The Big Picture programs operating in Australia range from within-school academies to whole-school programs and in some cases greenfield sites.

BPL aims to put students at the centre of their learning, specifically the decision around what, how, and when they learn. This personally motivates students based on their passions and capabilities, with support provided by peers, advisory teachers, expert mentors, and family.

⁶⁵ OECD, *Recommendation of the Council on Creating Better Opportunities for Young People* (2023).

There is an emphasis on the relevance of learning to the 'real world', with students combining academic work with real-world internships, and planning their pathways to future employment, training, or study. Students' personalised learning plans are focused on their goals and the people and processes needed to achieve these goals. For example, advisors, internships, assessments, mentors, and parents.

Success is evaluated through the exhibition of learning or achievement (in a portfolio) rather **than standardised tests. Students' final year results are presented in a Learner Profile**, highlighting attainments, and supported by an interactive online portfolio of work.

There are several elements that, in combination, distinguish Big Picture Learning from other designs of schooling. This includes:

- **personalisation:** Each student develops a learning plan that explores their interests and passions, and identifies personal learning goals, authentic project work, and wider curriculum requirements. This plan is reviewed and updated regularly.
- **academic rigour:** Students are challenged to deepen their learning and improve their performance across quantitative reasoning, empirical reasoning, social reasoning, communication skills, and personal qualities.
- **authentic assessment:** Each term the students exhibit their portfolios of work to a panel made up of the advisory teacher, family, peers, the mentor, and others from the community. Students provide evidence of progress against their learning goals and reflect on the learning process.
- **leaving to learn:** Students work two days a week in an interest-based internship with a mentor from the community on a project that is connected to their learning goals.
- **diverse and enduring partnerships:** A Big Picture School has a strong focus on building and creating external partnerships. These include partnerships with the family, mentors, local councils, businesses, universities, TAFE colleges and other training providers.

Finding 1: Stakeholders described a range of desired outcomes that form the basis of an effective, high quality education system. Overall, there is a clear emphasis on the value and importance of completing school among students and communities across all parts of the NT.

4.1.2 The need to articulate a broader conception of success

Overall, there is a strongly held belief among stakeholders that every student should be supported to succeed and develop the skills, capabilities and attributes required post-schooling, and with these successes recognised and certified by the system. This section sets out broader conceptions of success, as described by stakeholders, and the ways in which the system is on a path to recognising these.

Students should be able to demonstrate learning success, including in ways that are not currently recognised by the system's traditional metrics.

Stakeholders described that the **traditionally 'narrow' views of success** for systems, including a focus on academic success, are no longer sufficient to represent the richness and diversity of learning and success for students in secondary schooling.

The Northern Territory government system is moving away from this, and towards recognising other measures of success, as well as articulating the importance of other pathways rather than a sole focus on academic pathways. This is occurring through the work of the SACE Board, and through this the NTCET, which is designed to recognise what students aspire to and should achieve through secondary schooling, and offers opportunities, learning design (including subjects) and credentialling to develop the necessary attributes, capabilities and skills.

In working towards recognition of a broad range of learning success, stakeholders also described that it is essential to achieve a parity of access and opportunity for students. It is critical that broadening the recognition of learning does not lead to a two-speed system that privileges certain

success or pathways over others, whether it is an academic, vocational or cultural pathway (or some combination) that students are pursuing.

Rich learning, experiences and successes are occurring across the NT, with growing opportunities for these to be formally recognised and contribute towards completion.

The Review identified examples across the Territory where students are experiencing rich learning, undertaking cultural activities, experiences and successes that occur outside of traditional academic measures of success.

For example, Learning on Country (explored in more detail in Section 6.3) is noted as a strong example of two-way, bicultural education, where students undertake VET units in locally applicable areas in collaboration with local industry. The learning that occurs through the program contributes credits towards the NTCET, drivers licenses, first aid certificates and Cert IIs in conservation and land management.

However, such experiences are not always formally credentialled outside of programs such as Learning on Country and academic and VET pathways, and do not consistently contribute towards completion of Year 12.

Further, stakeholders noted the rich cultural experiences that students gain, for example when undertaking cultural ceremony or leadership opportunities in community, and the significant opportunity to have these appropriately recognised (through credentialling) and contributing towards Year 12 completion.

Ceremonial and cultural practices and knowledge should be acknowledged as a strength, and recognised through certification where it is appropriate and possible to do so.

Students in remote communities are often required to participate in traditional ceremonial practices and events. Sometimes this can result in students missing school, which may lead to lost school learning and can affect their likelihood of completing schooling or training.

However, students gain deep cultural knowledge and experiences through this process that are not currently acknowledged and recognised by the system. As reflected in a submission from Northern Land Council:

"It is important for the [NT Department of Education] to recognise, where appropriate, this other learning and training and give it some status to ensure it is recognised along with mainstream learning. Cultural obligations should not disadvantage students or possibly contribute to them not finishing their official educational requirements." – Submission from Northern Land Council

The Review heard that, rather than resulting in negative consequences for students, there should be a shift in narrative around appropriately recognising the rich cultural experiences and leadership opportunities students have taken and demonstrated, with **one school leader noting "we can't bend students to us."** This was further noted in a submission to the Review, with the Aboriginal Peak Organisations NT (APO NT) Aboriginal Education Steering Committee calling on the Department to **"honour the participation and attendance of students in cultural ceremonies and activities as part of their learning and attendance."**

This could be recognised through developing capability frameworks (i.e., as aligned with Australian Curriculum capabilities), or showcased in a Learner Profile that may be relevant for pathways into tertiary and industry (see below).

Learner Profiles are an opportunity to recognise personal attributes, abilities, achievements and capabilities of students that reflect their aspirations for learning, and allow students to present their achievements on their pathways beyond school.

The Review heard from a range of stakeholders, including school, system stakeholders and academics, who consistently noted the potential benefits of representing achievements in a more

rounded way than current year school certificates and reports, for example through a Learner Profile approach.

Learner Profiles have been advocated for in the 2020 *Review of senior secondary pathways into work, further education and training*, and stakeholders across several jurisdictions who were consulted with throughout the Review also recognised its relevance, applicability and potential benefit for the Northern Territory context.

These stakeholders noted opportunities for Learner Profiles to record not only academic achievements, skills and knowledge, but also evidence of how students have developed as a person, in a non-prescriptive fashion. This **could include students' broader capabilities and experiences** (for example, cultural and caring responsibilities, sporting achievements, contributing to Clontarf and Stars programs, and Duke of Edinburgh awards), driver's licences, white cards and preparing a resume, **in addition to traditional 'academic' reporting**.

Experts consulted for the Review emphasised the importance of having such an avenue to show and recognise these accomplishments, even if they do not directly contribute towards the achievement of the NTCET. This would provide a record of achievements and attributes for students that could prove to be valuable in pursuing post-school pathways.

"This inspires students to say, 'I can do things. It inspires you to think, I can go further, I can go on after learning.' – *Expert Reference Network member*

"I would love it if a young person could say, 'I've learned to do problem solving because in my community I did this', or 'I was volunteering for this'. You could actually pick up those attributes as well as how you performed in subjects. You could have those as both sides of the coin." – *Expert Reference Network member*

Introducing Learner Profiles could also have utility for industry and employers. However, this would require further work to connect with industry stakeholders, and ensure that what they require and value (i.e., in terms of employability skills and other capabilities) is appropriately aligned with what is recorded on a Learner Profile and how students might describe themselves. Furthermore, another critical element is the need for employers and industry to buy-in and value the recorded capabilities.

Implementing Learner Profiles in the Northern Territory context would require coordination and partnership with the SACE Board, who are currently undertaking piloting in select schools, systems and jurisdictions, to allow for effective integration with the NTCET. Furthermore, co-design with schools and stakeholders, and learning from the contextual factors at a school and system level, would also be required to support this change.

Finding 2: There is a need for the NT government system to articulate and recognise a broader conception of success in secondary schooling.

4.1.3 Significant opportunities are available through the senior secondary certificate [The design of the NTCET \(delivered through the SACE\) is a recognised strength of the Northern Territory system that offers strengths and opportunities for the system.](#)

A key strength of the NT system is the flexibility of the NTCET, which allows students to pursue various pathway options towards completion. As the SACE does not dictate how the certificate is designed at the local school level, it can be tailored to school context. As such, broader reform of the NTCET model is not required to provide viable pathways for students pursuing academic, vocational or cultural pathways, in contrast to other Australian jurisdictions.

There are multiple initiatives and subjects that can flexibly contribute to the completion through NTCET credits, including Stage I and Stage II subjects, VET courses, Clontarf or Stars, and Duke of Edinburgh. As discussed in Appendix C, a minimum of 200 credits is needed to complete the NTCET, with there being a number of ways to gain credits.

This flexibility presents significant opportunities for expanded learning and relevance of curriculum opportunities for students across each site, yet does not present a trade-off between the rigour of the certificate, as noted in consultation with the SACE Board. The SACE Board also emphasised the **'tightness' around the learning** entitlement for students (to ensure outcomes for secondary schooling are met), and **'looseness' around the way students can achieve that** (with multiple flexible options contributing to completion). Further, they noted that the compliance around the certification allows schools to embrace the contextual nuance that suits their local setting.

For example, one school described examples of how it leverages the flexibility of the NTCET in practice. The school builds the certificate **around what is 'core'** and strengths of their local context (in this instance, Learning on Country), accreditation of cultural learning, and then identifies what can be further scaffolded to provide diverse pathway opportunities for students. The school expanded further on this, noting:

*"We were very deliberate that we will offer this. These subjects are aligned to what people want in the community. We were narrow but deep – this is what we can offer, this is what **we're good at, these have authentic pathways** into jobs [here]." – Principal, very remote combined school*

The flexibility of its senior secondary certificate, and the unique context, suggests the NT can establish itself as nation-leading in the way it supports a diversity of pathways and outcomes for students. The SACE Board recognises the qualifications of the certificate in a range of different ways. A modified NTCET is available as the same certificate and provided to students completing the modified subjects. This was noted favourably by a school leader at a special school:

*"We do the modified NTCET, and our school and teachers are the experts in the field in respect to that, making sure that certificate is accessible for all our students. We are strong advocates that success is different for each student, **and it's not all about getting an ATAR**. We started just with our more capable students in the outreach classes, but now all our students are accessing the Year 12 certificate and even higher support students are accessing the Year 12 certificate." – School leader, outer regional special school*

Despite the widespread positive perception of the NTCET, there remains several opportunities to fully leverage and enact its flexibility in practice, and to ensure it is appropriately scaffolded back into the years 7 to 9 curriculum (see Section 4.1.4).

[The system is on a path to recognising and accrediting Aboriginal cultural learning and knowledge.](#)

The flexibility of the NTCET is being pushed further through cultural and language recognition, which represents a significant future direction for credentialling of learning, with opportunities to expand further across the NT.

Department stakeholders and school leaders acknowledged the strength of current pilot programs underway at ten sites to credential Aboriginal cultural knowledge and competencies as Stage I and Stage II subjects and cultural learning units. These are delivered and assessed by Elders in the community, involving them in secondary schooling education. Schools also noted that *"there is rigour of assessments – **we're not handing over credits, Elders have at times not passed students because they haven't learned.**"*

"Students are assuming their roles within the community, with their development respected by the school." – School leader, very remote combined school

There is strong support for these credentials in the schools and communities where they are currently being piloted, and for these to be further expanded across the NT. Expanding the pilots will require collaboration with the SACE Board and genuine co-design with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities and leadership. While stakeholders noted there would be significant work involved (including professional development and other system supports), there was a strong conviction that doing so (in parallel with broader efforts around recognition of learning) has the

potential to change the paradigm on secondary education in the Northern Territory, and ensure learning is relevant, culturally responsive and engaging for young people.

The following discussion paper submission from the Central Australian Aboriginal Congress supported the recognition of cultural learning and knowledge, however included important caveats:

“Congress strongly supports any approach that recognises and builds upon the cultural foundations of our young people’s lives. However, this should not be at the expense of providing high quality formal education that prepares young Aboriginal people to be successful. In our experience – especially through our Remote Health Boards – Aboriginal families want their children to be well-educated and want that education to prepare them to be successful in the wider Australian context, as well as to have the skills to contribute to their own communities or beyond.

The provision of primary health care by Congress and other [Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Services] ACCHSs provides a useful analogy: we provide high quality evidence-informed care which is also culturally responsive. We have a ‘both/and’ not an ‘either/or’ approach and reject the idea that quality care and health outcomes can be traded off against cultural appropriateness.

We advocate the same philosophy to the Department of Education in relation to schooling, noting that it will require (a) genuine Aboriginal leadership and **(2) sustained investment.**”
– *Submission from the Central Australian Aboriginal Congress*

Furthermore, a culturally responsive workforce is required to deliver on this aspiration, including Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander and non-Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander teachers, educators, and community members who work at the school (see Section 8). Fostering structures for community engagement and partnerships is also required in working with communities to identify opportunities for this recognition to occur. There are considerations that relate to the cultural load and burden that would be placed on the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander workforce (particularly given the practical difficulties of a non-Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander person assessing culture, knowledge or language), which must be appropriately balanced with efforts to recognise learning and success of students.

These considerations were reinforced in a submission from the Indigenous Education Consultative Meeting Members, which referenced the day-to-day of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander workforce, with relevance to recognition of learning:

“... These staff have a wealth of knowledge and capability that is appropriate to draw on for the success of the school and its students’ education outcomes, but this needs to be approached respectfully and with appropriate recognition of the contribution that they make. It is appropriate to have Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, with appropriate skills and experience, working in positions across all levels in a school environment. This contributes to a culturally safe and responsive environment where Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures and languages are visibly present and respected. However, too often we see these staff placed in junior positions with minimal recognition, but undue expectations on the support that they will provide to all staff.” – *Submission from Indigenous Education Consultative Meeting Members*

4.1.4 There are further opportunities to leverage the **NTCET’s** flexibility **Despite the flexibility and opportunities the NTCET offers, there is a disconnect between what is available or what schools could offer, and what is being enacted in practice.**

Consultations with schools highlighted further opportunities for the system to leverage the flexibility of the NTCET. The Review found varying levels of understanding and confidence among school leaders and teachers across the NT regarding the NTCET and how the flexibility is enacted in practice. For example, a remote school consulted for the Review described how they had designed the NTCET to build on the strengths and context of the local community, while others had not designed such an approach and had limited understanding of the full breadth of pathways that can contribute towards certificate completion.

Consultation with the NT Youth Peak Voice group revealed a possible disconnect between the intended and enacted flexibility of the curriculum, where students did not perceive the NTCET as flexible. **Where schools' understanding of the NTCET is limited, this may** possibly preclude the flexibility from being fully leveraged in practice. This was further emphasised by a discussion paper survey response, which called for *"More understanding of the NTCET as a flexible pathway that incorporates locally based and contextually relevant learning."*

Furthermore, it is likely that the skill and capacity required to deliver the senior secondary certificate may not exist in some remote schools, particularly where secondary schooling expertise has been eroded over time or is lacking, for example due to teacher workforce constraints. Furthermore, gaining a SACE number to deliver the NTCET is noted as a complex undertaking and is an area where remote schools may require support from the Department to navigate.

This indicates that there is benefit to the system being more intentional around communicating what is possible within the NTCET, providing professional development, and building workforce capability. This may also encompass guidance and support for schools to identify what is core to their local context (e.g. how to design around strengths or pathway opportunities), and the components that can be flexible. In turn, this is likely to enhance the effectiveness of student transitions during schooling and to post-schooling pathways.

There are opportunities to ensure that all students have a SACE registration and are on a pathway to NTCET completion.

Stakeholders noted the opportunity for the system to ensure that every student is on a pathway to completion by registering students for the NTCET (through SACE). In 2021, there were 530 students in Years 10-12 across the NT without SACE registrations. Of these students, 96 were enrolled at the NT School of Distance Education while 434 were not.⁶⁶

There are benefits to ensuring students are set on this pathway early on, including greater clarity for students regarding pathways through and beyond school, and enabling the system to support student case management. This would also enable the system to identify markets and predictors, particularly around key retention points, towards completion and provide support where appropriate.

Where students have a SACE registration, there would also be increased capacity for the system to recognise achievements that students who are out of the system go on to achieve (e.g. further training or community activities), and contribute towards NTCET attainment over time.

This reinforces the opportunity for the system to ensure that all students are registered for the NTCET pathway, with the expectation that they will complete, and for the system to create opportunities for students who require support to reengage and continue on their education pathway.

Finding 3: The current senior secondary certificate (NTCET), delivered through the South Australian Certificate of Education Board (SACE), is a key strength that offers significant opportunities for recognising learning and providing a pathway to school completion.

4.1.5 The need to recognise success throughout secondary schooling
In the absence of Year 12 completion, students do not typically have any certification of their knowledge, skills and achievements achieved throughout their schooling.

Stakeholders consulted with for the Review noted that there is a lack of meaningful recognition of **students' learning success throughout the middle years**, in contrast to the senior years which recognises achievements in a broad range of areas through the NTCET.

⁶⁶ Based on analysis of 2021 NT student completions data.

“**[There’s] no meaningful pathway or recognition [in the middle years]. What do you get when you finish Year 10? Year 10 is put with senior secondary using a different curriculum, where’s their endpoint moving into Year 11 and 12? How can kids feel like they are working through something and achieving things?**” – Department of Education stakeholder

Stakeholders also referred to the need for more strengths-based reporting and assessment **throughout students’ schooling, noting this undermines students’ ability to experience learning** success, understand their milestones, and how these can be built upon during secondary schooling. These factors can contribute to disengagement during the middle years, as well as leading to students feeling disconnected from the end goal of Year 12 completion.

In this regard, establishing certification and milestones would alleviate some observed challenges, with benefits including more effective transitions through secondary schooling, improved retention, and learner agency. For example, this would help students to consider their learning achievements and milestones, and readiness to transition. There would also be an early and intentional focus on aspects of secondary schooling, for example reflecting literacy and numeracy achievement (and progress towards the level required for NTCET attainment), or provide inputs to the **Personal Learning Plan as part of the NTCET or a student’s Learner Profile.**

Stakeholders also noted that this would ensure that students (where leaving school before Year 12 completion) can have a record of their skills and achievements from schooling.

4.2 Recommendations for recognition of learning

The Review has identified two recommendations in response to findings within this domain. These recommendations reflect the significant opportunity for the system to recognise and certify learning of students, including through credentialling Aboriginal cultural learning, knowledge and competencies, and the broader skills, capabilities and attributes that students require to be successful in their pathways post-schooling.

An overview is provided below, followed by detailed recommendations.

The Review recommends expanding current systems of credentialling and recognition (Recommendation 1.1). Rather than representing a wholesale change for the system, it reinforces the current best practices and piloting occurring across the Northern Territory, and suggests a path forward to fully expand and realise the opportunities available through the senior years certificate. However, while further leveraging this flexibility is a key opportunity for the system, it is also important to not over broaden the NTCET, and to ensure it is also implemented with fidelity across contexts. System oversight, as well as guidance and capability building for schools to understand and utilise the flexibility of the NTCET, will be required. Pursuing this recommendation will require working in partnership, as further specified below.

The Review also recommends implementing, through a certificate in the middle years, a literacy and numeracy guarantee (Recommendation 1.2). The Review identifies that certificates to record achievement (or progress towards) the core literacy and numeracy standard is a key area of focus for the system in supporting students’ **progress throughout and beyond secondary** schooling.

It is also acknowledged that credentialling and assessment are not the sole solutions to achieving recognition of learning. A first order consideration is ensuring that the design of learning and curriculum is aligned with student interests and aspirations, is culturally responsive and relevant to context, and furthermore that it is appropriately supported by a workforce with knowledge and expertise of Aboriginal language, culture and knowledge. This is explored further in the related domains.

Recommendation 1.1: Expand systems of credentialling and recognition of learning
In relation to current systems of credentialling and recognition, the Department should:

- continue to work with the SACE Board to expand current pilots recognising Aboriginal culture and language, to other regions and schools
- expand micro-credentialling offerings that can contribute towards year 12 completion

- work with the SACE Board to explore opportunities for moderation, assessment and standards to occur (including for Stage I and Stage II subjects), and
- work in partnership with the SACE Board, academics and industry to design a Learner Profile **approach that would recognise students' attributes, abilities, and capture capabilities and experiences** – for students, parents and industry – and connect in with implementation following relevant Commonwealth reviews, including the 2020 *Review of senior secondary pathways into work, further education and training*.

In relation to the senior secondary certificate (NTCET), the Department should:

- build **schools'** awareness and develop understanding of the NTCET
- provide guidance to schools regarding how the flexibility of the SACE can be leveraged to generate expanded curriculum and learning opportunities, and contribute towards year 12 completion, and
- support capability building of schools as necessary to implement the flexibility of the certificate (and secondary education provision more generally).

Recommendation 1.2: Design, pilot and implement an assessment, from Year 9, to record and certify achievement of (or progress towards) the core literacy and numeracy standard

The Department should design, pilot, and – subject to the findings from the pilot – implement a mechanism to record achievement of, or progress towards, the core literacy and numeracy standard from Year 9, in line with other Australian jurisdictions such as WA and NSW. In the near term, this should be set at Level 3 of the Australian Core Skills Framework (ACSF) which is the standard required for attainment of the NTCET and consistent with other jurisdictions.

The Department should consider ways that achievement of the standard could be assessed. An efficient model would be to utilise Year 9 NAPLAN, as a default assessment to allow students to demonstrate proficiency (as is the case in WA). Supplementing, or in place of, year 9 NAPLAN may be the use of a bespoke assessment either developed in the NT or elsewhere, such as the Higher School Certificate (HSC) minimum standard test utilised in NSW.⁶⁷ Importantly, there should be flexibility in the manner in which students are able to demonstrate proficiency, both in terms of the timing and frequency of attempts of the test (while ensuring that its rigour is not unnecessarily compromised).

The Department should also engage with the SACE Board to understand how demonstration of proficiency through this assessment can support successful completion of the relevant essential English and Mathematics components of the SACE.

This record should be shared with schools and students to ensure there is intentional preparation around guaranteeing literacy and numeracy skills, and scaffolding students for senior secondary schooling and NTCET completion.

Where students have met the minimum literacy and numeracy standard, this would be recorded and schools would be supported to represent it as part of a certificate of achievement, including alongside a broader Learner Profile (Recommendation 1.1) that could be issued upon transition to senior schooling years, and/or at the completion of school (in support of Recommendation 2.2).

⁶⁷ The HSC minimum standard was announced in 2016 and implemented in 2020 as part of the Stronger HSC Standards reforms of the NSW government. Meeting the standard is a prerequisite for eligibility to receive the HSC credential, and is satisfied by sitting online tests for reading, writing and numeracy and attaining at least level 3 of the ACSF.

5 Transitions between and beyond school

Key findings: Transitions between and beyond school

- Finding 4: **The Northern Territory's unique model of middle and senior secondary schooling**, while motivated by student need, has not been effective and lacks the support of much of the education community. To-date, evidence suggests that middle schooling in the Northern Territory has not delivered on intended outcomes.
 - On the one hand, middle schools are seen by students to provide supportive environments when transitioning from primary school.
 - However, the intended pedagogical practices and wraparound supports in middle years have not been implemented as intended and are not distinguishable from other years of schooling.
 - Teachers at middle schools describe the siloing and partitioning of expertise that occurs and express the desire for a more comprehensive model that supports continuity of learning and relationships.
 - The structure of schooling poses as an additional risk factor for student retention through to senior secondary, and ultimately, Year 12 completion.
- Finding 5: Student transitions throughout schooling, and continuity of learning, are not occurring effectively. Enhancing these areas to support improved engagement and outcomes should be a key priority for the system.
 - Certain groups of NT students are much more likely to continue progressing through government secondary schools than others.
 - Students with a history of consistent attendance and from a background with socio-educational advantage are much more likely to continue in the following year.
 - Students attending comprehensive schools, and larger schools, are more likely to continue secondary schooling in the following year.
 - Aboriginal students, male students and students who moved regions in the last 12 months are less likely to continue in the following year.
 - Students attending in remote and very remote locations are less likely to continue in the following year.
 - There are several key factors to supporting effective transitions throughout secondary schooling. This includes preparedness of students when transitioning from primary schooling, continuity of learning and scaffolding of curriculum, intentional preparation and transition support, and strong relationships and partnerships.
 - There are several key factors to supporting effective transitions post-secondary schooling:
 - Clarity of pathways for students (including through career advice), alignment with student and community aspirations and local context, and support for schools to identify, navigate and manage pathways (i.e. VET and partnerships).
 - Provision of career advice throughout all years of secondary schooling, to support more intentional preparation and guidance, and mitigate common challenges to effective transitions.
 - Small schools have limited ability to identify and facilitate these pathways for students, who may aspire to stay on country, travel interstate or overseas, or pursue pathways to tertiary study.
- Finding 6: There are numerous pathways for students post-schooling. There is a need to ensure that pathways are meaningful, tailored to local context, and recognised as high quality, equal and complementary.

- There are a range of post-school pathways that students may pursue within the Northern Territory, including further study, employment and cultural roles within the community.
 - Pursuit of all pathways should contribute towards completion of the NTCET, and therefore rely on the achievement of core literacy and numeracy outcomes.
 - There is evidence of limited direct alignment of VETiS delivery to occupations experiencing employment and skill shortages in the NT, indicating potential scope for closer alignment with identified skill shortages, and increased coordination with the Department of Industry, Trade and Tourism (DITT), Industry Skills Advisory Council Northern Territory (ISACNT), and registered training organisations (RTOs).
- Finding 7: A deliberate, coordinated approach to providing pathways is required in a resource constrained system, where not all pathways can or should be offered in every location. There is need to ensure that pathways are contextually relevant, matched to the aspirations of students and local communities, and aligned with opportunities for further work, study or training.

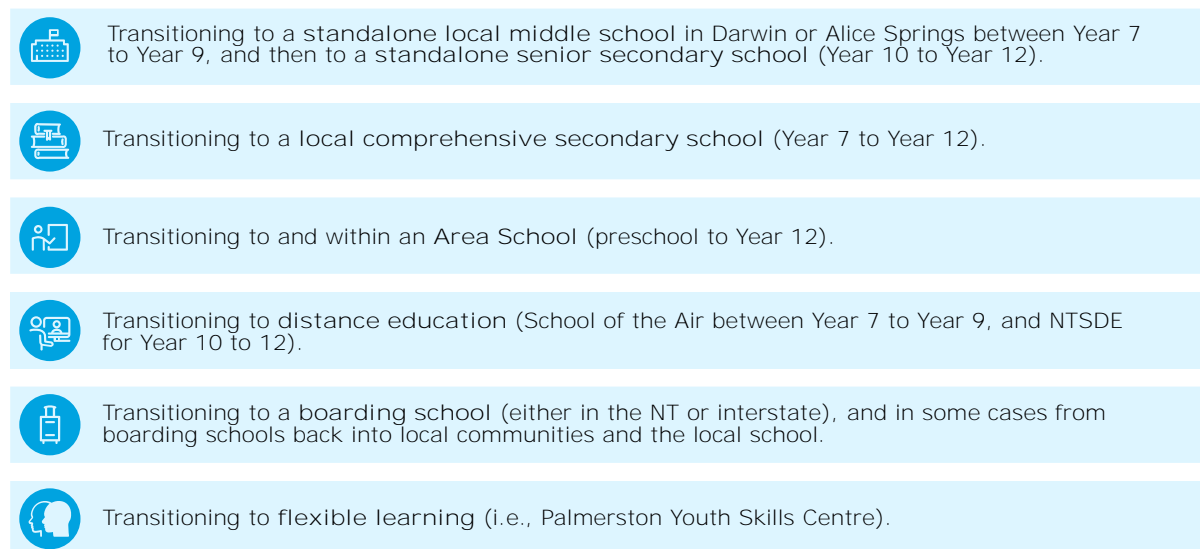
5.1 Transitions between the stages of schooling

5.1.1 Multiple models and transition points throughout secondary schooling The Northern Territory has a unique and complex model of secondary education provision, and multiple transition points.

Students in the Northern Territory experience several transition points as they progress through the stages of secondary schooling. Compared to other jurisdictions, transitions in the NT are unique in several ways. Specifically, there is an additional transition point between middle years and senior secondary years (in locations where there are standalone middle schools and senior secondary schools), a lack of comprehensive distance education schools, and a preference for secondary education delivery in urban areas for remote students (through a transition to boarding school).

Typical transition points into, and throughout secondary schooling, are illustrated in Figure 5.1:

Figure 5.1: Transition points into and throughout secondary schooling in the NT



Source: Deloitte Access Economics.

Each option provides choice and different models of schooling, for example regarding pedagogical approaches or learning environments for students, as well as catering for different student cohorts.

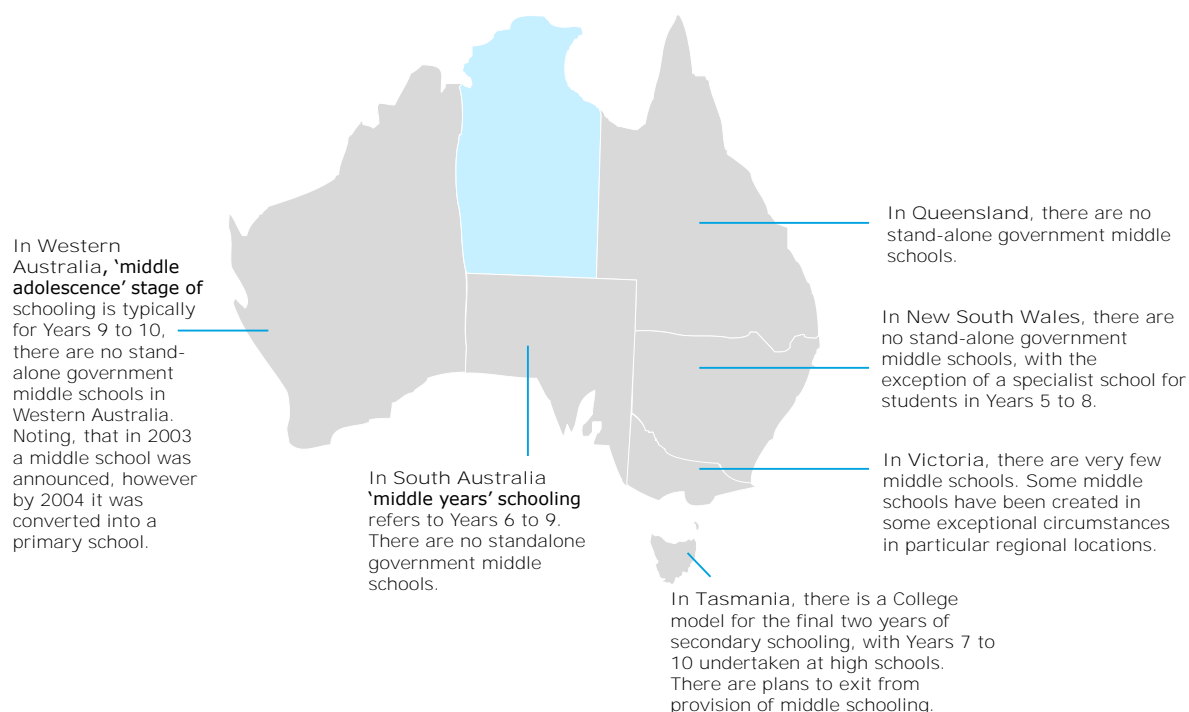
However, the current model of different school types (e.g. senior schools, middle schools, colleges, high schools) add to the complexity of secondary provision in the NT. Some stakeholders perceived the current policy provision as unclear or inconsistent, challenging to navigate for some students and parents, and is not as well established as it is in other jurisdictions.

“There appears to be almost no communication happening in the transition phase between primary, middle, senior schools. This is disruptive and confusing for children and families who struggle with bureaucracy and may require support to navigate systems.” – Response to discussion paper questionnaire

Furthermore, the current models pose risks due to the multiple transition points and structural elements within the NT. Risks include challenges to student retention and completion and impacts on continuity of learning likely to be observed in the absence of more comprehensive models of schooling.

With the exception of the ACT, Victoria and Tasmania, the Northern Territory is the only jurisdiction in Australia with standalone public middle schools, which were created following the implementation of recommendations from the 2003 *Report on future directions for secondary education*. While Tasmania currently has a College model for the final two years of secondary schooling, with Years 7 to 10 undertaken at high schools, there are plans to exit from provision of middle schooling in the state. While Victoria has very few middle schools, these have been created in exceptional circumstances in particular regional locations (Figure 5.2).

Figure 5.2 Approaches to middle schooling in Australia



Source: Deloitte Access Economics.

The 2003 Ramsey review recommended the development of middle schools in the NT ***“to deal with the wide span of learning required in secondary school, and the very different pedagogies (teaching and learning practices) needed to appeal to younger secondary-aged students, as compared with those required for young people approaching adulthood”***. The introduction of middle schools in the NT was to be accompanied by changes to the curriculum and pedagogy for both middle schools and senior secondary schools, and changes to the pre-existing organisational and physical structures of the schools.⁶⁸

This change aimed to provide a more supportive environment, in terms of socio-emotional support for middle school aged students, before entering senior secondary school. Additionally, it aimed to provide a teaching and learning and pedagogical approach to better service the middle years

⁶⁸ G Ramsey, *Report on future directions for secondary education in the Northern Territory* (commissioned by the Northern Territory Department of Education, 2003) <<http://hdl.voced.edu.au/10707/141240>>.

cohort. In part, the establishment of middle schools was also motivated by infrastructure limitations due to national movement of Year 7 students to secondary school, with some secondary schools (Years 8 to 12) having limited capacity for Year 7 students, as well as challenges in the Northern Territory with recruiting comprehensive secondary school principals.

In implementing the recommendations from the Ramsey review, five middle schools in the NT were subsequently created between 2006 and 2011 in urban areas (four in Darwin-Palmerston, and one in Alice Springs).⁶⁹ This included secondary school facilities being adapted to become middle schools, and the development of purpose-built facilities. The implementation of middle schooling was also accompanied by resources and guidance to support schools and teachers, including guides to planning, teaching, assessing, and reporting learning.⁷⁰

This shift resulted in an additional transition point into and throughout secondary schooling, from Year 6 to 7 (primary school to middle school) and Years 9 to 10 (middle school to senior secondary school).

5.1.2 Middle schooling has not delivered on intended outcomes due to both structural factors and implementation challenges

Middle schools are seen by students to provide supportive environments for students who transition from primary school, through an emphasis on pastoral care and wellbeing support.

As outlined in the intended rationale above, middle schools are intended to place a focus on providing pastoral care and wellbeing support for students. Students engaged with for the Review perceived middle schools as providing a supportive environment due to a perception of smoother transitions into a smaller middle school environment, rather than a large comprehensive school.

“It’s less hectic [at a middle school]. Not as much going on. It’s closer together, smaller, it’s easier to get around.” – *Student, middle school*

“There are Year 9s and 8s here, but with a big high school, there are lots of older people and it’s overwhelming and scarier.” – *Student, middle school*

“In middle school, the whole setup is different – there are no faculties, students are taught in year levels. Each school year shared two classes – so the same students would be in English, and Maths classes. It helps form relationships and gives an intermediate step to **changing classes.**” *Teacher, middle school*

On the other hand, some senior secondary students consulted for the Review expressed views that middle schooling did not adequately prepare them for the transition to what was often a larger senior secondary school, and noted they had experienced a large difference in learning environment and curriculum. The loss of relationships formed with teachers in middle schooling, and the need to get to know new teachers in a different environment, was also highlighted as a drawback in the additional transition to senior secondary school.

Pedagogical practices in middle years have not been implemented as intended, and at times are not distinguishable from primary years of schooling.

Although the 2003 *Report on future directions for secondary education* described essential features of middle years pedagogies, there is limited evidence that these practices are being implemented in middle schools. The Zbar *Review of middle schooling in the Northern Territory* (2014) found that there is significant variation in practice and performance between and within schools. A key issue identified was the lack of systemic direction for schooling in this stage, causing a lack of consistency.⁷¹

⁶⁹ Northern Territory Department of Education, *‘List of urban and remote schools’* (2023)

<<https://nt.gov.au/learning/primary-and-secondary-students/list-of-urban-and-remote-schools>>.

⁷⁰ V Zbar, *Review of middle schooling in the Northern Territory* (commissioned by the NT Department of Education, 2014).

⁷¹ Ibid.

Similarly, this Review also heard from some middle school students who described similarities with their experience of primary school: **"You learn stuff like you were in primary school"**, as well as other stakeholders who did not articulate a distinction in pedagogy that was specific to teaching the middle years cohort.

Consultations with middle school teachers also highlighted difficulties with teaching and learning in the middle years due to several factors, which include limited time to form relationships and build trust with students, limited opportunities for professional learning, and lack of opportunities to share expertise and collaborate, which in part was perceived to be due to a siloing effect between middle and senior secondary settings.

"It's hard to create a culture at this school. You do a huge amount to set behaviour expectations, and then you don't see a large amount of that success because they are set – and then they go. You have to start again with Year 7. A third of the school changes every year, that's a huge amount. Students come from six different primary schools – it's a huge workload." – *Teacher, remote middle school*

"I've never taught my actual method. To do that I'd need to go to [senior college] ... I want to stay here and have the option to teach towards different year levels." – *Teacher, outer regional middle school*

"My experience previously having been in a middle school, there's a lot of awareness and feeling around socio-emotional learning and behaviours and relationships. There is a different focus on senior secondary classes. I don't know if it's good for career experience." – *Teacher, outer regional middle school*

Additionally, the structure results in senior secondary schools teaching two curricula across three years: the Australian Curriculum in Year 10, and the SACE curriculum in Year 11 and 12. This results in confusion amongst some schools, and leads some schools to not teach the Australian Curriculum in Year 10 (focusing just on the SACE, or, in a handful of cases, the previous NT Board of Studies Year 10 curriculum).

5.1.3 Risk factors contributing to student retention and completion

The middle school structure presents an additional risk factor for student retention in the Northern Territory.

The middle school structure presents risks to student retention due to the additional point of transition between Year 9 and Year 10. Stakeholders noted that the transition point has created challenges for students and school staff, particularly the development of student-teacher relationships – a key success factor in learning, engagement and outcomes (including retention).

"We have a very structured environment here for them, whereas in senior school it's more self-motivated. For our cohort of students, who are often vulnerable, disadvantaged, and need socio-emotional support, they pack off to senior secondary school and start again in Year 10. There is nothing trauma-informed about the model we have. It takes a long time to build relationships with young people and by Year 9 they trust us, and we then say bye. There is a transition program, but nothing changes the fact that they're in a new environment, and that they don't have the relationships." – *Teacher, remote middle school*

Additionally, as described in a submission to the Review, the transition creates a risk of disengagement, lack of completion, and disrupts the continuity of relationships:

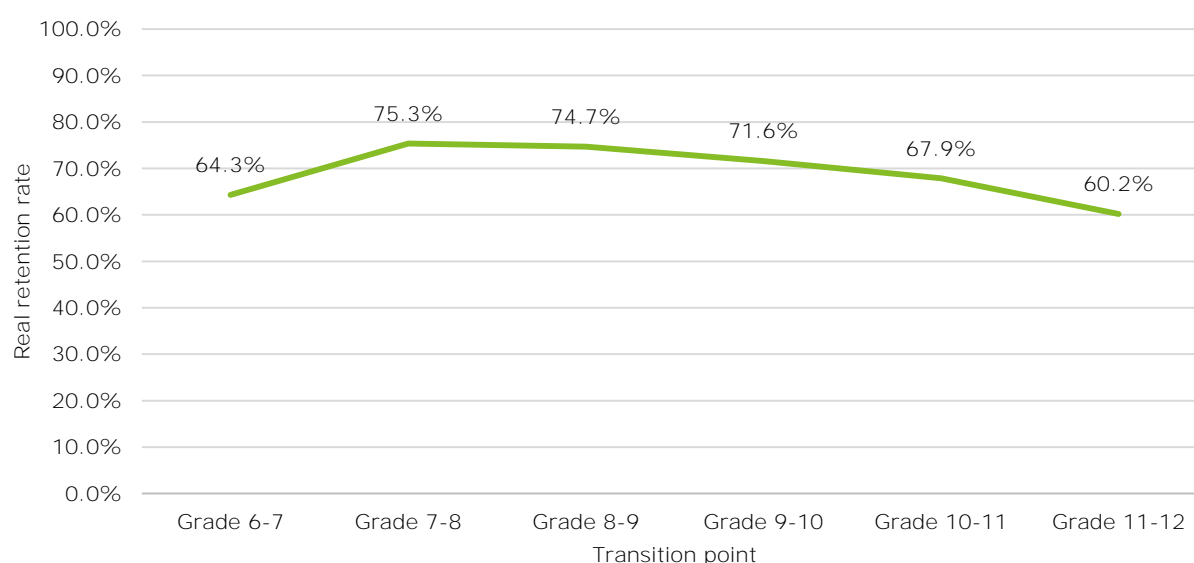
"Transitioning between schools creates a real risk of further disengagement and lack of completion. Relationships is the key factor for all students in secondary education. Continuity of relationships with adults who know them well supports a young person's learning pathway, mental health and wellbeing, feeling of inclusion and belonging and maintenance of a supportive peer group. Too often the move from one school to another creates an increase in disengagement." – *Submission from the NT Principals Association*

Stakeholders also noted the preference of some parents to have their child attend non-government school for the middle school years, particularly in catchment zones with standalone middle schools, and re-enter the government system in senior secondary years.

“I have personally seen parents walk away from [standalone middle school] ... My son went for a term, and we ran from that school... so many students are going to [private schools]. They’re looking for other choices.” – *Parent, outer regional senior secondary school*

Declining student retention rates during the middle years (both in comprehensive and standalone middle schools) is supported by analysis of system data, noting however that differences in retention rates between comprehensive and standalone middle schools could not be analysed. Analysis demonstrates that the real retention rate of students between Year 9 and 10 is 71.6 per cent, decreasing from 74.7 per cent for the transition from Year 8 to Year 9. The real retention rate drops from Year 10 to 11, reflecting that students may leave the system when they reach compulsory school age (Chart 5.1).

Chart 5.1: Real retention rate across the years of secondary school (2012-2022), for NT Government-funded schools



Source: Deloitte Access Economics (2023) using NT Census data.

Notes: Real retention is calculated as the probability that someone enrolled in a specific grade will enrol in the following grade in the following year. The analysis only considers enrolments in NT Government schools, and therefore does not capture migration across school systems and states & territories.

Students experience a disconnect when transitioning from middle to senior secondary schooling.

There is a disconnect for students when transitioning from middle and senior secondary schooling, which predominantly arises from differences in curriculum delivery and learning environments. Stakeholders in middle school and senior secondary settings also raised that the middle years curriculum is not sufficiently scaffolded to the senior years curriculum, to the point where some students do not feel that they have been adequately prepared for learning, and are not ready to engage in the curriculum following the transition.

The weight of evidence suggests that, while middle schooling provides a supportive environment for the post-primary transition, it is not always conducive to, or may not always prepare students adequately to transition smoothly into senior secondary schooling.

“Students who go into Year 10 are wildly unprepared. It’s like it’s an entirely different system. There’s a big divide between middle and secondary, we’re setting up for failure by having two separate systems... We have a very structured environment here for them, whereas in senior school it’s like they have to self-motivate.” – *Teacher, remote middle school*

“The culture and academic requirements between the two schools [middle and senior secondary] are incredibly stark.” – *Response to discussion paper questionnaire*

“In a middle school, there’s a lot of awareness around socioemotional learning and behaviours and relationships, [but] there is a different focus on what feels like the pointy end of the work [senior years].” – *School leader, remote middle school*

Finding 4: The Northern Territory’s unique model of middle and senior secondary schooling, while motivated by student need, has not been effective and lacks the support of much of the education community. To-date, evidence suggests that middle schooling in the Northern Territory has not delivered on intended outcomes.

Student characteristics associated with continuing secondary schooling in a government school in the following year include attendance, socio-educational advantage, gender, Aboriginal status, and mobility.

System data was analysed to identify student characteristics associated with continuing government schooling in the following year (used as a proxy measure for year-on-year real retention rates). The Review found that certain groups of NT students are much more likely to continue progressing through secondary schooling than others (see Chart 5.2 overleaf):

- History of consistent attendance: Students with an attendance rate that is 10 percentage points higher are 5.9% (confidence interval (CI): 5.7%-6.1%) more likely to continue secondary schooling in the following year.
- English as an additional language: Students that speak English as an additional language are 3.6% more likely to continue secondary schooling in the following year than students that speak English as a first language (CI: 3.0%-4.2%).⁷²
- Socio-educational advantage: Students with higher socio-educational advantage are 0.6% more likely to continue secondary schooling in the following year than students that have a lower socio-educational advantage (CI: 0.6%-0.8%).⁷³
- Gender: Male students are 1.3% less likely than female students to continue secondary schooling in the following year (CI: 0.8%-1.9%).
- Aboriginal: Aboriginal students are 0.9% less likely than non-Aboriginal students to continue secondary schooling in the following year (CI: 0.1%-1.7%).
- Student mobility: Students who moved regions to attend school in the last 12 months are 3.0% less likely to continue secondary schooling in the following year than students who did not move regions (CI: 2.2%-3.8%).

Remoteness, school type and school size are associated with students continuing with secondary schooling in a government school in the following year.

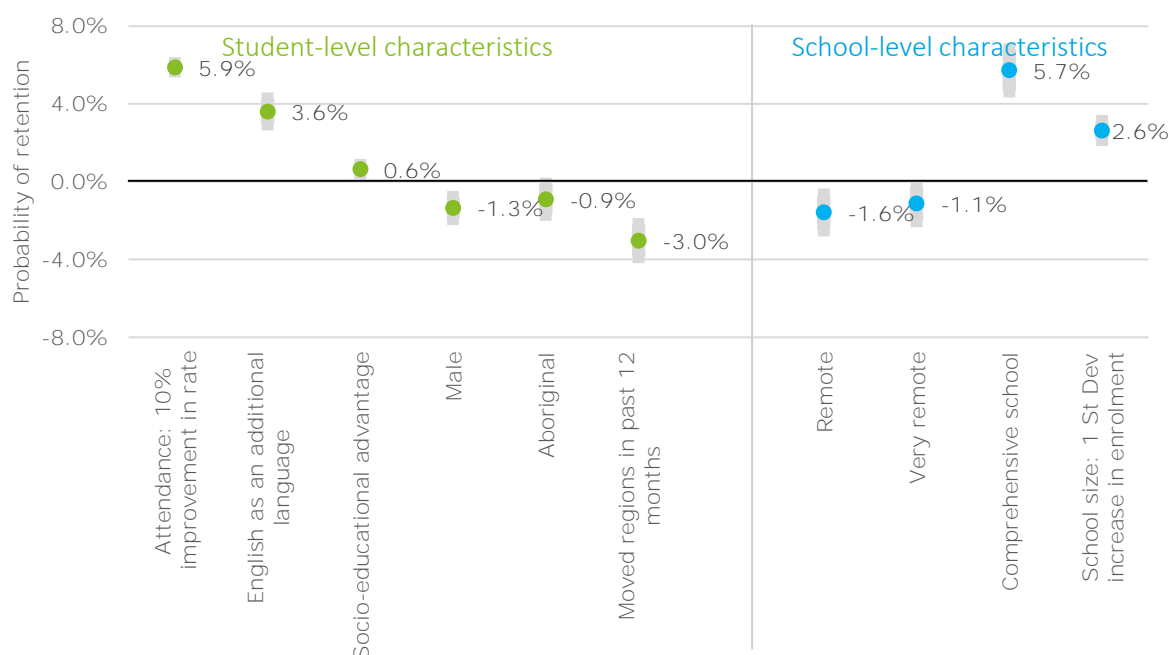
In addition, there are several school-level characteristics that influence the probability of students continuing with secondary schooling in a government school (see Chart 5.2 overleaf):

- Remoteness: Students attending schools in remote and very remote locations are 1.6% (CI: 0.7%-2.5%) and 1.1% (CI: 0.1%-2.0%) less likely than students who attend schools in Darwin to continue secondary schooling in the following year, respectively.
- School type: Students that attend comprehensive schools are 5.7% more likely to continue secondary schooling in the following year than students attending other types of schools (CI: 4.7%-6.8%). Attendance at other types of schools, such as middle schools are not associated with an increase in year-on-year retention rates of students.
- School size: The larger the school, the more likely students will continue schooling in the following year. A one standard deviation increase in a school’s student population is associated with a 2.6% (CI: 2.2%-3.1%) increase in the likelihood of progressing throughout schooling.

⁷² This result controls for whether a student is Aboriginal.

⁷³ Socio-educational advantage is defined as higher levels of education attainment of a student’s parents.

Chart 5.2 Drivers of year-on-year real retention outcomes from 2012 to 2022



Source: Deloitte Access Economics (2023) using NT Census data.

Note: This analysis measures the marginal impact of the 'driver' on the likelihood of secondary school retention for an average student. It measures the expected change in the outcome variable for each unit change in the predictor variable. Real retention is calculated as the probability that someone enrolled in a specific grade will enrol in the following grade in the following year. The analysis only considers enrolments in NT Government schools, and therefore does not capture migration across school systems and states & territories.

Dedicated transition support occurs within the Northern Territory; however, this only exists for facilitating pathways to boarding school.

Dedicated transition support is provided to students transitioning to boarding school, through the Transition Support Unit (TSU), as outlined in Box 5.1. However, support of this nature is not provided for other pathway options across the NT. The role of the TSU is explored further in Section 6.

Box 5.1: Overview of the Transition Support Unit

The Transition Support Unit (TSU) operates within the NT Department of Education. The TSU was established through the implementation of the *Indigenous Education Strategy (2015-24)* and is funded through the NTRAI.⁷⁴

The primary function of the TSU is to facilitate access to boarding schools, either across the NT or interstate, for students in remote and very remote communities who do not otherwise have secondary school options or pathways towards the NTCET. Currently this includes government, Catholic and independent schools.

The strategic intent of the TSU is to address the unique challenges faced by remote Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students when transitioning from primary to secondary boarding school. It aims to provide targeted support and resources to promote positive educational experiences, retention rates, and overall academic outcomes for these students.

Similar support services are present in other states and territories in Australia. Though they have some similar purposes or objectives, they serve distinct functions.

⁷⁴ NT Department of Education, *Indigenous Education Strategy (2020)* <<https://education.nt.gov.au/statistics-research-and-strategies/indigenous-education-strategy>>.

Similarly, the Queensland Government established the Transition Support Service (TSS) in 2008 to assist Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students from remote communities in transitioning into secondary boarding schools and residential facilities across Queensland. TSS offers primary and secondary school transition support, secondary school transition support, and re-engagement support for excluded students. They also provide assistance during student transit, including airport presence and support for compassionate returns to the community.⁷⁵

In Western Australia’s Catholic education sector, the transition boarding initiative TransitUs exists, to facilitate smooth transitions to boarding.⁷⁶ A key objective of TransitUs is to provide guidance for students in rural areas in the transition to boarding life **by “building relationships with other boarders, improves understanding about life as a boarder, and develops key technology skills”**.⁷⁷

Future Footprints is offered in the Western Australian independent sector. It aims to support students in their post-school transition, particularly those with disabilities or additional learning needs.⁷⁸ Future Footprints provides tailored assistance, including career guidance, skill development, and support services to help students successfully transition from school to further education, training, employment, or other post-school pathways.⁷⁹ There are no equivalent transition support services in South Australia, Tasmania, Australian Capital Territory or New South Wales.

5.1.4 Success factors for effective transitions between the stages of schooling Consultations undertaken throughout the Review highlighted several key success factors for effective transitions across the NT, including in very remote contexts, urban contexts, large schools, and small schools.

Readiness of students when transitioning from primary to secondary schooling

For students to successfully transition from primary to secondary schooling, students need to be **appropriately ‘ready’ and have** the foundational skills in literacy and numeracy to engage with a secondary curriculum. However, teachers and school leaders in the Northern Territory noted that this is not always the case; rather, they observe that a significant number of students start secondary school with low readiness and low literacy and numeracy skills, and that they do not **feel fully equipped to develop students’ foundational skills**.

This is consistent by research conducted by the Australian Education Research Organisation (AERO), which found that nationally, a significant number of students start secondary school without these basic skills, with those from equity groups and male students at higher risk of needing additional supports. A survey of secondary school staff conducted by AERO and the Australian Council for Educational Research (ACER) also noted that *“the students in scope are likely to struggle to engage in classes without significant differentiation on the part of classroom teachers, and the skill disparity may be so great that differentiating lessons for them is not feasible.”*⁸⁰

The resulting negative impacts on **students’** ability to engage in learning and the secondary curriculum were highlighted by stakeholders throughout the Review:

⁷⁵ Queensland Government, *Support services and resources*, 2022

<<https://education.qld.gov.au/student/Pages/support-services-resources.aspx>>.

⁷⁶ Catholic Education Western Australia, *TransitionUS smooth transitions to boarding*, 2019 <<https://stories.cewa.edu.au/transitus-smooths-transition-to-boarding/>>.

⁷⁷ Ibid.

⁷⁸ Association of Independent Schools of Western Australia, *Future Footprints Program* (n.d).

<<https://www.ais.wa.edu.au/job/aboriginal-education-consultant-future-footprints-program>>.

⁷⁹ Association of Independent Schools of Western Australia, *Future Footprints Program Overview*, 2021 <https://www.ais.wa.edu.au/aiswa_page_files_download/338873>.

⁸⁰ Australian Council for Educational Research, *Implementing effective tiered interventions in secondary schools. Survey of school and support staff* (report for the Australian Education Research Organisation, 2023) <<https://www.edresearch.edu.au/sites/default/files/2023-05/acer-implementing-effective-tiered-interventions-aa.pdf>>

"[Students] are disengaged and becoming more disengaged. Some kids come from **primary school that can't read and write** – there are no options for them." – *Teacher, outer regional middle school*

"I'm shocked that kids can get to Year 6 and not be able to read and write. A large number of kids are **going under the radar.**" – *Teacher, outer regional middle school*

This highlights a need for a shared response from both primary and secondary school settings, as well as an opportunity for the system to ensure greater engagement with primary schools to **improve students' readiness to transition and** ensure students are equipped with the foundational literacy and numeracy skills to succeed. Where students have low readiness or literacy and numeracy, there should be appropriate engagement and transition support provided to enable scaffolding and supports for students, as well as the use of effective and evidence-based approaches to help students catch up on literacy and numeracy skills (including through the multi-tiered system of supports framework). This is explored further in Section 6.1.

Continuity of learning and curriculum

To enable successful transitions, there is a need for secondary school students to experience a continuity of learning and curriculum, with each year of education building on the previous year. Continuity of learning is also particularly critical given the NT context, where there are high levels of student mobility and transitions occurring between different school stages and settings.

However, consultations highlighted that this is not always occurring effectively, with students experience a disconnect of knowledge, skills, and content when progressing through secondary schooling.

"I found Years 9 and 8 harder than Year 10. Year **10 didn't prepare me for Year 11.**" – *Student, outer regional senior secondary school*

"**There was a jump from** Year 9 to 10, but it was OK. But between Year 10 and 11 there was a big jump – it was so full on." – *Student, outer regional senior secondary school*

"**A lot comes into split between middle and senior school. We don't** have enough background information to support students due to disconnect between the middle school. **It's** not a middle school problem – the curriculum changes – the teachers **don't** know that." – *Teacher, outer regional senior secondary school*

"**It's hard to offer consistent pathways from middle school.**" – *Teacher, outer regional senior secondary school*

Strong relationships and partnerships support effective transitions throughout schooling

Across the NT, there are examples of strong relationships and partnerships in addition to student-teacher relationships (as explored above). This includes between primary and secondary schools, middle and senior secondary schools, secondary schools and communities, and schools and boarding providers.

Strong relationships between middle schools and senior secondary schools may enable the provision of transition programs to provide middle school students with an example of senior secondary schooling. A teacher highlighted the approach at their school:

"**The transition [from middle school to senior secondary school] is a three-day event** at the end of the year. We wait until Year 11 and 12 students are finished. Year 9 students get the opportunity to have a taster of what a senior [secondary school] timetable would look like – **with teachers they are likely to have...** This results in the change to Year 9 and 10 not being as stark." – *Teacher, outer regional middle school*

Relationships between middle schools and senior secondary schools also provide opportunities to ensure alignment of curriculum and provision of scaffolding. A key factor for students to successfully transition from middle school and senior secondary is to ensure the relevance of prior

learning and that learning is being built upon. However, it is unclear how consistently or systematically this is occurring across the system.

An example of a model in Western Australia that supports transitions from primary to secondary school, through a cluster approach with strong governance, is explored in Box 5.2.

Box 5.2: Ashdale cluster, Western Australia

The Ashdale Cluster (the Cluster) is a cluster model located in Perth, Western Australia. It comprises four primary schools and one high school.

The Cluster was formed as an Independent Public School (IPS) Cluster in 2009. As an IPS cluster, it is required they have a strategic plan and be reviewed every three years. However, in **consultation, it was noted that the IPS cluster model has “dropped away”** – with the Cluster maintaining a strong governance arrangement and trust among schools as key enablers of its success. The model is self-funded.

The Cluster’s model is designed to enhance students’ educational opportunities by providing specialist facilities and collaboration across schools. The Cluster consists of three focus areas:

- A common approach and shared commitment to the learning, development, and well-being of all K-12 students.
- A pooling of expertise and resources to ensure high-quality programs and collaboration among students, staff, and families.
- A focus on STEM learning across the Cluster developing the capabilities required by all students for jobs of the future.

The Cluster supports successful transitions between the primary schools and Ashdale Secondary College, with approximately 90 per cent of the cluster primary students transitioning to Ashdale Secondary College. In consultation, it was noted successful transitions are due to primary school **students’ exposure to the Secondary College through musical performances, open days, graduation ceremonies and more.**

The Cluster is governed by the Ashdale Cluster Board which establishes and reviews the **Cluster’s general direction and initiatives. The Chair of the Cluster Board is a principal of a school participating in the Cluster, which rotates among the schools.**

5.1.5 Barriers to effective transitions between stages of schooling

Across the NT, there are several challenges to effective transitions, including lack of clarity for students, students feeling disconnected from the end goal, and a lack of continuity.

Lack of clarity or intentional preparation

Lack of clarity on pathways, and where there is a lack of early and intentional preparation to **support students’ preparation**, are key barriers to effective transitions. Students noted in consultations that **“no one started talking [to us] about pathways until it was Year 10.”** This was also consistently noted in consultation with teachers and school leaders. Furthermore, this is further exacerbated where there is limited career guidance or support received.

“We can select our own subjects – choose electives outside of the core. But it hard – there is no direct career planning, and it feels like electives are very broad” – *Student, outer regional senior secondary school*

Disconnect from the end goal

Without an intentional focus on preparation for all years of schooling (including Year 12 completion) and clarity on pathways post-schooling – which is more likely to be experienced by students in standalone middle school settings, as identified in consultation - this can result in a disconnect from the end goal of secondary schooling. Students may not perceive the learning as valuable or understanding what learning is contributing towards, creating a risk for student retention and disengagement.

Stakeholders also highlighted that a focus by middle school teachers only on the middle years of schooling, rather than all years, also adds to the disconnect that students experience.

“For teachers, there’s a focus on only three years of school, and not all years of secondary – the disconnect isn’t good for our kids”. – *School leader, outer regional middle school*

On the flip side, students noted that a greater understanding of the end goal of schooling and what it could lead to, supported them to engage, and at times, re-engage in education. This was also observed where students accessed pathways that engaged them:

“I was going to drop out, and then I went into [vocational program]. I’m now going to get my NTCET early. I really wanted to drop out, but [vocational program] kept me engaged.”
– *Student, outer regional comprehensive school*

Visibility of student movement and transitions

High levels of student mobility between schools, systems and boarding school (discussed further in Appendix C) can result in limited visibility of students for the NT government system, and limited **ability for schools and the system to provide support at students’ point of need.**

This indicates a need for closer collaboration (and data sharing) between government and non-government settings to ensure students effectively transition and receive supports provided between settings.

It should be noted that data on the attrition to and from government, non-government and boarding schools was not accessed for the Review.

Box 5.3: Transitions between home, community and school

It is important to note that transitions do not only refer to transitions into and between stages of schooling, but that it also includes the everyday transitions a student may experience between various settings: their home environment, community, and the school environment.

The Department has developed a Continuity of Learning Framework (unpublished) which highlights several dimensions of ensuring continuity of learning. The key enabling factors include culture, context, language, learning purpose and vision, and partnerships and relationship, and ensuring these are consistent across environments. The Framework highlights that continuity of learning is needed across transitions and pathways, curriculum and assessment, pedagogy, and practice.

Finding 5: Student transitions throughout schooling, and continuity of learning, are not occurring effectively. Enhancing these areas to support improved engagement and outcomes should be a key priority for the system.

5.2 Transitions beyond school

This component of the Review domain relates to transitions beyond school into further training, employment, or study.

A key purpose of secondary education, as described by stakeholders, is to prepare young people for participation and engagement with the broader community and labour market, or further study. **This involves providing curriculum opportunities to build students’ general capabilities, support students’ interests and aspirations, and** assist them to make informed decisions about their subject choices and pathways.

Effective transitions directly support secondary schooling outcomes (**including the system’s** Headline Improvement Measures), including improved retention of students and completion of Year 12. Furthermore, students are more engaged in education and highly motivated about their future when they have a clear understanding of themselves and how they might live and work when they leave school.

The importance of transitions beyond school for the NT system is emphasised in its *Engagement Strategy* (2022-31), which highlights the goal of meaningful learning. Meaningful learning refers to young people or students seeing the practical value of their education and understanding where it can take them after school.⁸¹

Transitions beyond school have also been the focus of recent Commonwealth Government Reviews, including the 2020 *Review in senior secondary pathways into work, further education and training*. The 2020 Review provided advice and recommendations on how senior secondary students can be better supported to choose the pathway into work, further education and/or training that is right for them (discussed further in Appendix C).⁸²

Further, in consultation, the **NT's** Youth Peak Voice Group noted the importance of transitions after school. Students expressed wanting to understand their options post-school, for their learning to be relevant to their pathway, and to feel prepared to transition beyond schooling.

In the NT, post-school pathways are supported by Personal Learning Plan (discussed further in Appendix C) and, in some schools, career advisors. Career advice, for example through career advisors or other resources, supports student in secondary schools with advice or information about career pathways and the transitions from school to work, training or further education.

Departmental stakeholders and academics emphasised the need for the NT system and schools to ensure a destination and pathway through for all students, and equally, for students to see a pathway beyond school, including an end goal for their schooling. They described a range of pathway offerings for all students, including academic, vocational, and cultural pathways, that are held in equal regard based on aspirations for secondary schooling.

5.2.1 Numerous pathway offerings contribute towards NTCET completion and post-school destinations

A key objective for the system is to offer a pathway to Year 12 completion and NTCET attainment, for all students in all contexts.

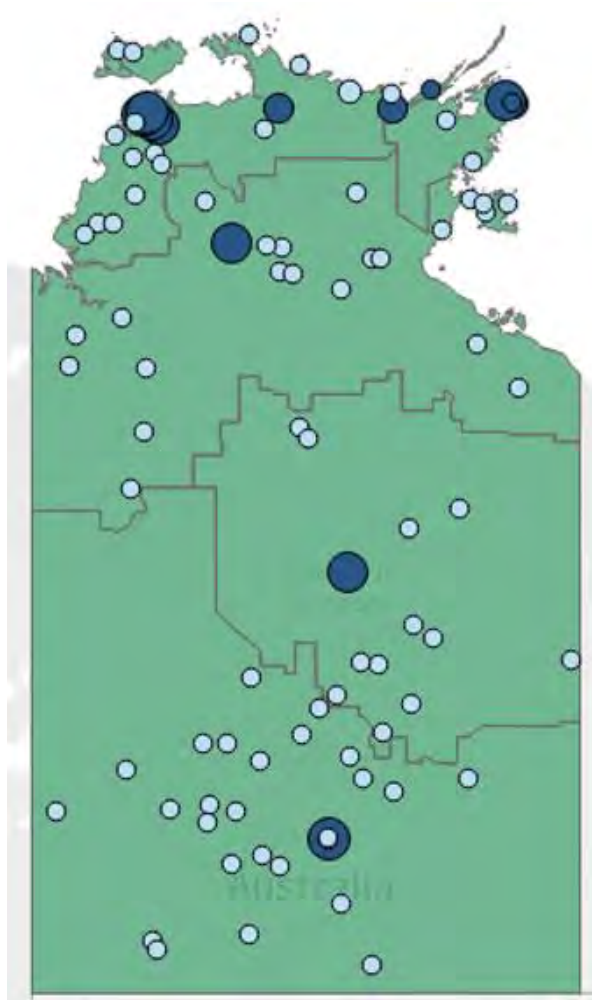
To support completion of Year 12, education and support must be appropriately targeted to the age of secondary students. Currently, in very remote and remote communities, there are limited options for the provision of appropriately aged education for secondary students, with students often having to attend a primary school in their community, or accessing distance education options, or boarding school (as discussed in Section 6.3.1).

A large proportion of secondary school locations do not offer Stage I or Stage II subjects (see Figure 5.3). Delivery predominantly occurs in regional centres, locations in the Top End and East Arnhem. Further analysis of NTSDE data shows that it is supplementing access to Stage I and Stage II subjects across various schools (see Section 6.3).

⁸¹ NT Department of Education, *Northern Territory Education Engagement Strategy 2022 – 2031* <<https://education.nt.gov.au/statistics-research-and-strategies/education-engagement-strategy>>.

⁸² Council of Australian Governments Education Council, *Looking to the Future: Report of the Review of senior secondary pathways into work, further education and training* (2020) <<https://www.education.gov.au/quality-schools-package/resources/looking-future-report-review-senior-secondary-pathways-work-further-education-and-training>>.

Figure 5.3: Secondary school locations offering Stage I or Stage II subjects



Source: Deloitte Access Economics using NT Department of Education data.

Notes: (a) The size of the blue circles shows the number of Stage I or Stage II subjects on offer with larger circles representing a greater number of subjects. (b) Pale blue circles reflect secondary schools with no provision of Stage I or Stage II subjects.

There are a range of post-school pathways that students may pursue within the Northern Territory, including pathways to further study, employment and cultural roles within the community.

As discussed in Section 4.1, a desired outcome for school systems to achieve is for students to complete Year 12 and pursue post-school pathways to employment, further training or study. Outlined below is an overview of the pathways from school that the Review has found should be a feature, in combination, of the Northern Territory secondary education system.

Academic: Students aspire to attend higher education to pursue a 'professional' career. Students would typically complete Year 12 and transition to a university course. Students on an academic pathway can access secondary education through:

- local offerings, including Stage I and Stage II subjects and in combination with VET
- distance education
- local offerings, supplemented by distance education
- local offerings, supplemented by regional delivery models
- boarding school

Vocational: Students aspire to gain employment post-school or pursue vocational courses. VET offerings should provide pathways to employment, and align with the jobs in the community or region with a clear employment outcome. Students may choose to complete vocational education

and training as part of the NTCET, or post-secondary schooling. Students on a vocational pathway can access secondary education through:

- a combination of their local school offering and the delivery of VET (Cert I to IV) through RTOs
- regional block intensives and residential options

Cultural: Students may aspire to remain on country and hold cultural responsibilities in their community. Schools should recognise the cultural achievements and support students in having community roles. As with any pathway, students may pursue this in combination with other pathways (i.e. vocational or academic pathway).

“A lot of our students in our community have significant cultural responsibilities. As schools and as a system, if we can hold currency in the community, we need to acknowledge those responsibilities.” – *Stakeholder, remote school*

Across these pathways, the system should meet students at their point of need, and support students to take their next step beyond school.

Pathways should be flexible to support diverse interests, strengths, and aspirations of students for life and work after school.

Pathways should also be flexible to allow students to change or progress to various pathways at a later point in time. For example, there is a potential for most students to engage with VET in their schooling journey, irrespective of the pathway they may be on, to build an understanding of work and development of workplace skills that can be built upon over time. In this regard, it should not be the intention of the system to silo or close off pathways to students as they progress through school, and a combination of pathways is likely to be pursued by most students, as they develop an understanding of their interests, strengths, and aspirations for life and work after school.

Importantly, pursuit of all pathways should contribute towards completion of the NTCET, and therefore rely on the achievement of core literacy and numeracy outcomes (see Section 4).

Box 5.4: Supporting transitions to higher education: Regional University Study Hubs ('Bush Universities')

Regional University Study Hubs (Hubs) is a Commonwealth Department of Education initiative that is designed to support access to and outcomes from tertiary education for regional learners. They provide a wide range of services and facilities from academic and wellbeing supports, enabling administrative functions, to the physical infrastructure and campus-style facilities that would otherwise not be available for many learners in regional and remote areas. Hubs are both community-led and tailored to local needs, and while they may have stronger relationships with specific universities, they are open to all students.

The courses are provided by universities or RTOs. Typically, these provide infrastructure (e.g. study spaces, internet access, computer facilities), administrative and academic support, and student support services (e.g. study advice and pastoral support).

Currently there are 34 hubs in Australia. The Northern Territory currently has four hubs, all located in the Arnhem region. Two examples are provided below:

- Wuyagiba Regional Study Hub provides a two-way university pathway. The pathway includes a focus on two-way learning – the learning and exchange of non-Aboriginal and Aboriginal knowledge. The Hub employs cultural and academic experts to teach on-country and focuses on cultural content taught by Elders with academic skills woven through. In 2023, the Hub offered two courses, a two-way **'pre-university' course including** first-year university-level subjects (in partnership with Macquarie University) and a Certificate I in Automotive Vocational Preparation (Mechanics), which is delivered in partnership with CDU.
- Arnhem Land Progress Aboriginal Corporation (ALPA) runs a Hub across three sites in **Arnhem Land (Nhulunbuy, Ramingining, and Galiwin'ku)**. The Centre has a focus on supporting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and currently has 80 students

across the sites. The Centre predominately supports students in completing VET studies on a part-time basis, as part of their current job, or for new employment opportunities. The most popular areas of study include health, education, and retail. **ALPA's key services include** one-on-one academic support, which involves intensive tutoring to develop language, literacy, and numeracy skills. Additionally, ALPA provides appropriate infrastructure, administrative support, pastoral care, and coordination of communication between employers, students, and education institutions.

In July 2023, the Commonwealth Government announced the establishment of up to 20 new Regional University Study Hubs and up to 14 new Suburban University Study Hubs across Australia. At the time of writing, locations have not been announced and will be determined through an independent process run by the Commonwealth Department of Education.

Vocational pathways should be recognised as a high quality, equal and complementary pathway to academic pathways.

Ideally, the range of pathways that feature in the Northern Territory system should be offered in complement to each other, with a combination of pathways, including vocational, contributing to completion and post-school pathways.

However, insights from consultations highlighted that vocational and academic pathways can at times conflict with each other, where at times a student who is enrolled in a VET course may experience timetabling clashes leading them to miss classes at school. Furthermore, VET can also be perceived by some to be for different cohorts of students, and in schools with a specific focus on a vocational or academic, the other pathway is often residualised.

"There is tension between the academic and VET side of school – there is a danger that academic side can be lost to VET. For example, Year 12 results aren't celebrated as much as other schools – that's the negative side." – *Teacher, outer regional comprehensive school*

"VET is not about taking students out of school or encouraging them to leave school. [We] want students to undertake VET but stay and complete school. This is the same with SBATs, [we] value for students to stay enrolled and complete Year 12". – *Consultation with not-for-profit organisation*

However, evidence suggests that VET can be a high-quality pathway, that supports student engagement, and is growing in importance to the system over time (as outlined below).

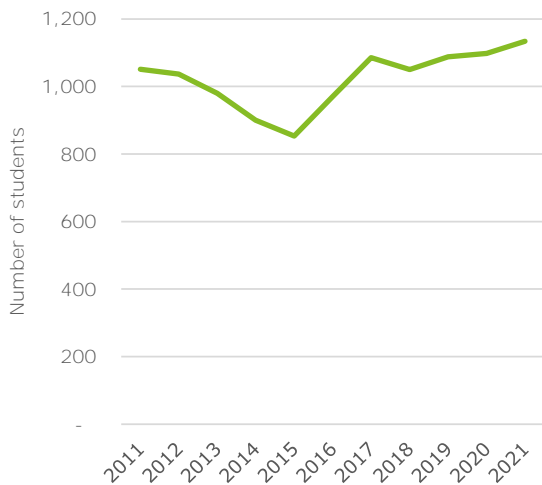
VET is increasingly contributing towards completion of schooling, with the total number, and types of course offerings, changing over time.

There is evidence that VET is increasingly contributing towards completion of schooling over time, as explored below and in Section 6.1.2.

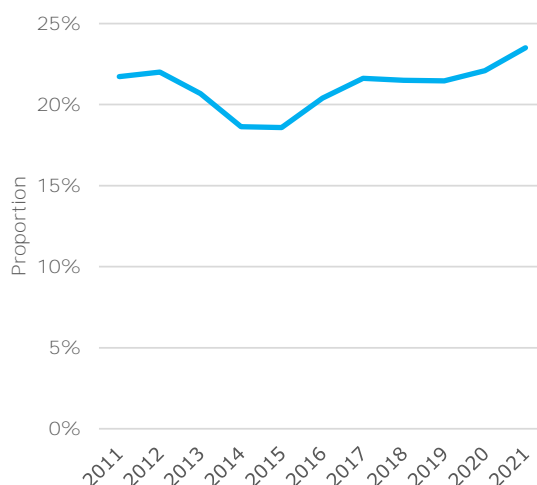
In 2021, approximately 1,150 students (or 25 per cent of students) undertook VET courses in support of NTCET completion. This is the highest recorded number of students enrolled in VET for NTCET purposes since 2011 (Chart 5.3).

Chart 5.3: Students enrolled in VET, by year

a) Number of students de 10-12 that undertook VET to support NTCET attainment



b) Proportion of students in grade 10-12 that undertook VET to support NTCET attainment

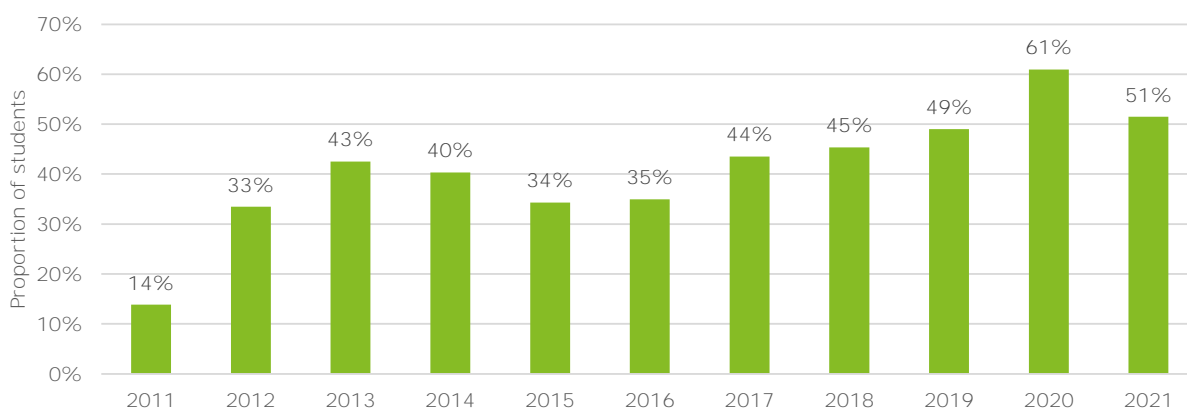


Source: Deloitte Access Economics (2023) using NT Department of Education data.

Notes: This analysis considers NT government schools only.

Over the period between 2016 to 2021, the proportion of NTCET completion with VET has increased from 35 per cent to 51 per cent (Chart 5.4). This indicates that more students are choosing to incorporate VET courses as part of the NTCET.

Chart 5.4: Proportion of students that complete NTCET with VET credits, by year



Source: Deloitte Access Economics (2023) using NT Department of Education data.

Finding 6: There are numerous pathways for students post-schooling. There is a need to ensure that pathways are meaningful, tailored to local context, and recognised as high quality, equal and complementary.

5.2.2 Greater planning, coordination and consistency of delivery to support meaningful pathways

Stakeholders emphasised the need for pathways to be flexible and intentional.

Stakeholders noted that as a general principle, pathways should be *flexible*, meaning that students should have the ability to move between pathways as it suits their needs and aspirations (as opposed to staying in either an academic or vocational pathway that is selected in Year 10), as well as the ability to access pathways not offered within their local school, or a trade that is not offered within their community.

Furthermore, pathways should be intentional, meaning students should be prepared for and given appropriate support and guidance to pursue their pathways. This notion emerged as a critical success factor that supports effective transitions into and beyond secondary schooling and contributes to meaningful learning outcomes for students.

There was also a strong view that pathways must be aligned with local context and offer meaningful learning outcomes (i.e., aligned with employment **in students' local community and skills needs** within the region).

In consultation, schools noting they would benefit from advice on meaningful pathways, as aligned to local opportunities and skills needs, from the regional and Central offices. Collaboration between the Department of Education, the Department of Trade, Industry and Tourism, and the Industry Skills Advisory Council NT is likely required to support this coordination and advice, with these stakeholders having a key role to play, through their work developing Remote Town Job Profiles and Skilled Occupation Priority Lists, which are produced to highlight the skilled occupation that are in high demand by NT businesses and industries.

The design and mix of pathways should be tailored to local context and aspirations of students and the community, rather than offering all pathways in every location.

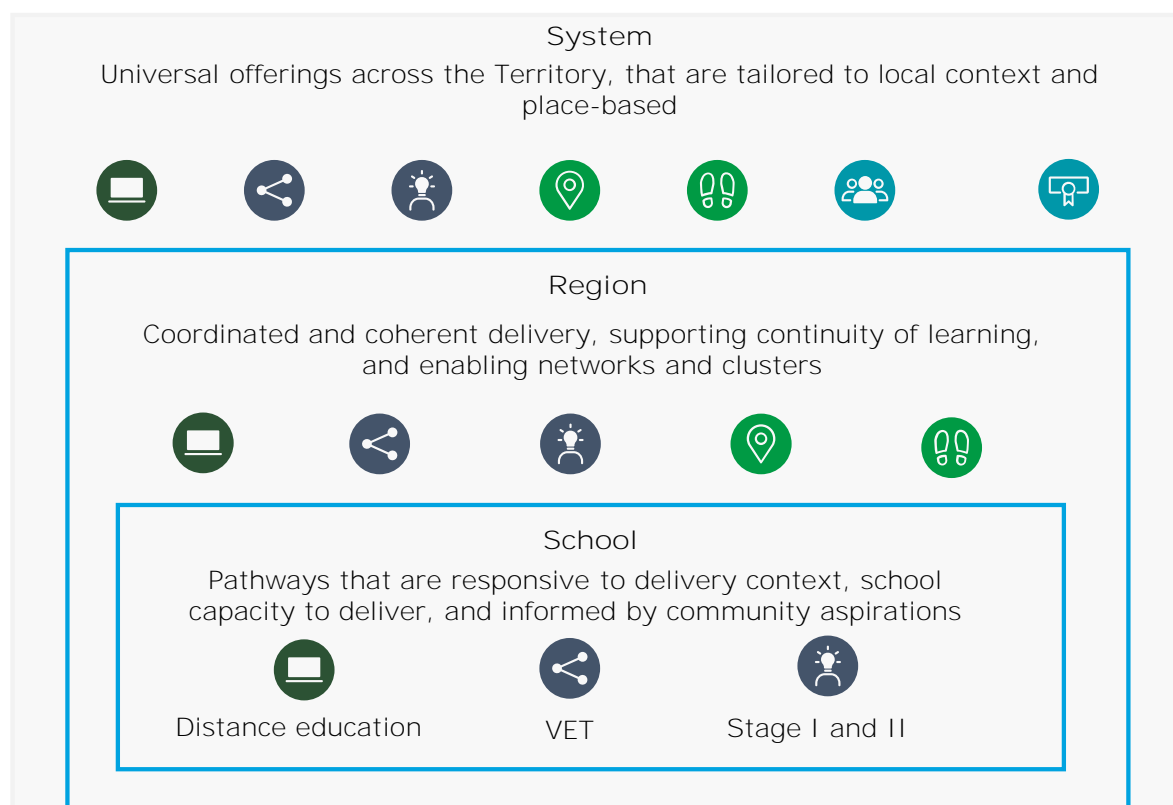
It was acknowledged by all stakeholders that the design and mix of pathways should look different across contexts, in catering to the various aspirations of students and local communities. The design of pathways would vary depending on the opportunity (for example, vocational pathways may be emphasised where students and parents aspire to remain in community, and these should be tied to local employment opportunities and skills needs), and school capacity to deliver.

Furthermore, there was a strong view that, particularly in a resource constrained system, it is not ideal or possible for all pathways to be offered in every school or region, and instead a more deliberate approach should be taken to design from the top down (driven by skills needs) and the bottom up (driven by the aspirations of the local community) to ensure alignment with local need and context. Overall, this highlights the need for greater planning, coordination and consistency of delivery, to support the delivery of tailored and meaningful pathways.

A stylised representation of this approach to secondary education provision is provided in Figure 5.4 (overleaf). In this example, the illustrative school offers three defined modes to NTCET completion that are aligned with its capacity to deliver and local context. This comprises part of the wider delivery within the region. The common delivery modes across schools in the region provides a mechanism for networks of collaboration and clustered delivery to occur, supports continuity of learning and pathways, and is a lever for students to access other pathways that may not be locally available. This aggregates to an overall set of pathways in the system.

This approach illustrates that, while every pathway can be valid, not every mode will be delivered everywhere in the NT. Rather, provision is underpinned by viable, coherent and place-based delivery that is coordinated and systematic.

Figure 5.4: Stylised overview of design of pathways



Source: Deloitte Access Economics.

There is evidence of limited direct alignment of VETiS delivery to occupations experiencing employment and skill shortages in the NT, indicating potential scope for closer alignment with identified skill shortages, and increased coordination with DITT, ISACNT and RTOs.

Analysis using the 2022 NT Skilled Occupation Priority List (the Priority List) suggests limited direct alignment of VETiS delivery to occupations experiencing employment and skill shortages in the NT.⁸³ However, it is acknowledged that many VETiS courses may provide indirect and flexible pathways for students towards those occupations, as well as recognising that multiple employment pathways can reveal themselves after training. Further, it is acknowledged that the Priority List does not necessarily capture all employment challenges within the NT.

Of the 99 unique VETiS courses studied in 2022, 17 were directly aligned to a priority occupation (Table 5.1).^{84,85} These courses account for only 5% of VETiS enrolments in 2022. Additionally, none of the top 20 VETiS courses in terms of enrolments in 2022 were identified as aligning directly to priority occupations. This indicates relatively low alignment of VETiS enrolments to priority occupations. However, this level of analysis does not consider the courses that act as pathways towards a priority occupation as additional training and/or experience is required.⁸⁶

⁸³ The Priority List is produced annually by DITT to highlight the skilled occupations that are in high demand by NT businesses and industries. The 2022 Priority List categorises a total of 154 occupations as being either 'Priority' or 'High Priority'.

⁸⁴ The 2022 NT Skilled Occupation Priority list identifies certain occupations to be either a 'Priority' or 'High Priority', in this report they are both referred generally as priority occupations.

⁸⁵ Direct alignment was assessed by comparing the 6-digit ANZSCO codes of priority occupations and VETiS courses.

⁸⁶ For example, the Certificate I and Certificate II in Conservation and Ecosystem Management does not directly align to the priority occupation of a Conservation Officer but it is a pathway towards a Certificate III which does have direct alignment. Similarly, the Certificate I in Automotive Vocational Preparation may act as a pathway towards being a Motor Mechanic despite not aligning directly.

The analysis therefore identifies potential scope for VETiS delivery in the NT to be more closely aligned with skill shortages identified by DITT, supported by the Department.

Table 5.1: VETiS courses aligned directly with the 2022 NT Skilled Occupation Priority List

Qualification title	Priority Occupation
Certificate II in Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander Primary Health Care	Aboriginal And Torres Strait Islander Health Worker
Certificate III in Air Conditioning and Refrigeration	Airconditioning And Refrigeration Mechanic
Certificate III in Carpentry	Carpenter
Certificate III in Conservation and Ecosystem Management	Conservation Officer
Certificate III in Electrotechnology Electrician	Electrician (General)
Certificate III in Horticulture	Gardener (General)
Certificate III in Hairdressing	Hairdresser
Certificate III in Barbering	
Certificate III in Light Vehicle Mechanical Technology	Motor Mechanic (General)
Certificate III in Heavy Commercial Vehicle Mechanical Technology	
Certificate III in Mobile Plant Technology	
Certificate III in Individual Support	Personal Care Assistant
Certificate III in Plumbing	Plumber (General)
Certificate I in Maritime Operations (Coxswain Grade 2 Near Coastal)	Ship's Master
Certificate II in Maritime Operations (Coxswain Grade 1 Near Coastal)	
Certificate II in Supply Chain Operations	Store person
Certificate II in Warehousing Operations	

Source: Deloitte Access Economics analysis using NT Government and training.gov.au data (2023).

Note: VETiS delivery across government and non-government schools, and home schooling is included. Direct alignment was assessed by comparing the 6-digit ANZSCO codes of priority occupations and VETiS courses.

Alignment between VETiS enrolments and priority occupations has improved over time, although only to a small degree. The share of VETiS delivered to priority skills courses increased from 3% in 2018 to 5% in 2022. The increasing trend demonstrates the opportunity and capability for greater alignment in the future.

Findings suggest the Department has an important role in collaborating and coordinating with DITT, ISAC and RTOs on course planning and delivery across regions. It is important to note that the Priority List does not distinguish region-specific shortages, and analysis has been conducted at the NT-level, which does not capture employment gaps at a local level. In order to understand and respond to community-specific needs, two-way channels of communication between schools and government are required. There is an opportunity to encourage more local alignment through the creation of region-specific priority lists similar to the Remote Town Job Profiles previously developed in 2017.⁸⁷

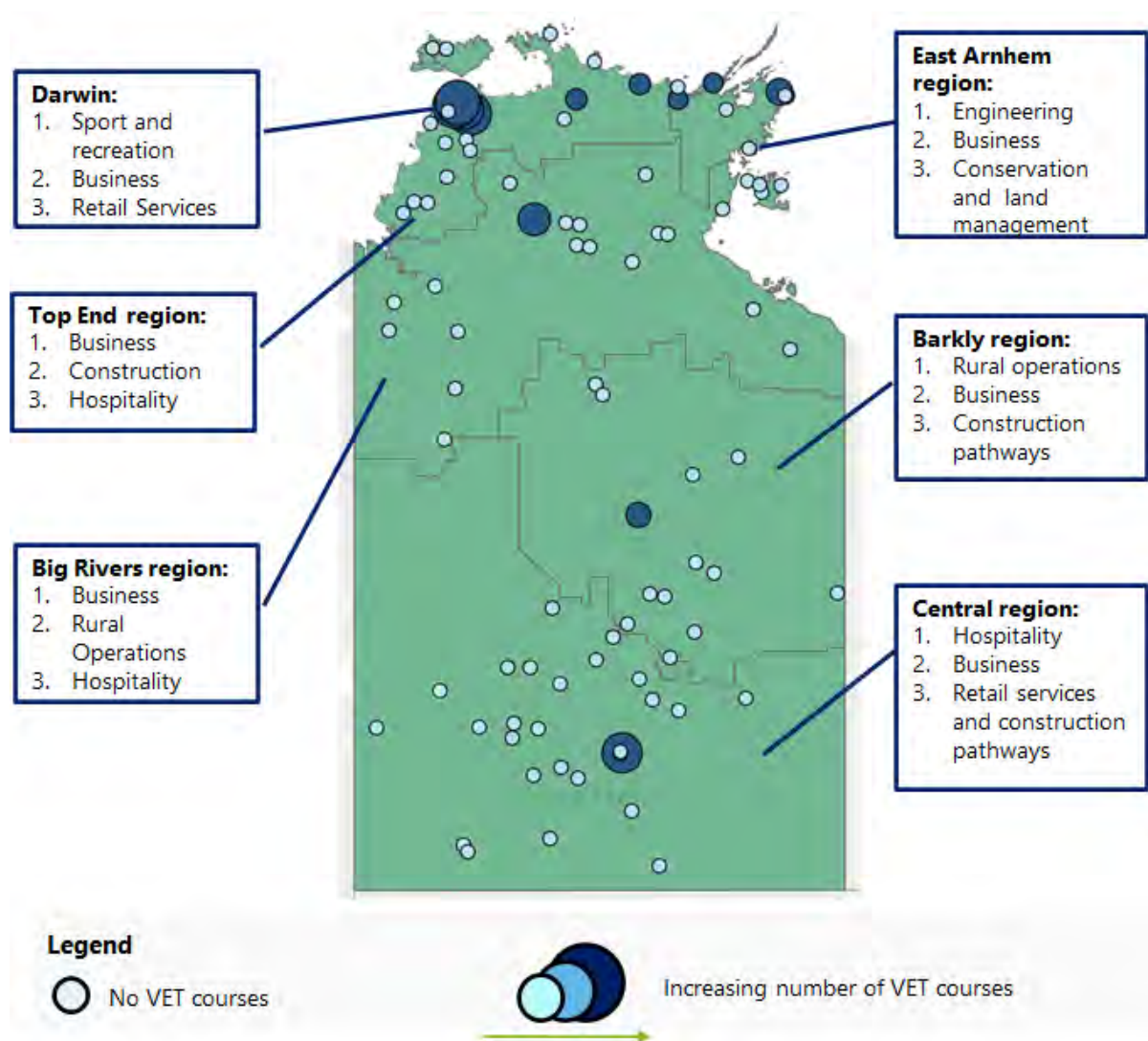
⁸⁷ NT Government, *Remote town job profiles*, (21 April 2021) <<https://nt.gov.au/employ/for-employers-in-nt/skills-existing-and-needed/remote-town-job-profiles>>.

Clustering of delivery would better enable access to VET opportunities for remote and very remote communities, but further resourcing and coordination support and planning is required to achieve this.

There are a small number of locations across the NT where there is access to VET delivery (see Figure 5.5). The most commonly offered courses across 2011-2022 also vary across regions. In some locations across the NT there is no delivery of VET, including more specialised options requiring equipment or infrastructure.

Given the key role of VET in the system and how it contributes towards school completion or equivalent, there are opportunities to further coordinate delivery to expand access to pathways, use of infrastructure, and support for other schools. Clustering arrangements could support this, and allow for economies of scale to be achieved, as further explored in Section 6.3.3.

Figure 5.5: Locations where VET is offered across the Northern Territory and most commonly offered courses across years, 2011-2022



Source: Deloitte Access Economics using NT Department of Education data.

Note: A course is regarded as more common if it is offered across multiple years (supply), not by number of schools offering the course (as in some regions, only one school offers VET courses) or students enrolled in the course.

5.2.3 Success factors for effective transitions beyond school

The Review identified several key success factors that support effective transitions beyond schooling.

Clarity of pathways for students

High-quality career education and guidance is essential in preparing students for their future. Guidance from careers advisors or other staff members supports **students' understanding of the options and clarity of the end goal, of completion and pathways to achieve this** (i.e., academic, vocational, or cultural pathway).⁸⁸

Insights from consultation with schools highlighted specific examples of providing students with options of pathways, including exposing students to varied pathways. For example, this includes providing academically inclined students with opportunities to undertake vocational courses.

"Most Year 10 students will complete a Certificate I course. Even if they are mostly academic – they'll get a taste for VET. For some students it's really important as it's a very different way of learning." – *School leader, outer regional comprehensive school*

Additionally, the importance of students having pathways options available in their homelands was strongly emphasised.

"All students want to stay in the homelands. It's a very strong message from everyone. The jobs and aspirations that people have are things they see in their community – rangers, teachers, youth workers, health workers. It's hard to aspire to something you don't see as an option." – *Teacher, very remote comprehensive school*

Intentional planning

A key success factor for students to effectively transition post-schooling is intentional planning and preparation. However, it was noted that this predominately occurs on an ad hoc basis, and is frequently based on the initiative of individual staff members. Overall, there was a sense that this nature of planning, support and guidance for careers advice and pathways should start early, and occur more systematically throughout secondary schooling.

"Every student has a pathway – as far as I know – they all finish academic pathway and then can decide to go vocational. For example, a student completed year 12 but wanted to get involved ICT. We can do this as a small school – wouldn't have capacity otherwise." – *School Business Manager, outer regional combined school*

Students were supportive of the compulsory PLP subject undertaken as part of the NTCET, noting that it was a good opportunity to consider their potential pathways. However, students noted that they would appreciate the opportunity to re-evaluate their PLP regularly, including into Year 11.

"In Year 10 I developed a PLP. But in Year 11, I needed a moment to re-evaluate – especially when choosing subjects." – *Student, outer regional senior secondary school*

"PLP helps me lay out my goals and research my interested. But it should be one semester a year." – *Student, outer regional senior secondary school*

Alignment with student and community aspirations and local context

Alignment of pathway offerings to student and community interests, and tailoring to local context and employment opportunities, are factors that support effective transitions. However, in remote and very remote communities, there is limited delivery of vocational and university courses, and often very narrow offerings due to limited student numbers, infrastructure, and workforce constraints. This comes with a potential trade-off of viability and relevance of delivery (as further explored in Section 6.1.2), and where there is a need to service pathways in very remote areas there may be a need for stronger incentivisation to deliver.

⁸⁸ Career Industry Council of Australia for the Australian Government, *Career education: Why is it important*, 2023.

Relationships and partnerships – for beyond school pathways

Relationships with local VET providers and industries are important to ensure the relevance of learning, provide access, and support work experience and traineeships. For example:

“We are lucky as we have Batchelor Institute so close – so students have the option to do extra training – it’s married in with land care group. We also run the outdoor education centre, where schools camps go and can steer some students to go to traineeships down **there.**” – *School business manager, outer regional combined school*

“Our students access VET through schools like Taminmin College, CDU, McKillop.” – *School leader, outer regional secondary school*

A teacher from a small very remote school highlighted the importance of partnerships with local community members and industries to ensure the relevance of pathways for local communities:

“We spend a lot of time organising work experience in the community with the local council, mechanics, rangers, and farms. **It’s about developing skills that will provide them with opportunities for employment.** While we do academic work, the focus is trying to **develop resilience and opportunities.**” – *Teacher, very remote primary school*

Box 5.5 provides an overview of various models that support the delivery of secondary education in the Kimberley region of Western Australia. All the models are based on developing strong **relationships between secondary schools and ‘feeder’ primary schools, other schools** in the region, communities, and vocational providers to support effective delivery and student transitions.

Box 5.5: Models to support secondary education in the Kimberley, Western Australia

In Western Australia, Broome Senior High School (Broome SHS) is the only comprehensive government high school in the Kimberley Region, with a high proportion of students across the Kimberley enrolled and attending.

In consultation, Broome SHS noted that a successful school is the foundation of a strong community that will attract people to live and work in Broome, which has a highly transient population. Previously, families would rely on a local Broome primary school. However, for secondary education, families would move out of Broome to larger regional centres or Perth.

Four key approaches to supporting the delivery of high education in the community and broader region were discussed in consultation: the Broome cluster model, the Kimberley regional network, the Broome Residential College, and the block intensive delivery of vocational education. These approaches all rely on the development of strong relationships, either with other schools in the region, communities, or vocational education providers.

Broome cluster model

Broome SHS has developed strong relationships **with the four ‘feeder’ primary schools, to build the relationships between the secondary school and primary school students and families and build trust that Broome SHS will provide a quality education.** In consultation, a school leader noted that 15 years **ago the school’s enrolment was decreasing, with approximately 300** students. Since the investment in the relationships with feeder primary schools and families they have consistently had around 900 enrolments. Additionally, a school leader noted that 80 to 90 per cent of students from the feeder primary schools transition to Broome SHS.

As part of the cluster model, all the principals meet twice a term to ensure the calendar aligns for consistency across Broome (e.g., pupil-free days). Further, they are committed to having at least one combined staff development day per year, that is a conference in Broome Senior High School with presenters attending from across Australia. Additionally, as part of NAIDOC week school staff of the cluster model wear the same shirt with all school logos on it. The principal noted that the broader community sees and values the unity of the local education community.

Kimberley regional network

Broome Senior High School is also part of a broader Kimberley regional network that includes all principals across the Kimberley. All principals from the Kimberley region (23 principals) gather twice a year, with a focus on providing support for the schools.

In consultation, the principal noted he visits remote communities every month, including being part of the remote primary school assemblies and meeting with community members. To improve knowledge of Broome Residential College and build connections with families whose students are or will attend secondary school in Broome.

Broome Residential College

Broome Residential College is a government-provided boarding facility for up to 104 secondary students who study in Broome (either at Broome SHS or St Marys College). The college was designed in collaboration with local Traditional Owners and aims to **“keep Kimberley kids in the Kimberley”**. The students mostly come from communities and stations in the Kimberley and 95 per cent are Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students. The facility has been designed to accommodate cultural practices and provide a safe environment for students.

In consultation, it was noted that in the broader Kimberley education system, students are encouraged to stay in their community as much as they can, but if the student is interested in a post-school academic pathway, they are encouraged to attend Broome Residential College.

Additionally, the principal discussed the transition supports provided to students, due to difficulties in some students transitioning from a small community to a boarding facility and a large school. They noted transition classes are provided to students, and the Clontarf Academy provides further support to students.

Block intensive delivery of vocational education

The principal noted that there are limited tertiary education options in the community, with 30 to 40 per cent of students attending university in Perth. In consultation, the principal noted Broome SHS has a strong relationship with North Regional TAFE, a vocational education provider. Broome Senior High School students attend the TAFE for vocational education. Previously, vocational courses were offered at Broome SHS, however, there was difficulty in recruiting and retaining staff with appropriate qualifications.

The North Regional TAFE operates as a block-intensive model, with lecturers travelling to different communities in WA and teaching local students in one-week intensive blocks. Lecturers visit approximately four locations in the Kimberley and Pilbara region.

Coordination and consistency within regions

Coordination and consistency of pathways (within and across regions) is a key success factor of transitions and pathways between and beyond school. This is particularly important where there are high levels of student mobility, and a need for continuity of learning and pathways as students move between schools and settings.

However, the Review identified that consistency and coordination is not fully optimised, with a need for a range of solutions such as data sharing **and record of students’ movements, attendance and enrolments** as they move schools, curriculum design which supports students to cover the curriculum rather than relearning the same content or falling behind, and deliberate design of pathways that ensures continuity even when students move schools.

Support and capacity to navigate VET and partnerships

The Review identified that schools, in particular small schools in remote areas, require additional support and capacity to effectively navigate and coordinate VET, apprenticeships or work experience for students. There was a desire for this support to be provided from the central or regional offices, which would ideally facilitate connections and partnerships with local industry, and communicate the skills needs and therefore opportunities and pathways for students at the community, region and NT level.

5.2.4 Barriers to effective pathways beyond school

Across the NT, there are several challenges to effective transitions throughout and beyond schooling.

Limited provision of support and guidance

In some instances, there is limited support and guidance for schools to plan for meaningful and contextually relevant pathway options, and for students to determine their pathways beyond schooling.

This is particularly relevant in remote and very remote schools in the NT, where it is difficult for students to see pathways to careers and jobs, and principals of small schools (who often have teaching loads) do not have capacity to coordinate pathways or provide career guidance to students.

More generally, insights from consultations with schools highlighted the limited capacity of staff and the lack of access to career counsellor support across the NT, as a key barrier to providing appropriate support to students (with some small schools not employing careers advisors).

"We don't have a career counsellor, there is no career guidance. By default, it falls to staff. We don't know the processes of applying to university in a remote location like this and we can't send groups of students to an open day." – *Teacher, very remote comprehensive school*

"We had a previous staff member, that is no longer funded, to connect with graduates, get students into jobs, talking about work, and help with administration (e.g., birth certificates). We've taken a dip in pathways since funding stopped." – *School leader, very remote combined school*

While large schools often employ a careers counsellor, a concern raised by students was the limited capacity of the careers counsellor, and minimal support being provided to identify their pathways post-schooling, contributing to an overall lack of clarity and understanding.

"We can select our own subjects and choose electives. But it's hard. There is no direct career planning, and electives are very broad. I feel like I'm walking in the woods with no clue what's around the corner. I'm not sure what I want to do post-school." *Student, outer regional senior secondary school*

"They don't explain what to do if you don't get a high ATAR." – *Student, outer regional senior secondary school*

Lastly, as reflected by a submission from the Northern Land Council, continued career counselling and employment support services (likely through DITT) should extend beyond school and be offered to students post-secondary schooling to ensure success.

"All students would benefit from extra support when starting in their first job. This is particularly true in remote areas where employment options have been limited and the realities of the workplace are new and less understood. One strategy that would support the transition to workplace is mentoring for a period to better support new employees in the early stages of starting a new job." – *Submission from Northern Land Council*

Limited ability of small schools to identify and facilitate pathways

Small schools in remote contexts are constrained by capacity to identify and facilitate a range of pathways for students. There is complexity as students may vary in their aspirations; students may aspire to stay on country, travel interstate or overseas, or pursue pathways to tertiary study. It is likely these schools would require support from **the Department's** regional offices to identify and facilitate pathways.

Narrow or specific pathway offerings

Where there are narrow or specific pathway offerings (including in very remote areas where there are constraints to delivery), these can prevent students from moving flexibly between pathways or accessing pathways that are not offered within their community. Stakeholders noted the lack of diversity of options in locations of the NT:

“Subjects are quite restrictive. Other schools have more classes. I’m not sure what I want to do [after school] – it would help if there were more options.” – *Student, outer regional secondary school*

“We’re limited by our location. A post-schooling pathway is university, it would be great for it to be an option on the radar for kids. There is a university in town, but the courses are limited. The opportunities for our young people here to experience what it might look like to go to Adelaide, Melbourne is really limited, because we don’t have the capacity to take them to school camps.” – *Teacher, remote middle school*

“In terms of supporting kids into other pathways, we do not have a lot of options. We just have CDU VET... It is important to understand what’s out there. It’s sad that we’ve lost one of our VET courses.” – *School Leader, remote middle school*

With this noted, and especially in remote and very remote communities in the NT, there is a trade-off between the breadth of subjects and courses that can be offered, and the viability and quality of those offerings. While stakeholders have a desire to ensure students have choice and access to a broad range of experiences, there is a recognition that narrow, but deep, delivery of a smaller number of subjects or courses is necessary given the challenges of small scale and remoteness.

In this regard, it is important to acknowledge that by offering only a small specific number of senior secondary courses (including VET subjects), this does not necessarily mean all students are expected to pursue specific pathways arising from those subjects (for example, Conversation and Land Management courses leading to employment as a ranger). Participation in certain subjects or courses in senior secondary help to build broadly applicable knowledge and skills that can support a broad range of pathways, when coupled with appropriate career counselling and other supports to assist students with transitions post school.

Alignment with industry

As discussed in Section 4.1, a key purpose of secondary education is to prepare young people in participation with the labour market. To enable students to transition to further education, training, or employment, learning must be aligned with the opportunities in their local context.

A concern raised by school stakeholders was the limited alignment they observed between the curriculum to jobs or industries within their region:

“The actual curriculum isn’t aligned to jobs – there are specific options for students and [the curriculum] doesn’t set them up for these. We need to create opportunities.” – *Teacher, outer regional middle school*

“Where are we directing our kids? There’s no purposeful ‘the NT needs 1000 new engineers or 20 new rangers’, or purposely targeting [pathways]. It depends on the experts on the room – the links and experience that someone who comes in brings, really influences our school and community.” – *Teacher, remote comprehensive school*

Finding 7: A deliberate, coordinated approach to providing pathways is required in a resource constrained system, where not all pathways can or should be offered in every location. There is need to ensure that pathways are contextually relevant, matched to the aspirations of students and local communities, and aligned with opportunities for further work, study or training.

5.3 Recommendations for transitions between and beyond school

The Review makes three recommendations in response to findings in this domain. The recommendations reflect the significant opportunity for the system to provide pathways for all students that are tailored, meaningful and relevant to context, and meet their aspirations for their next steps beyond school. These recommendations set out to address key strategic priorities of the system and improve student outcomes, including effective transitions, continuity of learning and student retention. Furthermore, these pathways should contribute towards guaranteed literacy and numeracy outcomes, and NTCET completion (as explored in further detail in the learning access and design domain).

An overview is provided below, followed by detailed recommendations.

These recommendations provide direction for the system to take critical steps towards ensuring greater system coordination, oversight and consistency of pathway options, a key need highlighted by the findings of the Review. Recommendations within this domain, in particular 2.1 (Pathways Plan), are critical to the overall design of the system, have close interdependencies with the implementation of recommendations within other domains, and provide the architecture for the proposed Delivery Model and guaranteed standards of delivery for the system (see Section 3.2).

The Review recommends designing pathways for the system (Recommendation 2.1) through developing and **implementing a 'Pathways Plan' across the Northern Territory**. This encompasses both a top-down and bottom-up approach to ensuring deliberate provision of tailored and meaningful pathways that are matched to school and community aspirations and aligned with employment opportunities.

The system would coordinate the overarching Pathways Plan where schools would be supported to engage with local community to identify the local strengths and needs to be built on, and the aspirations of community for pathways. This would form the basis of a *Pathways Agreement* between the school and the system that guarantees viable, high-quality pathways for students in every community in the NT. To ensure these are aligned with local skills needs, there is scope for closer collaboration between the Department of Education, DITT, ISACNT and RTOs.

Overall, the Pathways Plan would encompass individual schools' agreements with the system that are tailored to local context and place-based, while also ensuring these sum to an overall Territory-wide pattern of provision that is intentional, coordinated and coherent.

To support with the implementation of this recommendation, the Review also recommends redesigning and significantly expanding the role of its regional workforce to have a remit for managing and implementing the Pathways Plan and Agreements within the regional operating model. Existing functions and intended outcomes would be widened to provide access to viable high-quality pathways for all students. This would be a significant change to the current state and would likely require dedicated efforts by the Department to identify and attract a suitably qualified and capable workforce to lead this critical work across the NT.

The Review also recommends supporting effective transitions (Recommendation 2.2) by foster deliberate transition support between schooling stages and settings. This also recognises that strengthening engagement with primary schools to ensure student readiness **is critical to students' success in secondary schooling**. There is also an opportunity for the Department to improve its **oversight and visibility of students' transitions** throughout schooling, leveraging national development of the USI. This is driven by the observed need for improved monitoring of student progress and transitions, better sharing of student data between schools and across sectors, and to allow schools to respond to students at their point of need. This recommendation also encompasses opportunities to improve visibility of post-school destinations, provision of the support they require to succeed, and understanding the qualifications, experiences and skills they may gain that can contribute towards the NTCET. This monitoring and support role may be included within the remit of a dedicated team at the Department that manages student pathways (also explored in the following domain).

In response to findings relating to middle schools in the Northern Territory, the Review recommends moving away from the current model of middle schooling (Recommendation 2.3), towards comprehensive secondary schools, over time. This will require close collaboration and consultation with local school communities, and both structural and cultural changes. This change has the potential to be disruptive to some communities, and will require careful and dedicated implementation effort, including through community engagement and considering more than just merging school campuses (which may necessitate new infrastructure investment in discrete instances), to ensure it is implemented successfully. In the near term, efforts should be made to break down silos between existing middle and senior secondary schools, with the transition to comprehensive secondary schools across the NT to occur over the medium to long term.

Altogether, successful implementation of these recommendations will require a process of community engagement and local decision-making to inform the system's strategy and next steps.

Recommendation 2.1: Develop and implement a Pathways Plan across the Northern Territory

The Department should develop and implement a system-wide Pathways Plan, which would encompass both a top-down and bottom-up approach to ensuring a deliberate provision of contextually relevant pathways that are matched to school and community aspirations, and provide meaningful opportunities for students that are aligned with employment opportunities. The Pathways Plan **would encompass individual schools' agreements** with regions ('**Pathway Agreements**').

In implementing the Pathways Plan, the Department has a role in systematising pathways, collaborating with agencies, and providing top-down advice to regions and schools on pathway options. The Department should:

- work in partnership (with the Department of Industry, Trade and Tourism, the Industry Skills Advisory Council NT, Regional Coordination Committees, and the Department of Chief Minister and Cabinet on jobs in regional areas) to build on existing mapping of career pathways and industry and skills needs by region and community
- **map schools' existing pathways, readiness and capacity to implement, and availability of** existing infrastructure and linkages to communities
- provide guided choice for individual schools, on relevant and meaningful pathway options in regions and specific contexts
- establish a process of local decision-making with local communities, regions and employers
- redesign the role of the regional workforces within the Department of Education to have a remit for managing and implementing the Pathways Plan and Agreements within the regional operating model, and
- coordinate the system-wide provision through monitoring regional offerings.

The regional offices have a key role in establishing Pathways Agreements with schools, which will then aggregate **to the system's overall Pathways Plan**. Regions would:

- support schools to work with local community to identify pathways, strengths and needs to be built on
- **ensure coordination, consistency and oversight of schools' Pathways Agreements**, and regional offerings that build to an overall Territory-wide pattern of provision, and
- enable collaboration and coordination between networks and regions, supporting pathways and continuity of learning.

The implementation of the Pathways Plan, and ensuring that schools can deliver on agreed delivery modes, will also require continued support and resourcing for schools. This is set out in the Delivery Model for secondary education (Section 3.2).

The Department should work with regions to periodically renew Pathways Agreements (every three to five years), to ensure relevancy to skills needs, community aspirations, infrastructure, and school capacity to deliver. When renewing Pathways Agreements, the Department should ensure

that there are mechanisms to maintain the sustainability and continuity of existing pathways for students.

Recommendation 2.2: Foster deliberate transition support between schooling stages and settings, while strengthening primary school engagement to ensure student readiness.

The Department should consider the following, to create more effective transitions throughout stages of schooling, and between settings.

Bridging and transition support

The Department should:

- explore **programs or interventions for providing bridging or 'catch up' support**
- enhance the sequencing and scaffolding of curriculum throughout secondary schooling, and
- enhance scaffolds and supports for schools to reengage students who bounce back to community from boarding settings, and
- set expectations and engage with primary schools, to ensure there is intentional preparation, building readiness of students, and provision of transition support.

Pre-completion certificate

The Department should consider designing a pre-completion certificate in the middle years, to **reflect evidence of students' achievements, accomplishments and evidence of learning**. This certificate would be designed to:

- assist students to consider their learning achievements and milestones and consider their readiness to transition to the next stage of schooling and pathways, and act as a scaffold for senior secondary schooling, and
- link to the certificates that record achievement of, or progress towards, the core literacy and numeracy standard (Recommendation 1.2).

The Review suggests that implementation should not be prescriptive and there should be discretion for schools to define what comprises the certificate beyond certain core components, as well as whether the certificate is awarded across Year 9, Year 10, or later years, depending on how students are progressing through their learning at a point in time. While the literacy and numeracy certificate (Recommendation 1.2) would be provided from Year 9 and there is a case for alignment, the flexibility is intended to support earlier or later consideration of, and preparation for, transitions across stages or settings of schooling, to increase student retention.

For the system, the certificate should represent a way for the Department to report on student learning progress for students, parents and industry. In designing the pre-completion certificate, the Department should also consider linkages to, and how it may scaffold towards the Personal Learning Plan subject (compulsory NTCET subject). The Department could consider piloting the pre-completion certificate in a selected region, prior to expanding Territory-wide.

Career advice

The Department should expand provision of career advice, and facilitate access to external agencies and resources.

The Department should work with schools to grow and (re)establish career advisors in schools, or provide access to such staff through regional offices (e.g. for small schools in very remote contexts). This is further explored in Recommendation 4.2.

Visibility of student transitions

The Department should also consider opportunities to improve its oversight and visibility of **students'** transitions throughout schooling. This would leverage the USI, and enable monitoring of student progress and transitions, ensure better sharing of student data between settings, and allow schools to respond to students at their point of need. This could support the Education

Management Program (EMP) that is currently being designed and implemented by the Department to provide improved data throughout children and young people's education.

The Department should also improve **visibility of students'** post-school destinations. This includes:

- enhance its tracking of destinations and success of students, using this to inform its support for students on their pathways
 - This may be facilitated by further progress on the USI (working with the Australian Government and Education Ministers), which could enable education and training, qualifications and micro-credentials to be tracked. This may also build on the Learner Profile received upon completing Year 12.
- work with other Departments, sectors and industries to share and monitor post-school destination data, including evidence of post-school qualifications, experiences and skills students gain that may contribute towards achievement of the NTCET and other outcomes, and
- establish a mechanism to recognise post-school qualifications, further study and/or achievements of students who have left the system and ensure this contributes towards achievement of the NTCET.

Recommendation 2.3: Move away from the middle school model and establish comprehensive schools, in current settings, over time

In the near term, the Department should commit to moving away from the middle school model. This encompasses actions to foster cultural change and reduce silos between middle and senior secondary stages of schooling (which will be facilitated by the implementation of Recommendation 2.2). This includes enhancing avenues for collaboration and sharing of collective expertise between teachers in middle and senior secondary settings.

This move will also require a combination of structural and infrastructure changes, with a transition to comprehensive secondary schools across the Northern Territory to occur over the medium to long term.

The move to a comprehensive model over time should occur on an individual community-by-community basis over the medium to long-term with careful consultation and design to minimise disruption to current delivery and with appropriate regard to infrastructure and workforce constraints that may exist. More generally, the strategy for achieving this transition should encompass approaches to undertaking school and community engagement, to determine needs and preferences of local school communities.

The move towards comprehensive schools may also be supported by reforms to the loadings allocated towards secondary year levels as part of the SNBF. While it was not the focus of this review to assess the appropriateness of these loadings, it is notable that the SRM includes separate loadings for the middle and senior secondary years of school. While this is common among several jurisdictions in Australia (including the ACT, Tasmania and WA), this may not align with contemporary evidence on the relative needs of schools across these year levels, which suggest that high performing schools tend to invest equally in supports for students in the middle and senior secondary years of high school.⁸⁹ This is, however, ameliorated by the fact that the cost of delivering a diverse senior secondary curriculum can, especially in small remote communities, be relatively high.

⁸⁹ S Lamb and R Teese, *Development of a school funding model for Western Australian public schools: Report on funding and options*, prepared for the Department of Education, Western Australia, February 2012. <<https://www.parliament.wa.gov.au/publications/tailedpapers.nsf/displaypaper/3910394c0d3543f86dec936848257bc00023a005/%24file/tp-394.pdf>>.

6 Learning access and design

Key findings: Learning design

- Finding 8: Stakeholders hold aspirations for learning design to be meaningful, culturally responsive, provide a safe and supportive learning environment, and cater to the diverse needs of all students.
 - Strengthening the cultural responsiveness of schooling, through recognising language and culture in learning design and assessment, is a key area of importance for the system.
 - Meaningful, engaging and appropriate learning opportunities that are aligned with **students’ aspirations for schooling, should be at the core of learning design.**
 - VET can support engagement and provide meaningful pathways for students. There are further opportunities to ensure that delivery of VET occurs more flexibly and in alignment with other modes of delivery.
- Finding 9: There is a need to build upon the system guidance, resources and support for schools to ensure that learning design is meaningful, responsive to student needs, and supports achievement of core literacy and numeracy skills.
 - Schools experience challenges implementing the Australian Curriculum in years 7 to 9, and would benefit from system-wide guidance and support to declutter the curriculum, enabling a focus on supporting core literacy and numeracy achievement.
 - The health, literacy, numeracy and English learning needs of students are being addressed by the HEAL program (designed by the NT School of Distance Education) prior to Stage I subjects.⁹⁰ There is potential for further flexibility in its design, and expectations for schools to contextualise and tailor learning to suit the varying needs of students.
 - Further resourcing, guidance and support is required to overcome the following challenges observed in the NT system:
 - Limited secondary schooling expertise in remote and very remote contexts
 - Capability of schools to adapt and differentiate the curriculum, and to contextualise the curriculum and gather community input
 - Teaching and learning of language and culture. While historical targeted investment to support language development and funding of bilingual programs been somewhat aligned with need, there are some regional gaps. It is not within the scope of the Review to undertake a detailed review of bilingual education. However, further review and consideration of the effectiveness of bilingual funding is likely required if the Review recommendations on learning design, credentialling and recognising language learning are to be achieved.
- Finding 10: Additional resourcing, support **and guidance, that builds on the Department’s** implementation of the Quality Standards Framework, is required for schools to deliver flexible learning approaches for students with high levels of need and to meet literacy and numeracy outcomes.
 - Schools currently vary in maturity and capability to deliver flexible learning approaches.

⁹⁰ The HEAL program is a specialist program delivered by the NT School of Distance Education. The program targets disengaged students, through a focus in literacy, and targeted, engaging and differentiated cross-curricular learning materials in English, Health, and Physical Education.

- It is important to implement support for both the academic and behavioural needs for all students (including students with disability and diverse learners) to make progress at school.
- There is inequitable access to flexible learning programs and schools across some locations of the NT, particularly in remote settings.
- Finding 11: Key programs (e.g. Learning on Country) are gaining traction and have strong community support as they emphasise two-way learning, Aboriginal governance, ownership and authority, and culturally safe and appropriate approaches.
 - This provides a useful model of practice and principles for strengthening learning design in the Northern Territory.
 - However, there is unequal access across the Northern Territory (the program is delivered across 15 remote communities in the Top End), and there is stakeholder appetite to see the program expanded across sites and regions.

6.1 Learning design

This domain explores how secondary schooling can provide meaningful learning opportunities, be culturally responsive, provide a safe and supportive learning environment, and cater to the diverse needs of all students.

6.1.1 Strengthening cultural responsiveness of schooling

Strengthening the cultural responsiveness of schooling, through recognising language and culture in learning design, is a key area of importance for the system.

As described in the *Engagement Strategy (2022-31)*, ***“our education systems must reflect the rich cultural, social and linguistic diversity among our learners to ensure all Territorians are able to learn, contribute and achieve.”***

Evidence shows that when students feel culturally safe and supported, active engagement in learning opportunities increases; and that when perspectives, language, and culture are incorporated into curriculum, students experience learning success (Box 6.1).

Culturally responsive teaching practice is important for establishing safe learning environments. It involves maintaining high expectations for all students, where all students are given the same learning opportunities and opportunities for success, accompanied by support to provide a solid foundation for learning.⁹¹ Furthermore, as articulated in a submission to the Review from the Indigenous Education Consultative Meeting Members:

“... the impetus for this curriculum delivery goes beyond ensuring every Australian young person can learn about the depth, wealth and diversity of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories, cultures and languages or to engage in reconciliation, importantly, there is a learning outcomes driver as well.”

The importance of integrating and valuing students’ cultural and language background in learning design (and recognition of learning) was repeatedly emphasised as part of consultations for this Review. Stakeholders noted the impetus and opportunity for genuine two-way learning of Aboriginal culture, language and histories, and knowledge transfer to non-Aboriginal students, which could be facilitated through curriculum design and SACE subject offerings.

“Two-way education reflects community aspiration to deliver a true bicultural education, working through a place of strength of students, not pulling it apart two ways.” – School leadership, very remote combined school

⁹¹ P Carter and K Welner, *‘Closing the opportunity gap: What America must do to give every child an even chance’*, Oxford University Press (2013).

Furthermore, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander assistant teachers play a key role in facilitating two-way learning, **and** “frequently act as the linguistic bridge between classroom curriculum and students”.⁹²

“For the NT government education system to support Indigenous language speaking students to succeed at schools, these students need teachers in the classrooms who understand their language and culture. From transition through to secondary, Aboriginal educators in remote communities play a vital and often undervalued role in the education of remote students.” – *Submission from Association of Teachers of English to Speakers of Other Languages (ATESOL) NT*

Team teaching resources to support teachers to work in a teaching team with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander educators, **and support educators’ work in planning and teaching**, are important for supporting this learning, with resources available through the Department of **Education’s eLearn hub** (further explored in Section 8).

In addition, there are several key considerations for teaching and recognising language and culture in an appropriate way, including cultural protocols and intellectual property considerations that mean permission is required from Elders in each community.

Stakeholders acknowledged that there is still significant amount of work ahead to strengthen cultural responsiveness, contextualise learning, and embed language and culture in schools.

“... [there is] the opportunity to work towards creating a system change through a curriculum in remote Aboriginal communities. At the moment it feels like we are expecting students to fit our set of criteria rather than other way around. If we can work on creating something that is culturally responsive, knowing have a very culturally diverse place in the NT, would take a bit of time. Seeing students achieve within their culture and their broader culture would be great.” *Teacher, distance education school*

“All of the above [bilingual education] requires sustained collaboration between Aboriginal educators and non-Indigenous teaching staff and provides Aboriginal teaching staff with a **central role in the education of students who speak Indigenous languages.**” – *Submission from Association of Teachers of English to Speakers of Other Languages NT*

“**There’s challenges of learning in a language that isn’t ours.**” – *Student, very remote combined school*

The Northern Territory Indigenous Language and Cultures Curriculum (NTILC) is a NT Board of Studies (NTBOS) accredited cultural curriculum, developed so **that** “all learners... have access to education in an Aboriginal language that reflects and respects their background and develops knowledge, skills and understandings.”⁹³ Notably, the NTILC was not referenced by school stakeholders in site visits, which may indicate limited awareness or uptake by these schools.

It is noted that the NTBOS is set to undertake a review of the implementation of the NTILC, and this may pose an opportunity to assess the existing curriculum and the extent to which it meets the needs of students, as well as further exploration of how the curriculum could be used as a framework to integrate skills and knowledge into certification and recognition of learning.

Box 6.1: Case study: examples of two-way learning and curriculum, New Zealand

New Zealand provides a case study **example of efforts to enable success of Māori students accessing education taught from Māori perspectives**, while also understanding the mainstream

⁹² D Angelo, S Disbray, R Singer, C O’Shannessy, J Simpson, H Smith, & G Wigglesworth. *Learning (in) indigenous languages: Common ground, diverse pathways* (2022).

⁹³ NT Department of Education, ‘*Indigenous languages and cultures – guidelines*’ (2017) <https://education.nt.gov.au/__data/assets/pdf_file/0005/1117076/indigenous-languages-culture-guidelines.pdf>.

disciplines through its co-existing English-medium and Māori-medium curriculum. The approach aims to ensure that Māori students have access to education that acknowledges and incorporates their cultural heritage while also providing a foundation in mainstream academic disciplines.

Te Reo Māori, the Māori language, is recognised as an official language in New Zealand. The Treaty of Waitangi is a founding document in New Zealand, which established the partnership between Māori and non-Māori communities and sets out principles for cooperation. In the context of education, the Treaty of Waitangi serves as a guiding framework for incorporating Māori perspectives, language, and culture within the curriculum.⁹⁴ The incorporation of Te Reo Māori within the education system reflects the commitment to preserving and revitalizing Māori language and culture. Schools across the country offer Te Reo Māori classes, and some even provide bilingual education, where instruction is delivered in both English and Māori.

There are two distinct approaches to instruction and language used in the New Zealand education system. These include:

Māori Medium Education: Māori medium education is an approach where Te Reo Māori is the primary language of instruction, integrating Māori culture, values, and knowledge systems into the curriculum to revitalise and promote the use of the language while providing a comprehensive education for Māori students.⁹⁵

English Medium Education: English medium education is the standard approach in New Zealand, with the curriculum delivered in English and a focus on a wide range of subjects. However, efforts are made to incorporate Māori culture, language, and perspectives to foster a culturally responsive learning environment, including teachings on the Treaty of Waitangi, Māori history, and respect for Māori culture.⁹⁶

An illustrative example of the success of this approach to curriculum is the Year 12 completion rates of Māori students in New Zealand. In 2021, under the English curriculum, the completion rate for Māori students was 35.8 per cent. However, for those studying under the Māori curriculum, the completion rate was 53.4 per cent. This achievement was nearly on par with the average completion rate of all students, which stood at 55.8 per cent.⁹⁷

Funding for language and culture is provided through targeted funding of language programs, and additional loadings in the SRM.

The NT government system has historically funded two language support programs in secondary schools: intensive English Unit programs, and bilingual education programs (as described in Section 2.5.3).

In addition to the analysis of targeted funding for language development outlined in this section, it should also be noted that schools receive loadings in the SRM to support students with additional language needs. However, schools do not necessarily see the funding in that way, and specific resources and supports need to be provided to schools to realise the value of this funding.

Additionally, there are Aboriginal-controlled initiatives such as the Warlpiri Education and Training Trust (WETT) that fund Warlpiri language and culture teaching and development in schools in the Central region.

⁹⁴ New Zealand Government, 'The Education and Training Act 2020: Te Tiriti o Waitangi', 2021 <<https://www.education.govt.nz/our-work/legislation/education-and-training-act-2020/the-education-and-training-act-te-tiriti-o-waitangi/>>.

⁹⁵ New Zealand Government, 'Māori Medium Schools', *Education Counts*, 2023 <<https://www.educationcounts.govt.nz/directories/maori-medium-schools>>.

⁹⁶ Te Kete Ipurangi, 'The New Zealand Curriculum' (28 April 2023) <<https://nzcurriculum.tki.org.nz/content/download/1108/11989/file/NZ%20Curriculum%20Web.pdf>>.

⁹⁷ New Zealand Government, 'School leaver's attainment', *Education Counts*, 2023 <<https://www.educationcounts.govt.nz/statistics/school-leavers>>.

There is a desire for increased resourcing and support to strengthen teaching and learning of language and culture.

A range of stakeholders consulted with for the Review (including schools, peak bodies and Aboriginal community-controlled organisations) noted the efforts by educators and community to develop and maintain resources for teaching language and culture, and supporting curriculum delivery in language. As described in a discussion paper submission from **Yinjiya Mark Guyula**, Member for Mulka: ***"This also places great importance on well-resourced Literacy Production Centres producing materials in many local languages for parents and children to engage with."***

However, stakeholders frequently referenced the need to strengthen the level of resourcing and support to develop these materials and support teaching and learning. As an example, one school visited during the Review noted that it is becoming increasingly difficult to produce materials through its Literature Production Centre, and community Elders expressed concern that the school does not receive resources and facilities needed to protect and care for the Yolngu Matha resources. Community ownership and decision-making was emphasised as central to this process, where the community, rather than the school, should manage language and culture resources.

"The government think it should be English first, [our school] believe we should have both (English and Yolngu Matha)." – School leader, very remote combined school

Recognising the importance of these resources and the critical role of Literature Production Centres in some communities, this Review has not sought to evaluate the effectiveness and viability of these models of support for bilingual education, noting that Literature Production Centres and Interpreter Services, etc., may play a role in maintaining these resources and working with schools, in some contexts.

Analysis demonstrates that while historical targeted investment to support language development and funding of bilingual programs been somewhat aligned with need, there are some regional gaps.

Over the period of 2017 to 2021, the Department has invested approximately \$28.5 million in language supports. This investment has occurred in ten schools with secondary education students across the period 2017 to 2021 (Table 6.1).

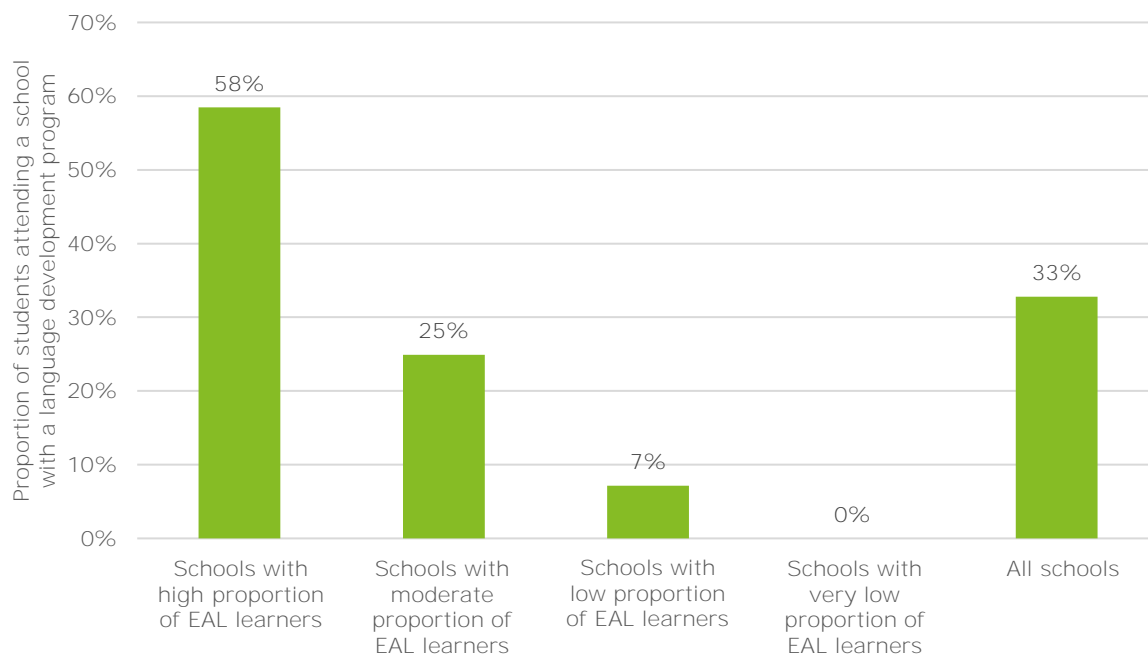
Table 6.1: Language development programs supporting secondary education delivery in NT

School	Program	Average funding per annum (2017-2021)
Darwin High School	Intensive English Unit program	\$1.54 million
Sanderson Middle School	Intensive English Unit program	\$1.02 million
Yuendumu School	Bilingual education program	\$0.49 million
Maningrida College	Bilingual education program	\$0.39 million
Shepherdson College	Bilingual education program	\$0.37 million
Yirrkala School	Bilingual education program	\$0.35 million
Milingimbi School	Bilingual education program	\$0.33 million
Lajamanu School	Bilingual education program	\$0.28 million
Numbulwar School	Bilingual education program	\$0.21 million
Willowra School	Bilingual education program	\$0.19 million

Source: NT Department of Education data.

The system provides targeted investment to support language development, with analysis undertaken for the Review showing that this investment has been somewhat aligned with need (Chart 6.1).⁹⁸ Overall, one-in-three students that speak English as an additional language attend a school with language development programs. This increases to 58 per cent in high needs schools – those with a large proportion of students that speak English as an additional language.

Chart 6.1: Proportion of secondary students that attend a NT Government-funded school with a targeted language development program



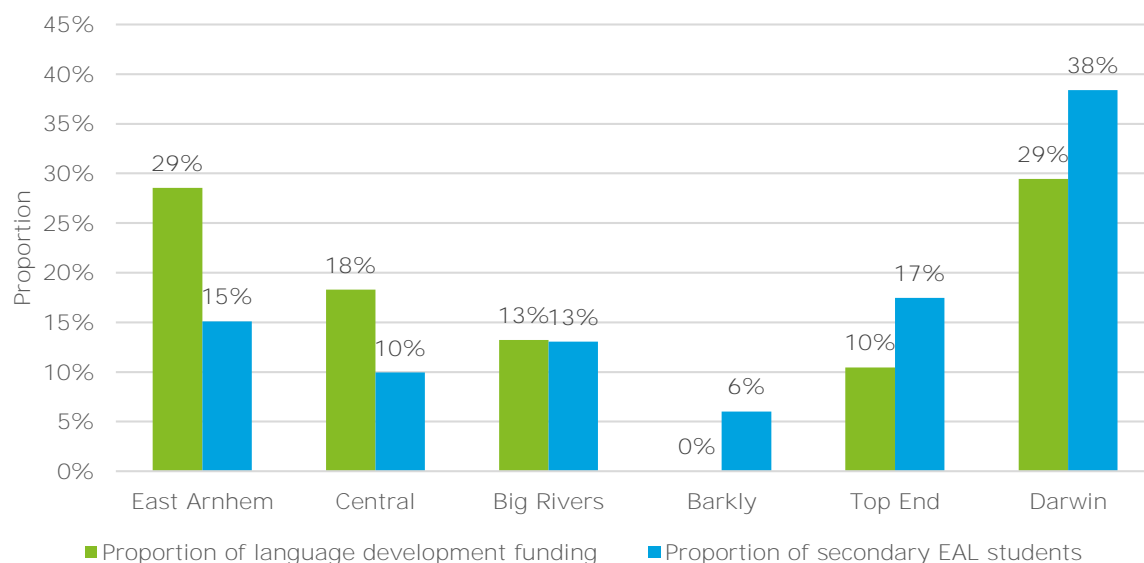
Source: Deloitte Access Economics (2023) using NT student needs-based funding model data

Notes: Need is defined as the proportion of students within each school that speak English as an additional language.

While funding for programs is somewhat aligned to where students that speak English as an additional language are located, there are some regional gaps. Specifically, the Barkly region has received no funding for language development programs, despite 62 per cent of students in the region speaking English as an additional language or dialect. This is in contrast to East Arnhem, which receives 29 per cent of total funding for language development programs despite accounting for 15 per cent of students that speak English as an additional language in secondary schools across the NT (Chart 6.2).

⁹⁸ To support this assessment, schools were sorted into four categories of need based on the proportion of students that speak English as an additional language at each school. Then, the proportion of students that speak English as an additional language that attend schools with language development programs within each need level was calculated, for the calendar year 2022.

Chart 6.2: Funding for language development programs in secondary schools in 2022, by region



Source: Deloitte Access Economics (2023) using NT student needs-based funding model data.

The reasons for gaps in regional delivery of language development programs appear to be related to historical allocations of language development programs. Consultations with schools identified that regions such as the Top End and East Arnhem tend to be relatively well funded to support language development due to strong community and school engagement in support of these programs.

The Review also identifies that there has been no growth in the scale of bilingual education programs in the Northern Territory. Schools funded to deliver bilingual programs were originally allocated funding under the now terminated NT Bilingual Education Program.⁹⁹ Since 2008, there has been no additional investment in bilingual education programs outside of these schools. This has been driven, in part, by difficulties in delivering bilingual education programs due to an inadequate supply of teachers, and a lack of agreement across the sector (despite strong support from community) of the effectiveness of bilingual education programs in improving English language attainment, and student outcomes.¹⁰⁰

It should be noted that it is not within the scope of the Review to undertake a detailed review of bilingual education. However, if the Review recommendations on credentialling and recognising language learning are to be achieved, further review and consideration of the effectiveness of bilingual funding is likely required.

Principles and demonstrated effective practices of some existing programs have a potential to provide a useful model for learning design in the Northern Territory.

There is an opportunity for the system to draw on pockets of existing effective practice to inform learning design. As an example, the Learning on Country (LoC) program is currently delivered across 15 remote communities in the Top End in partnership with ranger groups, and is administered by the Northern Land Council. The program has strong school and community support, and was frequently cited as delivering effective two-way learning in the senior secondary **years, building on students’ strengths, recognising rich learning of students, and engaging** students in learning.

In consultation, stakeholders noted that LoC reflects community aspirations to deliver a true two-way, bicultural education, and working through a place of strength of students. Stakeholders noted

⁹⁹ B Devlin, 'The Status and Future of Bilingual Education for Remote Indigenous Students in the Northern Territory' (2011), *Australian Review of Applied Linguistics*.

¹⁰⁰S Disbray, 'At benchmark? Evaluating the Northern Territory bilingual education program' (2013), *Charles Darwin University*.

several success factors for the program, including that it is delivered in partnership with ranger groups, community Elders in supporting intergenerational knowledge, and where there are embedded trainers.

“We need to be getting kids out of the school [learning on country], if we talk about two-ways, they need to be engaged. It’s massive but it’s so important.” – *School leader, remote middle school*

The LoC program was also recognised for incorporating suitable and locally applicable units of learning, that are integrated into curriculum-based tasks that target literacy and numeracy outcomes. The learning outcomes of LoC lead to VET credits towards the NTCET certificates in conservation and land management, and are aligned with employment opportunities in the region.

One school principal described that LoC is considered a core part of the senior secondary learning design and the NTCET offered through the school. There are also instances of LoC bringing together school communities who are clustering delivery, including through school camps, and helping isolated secondary students to come together and connect with their peers.

The Northern Land Council, which administers the program, noted the following key outcomes of the program in a submission to the Review:

“The results of this program speak for themselves. It is recognised across all sites that student attendance increases on timetabled LoC activity days and when on-country camps and ‘ranger days’ are scheduled. A number of principals have noted LoC was a key factor in adapting and engaging students during the period of COVID-19 restrictions and have referred to it as a true ‘lighthouse’ program. During the 2022 second semester, 2,575 remote Aboriginal students participated in LoC activities, with 835 middle and senior students undertaking regular core-based LoC activities and vocational education and training.” – *Submission from Northern Land Council*

The submission from the Northern Land Council also described the principles and practices that guide Learning on Country (see Box 6.2). These are key to the success of LoC, and are aligned with the foundations of the *Engagement Strategy* (2022-31), and as such provide a useful model for learning design and delivery of secondary education in the Northern Territory.

Box 6.2: Principles and practices that guide Learning on Country

- Aboriginal governance, ownership and authority, ensuring cultural safety and culturally appropriate approaches
- commitment to good two-way practice, incorporating Aboriginal and western knowledge systems
programs developed collaboratively between local Aboriginal stakeholders and the education system
- a focus on applied skills that increase readiness for jobs that exist in the community
- supporting intergenerational transfer of culture and traditional knowledge, which helps to keep culture strong and is a well-established protective factor for the wellbeing of young people
- monitoring, evaluation, improvement and reporting based on participatory planning and management.

Source: Submission from the Northern Land Council

There was a strong desire across many stakeholder groups, including schools visited throughout the Review, to see LoC – or models like the LoC – expanded across regions of the NT, given the current inequities of access. In a submission to the Review, the Aboriginal Peak Organisations NT (APO NT) advocated that the **“Commonwealth government look to expand LoC type programs across the NT, that are designed to led by Aboriginal people.”** The model is also considered to be suitable to be delivered in partnership with other sectors – for example, health – in addition to ranger groups who are currently involved in delivery.

However, stakeholders also cited challenges in delivering LoC, including availability of trainers, workforce capacity, and inflexible administrative requirements that can at times prevent community members, and in some cases, community Elders from delivering the program. These could be considered as factors that may impact on school or community readiness to deliver the program. Furthermore, additional resourcing was only available through grants, including the provision of vehicles, dedicated resourcing, and funds, which at times impacted its delivery.

6.1.2 Ensuring meaningful and engaging learning opportunities Meaningful, engaging and appropriate learning opportunities should be at the core of learning design in the Northern Territory.

Meaningful learning is one of four key themes within the **NT's Engagement Strategy (2022-31)**, and a fundamental part of learning design for the NT.

“Young people want to be challenged by their learning, to push themselves and feel a sense of accomplishment. Meaningful learning should inspire. Young people told us that they want to see the practical value of their education and understand where it can take **them after school.**”¹⁰¹

Key to meaningful learning is ensuring that there are options **that align with students' interests, goals and aspirations for secondary schooling.** As such, it is important that there is a diversity of **learning options and pathways that best meet students' needs,** with high expectations for all students to achieve. Given the flexibility of its senior secondary certificate, the NT is well placed to offer multiple options towards schooling completion, including a combination of academic pathways (e.g. specialist subjects and ATAR pathways towards tertiary studies), vocational pathways, community achievements, and more.

The subsequent section explores how the system can realise meaningful and engaging learning: that is, being culturally responsive, catering to diverse needs and ensuring the skills and knowledge they gain can be applied in real life. The following section explores how VET is contributing towards this objective for the schooling system, noting however there are several other considerations for meaningful learning (including the cultural responsiveness of the system, and curriculum design), which are explored throughout this report.

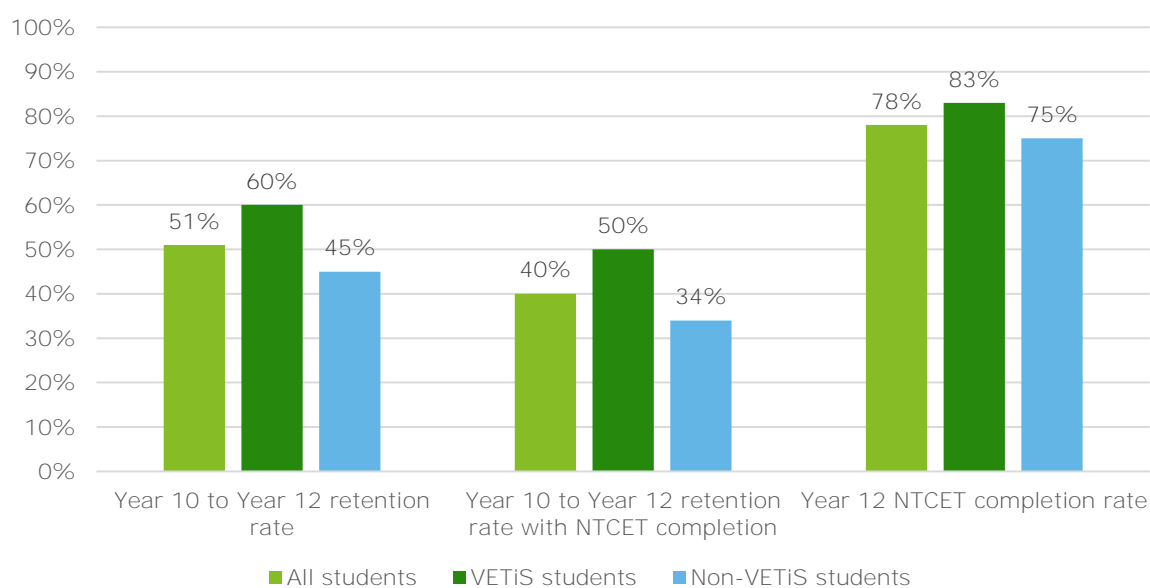
VET can support engagement in schooling, and achievement of meaningful post-schooling pathways.

School stakeholders consulted for this Review highlighted the role that VET plays in engaging students in schooling, completion of Year 12, and equipping students with the skills and competencies to pursue related post-school pathways.

There is some evidence of a positive association between engaging in VETiS and school retention and completion rates. Chart 6.3 below examines student retention (from Year 10 to Year 12) and completions (from Year 10 to achieving the NTCET). It identifies that 63 per cent of VETiS students commenced Year 12 (in 2021), compared to only 45 per cent of non-VETiS students. Furthermore, 50 per cent both commenced Year 12 and then finished with an NTCET, compared to 34 per cent for non-VETiS students. This represents an NTCET completion (for those who commence Year 12) of 83 per cent, compared to 75 per cent for non-VETiS students. While this analysis is preliminary in nature, it supports a positive trend and warrants further interrogation.

¹⁰¹ Northern Territory Government, *Northern Territory Education Engagement Strategy 2022-2031* <https://education.nt.gov.au/__data/assets/pdf_file/0003/1058421/northern-territory-education-engagement-strategy-2022-2031.pdf>.

Chart 6.3: Retention and completion rates in the NT, 2021



Source: Deloitte Access Economics analysis, foundational review of VETiS (2023).

Note: This analysis is restricted to government school students in Year 10 in 2019. VETiS students are identified as those that studied VETiS as part of completing their NTCET at any stage of secondary schooling.

These trends, combined with insights from consultations, point to VETiS as an important pathway contributing to the completion of schooling (and student engagement), and NTCET attainment.

“VET style learning which focuses on physical and practical learning, and capabilities provides much greater potential for increased educational outcomes, especially in remote and very remote areas.” – *Submission from the Australian Education Union NT*

However, with a focus on student engagement comes a potential risk that VET is viewed as a pathway for less academically inclined students, which can signal to students and stakeholders that the pathway is unequal to an academic pathway. This is despite a requirement for students to have foundational skills (language, literacy and numeracy) skills to undertake VET courses. It is important for this perception to be addressed, particularly given the role of VET in contributing towards achievement of the NTCET over time – highlighting these can be complementary pathways.

Various models of VETiS delivery are offered throughout the NT, which meet the learning needs of different learners in different contexts. Short courses are viewed favourably by school and community stakeholders, particularly in remote locations, where there was strong appetite for block delivery in regions where students reside in facilities and gain a certificate qualification (or part thereof). However, there was also preference among some school stakeholders for regular day attendance embedded within the school week, as identified through the VETiS review. As described in a submission from an internal Department stakeholder:

“Short courses are great for engagement and integrated learning. Certificate level courses can be too long and there is a risk of dis-engagement. Short courses have more engagement, and result in better outcomes.”

There appears to be a trade-off between principles of relevance and viability in relation to VETiS delivery in some contexts, with implications for meaningful learning. Viable course offerings in some small and remote communities may not always be relevant to student or community aspirations, or align with local skills needs and employment opportunities in community. Conversely, what may be relevant to a local community may not be viable to deliver due to a range of factors including availability of trainers or distance. However, the Review heard from an Expert Reference Network member that these course offerings still serve an important purpose –

provided there is rigour in VET learning design that keeps students engaged, supports development of general capabilities and employability skills, supports flexible pathways, and allows students see the possibilities of vocational pathways beyond schooling. This accords with broader conceptions around 'learning for life'.¹⁰²

"It [VETiS provision] has to align to personal capabilities, where it doesn't matter so much to a kid in a remote or small community which trade what they're being prepared for, it's more about what they learn about themselves and thinking about physical objects in their trade training. There's probably only half a dozen places in the Territory where you can be trained as an electrician. When you're thinking about how you can offer on the trade training side of schools, it's going to be thin in terms of what trade. But the personal capabilities you can develop in any context, where you learn skills that are valuable to yourself and your community." – *Expert Reference Network member*

In this regard, it may be less important for the system to deliver comprehensive VET offerings that are relevant and demonstrate alignment with regional skills needs, provided that the learning design enables student engagement and outcomes. However, a careful balance should be maintained between this position, and the need to ensure relevance to students, their interests and aspirations, and in supporting them to take the first step towards a vocation.

Timetabling VET delivery in a way that avoids clashes with core teaching and learning continues to be a challenge. Ensuring that VET is delivered in coherence is important as the system works towards the desired equality and status of pathways.

The Review heard of instances where VET delivery conflicts with schooling subjects and NTSDE delivery, rather than working as a coherent and embedded schooling experience. Stakeholders noted a tension for students who want to undertake VET, however, must miss subject classes due to school timetabling challenges. These challenges partly arise due to the quantity of VET courses on offer, meaning that clashes are often unavoidable. Where these conflicts occur, undertaking VET can be punitive for students as they miss out on learning and may also be streamed into 'catch-up' cohorts to make up for learning gaps, leading to potential residualisation.

Furthermore, NTSDE noted instances where they are starting to gain traction with students in terms of participation, only for students to participate in VET for weeks and miss classes as a result (with little communication between the two delivery modes).

Ensuring that all pathways are equally respected, seen as complementary, and valuable for meeting the post-schooling aspirations of students, requires lessening of undue focus on certain pathways, as well as more flexibility in ensuring learning structures do not privilege academic over vocational pathways.

This points to a need to make schooling curriculum and other modes of delivery more inclusive of, and coherent with VET delivery, and vice versa. This may be achieved where schools are given more flexibility to deliver VET, for example in a way that is more in line with a traditional subject and with embedded trainers. However, this approach may be challenging to deliver in certain settings, in that it requires a critical mass of students, flexibility in the workforce, and availability of trainers to suit a regular day attendance mode. It is also perceived by some school stakeholders to be difficult to introduce and maintain.

Practically, greater coherence of delivery will need to be managed through timetabling considerations, as well as the coordination of pathways more generally. There are examples of how vocational training and the NTCET can be pursued through a cohesive and embedded approach. The below discussion paper submission provides an example of how this is currently experienced by a student:

"We are currently transitioning through the NTCET which has greatly benefited my child who can now achieve their year 12 certificate while also working and attending VET. The Darwin High School's Centre for Skills and Training is a fantastic example of providing a

¹⁰² OECD, *OECD Skills Outlook 2021: Learning for Life* (2021) <<https://doi.org/10.1787/0ae365b4-en>>.

school timetable that allows for work/VET study, while enabling progress towards NTCET.”
– *Submission from Anonymous Individual 1*

Notwithstanding best practice examples that may exist in the NT, this area continues to prove challenging for school staff to manage with limited time and resources, likely leading to poorer student experiences as described above. It is important that schools and providers coordinate in support of this delivery, and to align with timetables (for example, ensuring classes are held on the same day(s) of the school week, or for block intensive models, holding training in the same two-week period regularly).

There are programs and settings across the NT that provide flexibility in learning and maximise student engagement.

In addition to Learning on Country (explored in Section 6.1.1) there are other programs providing flexibility and maximising engagement of students, with a case study provided below.

Box 6.3: Palmerston Youth Skills Centre (PYSC)

Palmerston Youth Skills Centre (PYSC) is an RTO that provides VET and supports the engagement of students through offering flexible delivery and work-readiness training.¹⁰³

It caters for secondary school students and youth who have disengaged or are at risk of disengaging from schools. Additionally, it provides young people leaving detention with supportive re-entry into learning.

At the time of writing, PYSC caters to up to 300 students, who can enrol in courses across a range of industries, including, engineering, animal studies, hospitality, construction, and automotive.

Students have a choice of three pathways:

- Career Pathways – a VET certification program for young people wanting to pursue careers in construction, electro-technology, engineering, automotive, or hospitality industries.
- Accredited Short Courses – deliver specialist training (e.g. digital literacy, drones, robotics, and artificial intelligence), support the worksite placements and learning opportunities with participating employers, and develop foundation employability skills and workplace literacy, language, and numeracy skills.
- Accredited and Non-Accredited Short courses – available to help young people decide on appropriate learning pathways and to prepare for training at the Palmerston Youth Skills Centre.¹⁰⁴

Each pathway provides students with credits towards their NTCET, as well as encouraging future training, skill progression, and employment opportunities.

In a consultation undertaken as part of this Review, **it was highlighted that PYSC's effectiveness** was based on developing strong relationships with the young people and their families, being a professional setting (rather than a school), offering pathways aligned to industry needs, and strong relationships with industries.

Finding 8: Stakeholders hold aspirations for learning design to be meaningful, culturally responsive, provide a safe and supportive learning environment, and cater to the diverse needs of all students.

¹⁰³ 'Who we are', Northern Territory Government – Palmerston Youth Skills Centre (2023), <<https://youthskillscentre.nt.gov.au/who-we-are>>.

¹⁰⁴ Northern Territory Government, 'Investing in education: Youth Skills Centre opens at Palmerston', *The National Tribune* (2021).

6.1.3 Guidance and support for core curriculum design and implementation
Schools experience challenges implementing the Australian Curriculum in years 7 to 9 and would benefit from system-wide guidance and support to declutter the curriculum, enabling a focus on supporting achievement of core literacy and numeracy.

Some school stakeholders found implementing the Australian Curriculum in the middle years challenging, as they perceived there to be little room to tailor instruction and learning to the unique needs and interests of students. Teachers described having many 'boxes to tick', and limited time to deliver targeted interventions due to the need to move through the curriculum quickly, which can contribute to students falling behind, experiencing learning gaps and hindered engagement. This was raised as a particular issue in the NT given high levels of student mobility: where the curriculum content is not being taught in the same sequence across schools, this can impact on learning and engagement of students who are frequently moving between schools, for example where they need to re-learn the same content.

"Going by the Australian Curriculum – **it's hard as it's so prescriptive and doesn't hold purpose in clientele.**" – *School leader, outer regional comprehensive school*

Stakeholders described difficulties with adapting and sufficiently differentiating the Australian Curriculum for a wide range of student needs. This is especially challenging when middle and senior years are combined in a single class, and where students are not working at year level for literacy and numeracy, as is frequently the case in very remote areas of the NT.

"**A challenge is the (academic) variation of levels of students. The curriculum isn't what students need and becomes impossible to teach, especially in English.**" – *School Leader, very remote combined school*

Stakeholders felt that greater flexibility in teaching and learning, and support and guidance to focus on core content, would enable a stronger focus on achieving core literacy and numeracy outcomes for students. However, the Review acknowledges that these actions are currently being **pursued in strategic reforms by the Department's central curriculum teams**, and that greater flexibility is anticipated to be realised when version 9 of the Australian Curriculum is fully implemented in the NT.¹⁰⁵

"Teachers are trying to do it [focus on core content], **but curriculum is jam packed, there's not flexibility.** But we need to push back and say you need to do things differently. A lot of **principals don't have the knowledge and experience to do it. It's really giving them permission to say, 'it's not what it has to look like'. This should come from higher.**" – *School leader, remote comprehensive school*

"A great deal of educator inefficiency comes from constantly redesigning educational resources. Alongside high staff turnover rates, this results in a lack of continuity in educational programs... The Department of Education has a role to play in providing clearly differentiated resources for each subject. Ideally, these resources will not be differentiated according to year-level, but against a literacy or numeracy standard so that local educators can choose the level most appropriate for their students." – *Response to discussion paper questionnaire, school staff member*

The HEAL program is being used to address the health, literacy, numeracy and English learning needs of students prior to stage I subjects. Some schools are building on HEAL to contextualise learning for students.

The HEAL program – a specialist program developed and offered by NTSDE across the NT as a re-engagement and intervention program – was extensively reflected throughout school consultations as a strength that is meeting **schools' needs**. Specifically, the HEAL program targets disengaged students, through a focus on literacy, and targeted, engaging and differentiated cross-curricular learning materials in English, Health, and Physical Education. Enrolment in HEAL contributes to NTCET credits, supporting schools to provide an NTCET education where they do not have the

¹⁰⁵ Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority, *Curriculum* (2022).

resources available, and provides bridging support to students before undertaking Stage I and Stage II subjects.

The program is seeing rapid and increasing uptake across many remote schools over recent years.

"There's lots of positives if it's getting traction. The positive is there's support for [senior secondary teacher], there's a specific learning and teaching component that is at level, so [senior secondary teacher] is not planning for every individual student because it's prepared for him. The strength of that is [senior secondary teacher] can put more time into the teaching side and not so much as preparation. You can't do both." – *School leader, very remote comprehensive school*

The HEAL program was noted by stakeholders to be addressing a key gap, and meeting a need in the system and for the students it caters for. It is seen as an effective starting point for enabling curriculum delivery in remote contexts, supporting students below EAL/D level 4 who do not have foundational literacy and numeracy skills, and scaffolding the curriculum prior to stage I and stage II subjects.

"[Students] struggled with the structure of secondary school, and it appeared that because we have to use a curriculum, they work the curriculum, but the real needs of the students had been forgotten. I hadn't been working with a confined curriculum, at times I use HEAL, but I concentrate on developing the basic skills – reading and numeracy skills." – *School leader, very remote primary school*

The Review visited schools that were benefitting from HEAL program resources and the support provided by NTSDE staff, particularly where the school does not have the capacity or the personnel to design and implement learning that is aligned with student needs. Staff from NTSDE visit schools to establish the program, including validating current course curriculum needs, and provide continued support with delivery, curriculum materials and student assessments. In these contexts, the HEAL program minimises the planning and curriculum work, and support schools through on-the-ground support and capability building from visiting NTSDE teachers.

Box 6.4. Key elements of the HEAL program developed by NTSDE

The HEAL program has several key elements that currently enable it to address the needs of schools and students in the system and that meet gaps in delivery. Where these are observed, this is likely to drive successful implementation.

- supports teachers with planning and delivery: the materials provided through HEAL are reducing the time teachers need to plan and supporting the capacity of the school.
- resources available at the local schools: a staff member needs to be available to support students undertaking the HEAL program, noting that capability is built by staff at the NTSDE.
- aligned with, and scaffolded to the NTCET/SACE curriculum: the resources align with the curriculum and map backwards to build numeracy, literacy and ICT levels so that students can successfully complete stage I subjects
- facilitates personalised learning for individuals
- provides capability building for school staff on-the-ground: staff at the NTSDE work with schools to provide support and capability building, and undertake moderation processes to understand how it is being delivered
- allows for differentiated literacy access: materials can be adapted for different levels
- allows for further contextualisation: the HEAL curriculum can be built upon to be contextualised for relevance to individual context. Noting this, however, there is potential for further flexibility in its design, and expectations for schools to further contextualise and tailor learning to suit the varying needs of students
- shared data and visibility of progress: data follows the student, supporting visibility of student progress and need. As this data can be accessed and used by teachers, this can support students to transition effectively into a new learning environment (which is especially critical given high levels of student mobility).

There is potential for further flexibility in the design of the HEAL program, and expectations for schools to contextualise and tailor learning to suit the varying needs of students.

While the HEAL program meets a key gap for student learning, it was also acknowledged by school and system stakeholders that it is not sufficient on its own (e.g. without contextualisation to the local context), nor is it intended to be the sole solution for meeting the learning needs of students.

"There's some different views on the value and merits where it's [the HEAL program] not contextualised – but here, you just need something and as you build the other strengths of the community." – *Principal, very remote combined school*

Teachers described the adaptation and contextualisation of the HEAL that needs to occur in very remote areas and homelands:

"... in this context, everything requires adapting – but the person running it still needs to spend a large amount of time to tailor it – you may as well as design it yourself. Ideally accessing learning that is prescribed doesn't give rise to contextualised learning – they do the best they can do when you do it NT-wide, but at the end of the day it doesn't completely fit around here."

Additionally, some stakeholders noted the program offered limited flexibility for students, particularly when enrolling in units that meet their skill level. For example, students are required to undertake all units, even if they do not require the additional scaffolding (e.g. undertaking an 'essential' level unit when they could be engaging in a higher level of learning). This may result in students disengaging from HEAL, if they perceive the learning is not suited to their ability.

It was noted by stakeholders that there should be an expectation for schools to build on, tailor, and contextualise this from the base that the HEAL program offers, and to integrate this with the school curriculum. From a system perspective, support and capability building for schools is likely required to achieve this objective of contextualised and tailored learning for students when implementing the HEAL program.

Furthermore, a review and evaluation of the HEAL program's evidence base, and assurance that the program is aligned with and can be further leveraged to meet the system's teaching and learning priorities, is likely required.

There is a need for improved and centralised data that allows schools to understand and respond to student needs.

Data-informed practice is critical for supporting and meeting students at their point of need in foundational literacy and numeracy skills, particularly to enable students to connect with new content and skills. However, sometimes data is not available, preventing schools from being able to adequately plan for new students, and particularly for those who have additional needs. Furthermore, in the context of widespread student mobility in the Northern Territory and data challenges, schools often face challenges in understanding student need and progress when they move schools.

Schools consulted with for the Review noted that one of the benefits of the HEAL program is the centralised data system that provides visibility of student data and progress, supporting teachers' planning and supports for students. The centralised data can be accessed by teachers to understand student progress and cater to their point of need, more easily facilitating the transition to a new learning environment. This provides a basis for further exploration by the system, to inform a more systematic approach to data.

6.1.4 Capability to contextualise and scaffold the curriculum

This section builds on findings of the previous section, positioning the need for a core curriculum, expectations for schools to build in a base level of contextualisation, and to ensure sufficient scaffolding of the middle years to senior secondary curriculum.

In some contexts, limited secondary schooling expertise in the workforce creates challenges for effective teaching and learning.

Resourcing secondary schools with qualified secondary teachers, particularly in specialist subject areas, is a key challenge for delivery in the NT that is acutely observed in remote locations. This is exacerbated within the context of national teacher shortages, and with the erosion of senior secondary provision in remote areas of the NT over the past decade.

In delivering secondary education, remote schools often combine multiple year levels between ages 13 to 17 in a secondary education classroom – or in some instances, one middle years classroom and one senior years classroom. These classes are frequently taught by primary trained teachers who do not have previous secondary teaching experience. Differentiating for a wide range of student needs is especially more challenging where teachers do not have expertise in pedagogical practices or curriculum for the secondary years.

“There’s not a good understanding of what secondary education should look like and it’s not prioritised.” – *Teacher, very remote combined school*

Schools also described the workload challenges associated with teaching a combined secondary education classroom, and the limitations of delivering a diversity of curriculum where specialist teachers are not available (noting, however, that NTSDE is currently supplementing access in remote locations).

“There is no senior secondary teacher at the school. The principals each have a teaching load – 12 hours per week – to make up for this. This puts pressure on the school.” – *School leader, very remote combined school*

Furthermore, a lack of secondary teaching expertise can make it particularly difficult for schools to navigate senior secondary and SACE provision, understand the flexibility the certificate affords, and access available supports or resources. Capability building is difficult where there are limited opportunities for professional development, as is the case in remote locations.

This suggests that a more intentional approach to providing professional development, whether this is around understanding and enacting the flexibility of the NTCET, is important to drive improvements in secondary education delivery.

There is varying capability to differentiate and contextualise the curriculum, and a need for the system to set expectations and provide supports for school to achieve this through gathering community input.

School consultations highlighted the varying capability of staff to implement contextually relevant learning design, and create learning experiences that are meaningful and engaging for students. Furthermore, it was acknowledged that differentiating and contextualising the curriculum is difficult to implement in practice, particularly without capacity and capability to engage with community to gather input.

Stakeholders expressed that they do not always have, or know where to access, supporting resources and guidance.

“[We have] Year 5 to senior years in one classroom, and the older children struggle to engage, and learning is not relevant or contextualised to their stage of learning.” – *Principal, Barkly Region Principal Collaborative Learning event*

“I can’t get my head around why an entire state doesn’t break it down, all the way into a guide to making judgement, to year levels – taken from a curriculum and used into the assessment. I’ve had to adopt a lot of stuff from Queensland to here with A-E. That was something I struggled with.” – *Teacher, very remote comprehensive school*

In some instances, there are cases where community input has been gathered in curriculum design, with this occurring through the **support provided from the Department’s central curriculum team**. However, many stakeholders identified the opportunity and need for all schools (including

small schools) to do this better, and expressed the need for support to undertake community engagement to develop a contextualised local curriculum that reflects community aspirations:

“The LEaD committee were saying we needed to incorporate in the school, we want more learning on country so that the culture was not lost. We wanted to incorporate our Amantyerre phonics in the program, so they can read and write. That’s what we were hearing.” – *School leader, very remote combined school*

There is a need for the system to set expectations for schools to contextualise and scaffold the curriculum, while ensuring that there is high expectations and quality of curriculum for all students.

Stakeholders emphasised that the need for the system to set expectations for schools to contextualise and gather community input on curriculum to ensure it is meaningful and engaging for students. This would require support and guidance from the system, as well as strong messaging that curriculum design should support all students to achieve, rather than creating a two-speed system with different levels of expectation or quality of curriculum for students across different contexts of the NT.

“The best outcomes result from aiming towards and utilising nationally based standards and systems. Our kids can achieve. Our remote kids can achieve. Our kids in youth detention can achieve. We don’t need a lower quality option for them, we need to find ways for them to access the same quality curriculum as everyone else.” – *Submission from discussion paper questionnaire*

Finding 9: There is a need to build upon the system guidance, resources and support for schools to ensure that learning design is meaningful, responsive to student needs, and supports achievement of core literacy and numeracy skills.

6.1.5 Supporting flexible learning for students

Schools require additional support to grow in maturity and capability to deliver flexible learning programs, in order to deliver literacy and numeracy outcomes and meet high levels of student need.

Stakeholders noted unmet needs in terms of appropriate learning environments and pathways that support the diverse academic, social, emotional and behavioural needs of students. This includes students with significant levels of additional need, and who may experience anxiety, trauma, school refusal, or have a disability.

There was also a view held by several stakeholder groups that the government schooling system has an opportunity to strengthen supports to schools, to ensure they can respond to varying student needs, including those who begin secondary schooling with low levels of readiness and literacy and numeracy skills.

Student behaviour was also cited as an area where teachers need more support to manage. Nationally, teachers report that behaviour appears to have worsened post-COVID-19.¹⁰⁶ Research shows Australian teachers feel less prepared for, or capable of managing disruptive classroom behaviour.¹⁰⁷ A Senate Inquiry is currently underway examining this issue, with the Terms of Reference indicating that disruption in Australian classrooms is disadvantaging students and is

¹⁰⁶ Monash University, *'Australian classrooms are among the 'least favourable' for discipline in the OECD. Here's how to improve student behaviour'*, 2023.

<<https://lens.monash.edu/@education/2023/04/13/1385664/australian-classrooms-are-among-the-least-favourable-for-discipline-in-the-oecd-heres-how-to-improve-student-behaviour>>.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid.

contributing to poor literacy and numeracy outcomes, which prevents students from acquiring the foundational skills necessary to reach their full educational, economic and social potential.¹⁰⁸

A sharp increase in school refusal (also commonly referred to as 'school can't') has been observed in Australian schools since the COVID-19 lockdowns. This led to a Senate Inquiry into 'the national trend of school refusal and related matters'.¹⁰⁹ Findings released in August 2023 recommended, among other things, for targeted interventions to be delivered within a multi-tiered system of support.¹¹⁰

Submissions to the Inquiry also highlighted the role of the health system in supporting children and young people experiencing school refusal, emphasising that schools require support from education authorities and health systems and called for improved collaboration between the health and education sectors.

It is important to provide support for both the academic and behavioural needs for all students (including students with disability and diverse learners) to make progress at school.

A framework that is becoming increasingly popular in the provision of support for diverse needs of students is the multi-tiered system of supports (MTSS) framework. The MTSS framework is organised across three tiers of support:

- at Tier 1, evidence-based practices are provided for all students. These include high-quality schoolwide academic, social, emotional, and behavioural programming and supports that are designed to meet the needs of all students.
- at Tier 2, strategically targeted interventions are provided to some students not responding to Tier 1 practices. This may include academic interventions such as literacy or numeracy programs informed by evidence, or targeted behavioural or mental health supports using evidence-based intervention programs.
- at Tier 3, interventions are intensive and individualised and are provided for a few students not responding to Tier 2 interventions.

Interventions at all levels should be underpinned by evidence and should be implemented with fidelity. For interventions to be successful, schools should continually develop the capacity of educators.

One use for this model of tiered instruction and intervention is in supporting students who enter secondary schooling with low levels of literacy and numeracy (see Section 5.1.4) or are struggling to engage with age-appropriate curriculum (see Section 6.1.4). This provides a framework for delivering targeted support and intervention to students based on their specific learning, behavioural, and socioemotional needs – and reducing the likelihood of their challenges escalating.

The MTSS model emphasises using proven teaching methods for all students, regular testing of all students to identify gaps in learning, delivering frequent small group or 1:1 interventions with a focus on these learning gaps, and continuous data-based tracking of student progress.¹¹¹

¹⁰⁸ **Parliament of Australia** 'The issue of increasing disruption in Australian school classrooms, Terms of Reference (2023)
<https://www.aph.gov.au/Parliamentary_Business/Committees/Senate/Education_and_Employment/DASC/Terms_of_Reference>.

¹⁰⁹ **Parliament of Australia** 'The national trend of school refusal and related matters' (August 2023)
<https://www.aph.gov.au/Parliamentary_Business/Committees/Senate/Education_and_Employment/SchoolRefusal/Report>.

¹¹⁰ Pursuit, the University of Melbourne 2023, *School Refusal needs a national response*, <<https://pursuit.unimelb.edu.au/articles/school-refusal-needs-a-national-response>>, accessed 14 October 2023

¹¹¹ K de Bruin et al. 'Supporting students significantly behind in literacy and numeracy: a review of evidence-based approaches' 2023, <<https://www.edresearch.edu.au/sites/default/files/2023-05/aero-supporting-students-significantly-behind-literacy-numeracy.pdf>>.

There is inequitable access to flexible learning programs and schools across some locations of the NT, particularly in remote settings.

School stakeholders consulted across the Barkly and Central regions in particular spoke about the gaps and needs for flexible learning settings (both in terms of learning environments and pedagogical practices), and noted they faced constraints given limits on their resourcing, as well as access to skilled teachers.

Further, school stakeholders in remote settings noted that, unlike urban schools, students with additional needs do not have the opportunities to be part of a class with a smaller teacher-to-student ratio (allowing for more tailored support).

“Addressing the educational needs of young people requires adequate resourcing including financing and staffing. Many students who become disengaged or suffer from mental health issues, require options for alternative flexible learning, however this is often inhibited by a school’s ability to resources and finance this.” – Submission from the NT Principals’ Association

There is a need to grow capability of educators to deliver flexible learning, use trauma-informed practice, provide culturally safe learning environments, and support literacy and numeracy skill development in catering for students with high levels of need.

Furthermore, the Review identified instances where schools are delivering flexible learning programs without an appropriate exit pathway for students to enter mainstream classes or schooling, leading to the residualisation of students in those classes.

These findings indicate a need for the system continue on its path to setting expectations and driving best practice in this regard. This is beginning to be trialled and implemented through the **Department’s Quality Standards Framework**, which is underpinned by the foundations for engagement outlined in the NT *Education Engagement Strategy (2022–2031)*.

There is a need for student learning growth to be reflected more accurately through assessment.

Stakeholders expressed the need for assessment to reflect student learning growth more accurately, and to provide strength-based progress and reporting to students.

Stakeholders perceived that A-E grades are not reflective of student progress, citing examples where students demonstrate learning growth **however still receive an ‘E’ grade for learning as they** are not yet at year level. They expressed the benefits associated with students receiving feedback that better represents their abilities, successes, and areas for improvement. Furthermore, this could help inform teacher pedagogy and differentiation practices.

“In terms of curriculum assessment, The AEU-NT holds that view that this is often measured in terms of deficit – what students cannot do when compared to the standards set out by the Australian Curriculum – as opposed to how a student has grown and developed as a whole person.” – Submission from the Australian Education Union NT

Noting this, however, A-E grades are also used by other systems, and its use is intended to create increased opportunities for moderation and rigour in teacher assessment practices.

Finding 10: Additional resourcing, support and guidance, that builds on the Department’s implementation of the Quality Standards Framework, is required for schools to deliver flexible learning approaches for students with high levels of need and to meet literacy and numeracy outcomes.

6.2 Recommendations for learning design

The Review has identified two recommendations in response to the consistent findings of the Review, which highlight a need for the NT to strengthen the cultural responsiveness of the learning design, and reflect the diversity and richness of Aboriginal culture, knowledge, and languages in its curriculum. There is also a clear imperative for the system to support schools to deliver a core and contextualised curriculum, and ensure appropriate learning environments and experiences for students through flexible approaches. This underpins the following recommendations for learning design, with further important implications for how learning is recognised and credentialled.

An overview is provided below, followed by detailed recommendations.

The Review recommends building on **the existing work of the Department's** Teaching and Learning Services Unit, and rolling out meaningful, contextualised and continuous curriculum (Recommendation 3.1). This is intended to support continuity of learning, declutter the curriculum for schools, and enable a stronger focus on core content that supports achievement of core literacy and numeracy skills to the standard required to complete year 12. Achieving this objective will require the system to continue to provide supports for schools to contextualise the core curriculum and ensure meaningful and tailored learning opportunities for students. The Review emphasises the objective for the system is not to create a two-speed system with different levels of expectation or quality of curriculum for students in urban or remote areas. Rather, the system should work towards, and message accordingly, that the purpose of the core curriculum is to support all students to achieve, regardless of their location.

The Review recommends building on the existing work of the Department, and rolling out flexible learning approaches (Recommendation 3.2). Setting expectations for delivery of flexible learning environments and driving capability of schools to implement effective practices, is critical to ensuring effective learning design and outcomes for students. This encompasses approaches to flexible learning centres, as well as practices for mainstream schools, which include professional development and supports for schools to deliver evidence-based, trauma-informed practices and support students to achieve.

In large part, these recommendations are aligned with current strategic priorities and reforms that are, at the time of writing, in the process of being designed and implemented by the central teams within the Department, and increased flexibility is also expected to be enabled by the implementation of version 9 of the Australian Curriculum. These recommendations aim to provide clarity to the critical next steps for the system, as aligned with the needs, aspirations and gaps of stakeholders that have been highlighted throughout the Review.

Implementing these recommendations will require further work, dedicated support for schools through centralised curriculum teams, and a process of community engagement and local decision-making to inform contextually relevant approaches across the NT.

Recommendation 3.1: Build on and roll out guidance, support and resources for core curriculum design and implementation.

Core curriculum

In the first instance, the Department should build on its current work on curriculum design, and roll out guidance, support and resources for core curriculum design and implementation. The Department should:

- undertake mapping from transition to Year 10 to ensure the curriculum is scaffolded and connected, and ensuring it is appropriately scoped and sequenced to enable teaching the same content at the same time.
- identify and removing duplication in curriculum within and across year levels
- develop a scope and sequence for teachers, and providing guidance on how to deliver this
- link to student learning dispositions and achievement standards
- collaborate with other jurisdictions to leverage the availability of curriculum resources that could be used in the NT, and
- develop units of work, that can be accessed with lower levels of literacy.

In rolling out the guidance, support, and resources for schools, the Department should consider the following (within the confines of what is possible through the implementation of the Australian Curriculum):

- develop and communicate a core curriculum to schools
- provide guidance on the instances where and how a focused curriculum can be implemented
- set an expectation that curriculum design should focus on the achievement of core literacy and numeracy skills
- set expectations for the additional scaffolding and contextualisation (in both remote and urban settings) that should occur to meet students at their point of need
- ensure accountability of schools to deliver additional scaffolding and contextualisation in their context, and
- develop structures and expectations for how community input can be gathered to inform a contextually relevant curriculum.

Senior years curriculum (NTCET)

The Department should undertake the following in relation to the senior years certificate:

- communicate and build secondary **school leaders and teachers' understanding of the NTCET**, including its flexibility
- provide guidance on how the flexibility can be leveraged, to generate expanded curriculum and learning opportunities for students that contribute towards completion, and
- ensure accountability of schools to deliver additional scaffolding and contextualisation.

Implementing curriculum guidance and resources

The Department should also undertake the following, to support the roll out and implementation of curriculum guidance and resources:

- **build schools' awareness of the centralised curriculum supports**
- provide support (e.g. through resources and professional development opportunities) for how teachers can translate and sequence the curriculum, and
- facilitate opportunities and structures to share and coordinate curriculum resources and expertise, within networks or clusters of schools across regions.

Curriculum policy and guidelines

The Department could also consider reviewing the Curriculum Assessment and Reporting Policy and Guidelines, in relation to the accountability of schools.

The Department should **explore the following through the NT Board of Studies' review of the Northern Territory Indigenous Languages and Cultures Curriculum**, to:

- ensure its currency and that it meets the needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students
- understand its uptake and the results it has achieved, and where its implementation (including **schools' awareness and ability to use**) can be better supported, and
- explore how it can be used as a framework to integrate further skills and knowledge into certification and credentialling (formal recognition of learning).

Bilingual education

It is not within the scope of the Review to undertake a detailed review of bilingual education. However, if the Review recommendations on credentialling and recognising language learning are to be achieved, further review and consideration of the effectiveness of bilingual funding is likely required.

Assuring and scaling programs

The Department should develop a systematic approach to reviewing, implementing and scaling programs and interventions. This will involve quality assuring programs and confirming alignment with overall teaching and learning design and approaches, and expand provision of key programs to strengthen overall learning design (i.e. HEAL program and Learning on Country). In reviewing and assuring these programs, the Department could consider opportunities to leverage these resources to develop or expand resources for all schools.

In doing so, the Department should develop structures for how these programs are implemented and ensure an intentional approach around growing capability to implement, and more broadly, its development and sustainability.

Digital capability and literacy

It is recommended that the Department take an intentional approach to building the digital capability of teachers (e.g. use of electronic devices, technological platforms and devices, engagement with distance education), and to build digital literacy skills in students.

Recommendation 3.2: Build on and roll out guidance and support for flexible learning approaches, expanding to all settings across the system.

The Department should build on the implementation of its Quality Standards Framework, and mapping availability of flexible learning programs and/or supports and/or outreach that seeks to understand current maturity, gaps, and a plan for how these can be addressed.

Through the implementation of the Quality Standards Framework, the Department should build on and roll out guidance for flexible learning environments and drive capability in all settings across the system. This includes defining:

- purpose, target cohort, evidence base, activities, policies, procedures, and governance
- physical learning environments
- relationship-based learning, culturally appropriate pedagogy, and trauma-informed practice
- defining transitions and pathways to and/or coordination with mainstream schooling, or further work, employment, and study, and
- provision of flexible learning approaches and supports to support reengagement of students who bounce back to community from boarding schools.

The Department should build capability across the system in the use of the MTSS, and support schools to adopt the use of MTSS to meet the learning needs of students, tailor learning to individual needs, and enable students to develop foundational literacy and numeracy skills.

This should accompany the Department's provision of guidance and support, through its Strategy documents, for schools to establish a whole-school vision and school-wide, evidence-based instructional models, buy-in for collecting data, and providing intervention.

It will be important for schools to ensure adequate staffing and resources to support flexible learning. This includes cultural, social and wellbeing support, to be aided through the system providing increased access to school counsellors, allied health staff, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander support workers, and support services (explored in further detail in Section 8.1).

6.3 Learning access

Key findings: Learning access

- Finding 12: There is inequity of access and uneven previous investment in secondary education across the Northern Territory.
 - There is no minimum standard of secondary education delivery across the NT, nor policy, laws or regulation that clearly set out expectations for provision.
 - Historical targeted investment to support secondary education provision has been prioritised in larger secondary schools in remote population centres, in line with the current policy provision implemented through the *Indigenous Education Strategy (2015-24)*.
 - An audit of investment in secondary provision was undertaken to consider the initiatives and programs supporting delivery of secondary education (in addition to core school funding). It identified that no targeted funding to support student engagement is being allocated to very small remote communities that support secondary students. From 2017-2021, 90 per cent of funding with a specific focus on secondary student engagement and completion was allocated to schools located in remote population centres across the NT such as Katherine, Tennant Creek, and Nhulunbuy (equating to just 10 per cent of schools that supported secondary students across the NT in 2022, and 45 per cent of secondary students).
 - Investment has not been effectively aligned with student need. Overall, one in two secondary students attend a school with targeted programs to support student engagement. However, just 9 per cent of students with high needs attended a school with access to targeted programs, while 83 per cent of students with the lowest need had access to these programs.
 - There are gaps in infrastructure and secondary education provision, particularly in remote communities, due to the prioritisation of past investment, lack of linkages created, and challenges of delivery.
- Finding 13: Stakeholders consistently demonstrated a conviction and urgent desire to provide access to secondary education in remote contexts. High quality local secondary education delivery in all contexts, and through this, improved engagement and outcomes for students, is the key aspiration for schooling reform.
 - While ensuring access to high quality local provision is the key objective for the NT government schooling system, there are limitations to offering universal pathways in all **contexts, and constraints on schools' and system capacity to deliver**.
 - Delivering on this aspiration requires articulation and implementation of a guaranteed standard of provision, innovative delivery models and solutions, and access to infrastructure and system supports to enable delivery.
- Finding 14: Various regional delivery models are currently providing access to high quality secondary schooling, **in addition to what can be accessed in students' local communities**. These models can be expanded, particularly where there are currently no viable pathways to NTCET completion, through an increased regional delivery footprint.
 - Several approaches to regional delivery can be implemented to augment local provision. This includes hub-and-spoke approaches, cluster models, auspiced delivery, and a broad spectrum of boarding models (which range from boarding school to group home models, and short-term residential options).
 - Quality secondary education delivery is occurring in a spine of secondary schools in the Northern Territory, which could play a more systemic role in delivery.
- Finding 15: Greater coherence, coordination and support for small remote schools is required to provide access to secondary education and overcome delivery challenges in the NT, in addition to increased resourcing and capacity at all levels of the system.

- Finding 16: There are growing possibilities and strengths of blended and online delivery models in the Northern Territory (noting that it is not a universal solution for all students, in all contexts), with the opportunity to further embed and scale both delivery and system roles.
 - **The Northern Territory’s three distance education schools are currently providing access** to secondary curriculum, and responding to needs of students and the system (for example, through building workforce capability and providing on-the-ground support).
 - However, distance education is not a universal solution for all students, in all contexts.
 - In some contexts, there are barriers to effective delivery, including connectivity, infrastructure, digital capability, and accountability of schools to provide appropriate learning environments and supervision for students.
 - There is a rationale for more clearly defining expectations and delivery roles of the three distance education schools, and supporting continuity of learning of students.
 - There is an opportunity to review the funding model for distance education programs that focus on capability building, to ensure it provides incentives to efficiently scale the program to meet the needs of secondary students across the NT.
- Finding 17: While there are examples of success in boarding, it has not worked for all students.
 - There is an imperative for the system to:
 - work with boarding providers, the Australian Government and the non-government sector to improve the quality and appropriateness of boarding provision for NT students, including the engagement with, and supports provided to, local communities and families
 - prioritise supports and avenues for schools to reengage students who bounce back to community (including through setting a guaranteed standard of provision), and
 - **improve the NT government system’s visibility of student movements and boarding outcomes.**

6.3.1 Inequity of access and historic investment in secondary education [There is no guaranteed standard of local provision across the NT.](#)

In terms of what schooling must be provided, Section 15 of the Education Act outlines that:

The Minister may take all measures that, in the Minister’s opinion, are necessary or desirable:

- a) to assist parents of children and young persons whose usual place of residence is in the Territory in meeting their responsibility to educate them according to their individual needs and abilities; and*
- b) to make available, to all children and young persons whose usual place of residence is in the Territory, education or training services provided by the Minister; and*
- c) to assist all children and young persons whose usual place of residence is in the Territory with their own education.*

Furthermore, Section 82 (Standard allocation) sets out that:

- (1) A student enrolled in a Government school has an allocation of 26 semesters of Government school education (the standard allocation) from transition year to year 12.*

In the Northern Territory, there are some conventions that impact what year levels a school is **expected to provide** (e.g., “high schools”, “middle schools”, “area schools”). However, there is no policy, law or regulation that determines what year levels a school can or must provide, or what provision occurs in local settings.

This has resulted in a lack of a guaranteed standard of provision, and a lack of access in remote contexts where there is limited senior secondary provision and no viable pathways to NTCET completion.

As outlined in the **Review's** vision, the overarching goal for the NT secondary schooling system should be on providing pathways in all contexts that can contribute towards completion of school. The links to the legislation are discussed in Section 6.4.

Historical targeted investment to support secondary education provision has been prioritised in larger secondary schools in remote population centres.

Over the period of 2017 to 2021, the NT government system has invested approximately \$41.3 million across 18 programs aimed at improving student engagement, retention and completion of secondary students. This investment has occurred in 11 schools with secondary aged students across the period (Table 6.2).

Table 6.2: Programs supporting secondary student engagement, retention and completion in NT (2017 – 2021)

School	Program	Average funding per annum (2017-21)
Palmerston College	Centre for Excellence; Re-Engagement Centre; Tivendale Learning Connections; College Implementation Support	\$1.61 million
Nhulunbuy High School	Boarding school (Dawurr Boarding)	\$1.42 million
Top End School of Flexible Learning	Centre for Excellence; Taminmin Farm	\$1.36 million
Taminmin College	Katherine Flexible Learning Centre	\$0.92 million
Centralian Senior College	Centre for Excellence; Alice Outcomes	\$0.61 million
Katherine High School	Katherine Flexible Learning Centre	\$0.55 million
Centralian Middle School	At Risk Youth Program	\$0.44 million
Tennant Creek High School	Barkly Juno Centre Tennant Creek	\$0.41 million
Casuarina Senior College	Centre for Excellence; Adult Night Classes	\$0.28 million
Darwin High School	Centre for Excellence	\$0.11 million
Sanderson Middle School	Neighbourhood Activity Centre	\$0.09 million

Source: NT Department of Education, Targeted Programs data.

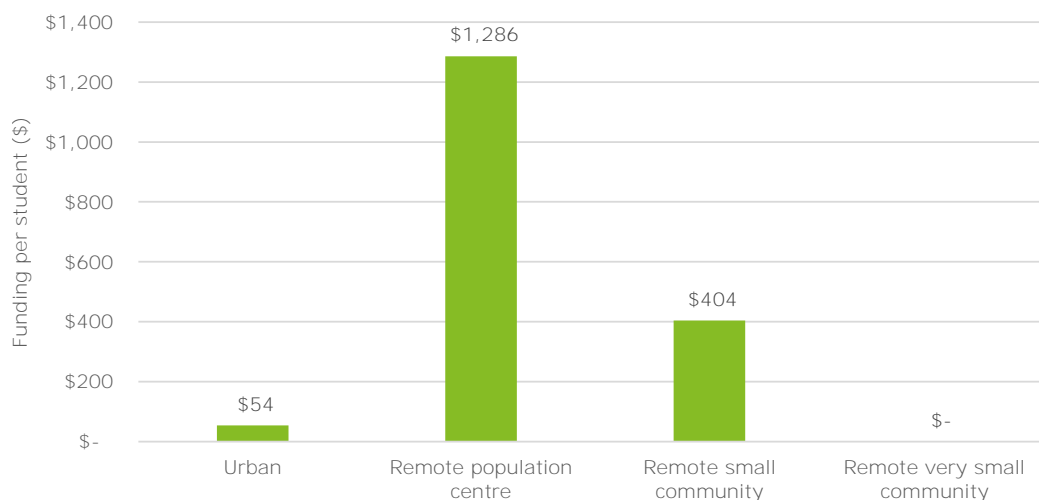
Notes: This data is sourced from the Department of Education SNBF funding model; Targeted Programs. There are other investments that aim to engage students that occur outside of Targeted Programs funding. These programs have not been included in this analysis.

As shown in Table 6.2, targeted investment to support secondary student engagement and completion is heavily concentrated in small number of schools. This has led to 90 per cent of funding with a specific focus on secondary student engagement and completion was allocated to schools located in remote population centres across the NT such as Katherine, Tennant Creek and Nhulunbuy (equating to just 10 per cent of schools that supported secondary students across the NT in 2022, and 45 per cent of secondary students), as shown in Chart 6.4.

As explored in Section 2.5.1, the current SNBF model is designed to allocate funding to align with needs, which includes regional and secondary loadings. Therefore, secondary schools in very remote areas may be benefitting from increased funding through the SNBF model. However, the

effective enrolment mechanism tends to dilute the ability of the SRM to adequately allocate resources to support secondary education delivery in small remote settings.

Chart 6.4: Funding per secondary student to support secondary student engagement, retention and completion in 2021, by region



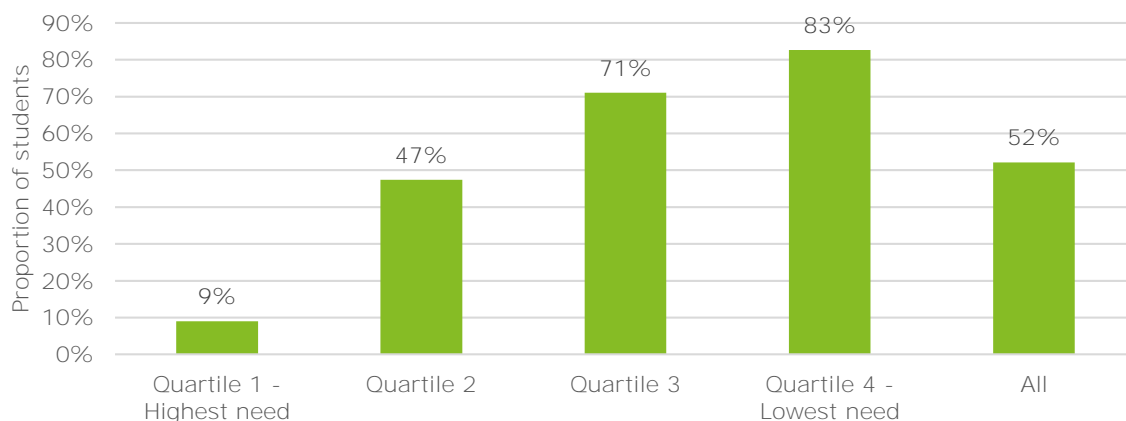
Source: Deloitte Access Economics (2023) using NT student needs-based funding model data.

Notes: Geographic locations are defined as follows: Urban areas are suburbs located in Darwin, remote population centres are suburbs with a population of more than 1,000 people, remote small communities are suburbs with a population of between 300 and 1,000 people, remote very small communities are suburbs with a population of less than 300 people.

Targeted investment to support secondary student engagement, retention and completion has not been effectively aligned with student need.

Analysis demonstrates that overall, one in two secondary students attend a school with targeted programs to support student engagement. However, just 9 per cent of students with high needs attended a school with access to targeted programs, while 83 per cent of students with the lowest need had access to these programs (see Chart 6.5).¹¹²

Chart 6.5: Proportion of secondary students with access to targeted investment to support engagement, retention and completion, 2021



Source: Deloitte Access Economics (2023) using NT student census data.

Notes: Need is defined as the predicted probability that a student will drop-out of school in the following year. This is informed by a regression analysis on unit record student census data to understand the risk factors of student dropouts over the period 2012 to 2020.

¹¹² This assessment was undertaken using regression analysis with NT student census data to identify a **student’s predicted risk of** secondary school drop-out, based on characteristics, such as geographic location, demographics, year level and school characteristics. Then, students were sorted into four categories of need based on their predicted risk of drop-out.

Implementation issues, including lack of linkages created, are contributing to underutilisation of infrastructure that supports secondary education delivery.

Although several notable logistical challenges and delivery constraints contribute to the underutilisation of infrastructure in the NT – these include coordination of clustering arrangements, geographical distance, transport, and a lack of available trainers to deliver training – both Department and school stakeholders recognise that the system’s approach to managing and utilising existing infrastructure can be improved to support improved access.

Stakeholders identified a wide range of Northern Territory and Commonwealth Government investments across urban and remote contexts, including VET facilities, boarding facilities at Nhulunbuy High School, and Trade Training Centres across the NT as particular examples of investments that are underutilised, relative to their scale and investment, with inconclusive evidence to-date of improvement in student engagement, retention or completion.

Another example is the investment in the Juno Centre, which currently supports the delivery of vocational education and training in the Barkly region and has recently expanded its capacity to take more students. Nonetheless, the Centre has capacity constraints, and limited linkages have been established to-date with schools and students that would otherwise stand to benefit from accessing the facilities, noting too that there are challenges with attracting trainers. More generally, stakeholders also expressed similar sentiments regarding VET facilities that are in urban and remote locations (ranging from Darwin to the Central regions), noting that this infrastructure could provide access to increased opportunities for students from nearby clusters of schools, however, are not fully utilised.

Finding 12: There is inequity of access and uneven previous investment in secondary education across the Northern Territory.

6.3.2 Access to high-quality local secondary education provision
Access to high quality local secondary education provision in all contexts, and through this, improved engagement and outcomes for students, is viewed as core to delivery, and a key aspiration for schooling reform.

The Review consistently heard that the system should aspire to a strong equity imperative, that is, to provide access to secondary schooling and meaningful pathway options for students in their local communities, regardless of geographic location.

Stakeholders consistently shared their aspirations for secondary schooling reform to ensure high-quality, local secondary schooling provision is delivered in community, where students have opportunities to access to opportunities that keep them engaged in schooling and provide a pathway to completion.

This represents a desire to move away from the current policy position implemented as part of the *Indigenous Education Review* (2013), which saw greater investment in supporting students to access boarding.

“My feeling is that if the opportunities are there, if something was established, they would attend here.” – *School leader, very remote primary school*

“If we can provide quality education in remote schools, we don’t need to [attend boarding].” – *School leader, very remote combined school*

Stakeholders described **how the system’s** policy position through the *Indigenous Education Strategy* (2015-24) and reliance on boarding has created a lack of choice, which is seen in the limited availability and investment in local programs for secondary aged students who wish to remain in, or return to community. They consistently voiced a preference for local options that reduce the reliance on boarding as well as the perception that it is the only choice for students to access secondary education.

"Children must have the choice to attend school in their home towns, homeland towns and larger communities, and not be forced into boarding schools through lack of choice." – *Submission from Yijiya Mark Guyula, Member for Mulka, NT Legislative Assembly*

"Success for me is a strong local program, that has partnerships, relationships, meaningful learning, language and culture – so kids can stay there, and get enough without having to leave [their community]." – *Department of Education stakeholder*

"Lack of support in any kind of rigour in any secondary aged program for those who wish to stay in community, because the view **is there's a reliance on boarding and there's no need for it** [local secondary provision]." – *Department of Education stakeholder*

Stakeholders also noted that the NT needs to establish a vision that it does provide high quality secondary education (in urban and remote locations), with a need to enhance messaging out to community.

"All students, regardless of where they live, should be able to select subjects of their choice, although the method of delivery may vary. The Northern Territory's students should not be denied the opportunity to study advanced subjects taught by specialist teachers, or to apply for higher education courses for which those courses may be prerequisite, just because their individual schools may lack the resources to teach those subjects." – *Submission from Regional Education Commissioner (Australian Government)*

There is limited provision of senior secondary in remote contexts, and often no viable pathways to Year 12 completion for students who remain in community or return from boarding school.

Secondary aged students and/or those who discontinue boarding and return to community, often access secondary education at their local primary school with mixed aged secondary classes. However, as illustrated in Section 1.1, this does not provide students with viable pathways to Year 12 completion, and as stakeholders noted:

"Students don't want to come back or attend local primary school once they reach senior years." – *Principal, Barkly Region*

Where schools are catering for secondary students and trying to provide senior secondary offerings and a pathway to NTCET completion (often using the HEAL program to do so), they face several challenges, including a lack of resourcing and a dedicated secondary teacher to teach the middle years or senior secondary curriculum.

"Trying to do senior secondary – **it's not working as we don't have a dedicated teacher** with experience teaching across the range." – *Teacher, very remote comprehensive school*

Additionally, ensuring culturally responsive environments is difficult when secondary aged students return to their local primary school, particularly where the facilities of the school are limited and there may not be separate classrooms. For example, where Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students have gone through an initiation ceremony and have come of age, it is not appropriate for them to be in **classes with 'children'**. There are also important cultural considerations in the composition of combined classes, including the need to be responsive to gender norms, **'poison cousins'**, or tensions between clan groups.

"At [school], boys and girls are separated [in classes] and this works much better. In fact, this is essential." – *Former teacher at very remote school*

There is a place for boarding as a pathway for students to access senior secondary education and pursue pathways post-schooling. However, the weight of evidence from suggests that reliance on boarding should be reduced.

Throughout the Review, stakeholders noted that boarding has a place in the system. It provides access to secondary education (particularly in remote areas, resulting from the curtailing of provision in remote areas and policy shifts), and supports student and family choice, affording the

experience of a mainstream education and the opportunity to pursue desired pathways, including academic pathways.

However, this was also accompanied by a strong and consistent view that boarding should be an option within a broader delivery model, and not a universal solution for all students to access secondary education.

There is strong agreement that the system should reduce its reliance on boarding, which would be achieved through the provision of high quality and viable pathways to Year 12 completion in local communities, which would in turn provide choice to students and families, and opportunities for students to engage with secondary schooling without needing to leave their community.

“We’ve said all along that boarding solutions elsewhere are a solution for some kids. We haven’t discouraged those kids. But we’ve been clear that this is not an option here.” –
School leader, very remote combined school

It is also worth noting some communities may not see a need for local secondary provision due to a preference for students to attend boarding school. This can be driven, in large part, by a belief that boarding offers higher quality secondary provision, with pathways to Year 12 completion and allowing students to pursue tertiary pathways. While this is a valid choice for community to make, considering the demonstrated negative impacts of students bouncing back from boarding and not having options within their local community to engage with secondary education, this reinforces the need for a deliberate plan and accountability for schools to provide an option for students to engage with secondary provision in their local community.

Delivering on the aspiration for local secondary education provision requires a guaranteed standard of provision to be implemented, supported by innovative delivery models and solutions that are tailored to context, and enabled by infrastructure access and system support.

A key consideration for local provision is the need for a guaranteed standard of delivery, which would overcome unclear guidelines or expectations of delivery, and ensure a path for secondary education to be delivered to a determined standard, for instance, defined pathways for students to work towards to NTCET completion and achieve core literacy and numeracy skills (as set out in the Delivery Model in Section 3.2).

If the system is to establish viable and high-quality offerings across all areas of the NT, a further consideration is the various school contexts, and delivery challenges and existing constraints faced in remote locations, which will require dedicated support and resources. Furthermore, this points to a need for innovative delivery models and solutions, that are tailored to local context and that can augment what is available locally, to enable secondary provision and pathways to completion for all students.

Finding 13: Stakeholders consistently demonstrated a conviction and urgent desire to provide access to secondary education in remote contexts. High quality local secondary education delivery in all contexts, and through this, improved engagement and outcomes for students, is the key aspiration for schooling reform.

6.3.3 Regional delivery approaches to augment local provision

Expanded regional delivery is key to enabling access to high quality secondary education across the NT.

The Review identified a variety of regional delivery models that are currently operating and expanding access to secondary education, and also heard various aspirations of stakeholders regarding what they would like to see being expanded and delivered in their local context.

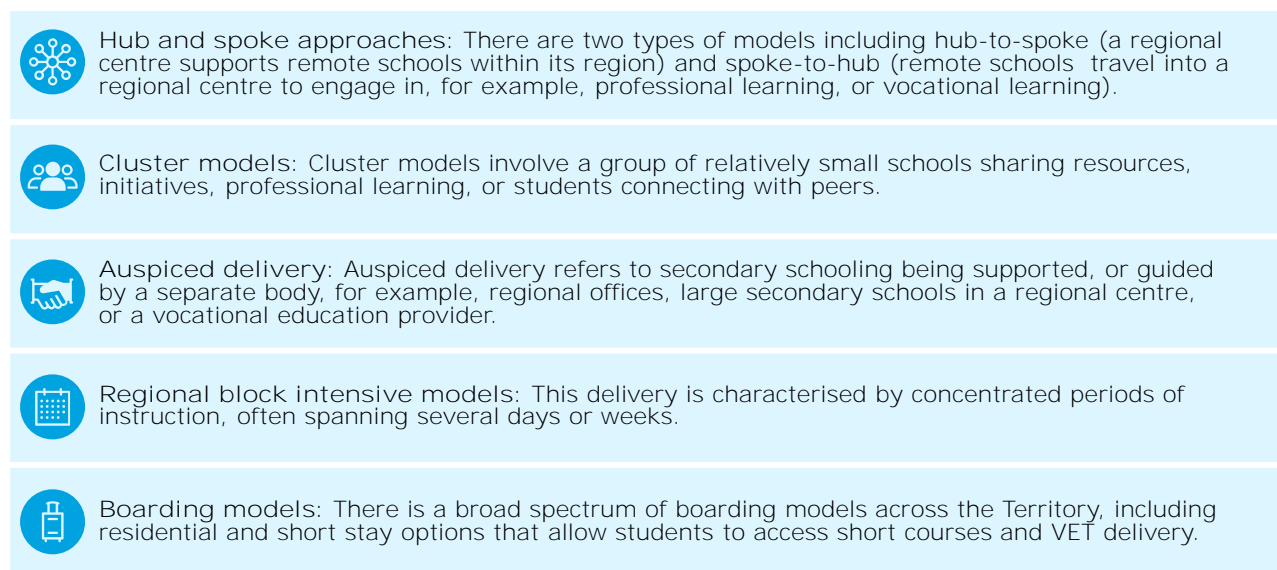
Overall, there is a range of innovative delivery occurring that is supporting access in remote contexts, however this is occurring on an ad hoc basis and not always being delivered coherently

alongside other delivery modes, pointing to a need for broader system coordination and consistency.

Stakeholders also noted the need for a place-based approach of regional delivery, acknowledging that a level of differentiation is required across contexts and regions. Furthermore, there are varying levels of readiness, outlooks and capacity that exists within regions. For instance, in the Central region, regional models of delivery may involve clusters of small schools in sub-regions, while in the East Arnhem region delivery may occur through a hub and spoke model with one school supporting the homelands.

Five types of regional delivery explored in this section are presented in Figure 6.1, and as follows:

Figure 6.1: Overview of regional delivery models



Source: Deloitte Access Economics.

Hub and spoke approaches

There are examples of hub and spoke approaches across the NT, that support the delivery of secondary education pathways within a region and help to achieve economies of scale. This includes the provision of expanded subject offerings, staffing, and access to infrastructure, facilities, and resources.

There are two types of approaches, including hub-to-spoke models and spoke-to-hub models.

- **Hub-to-spoke:** A regional centre (the hub) supports remote schools within its region (the spokes) by providing outreach support and sharing resources
- **Spoke-to-hub:** Remote schools (spokes) travel into a regional centre (the hub) to engage in, for example, professional learning, or vocational learning.

In many instances, these models of delivery are observed in VETIS provision, for example, where embedded VET trainers based in a regional centre travel out to remote and very remote schools to deliver training, with students attending block intensive training for a period of a few weeks at the regional centre a few times each year. Another example of a hub and spoke model operating in the NT is in the Big Rivers region, where the hub school is providing support and resources to a neighbouring school to support provision of secondary schooling. This approach is also observed in the homelands, where **one 'hub'** school auspices all homelands learning centres.

There are key success factors for successful hub and spoke approaches, including proximity of schools, and connected communities and language groups.

Cluster models

Across the NT, there are examples of cluster models that support a group of relatively small schools to access secondary education options, including VET, or extracurricular activities. The

clustering may involve schools sharing resources, initiatives, professional learning, or students connecting with peers.

Particularly strong examples of these models are observed in some homelands schools in the NT, such as the Laynhapuy Homelands model that operates in East Arnhem and provides access to NTCET pathways through a dedicated program delivered in Garrthalala for all students in the homeland learning centres. Further, there are also instances of Learning on Country bringing together school communities in the Top End region, who are clustering delivery, including through school camps, and helping isolated secondary students to come together and connect with their peers.

Clustering arrangements can also support small schools in remote areas who do not have sufficient numbers of students to warrant embedded VET trainers, to access VET opportunities. Cluster models with neighbouring schools see students being transported to an offsite location where an RTO provides training.

Furthermore, in the context of VETiS delivery, the practical nature of VETiS courses means that some require specialised equipment or infrastructure in order to deliver training (e.g. certificates related to construction, mechanics and hairdressing) that are not available in many remote locations. Clustering models could help to support schools to access these VET options and achieve scale. This is beneficial for efficiency reasons and to mitigate trainer supply challenges. The Ti Tree VET hub is an example of current delivery that can be built upon to strengthen delivery and coordination.

Auspiced delivery

Auspiced delivery involves local secondary schooling provision being supported, or guided by a separate body, for example, regional offices, large secondary schools in a regional centre, or a vocational education provider. Auspiced delivery is a model used in the delivery of VET:

“With appropriate design and funding models, more VET-in-schools could be delivered in remote settings. An important challenge is the high cost for small cohorts which could be addressed with auspicing arrangements to allow linkages with VET providers, school staff and industry. Where small numbers of students exist, it is critical for funding models to adopt a cost of delivery approach, rather than a ‘per student per hour’ basis as VET is usually funded.” – *Submission from Charles Darwin University*

Furthermore, auspiced delivery is an approach that may be expanded to the delivery of NTCET more generally. This would occur where the SACE registration for a school may be held by a hub school (including the NTSDE) and/or the Department, through the regional offices, enabling the school to provide access to stage I and stage II subjects, as well as leverage senior secondary expertise more generally.

Regional block intensive models

Block intensives include delivery of VET, providing a certificate and credits towards the NTCET, and work experience opportunities to support the work readiness of students. This delivery is characterised by concentrated periods of instruction, often spanning several days or weeks. This condensed format can be advantageous for certain subjects or skills, allowing for immersive learning experiences and in-depth exploration, and for students to reside on location and obtain a certification.

“For remote, what works is small blocks, and [a focus on] skill sets would be better.” – *Consultation with Arnhem Land Progress Association*

“I think we would get more success, where there is a short, sharp focus.” – *School leader, very remote combined school*

These short-term residential opportunities (with practical, vocational offerings) are viewed favourably by stakeholders consulted with for the Review, as they provide access outside of their local community, which is a highly desirable experience for many young people.

Factors that contribute to the success of block training delivery include resourcing and support to get students and/or trainers from the course, student support liaison to ensure students transition to the regional block training, which may require them to leave community for a substantive period, and a home teacher travelling with students to settle into their facility and offer support. Delivery is also enabled where opportunities are identified for schools to form networks and clusters, establishing a process for schools to develop a critical mass of students and coordination for block training within each region.

There are also limitations to the block delivery model, with stakeholders describing several challenges in delivery. These include timetabling, staffing and workforce, and infrastructure availability and access. In some instances, the model introduces high stakes and inflexibility for delivery. In the case where students cannot attend, it becomes a challenge for them to achieve the certification in another way or at another time. To mitigate this issue, it is ideal to have trainers located in central areas and have access to the local school, allowing for more regular engagement with schools and further opportunities for students to engage.

Fostering greater coordination across various delivery modes, for example block delivery of VET and NTSDE, is also key to ensuring students can engage flexibly with options. The Review heard examples of where students attend block training for weeks, therefore missing their NTSDE classes and not completing assessments. Enhanced coordination, flexibility, and support of when training is being delivered, when NTSDE assessments are required, and around school timetabling, will ensure there are no lost opportunities or consequences for participating students, and allow students to access various delivery modes in parallel.

Boarding models across the NT

There is a broad spectrum of boarding models across the NT, from traditional residential boarding options to residential and short stay models that allow students to access short courses and VET delivery. Several models have strong stakeholder and community support, particularly where they emphasise pastoral support, socioemotional wellbeing, and connections with peers.

Creating opportunities to board on country, as described by many stakeholders who were consulted with and provided submissions to the Review, is also an important consideration for secondary education delivery. As described in a submission from the Regional Education Commissioner (Australian Government), ***"Creating opportunities for First Nations students to board on Country may support connection to country to protect the wellbeing of these students."***

Furthermore, a range of stakeholders in the Central region felt that on-country and homeland models are important to make available to students. A representative from an Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisation noted: ***"[want to make] a very strong point about the need for a new way of looking at boarding schools for Central Australian communities... would strongly suggest that the government consider developing homeland boarding schools."***

The different types of boarding models available across the NT are outlined in Table 6.3 below.

Table 6.3: Types of boarding models for students in the Northern Territory

Models of boarding	Description
Group Home Model	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> This model was developed around 30 years ago, involving multiple students in a house with host parents. An example of the model is run out of Tiwi College, in the non-government school sector. This model aims to provide consistency of care, grounding, and support student wellbeing. One of the challenges include finding houseparents who understand and can manage the complexities of the lives of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students and cater for a range of needs. Further, there needs to be appropriate school support structures in place to cater for these needs (e.g., school counsellors, class structures to support EAL/D learning, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultural workers).

Models of boarding	Description
The Garrthalala model	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The Laynhapuy Homelands School has a model of boarding that involves students boarding on campus (at Garrthalala) for five days of the week and returning home on weekends. This allows students to work towards Year 12 completion in a culturally safe environment, and maintain and connection to their homelands. A key success factor is community recognition of the facility as a culturally safe place for students in the homelands, as well as having the appropriate infrastructure and resources.
Block intensive with residential (i.e. Juno Centre and Ti Tree VET hub)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> This model combines block or concentrated periods of instruction with residential accommodation for students. It is beneficial for students in remote areas or students seeking specialised educational opportunities not available in their local communities. In this model, students typically gather in a specific location, such as a residential facility, for a specific period of time, often ranging from a few weeks to a few months. During this time, students engage in focused learning and intensive academic, vocational or other educational activities. However, this is difficult to deliver where there is a traditional model and structure based on semesters.
Residential 'halfway options' with boarding	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> This refers to residential facilities that provide a combination of residential and boarding services for students who require transitional or supportive living arrangements (i.e. Youth Hostels). This arrangement is particularly common for students who live a significant distance away from their school and are required to travel long distances to access quality education. Students are provided with a safe and supportive environment where they can live and study at a school local to the residential facility.
Residential boarding (including Dawurr Boarding, Callistemon House, and non-government facilities)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> These are two government boarding schools, and five non-government facilities in the NT, which offer the traditional full-time boarding facilities, where students live on campus during the academic year. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Callistemon House in Katherine (Big Rivers region) provides shared boarding with the non-government sector They provide a structured academic program combined with extracurricular activities and support services. In the NT, students may attend residential boarding schools within the NT at various distances away from home. Students may also attend interstate residential boarding facilities for a variety of reasons, e.g. educational opportunities or personal or family reasons.

Finding 14: Various regional delivery models are currently providing access to high quality secondary schooling, **in addition to what can be accessed in students' local communities**. These models can be expanded, particularly where there are currently no viable pathways to NTCET completion, through an increased regional delivery footprint.

Greater coherence between delivery models is needed, as is additional coordination and support for schools. This would enable a systematic approach to providing access, while avoiding ad hoc delivery and possible fragmentation.

While a diverse range of delivery models can enable pathways towards secondary school completion and augment what students can access in their local community, greater coherence and coordination between the various models is required to avoid fragmentation.

Fostering greater coordination across various delivery modes, for example block delivery and NTSDE, is also important for ensuring students can engage flexibly with options.

This will also require timetable coordination to occur at a school level to enable the coherent delivery of VET, NTCET subjects and NTSDE. For example, in WA, the School of Isolated and Distance Education collected the timetables from the schools they work with and developed one consistent timetable for all schools to reduce scheduling conflicts and increase access, noting this was a sizeable undertaking (further discussed in Box 6.5).

There is a need for regions to ensure there is sufficient support and coordination, as well as support for small schools to engage with these modes.

Finding 15: Greater coherence, coordination and support for small remote schools is required to provide access to secondary education and overcome delivery challenges in the NT, in addition to increased resourcing and capacity at all levels of the system.

6.3.4 Growing possibilities and strengths of blended and online delivery

The three distance education providers in the Northern Territory, the Alice Springs School of the Air (P-9), Katherine School of the Air (P-9) and NT School of Distance Education (Years 10-12) are responding to the needs of students and the system, particularly as it relates to the provision of secondary education in remote and very remote contexts.

Advancements in technology platforms, and teaching and learning are enhancing the delivery of distance education in the Northern Territory.

Advancements in technology platforms in recent years means the teaching and learning approach of distance education providers has evolved.

For example, at NTSDE, there has been a shift from the legacy of correspondence models and workbooks, towards new possibilities for online delivery, virtual classrooms and online learning management systems. A flipped classroom pedagogy is now being used, with content delivery occurring prior to lessons and the lessons being used for collaboration, teaching directly to students, and developing relationships.

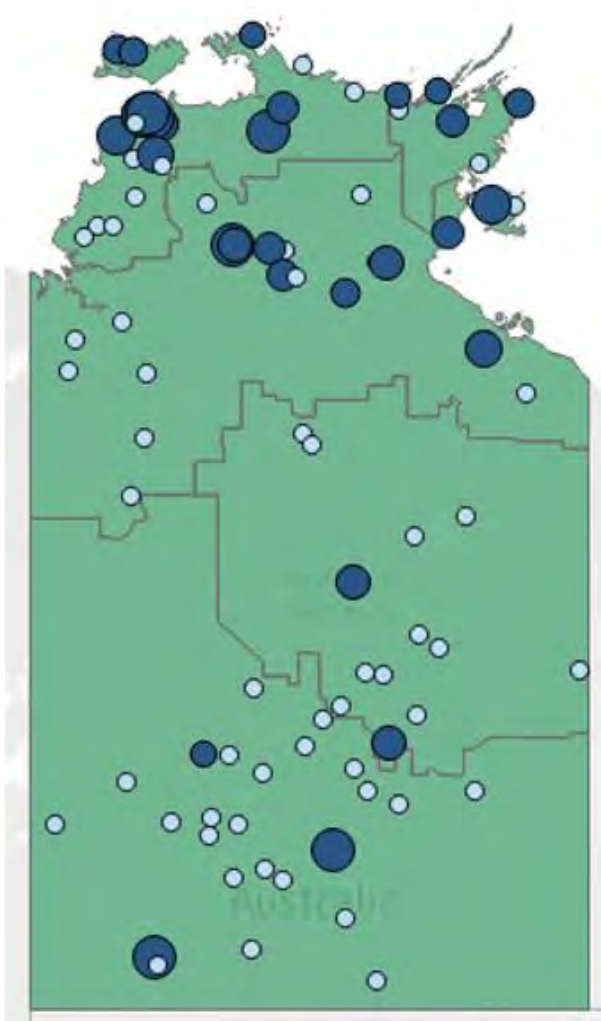
The new model provides increased interactive opportunities for students with their peers and teachers, particularly compared to the old correspondence models – strengthening learning outcomes, providing a platform for improved digital literacy skills, and a sense of belonging as part of a schooling system.

There are growing opportunities to scale and respond to needs of students and the system.

Distance education is playing a key role in providing access to a secondary education curriculum for students in their local community or school, which may otherwise not be available due to geographic isolation, availability of specialist teachers, and more.

The figure below shows secondary schools with students dual enrolled in the NTSDE (see Figure 6.2). Across locations, NTSDE is supplementing access to Stage I and Stage II subjects. This shows that delivery predominantly occurs in Darwin, Top End, Big Rivers and East Arnhem regions, and with a number of schools in the Central region with dual enrolled students. A high proportion of secondary schools do not currently have dual enrolled students.

Figure 6.2: Locations with dual enrolled students accessing subjects through NTSDE, 2010 to 2022

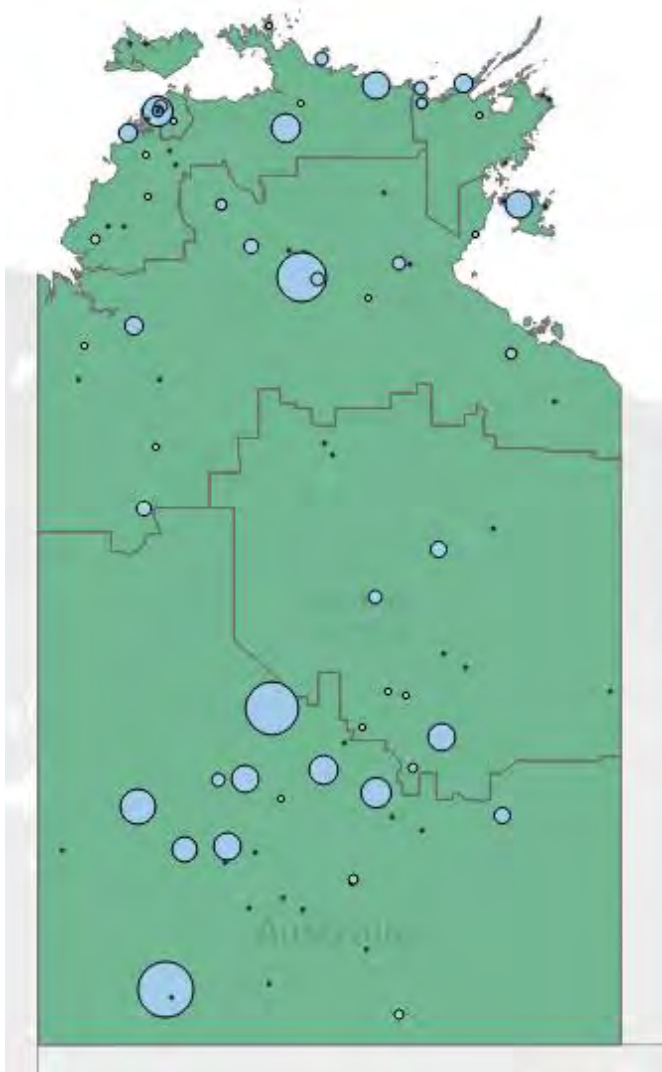


Source: Deloitte Access Economics using NT Department of Education data.

Notes: (a) The size of the circles shows the number of NTSDE subjects being accessed, with larger circles representing a greater number of subjects. (b) Pale blue circles reflect secondary schools that do not currently have dual enrolled students. (c) This does not represent schools that are using the HEAL program through NTSDE.

The location of students accessing Katherine School of the Air and Alice Springs School of the Air is provided in Figure 6.3.

Figure 6.3: Locations with students accessing Alice Springs Schools of the Air and Katherine School of the Air, 2010 to 2022



Source: Deloitte Access Economics using NT Department of Education data.

Notes: The size of the circles shows the location and number of students accessing the Schools of the Air, with larger circles representing a greater number of enrolled students.

Overall, stakeholders noted the growing possibilities across the NT to scale and expand access to distance education and curriculum in remote areas, which has, and will continue to be enabled through recent connectivity announcements and advancements in teaching and learning platforms. This is explored in further detail below.

[Distance education schools are increasingly catering to the needs of various student cohorts and those with complex needs.](#)

Distance education schools in the Northern Territory have historically serviced different student cohorts, including students from geographically isolated locations¹¹³ (Schools of the Air and NTSDE), and students who are unable to attend schools due to a variety of factors (e.g., medical, behavioural, athletic).

¹¹³ Geographically isolated students may be unable to easily access schooling where they live for a range of reasons, including the distance between where a student lives and their nearest school, as well as their ability to access a school due to transport, weather, or environmental conditions. Geographically isolated students and their families typically reside on cattle stations, remote communities, small towns, islands and boats.

Insights from consultations highlighted that the schools are increasingly enrolling and catering for students with complex needs (including trauma, anxiety and mental health needs). It was noted that this is set to become a growing trend in the future, not only for distance education providers in catering for these students, but also the system more broadly to plan for.

"The school has always been doing special circumstances, but it's increased more and more in recent years. We've got a whole list who are all special circumstances, which is why we had to put special measures in place recently." – *School leader, distance education provider*

"A challenge NT-wide will be an increase in students experiencing mental illness and prevented from going to face-to-face school based on those challenges and coming to us as a student... [I] had a number of inquiries from people who are choosing not to send kids to face to face school and want them to study online. This needs to be explored and how we do that if it is going to be open for all – should online schooling become a choice by the majority of people moving forward? We will need to plan for it. Another challenge Territory wide is the increase in students with disabilities who are choosing not to go to face-to-face school, and access special needs areas and choosing to go online. I **don't know much about it but it's something that is growing."** – *Student support coordinator, distance education provider*

Additionally, NTSDE through its HEAL program is supporting schools to reengage students and **developing school's capability to deliver a secondary curriculum (as described in greater detail in Section 6.1.3)**. This program has been seen by stakeholders to be successful in re-engaging students, meeting their English, numeracy and health learning needs, and supporting at-risk students to move towards Stage I and Stage II subjects on a pathway to achieving the NTCET.

Distance education providers are playing a key role in building workforce capability of schools across the Northern Territory.

Distance education providers are playing a broader system role, involving workforce capability building and curriculum support, in addition to their core role as schools.

Consultations with the NTSDE noted that their role is one that involves collaboration and capability building with the schools they support, for example in curriculum and senior secondary delivery. There are three distinct ways in which it supports collaboration and capacity building across the system:

- the HEAL program, where a NTSDE teacher travels to schools, supporting with teaching and learning and undertaking a standard validation and moderation process.
- SACE subjects: NTSDE teacher works directly with the student or with the teacher on the ground to upskill them
- student pathway coordinators: subject selections, future aspirations work, and with the partnership with CDU, are aligning work more with opportunities within schools, school profiles, and community aspirations

"There's a legacy in remote schools that think that their teachers should deliver it [secondary education]. We want our teachers to deliver programs with their teachers supporting on the ground." – *School leader, distance education provider*

The capability building is valued by remote and very remote schools, particularly as they may have limited capacity to deliver secondary education and to invest in, or access, professional development.

Additionally, insights from consultations with School of the Air highlighted innovative examples of supporting curriculum delivery. As an example, an ASSOA teacher has supported staff in remote schools in the Central region **through a 'train the trainer' model, to deliver a 'science in bush schools' program.**

"The ASSOA teacher works with remote schools who sign up to the program... **We unpack** it for them, help them understand the concepts, and contextualising it for the community. **It's a 'train the trainer model'** to upskill the teachers and providing them the materials." – *School leader, distance education provider*

"**School of the Air, wouldn't it be fantastic if we had that?** Teachers delivering and getting support. Having realistic expectations around it? What is most important? Maths, English, science and local geography and history through an ILC program." – *Department of Education stakeholder*

Additionally, consultations with NTSDE highlighted **the potential of 'collaborative learning hubs'** which are already being set up between schools, to enable sharing of knowledge and workforce capability building within regions.

However, one distance education school noted that the ability to build workforce capability was dependent on their own workforce capability, indicating that it would need to be resourced appropriately (along with clear expectations in delivery) if they are to take on this role within the system.

Distance education providers are providing on-the-ground support, and continuity of relationships and teaching for students, schools and communities.

Although distance education is delivered remotely, school leaders from schools engaging with distance education noted that they value the visits and supports from distance education providers visiting schools. This relates to the indirect or on-the-ground support that visiting teachers provide to school leaders, school staff, and students, and that is sometimes delivered through annex models in parts of the NT (for example, in the Big Rivers region).

"**There's a legacy in remote schools** who think that their teachers should deliver it [secondary education]. We want our teachers to deliver programs with their teachers supporting on the ground." – *School leader, distance education school*

Additionally, consultations with schools engaging with distance education noted that distance education can provide stability and continuity of school staff for students, particularly, in very remote settings, where there is frequent teacher turnover.

"When you have turnover, **they don't have consistent learning at school and at home.**" – *Teacher, very remote comprehensive school*

Furthermore, NTSDE noted in consultation that their staff are often the most consistent staff members at some schools where there is otherwise high staff turnover. As such, they play an important role in maintaining continuity of relationships, and teaching and learning for students.

Box 6.5. School of Isolated and Distance Education, Western Australia

Within the WA government school system, distance and online education is provided by the School of Isolated and Distance Education (SIDE). SIDE is the largest school by enrolments in WA, supporting over 3,500 students enrolled full-time at SIDE, and additional students enrolled at another school with some units at SIDE. SIDE operates similarly to other schools, having a school principal, school staff, and a school campus. However, unlike other WA schools, SIDE is managed internally by the Department of Education's Statewide Services function.

SIDE is providing education for students who cannot attend classes in a regular school. SIDE students fall into four key groups:

1. students with mandatory curriculum gaps: SIDE delivers some or all of the mandated curriculum to a student. For example, a student in a remote area takes maths via SIDE as they do not have a specialist teacher.

2. students that cannot attend class in a mainstream school: SIDE represents the most **convenient, flexible schooling option to fit a student's lifestyle or location**. For example, a student in elite sports or a living on a station.
3. students who do not respond to mainstream schooling: students who would be at-risk or disconnected if they attended a mainstream school. For example, due to mental health concerns or behavioural issues.
4. students choose SIDE: SIDE delivers a subject of interest to a student. For example, a student enrolled at a traditional school enrolls to learn an elective through SIDE.

Additionally, SIDE is an RTO, with some students completing vocational courses through SIDE. SIDE also provides a small area onsite for referral students, providing an on-site location with psychologist support for students with mental health challenges that cannot attend school.

Education model: SIDE is a blended delivery model, with a significant online component. Education is currently mostly delivered by teachers in an open-plan setting with office-type desks. **SIDE has two examples of contemporary teaching spaces which include two 'virtual classrooms'**, two virtually enabled specialist rooms, a woodworking room, and an art room.

Additionally, SIDE operates on a hub and spoke model, with the main hub being in Leederville, Perth, with four sites operating across metropolitan Perth. SIDE noted a long-term goal to have regional hubs across Western Australia to further facilitate face-to-face contact with students and develop teacher-student relationships.

Community visits: Currently, SIDE teachers visit **students'** communities for approximately one week to facilitate the development of relationships with students, families, and school staff. Additionally, in remote and very remote contexts, SIDE teachers visit communities to co-design courses. Specifically, following a community visit SIDE teachers design and develop courses to align with the needs of communities. In consultation, SIDE noted that the ability to facilitate visits to **students'** communities was embedded into the funding model.

Timetabling: SIDE noted that a key success factor in catering for a large number of students is the work they have undertaken in timetabling. Initially, SIDE taught most areas through one virtual lesson per week per student. In consultation, they noted it was not enough class time to facilitate a strong connection between teachers and students. To improve outcomes, they developed a timetable for 240 schools. The timetable was developed following the collection of timetables from schools they work with, research, and consultations. It was noted that development of SIDE's **timetable** has increased subject access and choices for secondary students (due to reduced scheduling conflicts), and supports the VET courses they offer.

Innovative delivery to overcome teacher shortages: In consultation, SIDE highlighted the delivery of woodwork courses as an example of innovative delivery. In WA, there is a significant shortage of woodwork teachers, therefore several schools are interested in the delivery of woodwork through distance education.

At the SIDE Leederville campus, a teacher delivers woodwork in a workshop through live class demonstrations. The teacher has a mobile trolley that features three different camera angles and a microphone. At the receiving school, up to 10 students (the safety limit) are in a workshop room, with safety gear and a trained supervisor, following along. The supervisor must undertake an induction program on safety and the program. Further, at the receiving school, the same three camera angles are being streamed to SIDE allowing the SIDE teacher to give feedback and ensure safety.

The receiving school must also meet safety standards and requirements, with the principal having to go through an assessment and agreement to participate (e.g., having appropriate facilities, teachers, and bandwidth).

Government support and buy-in: In consultation, SIDE noted the importance of the support and buy-in they receive from the WA Government, with high levels of shared understanding of the role of distance education to achieve equity of access.

Challenges: In consultation, SIDE noted several challenges in delivery, including teacher recruitment. They noted teachers need to be high quality to facilitate online learning, and willing to visit remote communities. They also noted bandwidth as a challenge, with students being disengaged through low-quality images or buffering. However, it was noted that WA has invested heavily in bandwidth, and there are very few remote schools unable to access distance education for this reason.

There is an opportunity to review the dual enrolment funding model for distance education programs that focus on capability building, to ensure it provides incentives to efficiently scale the program to meet the needs of secondary students across the NT.

Distance education programs in the NT are funded through a dual-enrolment process through the NT School Resourcing Model (SRM). NTSDE receives variable funding based on student FTE, loadings based on student need, and a loading for recognising additional costs associated with delivering distance education to students. Home schools are also fully funded for the same student, based on the student needs-based funding formula.¹¹⁴

Using this funding, distance education providers deliver two types of programs:¹¹⁵

- direct education programs: Distance education delivered by a distance education provider, **either in a home setting or at a 'home school'.** Class sizes are driven by student-teacher ratios.
- capability building: Some distance education providers support schools to deliver education directly to students. Providers deliver provide capability building for teachers to deliver classes, develop curriculum, and provide materials to support the delivery of classes.

Delivery of capability building programs through distance education is driven by different cost-structures than direct education programs. The dual-enrolment funding model allocates resources for programs that are driven by enrolments, both at the home school and distance education provider.

While this is suitable for direct education delivery, capability building programs tend to have cost structures that are less responsive to student-teacher ratios and therefore may not be an efficient way to fund capability building programs. A specific example is the HEAL program which involves a train-the-trainer model (alongside direct delivery of learning to students), where NTSDE staff provide training and support for on-campus teachers to deliver a specific curriculum. In this model, a given NTSDE staff member supports multiple schools in a given week,¹¹⁶ allowing for cost sharing of distance education provider resources across home schools and a potentially lower efficient per-enrolled student cost of delivery than direct education programs.

The current funding model may not be appropriate to support efficient delivery of capability building programs through distance education due to this different cost structure. As the funding model has little relation to the cost drivers of delivering capability building programs, providers may have little incentive to scale programs sufficiently to capture cost efficiencies. This could lead to underutilisation of programs and higher per-enrolment cost of program delivery than is necessary.

6.3.5 Barriers to effective delivery of distance education that limit opportunities to scale

Distance education is not a universal solution for all students, in all contexts, as consistently emphasised by stakeholders.

Despite the growing strengths of distance education in the NT, the model in its current form is not a universal solution in all contexts for all students, particularly for students with low digital literacy skills, those who require relatively more intensive supports, or specific cultural requirements.

¹¹⁴ Sourced from analysis of the NT School Resourcing Model.

¹¹⁵ 'Schools', *NT School of Distance Education* (2023), <<https://www.ntsde.nt.edu.au/schools>>.

¹¹⁶ 'HEAL Project', *NT School of Distance Education* (2023), <<https://www.ntsde.nt.edu.au/news/heal-project>>.

“Online learning does not suit remote indigenous secondary learners with low digital literacy skills, find the content too abstract, and require opportunity for more hands-on learning and pathways to remain engaged. The issue of remote schools’ digital systems also presents a problem as programs and software required for online learning do not work consistently in remote schools. An issue exists when a student enrolls in online learning through a different school who receive the annual funding for that student. If the student decides to return to the local school, the funding does not follow them in that given year, creating a resourcing issue for the local school.” – *Submission from NT Principals’ Association*

Although the Schools are currently enrolling and servicing varying needs of students (see Section 6.3.4), there will be future challenges, and capacity and resourcing constraints that must be considered, particularly as the cohort of students with complex needs looks set to increase, along with a growing national problem of school refusal.¹¹⁷ It will be important for the system to understand further where need is growing, and work with distance education schools to plan and explore enrolment parameters to meet this need (among other system responses).

Additionally, there is tension between the structure of the teaching and learning provided by NTSDE, and the flexibility required to support some students. Specifically, the ability of NTSDE to provide rigour and structure to schools to support student engagement, retention, and **achievement, may be at odds with students’ ability** to engage in learning at that pace. The inflexibility of NTSDE and minimal modifications to courses may at times prevent students from fully engaging in the learning. There is a need for NTSDE and schools to work collaboratively to ensure courses are appropriate to meet the varying needs of students. As described by an internal stakeholder’s submission to the Review:

“Schools have reported NTSDE’s lack of flexibility and willingness to work with schools on modifications to courses that are offered, particularly around supporting Indigenous students and alternate pathways.”

Furthermore, the Review consulted with stakeholders, including current NTSDE students, who expressed a desire for stronger social interactions and peer connections in the current model. While there were opportunities for students to meet in the Darwin campus on-site, this may be better serviced by models similar to the Alice Springs and Katherine Schools of the Air, where there are opportunities for students to meet each term, trainers meet students and build relationships as they deliver distance education.

“I found it was a bit isolating at times. I very rarely got to meet fellow students outside going to the office, or camps, or when people would come on-site for the week. In classes it was more of a presentation, not opportunities to socialise or interact. In **classes you’re disconnected from students.**” – *Student at NTSDE*

Additionally, it was highlighted in consultation with stakeholders that distance education in its current form cannot be a solution in remote and very remote areas, particularly without the critical enablers to support delivery (as outlined below). For instance, there are challenges to delivering and scaling distance education, where there is a lack of connectivity, suitable infrastructure, appropriate learning environments for students, or a local workforce with low levels of digital capability.

The Review also heard through consultation that some remote and very remote schools lack an understanding of the role of NTSDE, and, due to historical reasons schools may not fully understand the role of NTSDE and have low levels of trust, in part due to the perception that the school is a government body.

The Review identifies several key success factors for distance education provision in the NT:

- access to support services and socialisation opportunities to support **students’** socio-emotional learning, form connections with peers

¹¹⁷ Commonwealth of Australia, 2023. *The national trend of school refusal and related matters.*

- opportunities for the provision of adjustments and support for students with additional needs to enable successful participation.
- local supervision: this is required for students to complete their learning, often in a different classroom. This includes learning support, wellbeing, and behavioural support, as well as motivation and engagement. However, in some instances students may not receive the necessary local supervision and support to participate in learning.
- connectivity: lack of connectivity and service issues are acute in some very remote areas, which can prevent students from engaging with distance education, and impact their ability to participate in virtual lessons, access resources and communicate with teachers and peers.
- infrastructure: this includes the need for an appropriate learning environment and space for **students to engage with distance education. Students' experiences can be challenging where** there are no designated, quiet classroom spaces or an appropriate set up for students to engage with learning.
- access to resources: including laptops, other digital resources and internet connectivity.
- digital capability: this includes teachers on-the-ground to provide suitable supervision and support to students, and digital capability of students to engage in learning opportunities.

"We had kids dual enrolled because they have bad internet. We're unable to get work out... We have a few communities who struggle with connectivity." – *Principal, distance education provider*

"We're not resourced for it [distance education] in terms of technology and Wi-Fi and staffing to oversee distance education."**"** – *Teacher, very remote combined school*

Buy-in and accountability of school leaders and teachers is key to ensuring positive learning experiences for students.

The buy-in and accountability of school leaders and teachers is critical to the success of distance education in the NT. Their involvement ensures that students receive effective support, high-quality education, and a positive learning experience, ultimately contributing to learning outcomes.

However, distance education providers noted that there could be increased accountability for schools to support students to access distance education, including the provision of appropriate learning environments for students, and supervision and support to ensure students can complete their work.

There is a rationale for more clearly defining expectations and delivery roles of the three distance education schools.

Previous reviews undertaken in the NT (including *A Share in the Future*, 2014), at the time of writing, identified opportunities to reduce inefficiencies in distance education provision. This was based on identified overlap in operations, duplication of course development and delivery, and potential inefficiencies in the structure of provision. Recommendations of past reviews suggested that future investment may focus on a singular program that can be delivered across the NT.

While there continues to be a rationale for more clearly defining expectations in delivery, providing continuity of learning, and distinguishing the various roles – including systemic – for the distance education schools, this Review suggests that this outcome can be achieved without structural reform or a merger of the distance education schools, which is likely to lead to unintended consequences rather than the intended outcomes. For example, the system could define the role and supports that Alice Springs School of the Air could provide to remote schools in the Central and Barkly regions, and vice versa for Katherine School of the Air in supporting remote schools in the Big Rivers region. This could be flexible depending on the students enrolled and their intended pathways, and could at times involve support post-Year 9.

Finding 16: There are growing possibilities and strengths of blended and online delivery models in the Northern Territory (noting that it is not a universal solution for all students, in all contexts), with the opportunity to further embed and scale both delivery and system roles.

6.3.6 There are examples of success in boarding, however, it has not worked for all students.

Boarding is viewed as an important part of the NT education system, as it offers students and their families a choice in secondary education, and pathways for students. However, it has not worked for all students.

In consultation with Departmental stakeholders, experts, and schools, the importance of choice in secondary education was commonly recognised, with there being a need to broaden the understanding of education choices and options available.

While boarding is an important option for many students in these communities, and is supported by many families and schools, the overwhelming evidence provided to the Review suggests that it is not an effective pathway for many students, and that the design and implementation of the *Indigenous Education Strategy (2015-24)* has not been effective in supporting access and outcomes in secondary education for many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students across remote NT communities.

There is a need to improve the quality of boarding, and to safeguard young people from boarding providers that may vary in their ability to meet the educational, health, and cultural needs of students.

It was widely recognised by school stakeholders that the boarding experience for many students is often met with challenges relating to transition, cultural support and educational barriers faced (such as language and a lack of culturally relevant curriculum and teaching). Specifically, there are concerns that in some instances, traditional boarding options do not provide culturally safe experiences of mainstream education for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students.

In consultation, school leaders reported that students have negative experiences and outcomes attending boarding schools where they do not deliver a culturally relevant education, often resulting in students returning to community.

"Others [students] have gone [to boarding school] for a short period of time, and because **they haven't had access to the community and cultural meanings, it just hasn't worked.**" - *School leader, very remote primary school*

"Some [students went to boarding school] did in my time some did but they came back, not because of COVID, but because they wanted to be with their families. Questions of bullying, fraud, and neglect." – *School leader, very remote comprehensive school*

A submission provided by the Isolated Children's Parents Association Northern Territory (ICPA NT) also noted the limited boarding options available for geographically isolated students, and the support required (including through the Student Assistance Schemes) to allow students to access quality boarding options either in the NT or interstate.

While there are examples of success in boarding (where students complete Year 12 and pursue desired post-school pathways), the weight of evidence considered by the Review suggests this has not worked for all students, with many instances of students bouncing back, and subsequently disengaging from schooling. Furthermore, in the absence of systematised data and visibility of boarding outcomes, the extent to which this happens is likely not fully captured in the available data. In this regard, there is an imperative for the system to focus on improving the quality of boarding, as well as appropriately safeguarding young people from boarding providers that may vary in their ability to meet the educational, health and cultural needs of students.

Stakeholders described a key role for the system in this area to prioritise supports and avenues for schools to reengage students who return to community. This can be pursued by ensuring accountability for supporting students and setting a minimum standard of provision in local communities (which in turn may also work to reduce the reliance on boarding options), provision of flexible learning, and providing scaffolds and supports for the transition. It was also noted that these actions would be **enabled by the system's** visibility of student movements and boarding outcomes.

Facilitating improvements in quality of boarding options for students can be pursued through government boarding facilities in Nhulunbuy, Katherine and Tennant Creek (to be built), as well as regionalised models of residential boarding in the NT, where there is evidence of positive experiences and learning opportunities for students. This includes residential halfway options with boarding that emphasise pastoral support, student wellbeing and peer connections (as outlined in Section 6.3.3) and could be delivered where appropriate and relevant to context and student need.

While the NT government has limited oversight of boarding quality, there is a further role to play through the boarding schools they recommend to communities, as well as working with the Australian Government and non-government system to hold both NT and interstate boarding providers accountable for provision and outcomes, and pursuing opportunities for ABSTUDY funding that allow innovative and quality delivery to occur.

There is a need to prioritise supports for reengaging students upon their return to community, with several challenges currently faced.

The above issues described by stakeholders tend to result in students disengaging and poor retention rates from boarding school. Evidence indicates that poor boarding school engagement and a high boarding school dropout rate is common in the system. A 2020 study undertaken of boarding in a Northern Territory community showed that for students that completed boarding school engagement, 59 per cent of students had dropped out from boarding school in their first year and 74 per cent had dropped out in their second year.¹¹⁸ More generally, poor boarding school retention rates have been attributed to poor transitions, lack of cultural and community recognition, and weak relationships with parents and community.

School leaders consulted with for the Review reported that they experience challenges with re-engaging students at their local school, and supporting their learning and general wellbeing, when they bounce back to community from boarding. Furthermore, the lack of systematised data sharing and visibility means that the NT Government, and schools are unable to identify when students have returned to community.

"Boarding school doesn't work for most of our kids. We had a lot of kids who got sent off, and got sent back very quickly and they came back to community, but no one came back to pick them up." - *School leader, very remote combined school*

"Students end up feeling like they are missing out on important family happenings and the systems are usually one way, not both ways, so students get lost but also find coming back really hard and get lost here. Returned students feel unaccepted by community and it affects their wellbeing." - *School leader, very remote combined school*

Furthermore, when students '**bounce back**' to community, there are pronounced challenges with reengaging in secondary education (as explored in Section 6.3.2). School leaders consulted with for the Review consistently described the difficulties in catering for these students, with there being no dedicated secondary education provision, classroom space or teacher and associated resourcing. As a result, returning students are placed into primary classrooms, a factor contributing to their overall disengagement from schooling.

"Many remote principals find that young people may enrol at boarding at the beginning of the year (therefore the local school is not funded for these students) but during the year when the students return to the community because boarding has not been successful, the school is under resourced to provide quality education or pathways for them." - *Submission from the NT Principals Association*

¹¹⁸ M O'Bryan and W Fogarty, 'Boarding off and on country: a study of education in one Northern Territory remote community', *Australian National University* (commissioned by the Centre for Aboriginal Economic Policy Research, 2020).

Successful outcomes in boarding are characterised by several key factors.

The Review identified some key success factors for boarding pathways for students, as outlined in Table 6.4.

Table 6.4: Factors for success in boarding school

Success factor	Description
School, community, and boarding partnerships	School, community and boarding relationships relates to establishing connections and collaboration between home schools, local communities and boarding providers to ensure these meet the educational, social and cultural needs of students.
Family structures and support	Family structures and support for students to undertake a boarding pathway (including whether there is a successful history of boarding in the family or community). Regular and effective communication with families, and between students and their families, also supports a positive boarding experience.
Intentional pathways	Deliberate, and early, provision of support and planning to support students to transition to boarding pathways.
Bridging and transition support	Bridging and transition support help students to transition to a new environment, including intensive catch-up for literacy and numeracy skills.
Ensuring secondary schooling (boarding) readiness	Emphasis on placed on preparing students academically and emotionally for boarding school, to ease the transition to boarding.
Data tracking mechanisms	Data systems to track student engagement, outcomes and completion data, and provide case management support. The NT is designing and implementing the Education Management Program to meet this objective.

Source: Deloitte Access Economics.

In contexts where the delivery of boarding is characterised by quality teaching and learning, wraparound supports, informed choice, and matching of boarding providers with the community and needs of students – success stories are evident.

There are examples in the NT where students in remote areas transition to boarding pathways, and go on to achieve success and complete Year 12. The Review visited schools where there was a strong sense of community pride over the educational success of students, and a desire within the community to continue the boarding relationship. This success was attributed to the established and long-term relationship with an interstate boarding provider and the community. As it has become the expected pathway for students' **secondary schooling, the school and community work together to intentionally plan for and support students'** transition to boarding school. The school acknowledged the need for students and families, community members and schools – to work together to prepare young people for transitions to boarding early.

"The community relationship [with the boarding provider] is making the difference." - LEaD committee member, very remote primary school

More recently, the school also established a new relationship with a boarding school in the Big Rivers region, to ensure that all students had a place at a boarding school. This relationship was identified and facilitated by the Transition Support Unit. The school noted there were early signs of **a successful partnership, and students had not yet 'bounced back' and remaining at boarding facilities.** A key factor is distance, where students are not able to easily return home on weekends or during challenging periods, thereby leading to longer periods of retention. In consultation, members of the school's LEaD committee discussed:

"TSU has made the connection to Katherine High – the kids are doing well there. We have success there when we send groups of kids together. We send a community member **there, they are supporting down there.**" - *LEaD committee member, very remote primary school*

Furthermore, in consultation with non-government boarding schools, a critical success factor noted was family support and engagement. Stakeholders reported that when parents provide encouragement, set expectations and work with the school to support the students, success is heightened. Stakeholders in the government system also revealed how family support amounts to success in boarding. For example:

[For some students] It's [boarding has] worked for a term sometimes, but a lot of it has got to do with how the parents interpret that movement." - *School leader, very remote primary school*

Consultations with two non-government boarding providers also highlighted the importance of models of pastoral care as a factor that is necessary to boarding success. For example, stakeholders at one non-government boarding school in the NT noted that they offer a range of supports for students, including dedicated staff who reside in the facility with the students as **'house parents'**. This arrangement offers students consistency of care, grounding and supports the **student's overall** wellbeing.

Another non-government boarding provider noted the importance of intensive transition support offered by developing an orientation program to ensure the student is familiar with the aspects of boarding, and subsequently reducing the likeliness of homesickness. This requires high levels of resourcing, however, is currently supporting student retention:

"[homesickness]: we can minimise it but can't eliminate. We have an orientation program, we can bring students and families in prior, spend a few days in Darwin, tour around, we do this prior to making the decision that we will take on the student, so we can see if the homesickness will affect the student, and then we converse with the families. This allows us to reduce the homesickness. We do activities that support pastoral care, wellbeing, and recreation (e.g., movies). There is constantly stuff happening for students for retention and wellbeing." - *Leadership, non-government boarding provider*

In consultation with the Warlpiri Education and Training Trust, it was noted the most successful boarding outcomes are observed with older students:

"The transition back home is difficult, especially for those who have a difficult experience at boarding school as they often have difficulty reengaging with education when they return. The most successful boarding arrangements are with Year 11/12 students and the majority of students who now go to boarding school are from Year 11/12."

The work of the TSU was acknowledged by some schools and boarding providers for its support with transitions, administrative processes, and identifying and maintaining boarding relationships. Stakeholders noted that there is a priority to preserve the existing boarding provider relationships developed with community, and the efforts of the TSU over the past eight years to facilitate these. However, some remote schools consulted with for the Review were not aware of the **Unit's function**, or did not believe the frequency of visits, which occurred once a term, was adequate to support student and community engagement in particular.

There are several barriers to achieving boarding outcomes.

Anecdotally, boarding schools do provide opportunities for students to achieve outcomes and is an avenue for students to complete Year 12 and pursue a variety of options for further study and work. However, it has not worked for all students. In either case, the system lacks visibility, and cannot claim success where this is achieved, despite investing in transition support and partnership building, and does not have the mechanisms to systematically identify and support students who return to community and who may fall through the cracks.

These findings have been highlighted in a range of past reviews which examined the impacts of the policy approach to facilitate boarding pathways in urban areas, including the 2017 Australian Government *Study Away Review - Review of Support for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Secondary Students Studying Away From Home*, and the 2020 *Boarding off and on country: a study of education in one Northern Territory remote community*.¹¹⁹

Barriers to success, developed from a synthesis of evidence considered for the Review, include:

- quality of boarding option: boarding providers have varying capacity and capability to meet the unique educational, social emotional and health needs of students
- lack of intentional preparation: effective transitions to boarding school require intentional and early preparation to support students to transition to boarding, however this does not always happen and students commence boarding with low levels of readiness
- absence of partnerships: where there is a lack of effective partnerships with community and minimal engagement with families
- visibility of student movements: **lack of data systems and visibility of students'** movements, to boarding or back to the system, limits the support that can be provided to reengage or support students on their pathway
- tension **between 'western' education and culturally responsive education:** For some Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students, there is a community and family expectation that there are at boarding to receive a western education experience. However, in practice, this does not always occur, as students are streamed into '**culturally responsive' transition** classes, sometimes without an exit pathway to mainstream classes.

Finding 17: While there are examples of success in boarding, it has not worked for all students, and there is a need to prioritise supports for reengaging students in secondary education in local communities.

There is a need to improve **the NT government system's** visibility of student boarding enrolments, movements and outcomes.

The limitations of data systems mean the NT government lacks adequate **visibility of students'** enrolments and movements. Once a student transitions from a mainstream school to a boarding provider, there is no visibility of the student by the Department. This lack of underlying data on students in boarding schools means there is no ability to track outcomes of success or progress, or understand which students are leaving or returning to community.

"There is no data on boarding – students go and then we lose track of them within the system." - *Principal, Barkly Region Principal Collaborative Learning event*

Improved data systems and reporting at a Commonwealth level is required to increase visibility of NT **students'** enrolments, movement within and out of other state system, as well as improved accountability mechanisms to support understandings of student progress, transitions and outcomes (including with other school sectors and boarding). This has been recommended by numerous past reviews, including *Study Away* (Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet, 2017) and *Boarding: investing in outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students* (Grant Thornton, 2019). **The current design and implementation of the Northern Territory's EMP** represents an opportunity for improvement in this area.

Finally, in instances where students move to boarding school in secondary years and succeed, there is limited credit or acknowledgement of the role of the local school in the NT in preparing students for boarding, including in building resilience and the academic readiness required to be successful.

¹¹⁹ M O'Bryan and B Fogarty, 'Boarding off and on Country: A study of education in one Northern Territory remote community', *Australian National University* (commissioned by the Centre for Aboriginal Economic Policy Research, 2020).

6.4 Recommendations for learning access

The Review has identified four recommendations in response to findings within the learning access domain. These recommendations are core to the Review and proposed reforms, in that they acknowledge and respond to the clear aspiration that stakeholders hold for access to high-quality secondary education in local communities. These recommendations set out how the system can work towards this aim, and subsequently, achieve improved engagement and outcomes for students.

An overview is provided below, followed by detailed recommendations.

Notably, and as with all recommendations set forth by the Review, there are interdependencies with other key domains, which provide the architecture and enablers for these recommendations to be successfully implemented. As such, these must be pursued in a sequenced manner and in some instances in parallel, to be mutually reinforcing in achieving the vision for the system. For example, the proposed Delivery Model for secondary education (Section 3.2) identifies the constraints that a school may face, or the enablers that support delivery, the delivery models they can offer to support pathways to NTCET completion, and subsequently the resourcing and supports for schools that are necessary.

Box 6.6: Overview of recommendations and links to legislation

As outlined in the Review's vision and findings, the overarching goal for the NT secondary schooling system is to ensure there is a guaranteed standard of provision, in all contexts, that can contribute towards completion of school. This has links to the legislation (Education Act 2015).

It is not in the scope of the Review to provide comment on legislative changes. However, the Review suggests that the overarching goal, and accompanying recommendations associated with recognition of learning and learning access, do not give rise to or necessitate a change in legislation.

That is, the recommendations set out the need for a guaranteed standard of provision (which may be a mix of pathway options that look different in each context) that contribute towards NTCET completion. It does not suggest that the minimum age of school completion should be raised to achieve this objective.

Rather, it is envisaged that this recommendation would be worked towards through provision and implementation (for example, how the NT system manages early exit from schooling, ensuring that all students are registered for the NTCET pathway early, and ensuring that schools and families are aware of the eligible options post-Year 10).

One other potential option that could go towards supporting a guaranteed standard of provision is to raise the bar on **what it means to 'participate in an eligible option' via the Education Regulations 2015**. At the moment, the Act states (in section 38(9)) that:

Regulations may provide for the following:

- (a) when a child completes year 10 of secondary education;*
- (b) when a child is participating in an eligible option*

Possible amendments to the regulation that could support this recommendation could involve adding that an eligible option must provide a pathway or recognition of learning towards the NTCET.

The Review recommends expanding regionalised delivery (Recommendation 3.3) to provide access to high quality secondary schooling provision in addition to what can be accessed in students' local communities. This will require an expanded regional footprint: the regional operating model (with increased capacity and capability) is viewed as a key avenue to support provision across regions and is necessary to ensure coherence across what is set to become an increasingly sophisticated

delivery model. This is particularly critical given that effectiveness of change and longevity of outcomes can be limited where certain resources or expertise are school based.

The Review highlights the need to augment secondary education delivery in local communities where there are currently no viable pathways to NTCET completion. This can be supported through provision of appropriate delivery modes in each context, as agreed upon through individual **schools' Pathway Agreements**. This refers to enhancing the systemic role of distance education schools (Recommendation 3.4), and expanding models and programs such as Learning on Country (Recommendation 3.5) that are currently contributing to learning experiences, outcomes, and pathways for students - where there are the necessary conditions, community readiness and aspiration for implementation.

The Review identifies that there is still a continued role for the system to play in facilitating boarding pathways and ensuring that a meaningful choice is available to students and families. This is important as there will always be students who benefit from accessing mainstream education and traditional boarding models either within the NT or interstate, as well as a need to preserve the relationships with school communities and boarding providers that have been established over the past decade, some of which have resulted in successful boarding outcomes. However, the recommendation to move towards providing access to high quality secondary **education in remote areas is intended to reduce the system's reliance on boarding**. In relation to boarding (Recommendation 3.6), the Review recommends working with the Commonwealth Government to improve visibility of student enrolments, explore opportunities for ABSTUDY funding for boarding (including for both traditional and innovative boarding models).

The Review recommends re-designing the Transition Support Unit, or replacing it with another appropriately resourced function across the system, with a view that the system continues to play a role in maintaining relationships with boarding providers and engaging with local communities, as well as broadening its support functions to be more inclusive of managing pathways towards NTCET completion more generally, and providing career advice to schools. It is envisaged that this function would also form part of the regional workforce responsible for operationalising the Pathways Plan and Agreements through the regional layers of the system (Recommendation 2.1).

Careful implementation, planning of provision, and piloting are required to bring about the vision of learning access. Underpinning the recommendations are two key considerations – (1) ensuring the system is coordinated and coheres to delivery, and (2) the role of the system in setting clear accountabilities and responsibilities for stakeholders in delivery. Otherwise, this will not only see ad hoc delivery continue across the NT, but additionally, significant risks of fragmentation across the various delivery modes and approaches.

Another key consideration is the need for a systematic approach that achieves consistency and coherence in delivery, that also allows for place-based delivery and actions across different contexts. While the implementation of the Pathways Plan and Delivery Model provides the architecture for the system to achieve this, the Review notes that different approaches are required across different settings, and that greater levels of differentiation are required in very remote contexts. As such, realising this objective will require a careful process of community engagement to understand what works and where, and community needs and aspirations. Implementation will also require key supports, as outlined in the partnerships and engagement and system of supports domains, to enable delivery.

Recommendation 3.3: Expand regionalised delivery models to increase access and enable pathways to attaining the NTCET.

The Department should expand its regionalised delivery footprint, as guided by the overarching Pathways Agreement, and undertake a coordinated approach that is tailored and responsive to local context and needs.

The Department should invest in the capability and capacity of its regional workforce to operationalise and support delivery (i.e., of block intensives), through coordination of pathways, hub-to-spoke resources and supports for schools, and facilitating partnerships and engagement, e.g. with industry and community organisations.

To ensure coordination and coherence in delivery, the Department should undertake initial activities including:

- identifying where there are opportunities for schools to form networks and clusters based on pathways agreements
- establishing a process for schools to develop critical mass and coordination for block training within each region, and ensuring there is resourcing and support to get students and/or trainers from the course, and
- developing a process for leveraging existing regional infrastructure and facilities, and identifying where there are gaps in access.

The Department should implement the following, to expand access to provision:

- auspice delivery through regions by accrediting regional offices with a SACE registration number, to enable delivery of Stage I and II subjects to schools without a SACE number, while building school capacity to deliver senior secondary schooling
 - an implementation consideration is that it is important that this still provides schools with ownership and the flexibility to design a useful and relevant curriculum, and
- clarify the remit, and further embed collaborative learning hubs or annex models (currently delivered through the NT School of Distance Education), to increase access to provision and support collaboration and accountability of delivery in regions.

The Department should ensure there is appropriate coordination, coherence, and governance of regional delivery. This includes the following:

- create accountability and governance through regional centres, above the layer of the individual school
- ensure alignment between regional and centralised layer, to ensure coherence of delivery and school support across the regions and the system
- consider coordination across delivery models, and
- enable networks or group coordination of schools, to enable sharing of knowledge, expertise, resources and more.

Recommendation 3.4: Enhance and embed the systemic role of distance education schools.

The Department should consider the strategic systemic role of distance education schools in the system, including but not limited to how distance education schools can enable greater access to specialist subjects, provide workforce capacity building for schools, provide curriculum expertise and resources, enhance case management support through current mechanisms of student data tracking, and play a role in catering for student needs (i.e. isolated and distant students, and a growing cohort of students with additional needs).

The Department should work with the Northern Territory School of Distance Education, Katherine School of the Air and Alice Springs School of the Air to:

- more closely align work units within the Department of Education, including curriculum and community engagement
- ensure alignment between **the Department and the Schools' curriculum and program** implementation
- agree upon system roles, (i.e., providing capability building in specialised curriculum areas, curriculum implementation, teaching and learning, case management, workforce capacity building, community engagement), and
- ensure that roles are clearly demarcated and communicated, with expectations set in delivery.

The Department should also consider moving towards comprehensive offerings in distance education, while maintaining the existing roles of the Schools of the Air:

- define the role and supports the Schools of the Air could provide in the Central, Barkly and Big Rivers regions (including a flexible approach to supporting students post-Year 9 where there are students enrolled and on the pathway), and
- consider whether NTSDE can provide an overarching role across middle years and senior secondary program to drive improved efficiencies in operations and continuity of learning.

The Department should also:

- explore enrolment parameters for the schools, informed by planning for students with additional needs
- consider how data management systems used by distance education schools can be leveraged and shared across the system to support case management, tracking and continuity of learning, particularly as students move schools, and
- acknowledge, and provide support for several enabling conditions for provision of distance education, including ICT capability, appropriate infrastructure and learning environments, connectivity, as well as coordination with other delivery models.

The Department should also consider reviewing the funding model of distance education providers and establish alternative funding models to support cost-effective delivery. This would involve the design of a funding model that supports the expansion of capability building activities that distance education providers undertake with other schools, and resource sharing models in remote areas to allow for teachers with specialised skills to support multiple schools.

Recommendation 3.5: Expand models of practice (e.g. Learning on Country) that emphasise two-way learning, Aboriginal governance, ownership and authority, and cultural safety and appropriateness.

The Department should develop a process to expand, in a contextually appropriate manner, successful models and programs, such as the Learning on Country Program. Programs should be prioritised where they are aligned with key system objectives, demonstrate the above principles, serve the place-based aspirations of community, are aligned with core curriculum delivery (i.e., Australian Curriculum), and are underpinned by teaching and learning rigour.

Where programs meet the identified criteria, the Department could consider a process for expanding in the below areas:

- locations – i.e., where there are current gaps, and/or existing community aspiration, readiness, and capacity (e.g. workforce) to adopt the models
- initiatives - i.e., expanding from ranger-facilitated programs to health or other sectors, as relevant to the identified locations
- year levels – i.e., considering opportunities across years 7-9, as well as senior secondary.

The Department should also undertake broader work to link the program with middle years and senior years curriculum, and ensure it contributes to completion.

Recommendation 3.6: Work with the Commonwealth Government to improve visibility of student enrolments, and explore opportunities for ABSTUDY funding that enables delivery of innovative boarding models and supports improved outcomes.

Overall, the system has a continued role to play in facilitating boarding pathways, however the weight of investment should be placed in strengthening access to high quality secondary education provision. The position of the system with respect to boarding in the overall model of delivery is articulated in the vision for the system in Section 3.1.

The Department should work with the Commonwealth Government to:

- communicate the NT's **needs for quality boarding provision** (including models) and data tracking into the system design review (led by Department of Social Services, Department of Education and the National Indigenous Australians Agency and being undertaken as part of the implementation of Closing the Gap)

- improve the availability and quality of boarding school data, to support case management and create visibility of outcomes being achieved and where students return to community
- conduct quality assurance of boarding providers (with the support of the Commonwealth Government, as necessary), including their ability to meet the educational, socioemotional and health needs of students, as well as a culturally safe learning environment, and
- improve accountability of boarding providers, in the Northern Territory and interstate, for boarding provision and outcomes (this will also require collaboration with the non-government system).

The Department of Education should also work with the Commonwealth Government, through exploring opportunities for ABSTUDY funding, to:

- provide access to regionalised models of boarding (e.g. short stay models), where there is evidence of positive experiences and learning opportunities for students (for example, where they emphasise pastoral support, safety, socioemotional wellbeing, and connections with peers)
- provide informed choice for communities by curating an appropriate list of boarding options that are matched to the community and needs of students (noting communities should still be free to explore and select from other options, especially where there is family history and strong connections in place), and
- redesign the roles of regional workforce to encompass coordination of other pathways throughout the stages of schooling, building relationships with employers and providing career advice (see Recommendation 4.2), and operationalising the Pathways Plan and Agreements (Recommendation 2.1).

It is acknowledged that work is underway to assess boarding options in Central Australia. The NT should continue to work with the Commonwealth Government to ensure that there is coherent strategy to boarding provision that aligns with community needs, and the findings and directions of this Review.

7 Partnerships and engagement

Key findings: Partnerships and engagement

- Finding 18: The NT government school system is on a path to strengthening partnerships and engagement, in line with its strategic priorities, with appetite from stakeholders for key programs and partnerships to be widened in support of student engagement and outcomes.
 - Strong engagement and partnerships are occurring through implementation of its *Engagement Strategy* and movements towards local decision-making, community-led schools are operating in ten sites across the NT, and Local Engagement and Decision Making (LEaD) committees have been established in 42 remote communities.
 - In partnership, the NT system is delivering key programs that provide valued opportunities that contribute to student learning success (e.g. Learning on Country, Clontarf and STARS). There is appetite from stakeholders for access to be widened across the NT.
 - There are effective partnerships with rangers, through programs such as Learning on Country, that are delivering positive learning experiences for students and contribute towards meaningful pathways and achievement of the NTCET. There is an opportunity to explore further collaborations with other sectors, e.g. health.
- Finding 19: While the NT system has unique strengths in partnerships and engagement, there are key risk factors that inhibit partnerships from being systematically established and with longevity, which require support from the system to overcome.
 - While there are examples of strong partnerships and engagement such as effective school partnerships established with local industry that provide pathway opportunities for students, these are often ad hoc in nature and challenging to maintain due to the capacity and transience of the workforce.
 - Schools vary in their capability to facilitate partnerships and undertake community engagement in support of secondary education delivery.
- Finding 20: Improving educational outcomes cannot be achieved through secondary education alone, and there is a need to strengthen and work in partnership with local communities, industry, government and non-government organisations. To achieve this:
 - Clearer expectations and structures (e.g. roles, procedures) for schools (including small and remote schools) is required, and must be supported by regional offices, the Department, and other government agencies.
 - System support to identify and facilitate relationships is key to ensuring these are more systematically embedded, with longevity.

7.1 Partnerships and engagement underpin secondary education provision

7.1.1 Key strengths of partnerships and engagement within the system

The National Agreement on Closing the Gap, and key NT Government strategic priorities highlight the need for partnerships and engagement in strengthening schooling.

The National Agreement on Closing the Gap highlights the priority reform area of formal partnerships and shared decision-making which commits all state and territory governments to *"building and strengthening structures that empower Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people*

to share decision-making authority with governments to accelerate policy and place-based progress against Closing the Gap.¹²⁰

The Productivity Commission noted in its Closing the Gap Review (released in July 2023) that currently the elements of shared decision-making are not widely adopted in practice. It identified that many government agencies appear to be consulting with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people on a pre-determined solution, rather than in genuine collaboration and co-design. Noting these review findings are national and not specific to the Northern Territory, it nonetheless signals the imperative to build trust, ensure a shared decision-making process, and pave the way for implementation of all priority reforms.

Further, the Productivity Commission report highlighted the need to ensure that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and organisations have adequate funding and time to support partnerships with governments.

“Many organisations noted that lack of time and resourcing were impeding their ability to participate in partnerships on equal footing with governments. The Commission was told that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people want to set the priorities and provide input but they need funding support for this to happen.”¹²¹

These goals and imperatives are being pursued by the Northern Territory government schooling system through its *Engagement Strategy (2022-31)*, which sets out a key goal for the system to work in partnership. The *Engagement Strategy* refers to creating strong partnerships based on the collective responsibility of parents, families, early years services, schools, and the community to educate young people, and working together to provide the best possible expertise for learners.¹²²

The NT schooling system is on a path to strengthening partnerships and engagement, in line with its strategic priorities.

The *Education NT Strategy (2021-2025)* includes the strategic action to **“increase the relevance of early childhood and school education programs to local communities by expanding Local Decision Making and strengthening governance skills of school board, council and committee members.”¹²³**

As of 2021-22, community-led schools are operating in ten sites across the NT, and Local Engagement and Decision Making (LEaD) committees have been established in 42 remote communities.¹²⁴ These committees work closely with schools to identify local priorities and participate in decision-making processes related to school matters, such as **“what kids learn, how culture is taught, who runs the school, how school money is spent”**.¹²⁵

LEaD committees operate within a guiding policy framework, including the overarching commitment to Local Decision Making (LDM) **under the NTG’s strategic** ten-year framework. This aims to empower and enhance **communities’ control of their own affairs**, to ensure that service delivery is responsive to and driven by the aspirations of community.¹²⁶ The strategic framework sets out that:

“Local Decision Making is facilitating a new working relationship between Aboriginal communities and government agencies to support self-determination.”¹²⁷

The six priority areas identified by the NT Government for LDM in the Northern Territory are outlined, with specificity to education in Figure 7.1 below.

¹²⁰ Closing the Gap, *National Agreement on Closing the Gap* (July 2020).

¹²¹ Productivity Commission, *Review of the National Agreement on Closing the Gap. Draft report*, July 2023.

¹²² NT Department of Education, *Northern Territory Education Engagement Strategy 2022 – 2031* (2022).

¹²³ NT Government, *Education NT Strategy 2021-2025* (2021).

<https://education.nt.gov.au/__data/assets/pdf_file/0007/1061386/education-NT-strategy-2021-2025.pdf>.

¹²⁴ NT Department of Education, *Annual Report 2021-22* (2022).

<https://education.nt.gov.au/__data/assets/pdf_file/0010/1157374/doe-annual-report-2021-22.pdf>

¹²⁵ NT Government, *Local Decision-Making* (2018) <

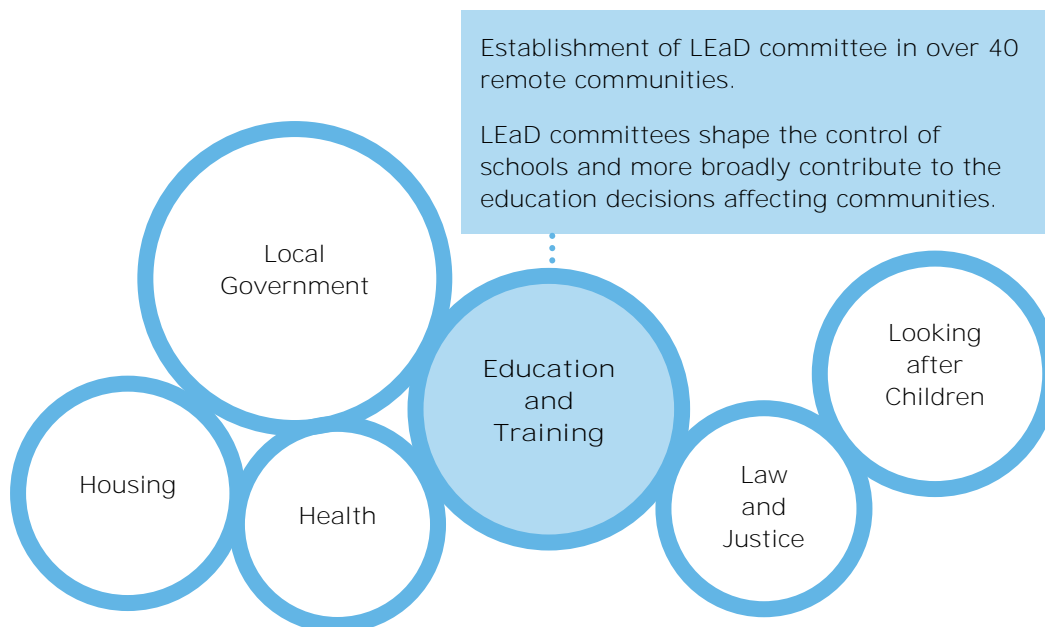
https://education.nt.gov.au/__data/assets/pdf_file/0008/568439/ies-cls-flyer.pdf>.

¹²⁶ NT Government, *Local Decision Making* (2020) < <https://cmc.nt.gov.au/aboriginal-affairs>>.

¹²⁷ NT Government, *Local Decision Making* (2023) <<https://ldm.nt.gov.au/home>>.

LDM in the NT represents a significant shift towards empowering local communities to shape their own future and determine the governance of their regions. It seeks to devolve decision-making authority from higher levels of government to local communities, aiming to ensure that decisions align with the unique needs, aspirations, and diversity of cultural identities in the Northern Territory.

Figure 7.1: Northern Territory Government Local Engagement and Decision-Making Priority Areas



Source: Deloitte Access Economics based on NT Government documentation.

Through partnership, the Northern Territory is delivering key programs that provide valued opportunities that contribute to student learning success. There is appetite from stakeholders for access to be widened across the NT.

The NT Department’s partnership with the SACE Board, through which the curriculum and assessment framework is adopted for the NTCET, stands as a significant strength and opportunity for the system.

As outlined in Section 3.2, the flexibility of the NTCET afforded through the SACE means it can be leveraged to meet the unique needs of students in the NT while maintaining compatibility and alignment with senior secondary directions in other states. This allows students in the NT to attain a qualification that is recognised within the NT and other jurisdictions, while also leveraging the flexibility and innovation of the SACE Board (discussed further in Section 3). Furthermore, the partnership enables sharing of resources (including curriculum) between South Australia and the Northern Territory.

There is strong community support for partnerships developed between schools and the Clontarf Foundation and STARS Foundation. Both foundations provide educational programs that operate in the NT, specifically supporting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students’ education and wellbeing, and are cited by stakeholders as being instrumental in supporting transitions beyond school, including through provision of career advice and connecting students with opportunities. Furthermore, the programs are noted for supporting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander **students’** engagement in their learning, and consistently celebrated as a strength by school leaders, students and teachers.

Additionally, stakeholder consultations highlighted the ongoing partnerships with local rangers, through Learning on Country, that are effective in delivering positive learning experiences for students, and contributing towards meaningful pathways and achievement of the NTCET. The opportunity to explore further collaborations with other sectors, for instance health, was also noted.

Across the NT, there are examples of schools engaging with community (for example, to determine NTCET offerings and to gather input on a contextualised curriculum), and establishing partnerships with local industry to enable pathways and opportunities for students. A key success factor is the presence of a teacher or school leader who facilitates connections and collaborations between school and external organisations.

Finding 18: The NT government school system is on a path to strengthening partnerships and engagement, in line with its strategic priorities, with appetite for key programs and partnerships to be widened in support of student engagement and outcomes.

7.1.2 Strengthening and systematising partnerships and engagement across the NT

While there are examples of strong partnerships and engagement, these are often ad hoc in nature and dependent on capacity and longevity of the school workforce.

While there are some examples of effective partnerships and engagement across the NT, these endeavours often remain ad hoc in nature, and are driven by schools, with no systematic process for how these partnerships are created or maintained.

Therefore, partnerships are often reliant on the available resources within a school, and the school's capacity to allocate time and effort towards building and sustaining partnerships. Given the transient nature of the workforce in the NT, this is also seen to **impact a school's ability to maintain partnerships over time.**

Limited funding, understaffing, or lack of capacity to facilitate partnerships present challenges for initiating or maintaining partnerships. As such, there is an opportunity for partnerships to be supported by the Department, for instance through its regional offices.

"Community engagement is very reliant on the work of the school staff and their local knowledge. Due to a very transient community both on the school side and the community business side, it could be an idea to have an agreement between big employers and the Department." – *Discussion paper survey response, school staff member*

"I was given VET from four different RTOS, which meant I had to complete four different lots of paperwork. There's no support for that. And each one of those RTOs has different **arrangements.**" – *Consultation with school stakeholder*

Systematically established and facilitated partnerships would enhance and support the sharing of resources, expertise and access to programs and provision, including through the development of regional clusters (discussed further in Section 6.3).

Although relationality is a unique strength in the Northern Territory, partnerships are not systematically established and are challenging to maintain due to the transience of the teaching workforce. Furthermore, there is variability in the capability and capacity of schools to facilitate partnerships.

In the context of secondary education delivery within the NT, some schools have the capability, resources, and support to establish partnerships. In some cases, these partnerships remain longstanding and can provide support, expertise, expanded opportunities for students, and a more comprehensive secondary education experience.

However, these examples of effective and sustained partnerships are limited across the system. This demonstrates the need for system support to facilitate these and enable a more systematic approach. Furthermore, regular monitoring of these partnerships by the system is likely required to support their establishment and ongoing sustainability.

"We've got the right teacher right here and right now, but how do we sustain this? It's a concern for us – what happens in two or five years? Is it going to be sustainable?" – *School leader, outer regional comprehensive school*

Schools vary in their capability to undertake community engagement in support of secondary education delivery, indicating that clearer expectations, structures, and support from the system would be beneficial in facilitating desired practices.

At the core of effective secondary education delivery in the NT is school and community engagement. This supports the delivery of contextually relevant and appropriate education, and provision of meaningful pathways for students.

Insights from consultations revealed that there are examples of strong school and community engagement across the NT. The Review heard examples of engagement with the community to support the design of the school curriculum and learning in a homelands context. The strong engagement between school and local community was characterised by genuine partnership, where community provided input to the design and delivery of contextually relevant secondary education, ensuring that the learning program and curriculum is scaffolded to meet the needs of students in community. The school described their priority to engage community in their approach to curriculum, and noted that engagement is key to delivering contextually relevant secondary education. **"We adhere to SACE and Australian Curriculum, but it's heavily consulted with community."** Furthermore, it was noted:

"We choose subjects that aren't content driven, they're more skill based. We apply the content of our community, we can create our subjects around [our] culture, health, or art with the perspective."

In one very remote setting, there was evidence of effective engagement with local community through initiatives with their LEaD committee. These structures provided platforms for collaboration, communication and shared decision making between the school and community. In the secondary years, the school delivers VET and the Learning on Country program which are a result of community aspirations.

"A lot more needs to be done in terms of engagement between the school and the community and engagement between industry and community. This takes time – people spending time to get to know the community and build cultural understanding." – *Consultation with Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisation*

However, not all schools have the capacity or capability to engage with community or embed the contextual relevance, as described in Section 6.1. Barriers include:

- limited resources and support: this can pose significant challenges to establishing partnerships. In particular, small schools and those with teaching principals, lack the capacity to effectively manage and sustain partnerships and community engagement activities without additional support (e.g. from the region).
- lack of system coordination: the absence of cohesive planning, guidelines, and coordination across various levels of the education system can hinder effective partnerships and community engagement. Schools, organisations, and stakeholders may operate in isolation – being ad hoc and varying across schools or regions.
- no model of expectations: refers to the lack of clear guidelines, standards and shared **understanding of the Department's expectations of partnerships and community engagement** initiatives, including the roles and responsibilities of small schools with teaching principals and how they may differ from that of a larger school.

This indicates that further support for schools, and clear expectations from the system, is required to enable this.

There are examples of school partnerships established with local industry to facilitate meaningful pathway opportunities for students. However, these are primarily informal and dependent on specific personnel or individual connections.

School partnerships with local industry are an important aspect of identifying and ensuring meaningful pathways and opportunities for students. These partnerships enable schools to connect with local industry, businesses, and employers to bridge the gap between education and the workforce. Partnerships are also essential for aligning the skills and competencies of VETiS learners with the current and future needs of employers and sectors.

Consultations with industry groups, undertaken through Deloitte Access Economics’ foundational review of VETiS (2023), highlighted several examples of strong interactions between industry, RTOs and schools, where there was provision of:

- business intelligence and information on areas of industry labour demand and skills needs
- in-kind support providing VETiS training facilities, equipment and tools
- provision of student work placements and **other ‘hands on’ opportunities**
- securing pathways to and opportunities for post training employment, including apprenticeships and traineeships.
- supporting career education, including careers fairs.

The evidence gathered through both this Review and the VETiS review indicates that industry partnerships are primarily informal, typically established at the individual school or RTO level, and based on individual relationships and connections. While these informal relationships were acknowledged to be strong with no major weakness or limitation associated with their informal nature, these nonetheless depended on specific personnel and individual connections, which can make sustained partnerships difficult in the face of a transient workforce. Furthermore, evidence provided to this Review indicates that schools have limited capacity to invest and sustain these relationships over the long term (outside a handful of examples in regional centres).

The Review did not seek to assess the effectiveness of industry partnerships or the extent to which students participate in training supported by industry partnerships (in part, due to a lack of data to identify these partnerships). Accordingly, should the Department seek to further examine the effectiveness of these partnerships, a centralised record would likely be required, and balanced against the potential administrative burdens for schools and providers.

There is a role for the Department to play in formalising partnerships with industry to support pathways for students.

Formalised partnerships with industry, where established by the system and coordinated through regional offices, could provide support to schools to establish partnerships, as well as providing enhanced opportunities and coordination of pathways offerings for students.

It is likely appropriate for the Department to identify, establish and promote higher profile partnerships with industry, particularly organisations operating interstate, nationally, and multinationals. Individual schools are likely to find it more challenging to facilitate, support and sustain these partnerships, due to their scale and a lack of dedicated capacity of staff.

As noted above, a centralised record or monitoring capability to allow the Department to understand strength and effectiveness of these partnerships on an ongoing basis will likely be beneficial.

Finding 19: While the NT system has unique strengths in partnerships and engagement, there are key risk factors that inhibit partnerships from being systematically established and with longevity, which require support from the system to overcome.

7.1.3 Strengthening partnerships and engagement to deliver on the articulated vision of the system

The following submission **describes the imperative for working in partnership “with many hands”** to create a strong secondary education system for the future:

“The current education system needs to be rebuilt with many hands from the grassroots and with support of Department staff who thoroughly understand concepts of ‘community development’, ‘two-ways’ and ‘self-determination’. It’s time for genuine partnership as we work to create a strong future for the next generations.” – *Submission from Yijiyi Mark Guyula, Member for Mulka*

A deliberate approach to strengthening partnerships and engagement with community organisations, government agencies, and other sectors are necessary to drive improved outcomes for students.

There is an opportunity for the NT government system to strengthen partnerships and engagement with a broader range of stakeholders, including community organisations, government agencies, and other sectors. This was consistently highlighted by stakeholders as a key priority for the education system, and necessary in driving improved outcomes for students.

“... supporting young people to achieve their full potential is a shared responsibility across **sectors and the various key actors in a young person’s life**. That shared responsibility is particularly important for young people experiencing disadvantage and particularly important in the Northern Territory. Schools play a key role, but this must be complemented by partnerships across government, for example with health and community services, and with non-government organisations and particularly in the area of careers support and post-school pathways, with business and industry. In the careers support space, trilateral partnerships, involving schools, non-government organisations and businesses, focussed on providing high quality exposure to the world of work, is particularly important for young people experiencing disadvantage.” – *Submission from The Smith Family*

“**Partnerships across governments, the Aboriginal Community Controlled Sector and non-government sector, must be pursued as a priority.**” – *Submission from APO NT*

“It is important this hearing of community continues. This requires listening to understand and implement, not listening to respond and defend. Too often, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples’ pleas are not adequately heard. We know what our communities need, and governments and institutions need to start sharing decision-making to ensure we can make a real difference.” – *Submission from the Indigenous Education Consultative Meeting Members*

Additionally, partnerships with the Department of Health and allied health workers were highlighted as being a key enabler of improved secondary education delivery and outcomes.

“**Strengthening of the relationship currently in place between NT Health and Department of Education will be important to enable the successful delivery of secondary education in the NT.**” – *Submission from the NT Department of Health*

As set out throughout the Review (see Section 5), partnerships and increased coordination with DITT, ISACNT and RTOs will be important to ensure that pathway opportunities for students are meaningful and tailored to local context, along with appropriate provision of career advice to support pathways beyond school that best meet **students’** needs and aspirations.

Strengthened partnerships will require, and be enabled by, increased support from the system, at both the central and regional layers, to ensure the longevity of partnerships and engagement, and relevance to context. Support provided by the central and regional teams may include the facilitation of partnerships, the monitoring of partnerships, the administration of partnerships, and service delivery. This will support the local capacity of schools, the longevity of partnerships and engagement, relevance to context, and in turn, strengthened secondary education delivery.

Finding 20: Improving educational outcomes cannot be achieved through secondary education alone, and there is a need to strengthen and work in partnership with local communities, industry, government and non-government organisations.

7.2 Recommendations for partnerships and engagement

The Review has identified two recommendations in response to findings for this domain. These recommendations within this domain are intended to work in support of achieving the foundations, goals, **and actions within the Northern Territory’s** current *Engagement Strategy (2022-31)*. As such, there are key interdependencies between the implementation of the *Engagement Strategy (2022-31)* and the recommendations set forward in the Review.

These recommendations are also a key enabler of the success of secondary education and implementation of other recommendations for change, given the importance of working in

partnership to achieving improved delivery and outcomes for students. An overview is provided below, followed by detailed recommendations.

The Review recommends a model of expectations for partnerships and engagement (Recommendation 4.1). While findings from the Review suggest that the Northern Territory is on a path to achieving strong relationships and partnerships, particularly with the strong partnerships created with other jurisdictions, industry, and organisations, and through the implementation of Local Engagement and Decision-Making Committees to-date, this is not consistently occurring across all settings.

The Review also recommends partnerships and pathway supports (Recommendation 4.2). This aims to provide further systematisation and support for schools to facilitate partnerships and engagement, and pathway opportunities for all students. The Review suggests that this is coordinated through the regional operating model, with the role of the central layer will be to set expectations of schools for practices in community engagement and partnerships and how this may vary across school types and settings.

Recommendation 4.1: Provide a model of expectations and structures for community engagement and partnerships.

The Department should undertake the following, including through leveraging its work implementing the *Engagement Strategy* (2022-31) and establishing LEaD committees:

- provide a model of expectations for schools for community engagement and partnerships, with consideration given to the context of the school (including, for instance, where there are Teaching Principals)
- strengthen the structure of community engagement between schools and communities
- consider the role of the regional workforce to support schools to undertake this community engagement, and facilitate industry partnerships, and
- ensure a mechanism to monitor and respond to evidence of partnerships and engagement across the NT, and understand their effectiveness.

This was further reinforced by a submission by APO NT to the Review, which called on the Department to:

“support a set of minimum standards across all NT schools that strengthen the engagement and partnership with local communities to include:

- Involving Aboriginal people in the recruitment and performance reviews of Principals and Teachers.
- Requiring teachers, principals, and other education staff to undergo a process of cultural emersion that is deemed appropriate by the local community.
- Providing culturally safe spaces for students and families in each **school.**”

Recommendation 4.2: Provide regional support for schools to facilitate partnerships and pathways (coordinating VET, work experience opportunities, career advice, and supporting work readiness).

The Department should establish a role within regional offices, to work with schools (or, where appropriate, schools in sub-regions) to facilitate industry partnerships, coordinate VET, block training and work experience opportunities, and support work readiness for students throughout and beyond secondary schooling. The role would also encompass the provision of career advice to schools (particularly small schools in remote locations).

In implementing this recommendation, the Department should:

- ensure interaction and collaboration with the Department of Industry, Trade and Tourism in each region, through its regional offices, workforce training coordinators, regional managers and small business officers, and
- ensure greater collaboration with Regional Development officers at the Department of the Chief Minister and Cabinet.

8 System of supports

Key findings: System of supports

- Finding 21: Numerous supports are foundational to the secondary education system and must be in place to enable successful delivery.
 - Workforce development to support the provision of cultural, social and wellbeing support for students and secondary education delivery, is a key priority for the system.
 - Access to professional learning, cultural training, leadership development, and sharing of expertise is essential for supporting effective and culturally appropriate learning experiences for students, but limited in some contexts.
 - Educational leadership is critical to the successful delivery of secondary education. There is a need for the NT to develop further pathway opportunities to grow what is a relatively small pipeline of leaders with expertise in secondary education.
 - Connectivity, access to technology and infrastructure solutions are critical to supporting equity of access to secondary education and overcoming key challenges to delivery in remote contexts.
 - Significant additional resourcing in the central and regional layers of the system, increased local capacity, and coordination and consistency in delivery is required to support secondary education delivery.
- Finding 22: The current NT school funding model is not appropriate to support secondary education delivery in small, remote settings, and could be modified to consider additional resources required for delivery.
 - Compared to similar schools in other jurisdictions, small secondary and combined schools in the Northern Territory tend to receive less funding.
 - The small school supplement could be modified to consider the additional resources required for delivery, and consider the secondary enrolments separately to primary grade enrolments when allocating funding.

8.1 System supports and enablers to underpin secondary education provision

The system of supports needed for schools to deliver secondary education extends beyond resourcing considerations, as referenced throughout all Review domains. A range of system supports were consistently noted by schools and stakeholders. This encompasses technology and infrastructure, central and regional support, coordination within and across regions, workforce considerations relating to professional development, educational leadership and careers education, as well as the cultural, social and wellbeing support to underpin culturally responsive delivery (as explored below).

8.1.1 Workforce development

Workforce development to support the provision of cultural, social and wellbeing support for students is a key priority.

The Review highlights the need for the system to deliver on a vision that recognises learning, provides a culturally safe learning environment, and meaningful pathways for students. This cannot occur without workforce development and capability building.

In consultation, teachers, school leaders, and secondary students consistently referenced the need to invest in and develop a workforce that can provide culturally safe, supportive, and engaging learning environments for students, as well as guidance on their next steps post-schooling (this includes teachers, support staff, liaison officers, career advisors, and more).

However, consultations also highlighted factors including acute staff shortages and turnover, which presents challenges and negatively impacts **students'** learning experience and the extent to which they can access the wellbeing and learning support they need. Supports in this area are particularly critical in supporting students with additional needs, and with a growing trend of mental health needs and school refusal nationally.

"Headspace and community services come and talk about how we can do things; it would help a lot of students. I think those services are accessible to everyone." – *Student, remote middle school*

"The school needs to support more mental health." – *Student, outer regional senior secondary school*

"They wanted to test me for dyslexia – the school said it was 12 month waiting period – **there was no point as I'll be done with school by then."** – *Student, outer regional senior secondary school*

The impacts of school staff and teacher turnover were described more broadly in the following discussion paper submission, which provided insights on the impacts on community and **students'** continuity of learning:

"Monitoring staffing levels and turnover at all schools serving Aboriginal communities: It is clear that – in common with many areas of the health system – the recruitment and retention of teaching staff, especially in remote areas, is a significant challenge to the effectiveness of school and engagement with the community. High staff turnover means investing considerable time and effort into orienting new staff; the risk that a constant churn of newly arriving staff poses to cultural safety; and limited or halted opportunities for community members to build trusting relationships with teaching staff." – *Submission from Central Australian Aboriginal Congress*

The NT Youth Peak Voice students noted the importance of relationships between students and teachers, with turnover having a big impact on students. Ensuring that students can experience continuity of relationships and trust, is a key part of positive learning experiences.

[Building a culturally responsive workforce to respond to the diverse knowledges, skills and cultural identities of students and recognise learning.](#)

There is an imperative to provide culturally responsive learning environments for students in the Northern Territory, and to ensure that all school staff and school leaders can respond to the diverse knowledges, skills and cultural identities of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students. As outlined in the recognition of learning domain, recognition and certification of student learning will need to be supported by an expert workforce.

The rationale for this was also highlighted in the following submission:

"A diverse workforce is better positioned to recognise, develop and foster the skills and capabilities of a diverse student body. This may be particularly important in schools serving larger numbers of First Nations students. A teaching workforce with cultural authority and cultural competence is equipped to recognise the unique experiences of First Nations students, nurture and certify their cultural knowledge, and build aspiration." – *Submission from the Regional Education Commissioner (Australian Government)*

Stakeholders strongly expressed the need to continue to grow the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander workforce, with conversations at a national and Territory level underway about recognition of these educators as cultural and language educators. While these educators may not hold qualifications such as a Bachelor of Teaching degree, they are valued for their knowledge, and acknowledged for the support they provide to students, the relationships they build, and the culturally safe and responsive environments they foster. These staff are also recognised as a key asset to curriculum delivery, as well as student engagement and classroom management approaches.

There is flexibility through the NT Teacher Registration Board to provide these educators with the authority to teach, where they do not hold Bachelor of Teaching qualifications but have specialist knowledge (in language and culture teaching) or meet other criteria. It was noted that this could be further communicated to school leaders to develop understanding and create buy-in.

Another initiative to develop the Aboriginal workforce in the Northern Territory is the Remote Aboriginal Teacher Education (RATE) model. RATE is delivered by CDU, the NT Government, and the Batchelor Institute. The model aims to build the capacity of existing Aboriginal educators in remote and very remote education settings at every step of their educational career and to create opportunities for Aboriginal educators who aspire to become qualified teachers. In 2022, the tertiary component of this model involves eight remote communities.¹²⁸ It is anticipated that the program will create a sustainable and streamlined approach for approximately 250 Aboriginal Assistant Teachers across remote and very remote locations.

The End of Term Review of the NTRAI noted the progress of the program in supporting the development of the Aboriginal workforce (as explored in Section 2.5), and it was furthermore noted by stakeholders as a model to strive towards, with potential to strengthen and expand to more communities across the NT.

"At its peak, the RATE Program provided a significant amount of people with opportunities for higher education. Many of those people are still teaching today or have become principals. This program at its most effective and most accessible, is seen as a model to strive towards." – *Submission from APO NT*

Further, cultural induction and onboarding programs, as well as ongoing cultural capability development, for non-Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff or staff who are not from community, is considered by a range of stakeholders to be a priority. **APO NT's** submission to the Review called for a minimum standard of partnerships and engagement **"requiring teachers, principals, and other education staff to undergo a process of cultural emersion that is deemed appropriate by the local community"**. This was also advocated for in the following submission:

"For the role which Aboriginal educators play in remote classroom to be appreciated, understood and enhanced, there is an urgent need for the Department to provide team teacher training to all non-Indigenous teachers in remote school. From ATESOL NT's experience, it is not uncommon to walk into a remote classroom and see a highly experienced Aboriginal educator sitting down the back of the classroom uninvolved in the teaching." – *Submission from the Association of Teachers of English to Speakers of Other Languages in the NT*

In this regard, the cultural responsive professional learning toolkit developed by the Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership (AITSL) could provide a consistent framework and set of resources for developing the cultural responsiveness of teachers and school leaders in the NT, as well as their capability to provide a culturally safe learning environment and enhance culturally responsive teaching practices. Additionally, the EAL/D Hub, an online professional development course for teachers developed by all states and territories, aims to support teachers to build their knowledge to cater for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students, and provides resources for team teaching that include Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander assistant teachers in planning, teaching and learning.

As noted in relevant report domains, the report also notes that cultural responsiveness is necessary to be embedded in all aspects of the teaching and learning process, including in assessment methods, pedagogy, and curriculum content as well as in school and system governance structures, and policy and decision-making processes.¹²⁹

¹²⁸ RATE is available to Aboriginal educators from Adelaide River, Alice Springs, Galiwinku, Groote Eylandt, Millingimbi, Nyirripi, Wooliana, Yipirinya School and Yuendumu.

¹²⁹ Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership, *Building a culturally responsive Australian teaching workforce* (2022). <<https://www.aitsl.edu.au/teach/intercultural-development/building-a-culturally-responsive-australian-teaching-workforce>>.

Increasing access to professional learning, cultural training, and sharing of expertise is essential for supporting effective and culturally appropriate learning experiences for students.

Across urban and remote settings, school stakeholders noted that there are limited opportunities for professional learning, leadership development (discussed further below), and sharing of expertise. This is more acutely observed in remote contexts of the Northern Territory, with school staff describing time limitations and lack of structures to enable this, and expressing a desire for opportunities to collaborate or cluster with other schools. School stakeholders noted:

“There is little access to professional development. There is no time to communicate to other school staff or leaders outside of the school.” – *Teacher, outer regional secondary school*

“We had a group school that used to provide professional development. However, we don’t have the structures currently.” – *Teacher, remote comprehensive school*

Additionally, APO NT’s submission to the Review reiterated the need to invest in the supporting workforce. The submission recommended that:

“all schools in the NT have a mandate to support the local workforce at all levels within education, with multiple approaches to training, mentoring and development of staff that are relevant and suitable to their needs and learning”. Furthermore, the submission noted that **“Investment in the workforce requires flexible learning modes, clear and established pathways for career development, mentoring, and ongoing professional development, as well as input of Aboriginal educators at all levels within the schooling system.”**

The Yalbilinya: National First Languages Education Project undertaken by the Australian Government explored the professional learning needs to support teaching of language, and identified key areas of focus for professional learning resources and activities, including career pathways, partnerships, lifelong language learning, teacher training, regional collaborations and networking, and creating a supportive school environment.¹³⁰

Educational leadership is critical to the successful delivery of secondary education. There is a need for the NT to develop further pathway opportunities to grow what is a relatively small pipeline of leaders with expertise in secondary education.

The NT workforce is comprised of a relatively young and inexperienced teachers from other states and territories. This further exacerbates educational leadership challenges, due to the relatively short tenure of school staff and turnover of leadership positions. This is more acute particularly when school leaders are working in contexts that are vastly different to their previous experiences.

“Leadership plays a role. It is a struggle to get a good strong principal – in the past NT has been quick to jump interstate [for principals]. We’ve had three interstate principals combined that lasted 8 months. It would be the best person in Sydney, but that doesn’t mean they’ll enjoy a remote town in the NT. By the time they look at an Assistant Principal role, they’ve gone interstate.” – *School leader, outer regional combined school*

Across the NT, school leaders vary in their level of leadership experience in secondary settings, past experience working in remote and very remote contexts, and experience working in schools with a high proportion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students. A principal consulted with for the Review also noted that they have observed a trend of less experienced staff members applying for, and filling middle leadership roles in the NT, creating burden on more senior and experienced leaders to support leadership growth of middle leaders.

¹³⁰ Yalbilinya: National First Languages Education Project, 2022. Report on Professional Learning to Support the Teaching of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Languages.

There is also concern about the small size of the current pipeline of school leaders, which occurs in part due to the smaller number of secondary schools in the NT. In consultation, school leaders discussed the impact of retirement of older school leaders and workforce on leadership expertise.

“They keep saying that in five years we will lose a huge amount of expert workforce from retirement. [We] need to be looking at pathway opportunities for leadership.” – *School leader, outer regional combined school*

Growing the experience and leadership expertise of school staff is fundamental to supporting the educational leadership in the NT secondary school system.

There is a need for greater access to dedicated career education and guidance for students throughout secondary schooling.

As discussed in Section 5, high-quality career education and guidance are essential in preparing students for their future. Guidance or support from careers advisors, VET and pathways co-ordinators or other staff members assist in strengthening **students’ understanding of their** pathway options, and provide greater clarity of next steps beyond schooling.¹³¹

However, insights from school consultations highlighted the limited capacity of staff and lack of access to career guidance as a key barrier to providing appropriate support to students. Furthermore, even where schools employ a career advisor, a concern raised by students was the limited capacity of the advisor, and minimal support being provided to students (see Section 5.1).

Previously, as part of the 2020 *Report of the review of senior secondary pathways into work, further education and training*, the concept of a Regional Careers Hub was discussed, with a pilot proposed in the Barkly Region with the Hub in Tennant Creek. This would result in the allocation of a regional careers position that is able to support schools in the region.

8.1.2 Connectivity, technology and infrastructure

Limited connectivity, access to technology and infrastructure continues to pose key challenges to delivery in remote contexts. Overcoming these challenges is critical to supporting equity of access to secondary provision.

Although there have been improvements in recent years, delivery of secondary education in very remote locations continues to be impacted by limited connectivity, and access to appropriate technology and infrastructure.

Across the NT, there are schools with limited connectivity and access to internet, and as a result are not able to access teaching and learning resources, or leverage distance education offerings which would expand access to curriculum offerings. However, recent budget announcements to increase connectivity, and **actions set out in the Territory Economic Reconstruction Commission’s** final report, stand to improve access and enable high quality secondary education provision in remote locations.

Furthermore, there are schools with limited access to technology (e.g., laptops and computers are aging, scarce, and needing to be shared among students, or not available at all) due to resourcing constraints. Students at the NT Youth Peak Voice meeting highlighted the importance of improved access to technology, noting that technology literacy is an essential part of learning, and that schools need to support students to build these skills and capabilities to ensure their future success (including through improved access to technology).

Across the NT, there is a large variability in the infrastructure of schools (e.g., buses for students to get to school, or for transport for excursions or training opportunities, buildings, desks, school facilities, and grounds), which can **impact schools’** ability to deliver secondary education and **students’** learning experiences. Furthermore, in remote and rural areas the service quality of

¹³¹ Career Industry Council of Australia for the Australian Government, *Career education: Why is it important*, (2023).

infrastructure is often variable, with this being more expensive to supply in remote and very remote communities.

"Infrastructure is a huge problem. Walk into our classrooms, the environment does matter." – School leader, very remote combined school

Additionally, there is evidence that existing infrastructure is not being fully leveraged or utilised. This is observed in some VET hubs, Trade Training Centres, specialised elective infrastructure, and schools with a decreasing number of students. There are opportunities to leverage existing infrastructure by creating additional linkages to communities, that would allow the system to build on the strengths of current delivery models and expand access to students (see Section 6.3).

8.1.3 Role of central and regional teams in delivery

The Department's central and regional offices have a key role to play in supporting schools to deliver secondary education.

In consultation, schools highlighted that they value the support provided by central and regional offices. For example, this includes support provided to contextualise curriculum design, and navigating pathway options for students, where it is being accessed by schools. Additionally, the central office also provides case management support for every NTCET student in Year 12.

However, there does not appear to be consistent awareness of the supports available to schools. Furthermore, due to internal NT Department of Education restructures and staff turnover, schools often do not know who in the Department to contact for support. Furthermore, schools referenced the loss of structural support and coordination for leadership teams in small remote schools that occurred when the College model and the Group School model ceased.

"The Department's restructure process has put me back – I'm not sure where to go [for support]." – School Leader, outer regional senior secondary school

"There's been a huge restructure in the Department, and they are still trying to build up the teams. If I have a big issue or something going on, I have to go to my own devices and people will support and work through the issue but having expertise that's probably something we need to work on in the Department." – School leader, outer regional secondary school

Schools noted they require greater access to, and support from allied health staff, psychologists, and EAL/D advisors through the regional and central offices, to meet the needs of students. There were instances where school staff described taking the role of supporting students where professional health support is required.

There is a need for the system to achieve greater understanding, coordination and consistency of delivery within and across regions.

There is a need for greater coordination and understanding within and across regions, in relation to supports, resources, practices, and delivery models. In consultation, schools noted that they have a desire to understand what is available, access these supports and resources, collaborate with other schools, and learn from effective practices and delivery models within their region or across the NT. However, they expressed a lack of understanding regarding what is occurring, in the absence of systematic coordination, sharing or processes. This results in schools not knowing where they can access certain resources or knowledge, and at times reinventing the wheel.

"Schools are really keen to work together, and we do try to work together, but it's just not coordinated anywhere. We found in the restructure in the past couple of years that things have gotten much worse in terms of who does what, who manages what, and who is responsible for what" – School leader, outer regional comprehensive school

Schools also expressed a need to build collective knowledge of existing strengths of practice, delivery models and knowledge. This would provide clearer avenues for schools to collaborate, access support and delivery models, and leverage existing strengths rather than promoting ad hoc or duplicative practices from occurring.

There are existing examples of coordination within and across regions that provide a base for delivery. For example, in the Central region, the regional office is establishing a residential VET training facility at Ti Tree School, with this designed in collaboration with the central VET team. The VET training facility supports students from other communities in the Central region to access vocational education, and allows Ti Tree to act as the central point, and provide support to smaller schools in surrounding communities.

There are several opportunities to support a systematised and strengthened approach to providing guidance and supports to schools, students, and communities. This includes:

- creating consistency in curriculum delivery, enhancing the continuity of learning for students, which is a key consideration given high levels of student mobility
- providing support to contextualise the curriculum and gather community input
- supporting workforce development and building collective expertise between schools in regions to support professional development
- supporting pathways and transitions – by providing oversight and ensuring coordination, consistency of delivery, and
- facilitating partnerships with industry, community organisations and more.

There is a need to enhance communications to stakeholders and drive increased awareness, understanding and ability to navigate the variety of provision and pathways within the system.

Schools, students and parents expressed a need for improved communications and information to be provided regarding secondary education. Navigating the choices, delivery models, and range of pathways, and the NTCET was reported as a challenge. Stakeholders expressed the need for greater clarity, consistency and intentionality of communications from the system, as demonstrated by the following submissions and consultations undertaken as part of the Review.

“When your students come into that senior secondary space, it is so confusing and there isn’t the information out there.” – *Consultation with education peak body*

“More awareness at secondary level, particularly in flexible or alternative learning settings of post school pathways. Sometimes there is the attitude that students can catch up later or don’t actually need an NTCET because they can learn on the job or do a trade, but actually students who graduate without qualifications find themselves locked out of many opportunities, including locked out of trade-based pathways and apprenticeships.” – *Discussion paper survey response, school staff member*

“As a parent I struggle to navigate the VET/apprenticeship space and as teachers/facilitators don’t include parents in discussions with students, we are unable to provide the assistance our child needs to keep him on track. Until this year I had no experience or understanding of VET and have had to find things out myself. Additional support for parents in navigating the VET system would help us support our children to achieve their goals.” – *Submission from Anonymous Individual 1*

“More streamlined processes shared between the department, educators, schools and students. Have the resources to get the assistance to the individual that they require ... something that gets everyone closer to equal opportunity and that ensures that all students and educators are aware of the different possibilities out there.” – *Discussion paper survey response, school staff member*

Finding 21: Numerous supports (including workforce development, connectivity, infrastructure, and resourcing) are foundational to the secondary education system and must be in place to enable successful delivery.

8.1.4 Resourcing to support secondary education provision

There is an opportunity to modify the small school supplement to consider the additional resources required to deliver secondary education in remote settings.

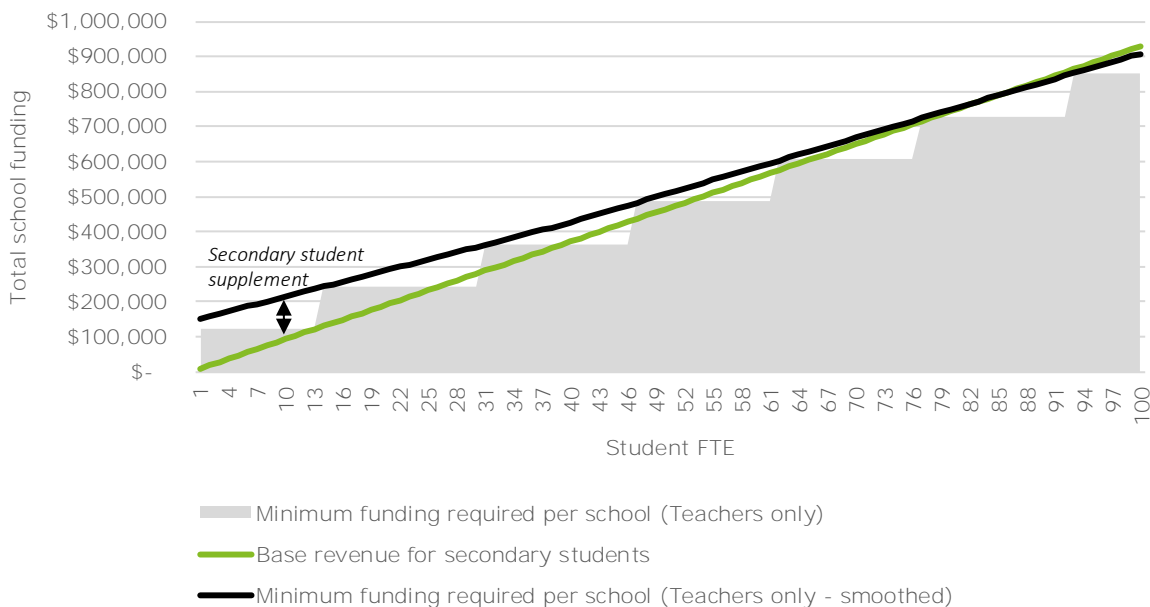
To address the limitations of the school funding model to support secondary education in remote settings (outlined in Section 2.5.1), there is an opportunity to adjust how the small school supplement allocates funding to schools that deliver secondary education.

This Review proposes that the small school supplement consider secondary enrolments separately to primary grade enrolments when allocating funding.

To highlight how the small school supplement can be modified, an indicative alternative small school supplement has been developed. This supplement uses the current model as a base and adds an additional secondary student loading for secondary enrolments students. This loading is provided to schools in a lump sum, **to ensure that a school’s base funding** is sufficient to add a minimum level of resources deemed necessary to support the delivery of secondary education, given a school’s secondary enrolment level.

The loading amount to be provided to secondary school students is based on an estimate of the minimum resources required to support the delivery of secondary education in small, remote settings (Chart 8.1). This is developed through a bottom-up process, using student to teacher ratios for standalone and mixed secondary grade classes to identify the teaching resources required to support secondary students in the NT. This level is smoothed to ensure each student receives an additional funding amount, which will improve incentives for schools to continue to add enrolments. Finally, the difference between the base level of revenue per secondary student and the smoothed minimum level of funding required is identified as the additional secondary student loading paid to schools (see Appendix D for an overview of the assumptions underpinning this modelling).

Chart 8.1: Underlying drivers of the secondary student supplement



Source: Deloitte Access Economics (2023).

Finding 22: The current NT school funding model is not appropriate to support secondary education delivery in small, remote settings, and could be modified to consider additional resources required for delivery.

8.2 Recommendations for system of supports

The Review has identified two recommendations in response to findings for this domain.

These recommendations for the system of supports domain are informed by guiding principles of effectiveness and sustainability and are driven by an overall model of change and system reform that is built around developing enduring supports and services for schools to support delivery. This approach, rather than a model oriented around implementation of programmatic supports (as has been observed in the past), is key to driving the intended sustainability of improvement. As a result, the recommendations identify several foundational supports for the system. An overview is provided below, followed by detailed recommendations.

The Review recommends a focus on workforce development and capability building (Recommendation 5.1). This is critical for delivering on a vision of a schooling system set out in the Review – one that has high quality local provision of secondary education, is culturally responsive, and caters to the diverse needs of students. This also recognises the system is implementing related and interdependent actions through its *Education NT Strategy (2021-25)*, for example the key action to **"develop and implement a plan to ensure we build an expert education workforce"**, as well as the implementation of recommendations from other reviews including the *Review of Effective Enrolment* (Deloitte Access Economics, 2022).

The Review recommends reviewing, and designing a model of resourcing (Recommendation 5.2) that considers the additional resources required to deliver secondary education in remote settings. Furthermore, these recommendations are made in the context of the need for a minimum floor of guaranteed resourcing to address the diverse needs of students and support high quality provision.

It is important to acknowledge that this domain encompasses broader considerations than just those recommendations outlined below. Given that these foundations are necessary to support all areas of provision of secondary education, there are related considerations set out across several other domains. This includes the workforce required to support recognition of learning (domain 1), supporting effective transitions (domain 2) including through the implementation of the Pathways Plan, and system guidance, support and resources required for curriculum implementation and flexible learning approaches (domain 3), and facilitating partnerships in a more systematic manner (domain 4). These recommendations should be considered alongside the detailed recommendations that follow.

Recommendation 5.1: Implement a workforce development strategy and pipeline (educators and leadership), to enable secondary schooling provision and cultural, social, wellbeing support

The Department should consider the following activities to develop the workforce and build capability across all levels of the system:

- review professional development opportunities and supports for schools to cater for the learning needs of students, and addressing key gaps
- review the adequacy of cultural induction and onboarding programs for non-Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff and new school staff, addressing key gaps, and implement supports
- strengthen supports and investments for the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander workforce, e.g. through training, mentoring and development.
 - As referenced in the July 2023 draft report for the Review of the National Agreement on Closing the Gap, the Productivity Commission noted that small-scale individual actions (such as cultural capability training and workforce strategies) are insufficient on their own to bring about meaningful change in this area.¹³² As such, implementation of these actions will need to be supported by system-level actions and change, including through the implementation of Local Engagement and Decision Making structures.

¹³² Productivity Commission, 2023. Review of the National Agreement on Closing the Gap. Draft report.

- communicate and promote **criteria for 'authority to teach'**, through regulatory authorities, to school leaders to create buy-in, and providing the resourcing to enable uptake¹³³
- build secondary education expertise in schools across the system, and understanding of the senior years certificate, and
- partner with other jurisdictions to leverage the work of leadership institutes/pathways.

Recommendation 5.2: Implement a small school supplement model for schools that provide secondary education

This model would consider:

- combined classrooms – classrooms that combine students across multiple year levels, with considerations for student time required to support a more diverse curriculum delivery, and
- the higher costs of delivering education in remote areas.

This model should provide schools with more control over their staffing, rather than representing a staffing allocation model that may be more restrictive in practice.

The modelling is set out in more detail in Appendix D.

¹³³ For instance, Queensland is making additional payments for VET trainers to gain permission to teach, through attraction bonuses.

9 Conclusion

9.1 Implementation considerations

Fully positioning the Northern Territory's schooling system to deliver the vision set out in the Review, improve outcomes for students and through this, its *Education NT Strategy 2021-25*, will require wide-scale reform and a deliberate process of planning and implementation over the long-term (i.e., for the next decade or more).

In responding to the recommendations of this Review, it will be necessary to strike a balance between two competing needs: stopping the constant changes in direction that characterises past decades of education delivery in the Northern Territory, while seeking to change the status quo of access to secondary education, building on strong delivery of secondary education in populated areas and in large regional towns, and addressing the current shortfalls in remote areas – as a critical lever in driving improvement in engagement and outcomes for students.

It is also necessary to overcome the challenges of implementation within the control of government. This includes the ad hoc nature of delivery and an absence of broader coherence and consistency, that have been observed throughout the Review.

The Review explores these considerations and how these should underpin the successful implementation of the Review recommendations.

9.1.1 Preconditions for realising the vision

The proposed reforms require an implementation approach that departs significantly from approaches taken in the past in order to bring about the intended outcomes. Drawing upon and responding to lessons learned, the implementation strategy should be underpinned by the following approaches:

- a model of change built around developing enduring supports and services for schools to support delivery, rather than being oriented around the implementation of programmatic supports or interventions
- an increased level of investment in the capacity at all levels of the system
- an intentional approach to growing capability at all levels of the system, and
- a deliberate plan to ensure ongoing sustainability and longevity of approaches and reform.

Greater investment in specialist capability within the central and regional layers of the system is necessary to drive successful implementation of these reforms, and to ensure the sufficient support, coordination and coherence across what will become an increasingly sophisticated model of delivery with expanded options and modes that will need to be tailored to local context. This is particularly critical given that effectiveness of change and longevity of outcomes may be limited where certain resources or expertise are school based.

In addition to these investments, it is particularly critical to engage with and build local capability on the ground, through empowering communities through local decision-making. Working in partnership with community, and across sectors, government, community organisations is necessary to drive the improvement in educational engagement and outcomes for young people and enduring change.

9.1.2 Considerations for implementation sequencing

The full journey of reform outlined by the Review will take time to implement, following a path whereby the prerequisites to the success of future stages are progressively established in advance.

In the first instance, there is work to be done in support of implementing the overall recommendation to ensure that all students, regardless of geographic location, have access to high-quality secondary school provision and tailored and meaningful pathway options that support improved engagement and outcomes, and contribute towards achievement of the NTCET.

This will require adopting and implementing the guaranteed standard of delivery, and operationalising the proposed Delivery Model to deliberately map, and provide the supports and resourcing schools require to achieve to this standard. The process set out within the Pathways Plan is integral to the overall planning and coherence of this work and should be established to support more deliberate and systematic provisioning around delivery models while ensuring that the agreed pathways are appropriately place-based and tailored to context. The Pathways Plan will also encompass a process for leveraging access and use of infrastructure and revealing gaps, as well as the coordination of regionalised delivery approaches across the NT.

Another key step for the system in the initial stages of implementation is to develop and assure models of their appropriateness and effectiveness for students in the NT, prior to expansion. This may involve reviewing programs or initiatives to ensure teaching and learning rigour and alignment with standards set by the Department.

A key implementation enabler is to establish a process for leveraging existing infrastructure in the NT, while identifying gaps and areas of investment to create additional capacity to support delivery.

Furthermore, as detailed within the respective recommendations, piloting of key reforms within select regions (through the regional operating model) and drawing on learnings and evidence of success for students, will be critical prior to seeking to expand across the Northern Territory.

Sequencing of recommendations

All recommendations as set forth in the Review should be pursued as they are mutually reinforcing, however, some may take more time to implement than others. Each recommendation is therefore graded by its appropriate sequencing in terms of when these could be implemented:

- immediate: within the next 6 months
- short term: 6 months to 2 years
- medium term: 2 to 5 years
- long term: 5 years or more.

The time horizon for when recommendations could be implemented is presented in Figure 9.1, where recommendations are graded by timeline.

This sets out the Review's **recommendations** from the immediate term (where preparatory work can commence to implement recommendations, some of which may already be underway), to the medium term and longer-term (which can start earlier but require more lead time, and will take up to 5 years or more to implement).

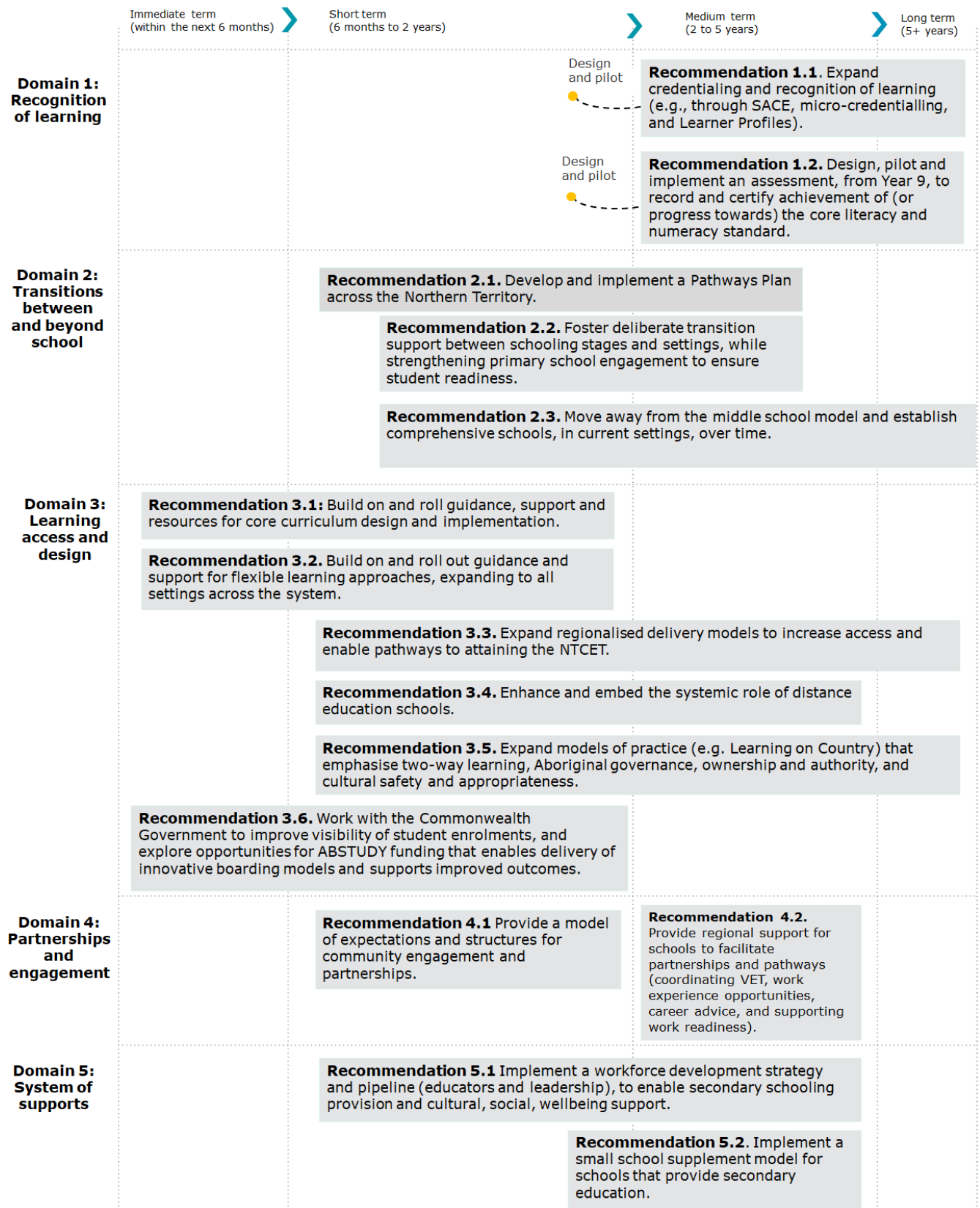
9.1.3 The cost of reform

Many of the recommendations outlined in this Review will require additional resourcing, both human and physical, to be realised. The case for equity and improvement for the system clearly establishes a case for investment in the system, at all levels: communities, schools, regions and centrally.

Detailed costings of the program of reform is a subsequent step to be taken in the implementation of the outcomes of this Review. Nonetheless, illustrative assessments of the costs associated with specific aspects of this Review have been developed by Deloitte Access Economics, separate to this report, for consideration by the Department.

Importantly, the Review acknowledges that the costs of meeting the vision outlined in this report would likely be substantially met through the commitment made by the NT Government to move **away from the current 'effective enrolment' model of funding for schools, to a model based on enrolment**. Depending on the level of investment associated with implementing this reform, it has the potential to significantly increase the resources available to small, remote and very remote schools across the NT, and therefore will **significantly contribute to the system's capacity** to provide a guaranteed standard of local secondary school provision for all students, regardless of geographic location.

Figure 9.1: Overview of sequenced recommendations



Source: Deloitte Access Economics (2023).

9.1.4 Implementing for success

There are several implementation actions required to drive the reform efforts. These include:

System messaging around secondary education provision

Stakeholders strongly asserted that the Northern Territory should provide enhanced messaging to the broader community regarding its provision of high-quality secondary education provision, particularly in remote areas, in complementing its broader reform in driving access. This is particularly important in addressing perceptions that high-quality secondary education is not available locally, which in part lead to the movement of students to non-government sectors and boarding pathways, and subsequent residualisation of government schooling system.

Clarification of roles and expectations in delivery and clear governance structures

This is necessary to achieve the systematisation and coordination of delivery necessary to drive improved access and outcomes. This is particularly important given the proposed reforms and key roles for various system actors at all levels. There is a real risk that the responsibility for implementation is diffused across the system such that it is the responsibility of everyone and no-one in particular. In this regard, a dedicated implementation team may be required to be stood-up to hold overall accountability for implementation across the system.

Systems of monitoring and accountability

The Review also recommends systems of monitoring and accountability to be implemented in support of this reform (including through the **Department's Education Management Program**). It will be necessary to monitor the progress that is being made, track evidence of success in outcomes and what works, and ensure that piloting of reform amounts to learning and an ongoing agenda of continuous improvement across the Northern Territory.

"In all aspects of program and policy design, a focus on outcomes is a key priority for government. Further work on measurement of outcomes might enable alternative ways to measure student engagement and success, beyond enrolment and attendance data to provide richer information on the outcomes of students in schools." – *Submission from the National Indigenous Australians Agency*

While the report outlines recommendations and implementation considerations in more detail, these are not intended to represent a detailed roadmap or operational plan for implementation in each community or context of the Northern Territory. It will be important to establish processes to enable community engagement and local decision-making, which are necessary to understand the needs and aspirations of communities and drive the place-based actions necessary to support successful delivery.

Achieving a strong and equitable public education system in the NT, where *every child has the opportunity to engage, grow and achieve*, will require wide-scale reform. Other reviews currently being conducted will aid in building out a comprehensive vision and directions for the system. The role of the recommendations provided in this report is to position the system to strive towards ensuring access and provision of high-quality secondary education for all students, regardless of geographic location.

9.1.5 Pursuing other domains in parallel

Although this Review is geared towards setting out a path for strategic policy reform for secondary education, it is important to recognise the range of social determinants which coexist alongside education improvement. While education is a force for improvement in the lives of young people, there are other domains that need to be pursued in parallel, including health and wellbeing, housing, and addressing disadvantage, which interact in complex ways to shape the opportunities and outcomes for young people.

Therefore, policy reform to drive improved educational outcomes needs to take a holistic view, and be undertaken in partnership across multiple sectors, collaboration between government agencies, community and schooling stakeholders, to address these various social determinants and barriers. A narrow focus on secondary education reform, in isolation, is unlikely to achieve the desired shift in outcomes. As described in a submission from The Smith Family: **"supporting young people to**

achieve their full potential is a shared responsibility across sectors and the various key actors in a young person's life."

9.2 Concluding observations

The recommendations presented in this report represent a significant departure from the current policy settings that have been in place in the NT for a decade or more.

It is clear that continuation of the status quo is untenable, and the benefits that can be achieved through these reforms will be significant and necessary.

The benefits will arise from a more equitable system of access and support for students and **communities across the NT, which will be necessary to meet the Government's strategy to improve student attendance, engagement in learning and learning outcomes, and to become Australia's most improving education system.**

Nonetheless, realising these benefits will require further dedicated implementation efforts over a sustained period of time and a significant level of investment, across all layers of the system. Reforms to funding that will see a move away from current effective enrolment measures will contribute significantly to the required local resourcing needed to meet the aspirations of remote NT communities to provide greater access to secondary education, but further investments, including in the enabling functions and services provided to schools across the NT, will also be required.

Appendix A: List of consulted stakeholders

As part of the Review, semi-structured consultation with schools, organisations, the Department and Expert Reference Network were undertaken. An overview is provided in the sections below.

School site visits

In total, the Review visited 25 school sites. Site-visit schools were sampled to ensure a collection of comprehensive and representative insights from diverse stakeholders. The Review employed a purposive sampling method used to identify schools that were visited as part of the consultation process, to collect in-depth and nuanced findings. The purposive sampling method was employed in consultation with Senior Directors of each region to facilitate the targeted selection of schools with varied delivery models and provision. This included:

1. representation across all regions of the NT and a range of geolocations (urban, regional, remote, very remote).
2. representation across contexts and types of education settings (i.e., comprehensive/primary, middle and secondary; specialist education settings – for example, training centres; distance education; schools with boarding facilities; training centres; special schools).
3. schools that currently deliver Secondary Education, and those that have not been able to deliver Secondary Education
4. locations of best practice or innovation – i.e., schools or homelands school centres delivering differentiated programs
5. locations with existing delivery challenges/experiences
6. representation of new and experienced school leaders in order to ensure the wealth of contextual knowledge is captured.

Site visits involved consultation with a range of stakeholders at each site (Table A.1), including school leaders, teachers, secondary students, School Council and/or Local Engagement and Decision Making (LEaD) Committee representatives, and community members.

Table A.1: Overview of school sites

Region	School	Remoteness	School type
East Arnhem	Laynhapuy Homelands School	Very remote	Combined
	Nhulunbuy High School and Dawurr Boarding	Very remote	Comprehensive
	Yirrkala School	Very remote	Combined
Barkly	Alekarenge (Ali Curung) School	Very remote	Combined
	Juno Centre	Very remote	Training Centre
	Tennant Creek High School	Very remote	Comprehensive
Big Rivers	Barunga School	Very Remote	Comprehensive
	Katherine High School	Remote	Comprehensive
	Katherine School of the Air	Remote	Distance education provider (P-9)

Region	School	Remoteness	School type
	Pine Creek School	Very Remote	Primary
Central	Alice Springs School of the Air	Remote	Distance education provider (P-9)
	Areyonga School	Very remote	Primary
	Centralian Middle School	Remote	Middle
	Centralian Senior College	Remote	Secondary
	Mount Allan School	Very Remote	Comprehensive
	Ntaria School	Very Remote	Comprehensive
	Yipirinya School	Very Remote	Comprehensive
	Yirara College	Very Remote	Comprehensive
Top End and Darwin	Batchelor Area School	Outer regional	Combined
	Darwin High School	Outer regional	Senior secondary
	Maningrida School	Remote	Combined
	Palmerston College	Outer regional	Middle and secondary
	Palmerston Youth Skills Centre	Outer regional	Combined
	Taminmin College	Outer regional	Comprehensive
	NT School of Distance Education	Outer regional	Distance education provider (10-12)

Schools consulted with for the Review

In addition to the school site visits, a number of schools were consulted with outside of a site visit (see Table A.2).

Table A.2: Overview of schools consulted with (non-site visit)

Stakeholder	Type	Location
Ashdale Primary School (Western Australia)	School	Virtual
Broome Senior High School (Western Australia)	School	Virtual
Casuarina Senior College	School	Virtual
Finke School	School	Virtual
Haileybury Rendall School (non-government)	School	Darwin
Henbury School	Specialist school	Virtual
Ltyentye Apurte Catholic School	School	Central
Marrara Christian School (non-government)	Boarding school	Marrara
Melbourne Indigenous Transition School	Boarding school	Melbourne
Middle Schools Forum (school leaders from all middle schools)	Virtual forum	Virtual
NT School of Distance Education	Distance education provider	Darwin and virtual
Principal Collaborative Learning event in the Barkly Region	Barkly region principals	Tennant Creek

Stakeholder	Type	Location
Principal Forums	Virtual forum	Virtual
St John's Catholic College (non-government)	Boarding school	Virtual
Top End Remote Schools Cohort	Virtual forum	Virtual
VET providers	Undertaken through VETiS review	
WA School of Isolated and Distance Education	Distance education provider	Virtual
Yipirinya School (non-government)	School	Virtual

Note: 'Undertaken through VETiS' indicates that the consultation was completed as part of a foundational review of the VETiS, undertaken for the NT Department of Education by Deloitte Access Economics in 2023. The Review undertook consultations which informed this Review.

Organisations

Table A.3 provides a list of stakeholder consultations who were consulted as part of the Review.

Table A.3 Overview of organisations consulted with

Stakeholder or organisation	Group	Date
Isolated Children's Parents' Association	Student and family support group	February 2023
NT Youth Voice Peak Group	Student group	February 2023 and May 2023
Australian Education Union, NT Branch	Education peak body	February 2023, June 2023
Department of Industry, Tourism and Trade	NT Government	February 2023 and July 2023
Dhimurru Aboriginal Corporation	Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisation	March 2023
Yirrkala Rangers	Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisation	March 2023
Yolngu Radio	Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisation	March 2023
NTCET Leaders	School leaders	March 2023
Djalkiri Foundation	Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisation	March 2023 and June 2023
Laynhapuy Homelands Aboriginal Corporation	Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisation	March 2023 and June 2023
Tangentyere Council	Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisation	April 2023 and July 2023
Yothu Yindi Foundation - Garma Institute (Dhupuma Studio Secondary School)	Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisation	June 2023
Teacher Registration Board NT	Education peak body	June 2023
Senior Education Advisory Group	Peak body	June 2023
The Arnhem Land Progress Aboriginal Corporation (ALPA)	Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisation	July 2023

Stakeholder or organisation	Group	Date
Northern Territory Council of Government Schools Organisations (NT COGSO)	Education peak body	July 2023
Wanta Aboriginal Corporation	Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisation	July 2023
NT Department of Treasury and Finance	Government	July 2023
Australian Department of Social Services	Government	July 2023
Australian Department of Education	Government	July 2023
Moriarty Foundation	Sector stakeholder	July 2023
Industry Skills Advisory Council NT	Industry	July 2023
Walpiri Education & Training Trust (WETT)	Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisation	July 2023 and August 2023
Aboriginal Peak Organisations NT	Peak body	August 2023

Expert Reference Network Members

Table A.4 provides a list of Expert Reference Network Members consulted for the Review.

Table A.4 Overview of consultations with Expert Reference Network Members

Stakeholder or organisation	Date
Dr Don Zoellner, Chair of ISAC NT Board	20 December 2022, 28 April 2023
Professor Sandra Milligan, The University of Melbourne	19 January 2023
Dr Marnie O'Bryan, Centre for Aboriginal Economic Policy Research	15 February 2023
Professor Tess Lea, The University of British Columbia	17 February 2023
Paul Bridge, Director of Education in the Kimberley region (Western Australia)	21 February 2023
Emeritus Professor John Halsey	20 March 2023
Professor Peter Shergold AC	27 March 2023
Professor Martin Westwell, Chief Executive of SA Department of Education	19 May 2023
Leanne Wright, Assistant Director-General, Queensland Department of Education	23 May 2023
SACE Board	22 March 2023
NT Board of Studies	26 May 2023

Department stakeholders

Table A.5 (overleaf) provides a list of Northern Territory Department of Education stakeholders who were consulted as part of the Review.

Table A.5: Overview of consultations with Department of Education stakeholders

Stakeholder	Location	Date
Karen Weston, Chief Executive	Darwin	18 November 2022, 21 February 2023, 16 May 2023, 5 June 2023
Joe Hewett, NTPA Arnhem Chapter Representative, Principal, and Project Board Member	Virtual	15 December 2022
Robyn Thorpe, President of NTPA, Project Control Board member	Darwin	15 December 2022
Kerry Hudson, Executive Director Teaching and Learning Services	Darwin	15 December 2022, 21 February 2023, 21 March 2023, 7 June 2023
Saeed Amin, Deputy Chief Executive Regional Service	Darwin	15 December 2022, 21 February 2023, 25 May 2023, and engaged through VETiS project 15 June 2023
Greg Franks, Director Transition Support Unit	Virtual/Darwin	16 December 2022, 28 June 2023
Brenton Toy, Director Strategic Engagement Partnerships, Inclusion and Engagement Services, and	Darwin	16 December 2022
Joe Brown, Director Community Engagement, and Local Decision Making	Darwin	16 December 2022
Miranda Watt, A/Senior Director Top End	Virtual	19 December 2022
Paul Van Holsteyn, Senior Director Education, Central Cassie Arnold, Director Regional Coordination	Virtual	19 December 2022
John Cleary, Senior Director, Education Improvement	Virtual	20 December 2022, 12 January 2023
Paul Nyhuis, Regional Director Darwin	Virtual	19 January 2023
Warren Giles, Regional Director Big Rivers	Virtual	20 January 2023
Maisie Floyd, Regional Director Barkly	Virtual	30 January 2023
Stuart Dwyer, Regional Director East Arnhem	Virtual	1 February 2023
Susan Bowden, Deputy Chief Executive Agency Services	Darwin	8 February 2023
Tony Considine, Executive Director Quality Standards and Regulation	Virtual	9 February 2023
Aderyn Chatterton, Executive Director Inclusion and Engagement Services	Darwin	21 February 2023
Sue Healy, Senior Director Secondary Years and Post School Pathways	Darwin	22 February 2023, 7 June 2023, 28 June 2023
Kate Robarts, Senior Director Differentiated Services	Darwin	21 March 2023
Curriculum, Pedagogy and Assessment 7 – 12 Team, Teaching and Learning Services	Darwin	4 April 2023, 22 June 2023
Jenny Carew, Director Remote Schools Central Region	Alice Springs	17 April 2023
The Honourable Eva Lawler, Minister for Education	Darwin	5 June 2023
Romane Abell, Executive Director, Education Learning Culture and Care	Darwin	6 June 2023
Education Leadership Culture and Care	Darwin	6 June 2023
Agency Services Leadership Team	Darwin	8 June 2023 and 20 June 2023
Secondary Years and Post School Pathways Team	Darwin	28 June 2023

Appendix B: List of discussion paper submissions

In total, the Review received 30 written submissions (Table B.1).

Table B.1: Overview of discussion paper submissions received between June – July 2023

Stakeholder or organisation
Anonymous 1
Anonymous 2
Anonymous 3
Anonymous 4
Anonymous Representative of Taminmin College
Aboriginal Peak Organisations Northern Territory (APO NT)
Association of Teachers of English to Speakers of Other Languages NT
Australian Council of TESOL Association
Australian Education Union NT
Australian Education Research Organisation
Australian Government Department of Social Services Disability Strategy Group
Catholic Education NT
Central Australian Aboriginal Congress
Charles Darwin University
Department of Territory Families, Housing and Communities
Engineers Australia
Isolated Children’s Parents’ Association (ICPA NT)
Indigenous Education Consultative Meeting Members
Integrated disAbility Action Inc
National Indigenous Australians Agency
Northern Land Council
NT Department of Chief Minister & Cabinet
NT Department of Health
NT Principals’ Association
Office of the Children’s Commissioner NT
Regional Education Commissioner, Australian Government Department of Education
The Arnhem Land Progress Aboriginal Corporation
The Smith Family
Top End Secondary Provision Remote Schools Network
Yijiyi Mark Guyula MLA, Member for Mulka, NT Legislative Assembly

Additionally, 60 survey responses were received through a discussion paper questionnaire. Respondent demographics are outlined in Table B.2 below.

Table B.2: Demographics of respondents to discussion paper questionnaire

Survey demographics			
Demographic question	Option	Count	Percentage
Category	A current secondary student (or within the last 5 years).	3	5%
	A parent or family member with a child(ren) currently or previously in secondary school.	29	48%
	A parent or family member with a child(ren) of secondary age but not current in secondary school.	4	7%
	A school leader, educator or support staff member in a school.	18	30%
	A sector or community representative.	4	7%
	Blank	2	3%
	No.	49	82%
Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander origin	Yes, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander.	2	3%
	Yes, Aboriginal.	5	8%
	Yes, Torres Strait Islander.	1	2%
	N/A	3	5%
Location	Top End Region	25	42%
	Darwin Region	23	38%
	Central Region	8	13%
	Big Rivers	2	3%
	East Arnhem Region	1	2%
	Other (other jurisdictions and overseas)	1	2%
	Barkly Region	0	0%

Source: Deloitte Access Economics using NT Government data.

Note: Responses for the location were provided by postcode, suburb, town and community. These have been presented and classified by the NT Government Regions.

Table B.3 provides an overview of consultations that were undertaken as part of the discussion paper process.

Table B.3: Overview of discussion paper consultations

Stakeholder or organisation	Date
NT Department of Education – Teaching and Learning Services	7 June 2023
NT Department of Education – Curriculum, Pedagogy and Assessment 7 – 12 team	22 June 2023
NT Department of Education – Secondary Years and Post School Pathways Team	28 June 2023
NT Department of Education – Agency Services	8 June 2023, 20 June 2023
Department of Industry, Tourism and Trade	5 July 2023
School principals (through Principal Forums)	6 June 2023
Haileybury Rendall School	7 June 2023
Senior Education Advisory Group	7 June 2023
Non-Government Schools Ministerial Advisory Council	14 June 2023, 16 June 2023, and 19 July 2023
St John's Catholic College	21 June 2023
Marrara Christian College	21 June 2023
Northern Territory Council of Government School Organisations (NT COGSO)	07 July 2023
Australian Government Department of Social Services	14 July 2023
Moriarty Foundation	19 July 2023
Industry Skills Advisory Council NT	20 July 2023
Australian Government Department of Education	21 July 2023
NT Department of Treasury and Finance	29 August 2023

Appendix C: Delivery context

Delivery of secondary education in the Northern Territory education system occurs in a unique context (this should be read in conjunction with Section 2.1, which describes the cultural diversity, high levels of geographic dispersion, high levels of socioeconomic disadvantage, and more).

To meet its goal to become the most improving education system in Australia, schooling delivery in the NT needs to cater for the following attributes:

Resourcing: As highlighted in the Effective Enrolment Review, the existing school funding model does not adequately support delivery of Secondary Education across the NT, with the effective enrolment methodology having limitations both as a resource prioritisation mechanism and an incentive, with impacts on equity within the system.¹³⁴ Additionally, due to the dispersal of population over vast distances, service delivery is costly. While other Australian jurisdictions have similarly remote and small schools, the relative concentration of such schools in the NT context is unique. As a result of these characteristics, students in the NT receive the highest funding amount per student in the country at \$26,079 on average in 2020.¹³⁵

Staffing: The NT school workforce is characterised by challenges in recruiting and retaining school staff. The relatively small and transient populations in the NT mean there is a high reliance on attracting teaching graduates from other state and territories to teach in remote and very remote areas.¹³⁶ Furthermore, remote, and very remote areas are also characterised by a relatively young and old teaching workforce, with a lack of mid-career teachers. In remote and very remote schools, there is a need for schools to be staffed by teachers who not only deliver the Australian curriculum but have the cultural knowledge to appropriately tailor education to contexts.

Staffing issues are also complicated by compounding factors in the some remote and very remote locations including lack of adequate housing, lack essential services, high degree of isolation, and high transport costs to visit family and friends. Staffing challenges can diminish the development of student-teacher relationships, which may negatively impact student learning, student behaviour, student engagement, and supports provide to students.¹³⁷

Technology and infrastructure: The delivery of secondary education is limited by access to appropriate technology and infrastructure in some remote and very remote locations. Globally, digital technology has emerged as a tool to deliver high-quality education and reduce administrative burden for teachers through using online platforms (e.g., Moodle, Compass), resource sharing, **undertaking assessments, students' research, development of presentations, and use of eBooks.**¹³⁸ Further, the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic has emphasised the applications of digital technologies in education, including the delivery of distance education. NT urban or regional centres (e.g., Darwin, Katherine, Alice Springs, Nhulunbuy and Tennant Creek) are well served by telecommunication services. However, remote and very remote services are not well served, with approximately 6,000 Territorians not having any form of telecommunication services. Further, as of 2021, of the approximately 750 NT communities and residential areas, 55 had

¹³⁴ Deloitte Access Economics, *Review of Effective Enrolment* (report commissioned by NT Department of Education, 2022) <<https://education.nt.gov.au/reviews-and-consultations/review-of-effective-enrolment>>.

¹³⁵ Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority (2022). Calculated as total recurrent expenditure excl. user cost of capital per enrolled student in 2022.

¹³⁶ NT Department of Education, *Northern Territory Submission into the Inquiry into the Status of the Teaching Profession* (2018) <<https://www.aph.gov.au/DocumentStore.ashx?id=3c8b5d18-c434-4db9-8b0e-2ffeb149356e&subId=664587>>.

¹³⁷ S Coristine, S Russo, R Fitzmorris, P Beninato, G Rivolta, 'The importance of student-teacher relationships', *Classroom Practice in 2022* (1 April 2022).

¹³⁸ A Haleen, M Javaid, M A Qadri, R Suman, 'Understanding the role of digital technologies in education: A review', 2022, *Sustainable Operations and Computers* 3 275.

mobile phone services, 43 had fixed broadband services and 40 were connected to the national network by optic fibre.¹³⁹

Furthermore, there is a risk of those without equitable access to electronic devices falling behind their peers in the capabilities they will require in the modern workforce. While many teachers may engage in innovative practices, others may not have the digital capability.

It is important to note there are opportunities for improved connectivity and infrastructure in many communities as a result of recent budget announcements (2023-24) and investments by the NT Government to improve connectivity, through low satellite technologies. These initiatives are a step towards overcoming the barriers, and lack of access, that some very remote schools experience in delivering secondary education.

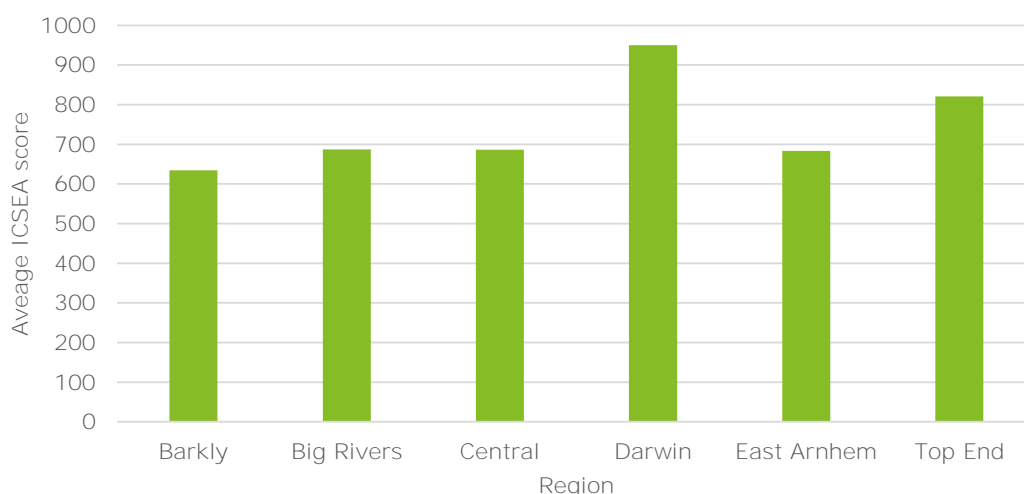
Significant levels of socioeconomic disadvantage: Compared to other jurisdictions, NT schools have a much lower average ICSEA score (Chart C.1).

Chart C.1: Average ICSEA across jurisdictions, 2022



Source: Deloitte Access Economics analysis of ACARA MySchool data (2022).

Chart C.2: Average ICSEA in regions of the Northern Territory, 2022



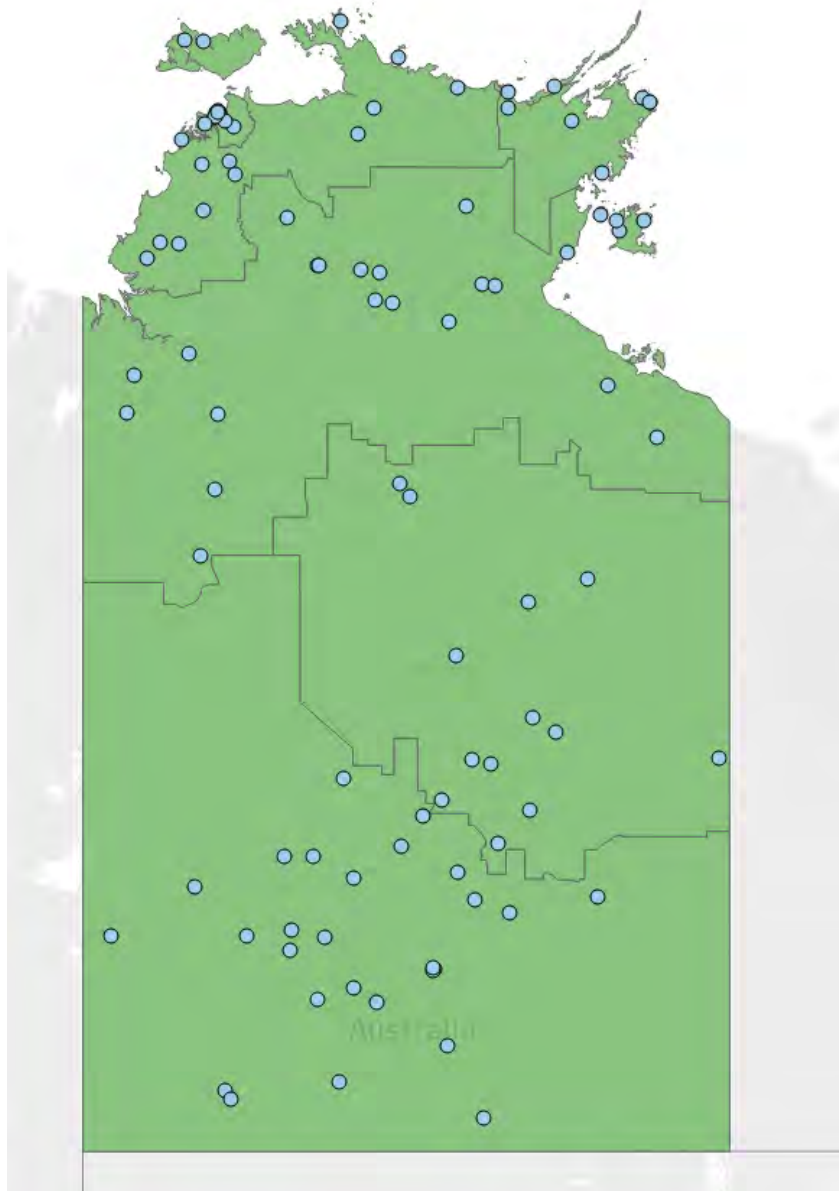
Source: Deloitte Access Economics analysis of Department of Education data (2022).

¹³⁹ NT Government, *2021 Regional Telecommunications Review - Submission to the Regional Telecommunications Independent Review Committee* (September 2021), <<https://www.infrastructure.gov.au/sites/default/files/documents/rtr2021-submission-no-244-nt-govt.pdf>>.

Overview of secondary education provision

The locations of secondary schools in the Northern Territory are represented in Figure C.1, demonstrating the dispersion and remoteness of a majority of schools.

Figure C.1: Secondary schools in the Northern Territory



Source: Deloitte Access Economics (2023) using NT Department of Education data.

Note: Secondary school includes combined schools, comprehensive schools, middle schools, and senior secondary schools.

As of 2021, approximately 30,500 students in the NT (year 7-12) were enrolled in 153 government schools across the NT (primary, secondary, and comprehensive schools). Of the total students, 54 per cent are registered for NTCET (which occurs between year 10 to 12).

The secondary system comprises of a range of school types and models offered in the secondary schooling stages (see Table C.1).

Table C.1: Overview of secondary school types by NT region in 2022

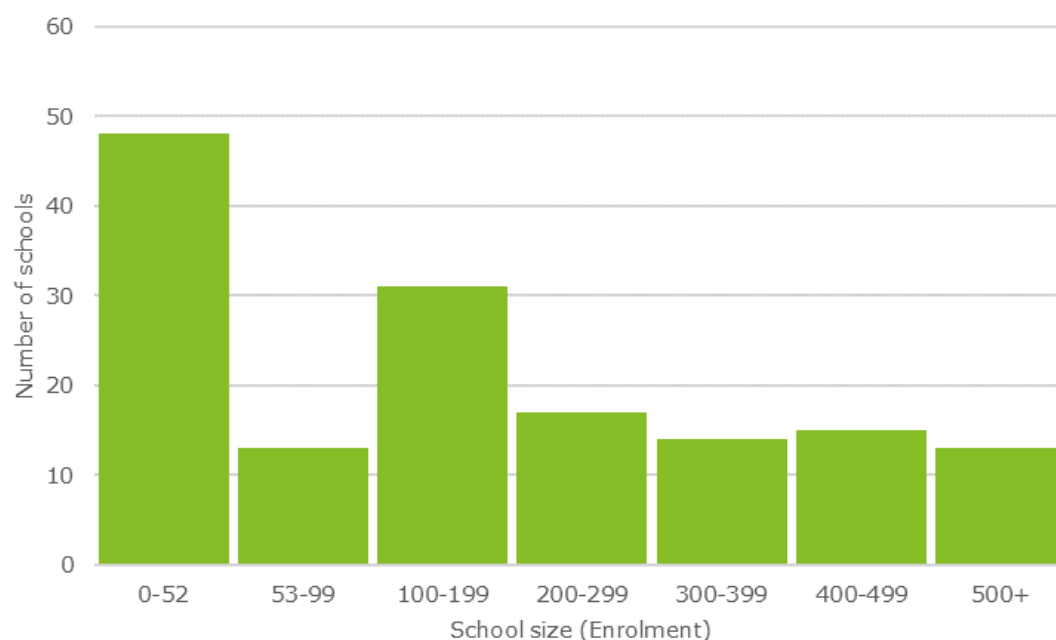
Type / Region	Darwin	Central	Top End	Barkly	East Arnhem	Big Rivers
Senior College (Year 10 – 12)	2	1	0	0	0	0
Special Education School	2	1	1	0	0	1
Middle School (Year 7 – 9)	4	1	0	0	0	0
Primary School (Transition – Year 6)	18	6	13	1	1	4
Comprehensive High School (Year 7 – 12)	0	0	2	1	1	1
Distance education school	1	1	0	0	0	1
Small School	0	23	13	11	0	14
School	1	2	4	1	9	6
Homeland Learning Centre	0	0	0	0	1	0
Area School	0	0	2	0	1	0
Music school	1	0	0	0	0	0

Source: Deloitte Access Economics analysis using NT Department of Education data.

Note: There is one registered hub school for homeland learning centres (represented in this table). There is more than homeland learning centres in the Northern Territory.

As represented in Chart C.3 below, the Northern Territory system is characterised by a large number of very small schools with fewer than 52 enrolments.

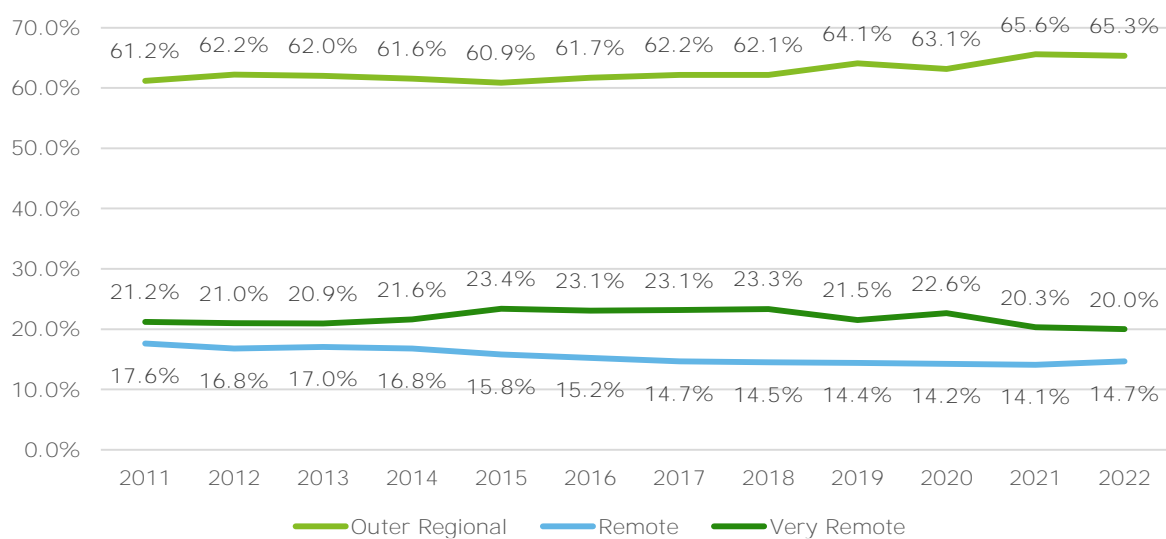
Chart C.3: Distribution of school size in NT, secondary schools



Source: Deloitte Access Economics analysis using NT Department of Education data.

As discussed above, the majority of secondary students in the NT are located in outer regional locations (which includes Darwin and Palmerston). In 2023, 14.7 per cent of secondary school students are from remote contexts and 20 per cent from very remote contexts (see Chart C.4).

Chart C.4: Distribution of secondary school students in the Northern Territory, by remoteness



Source: Deloitte Access Economics analysis using NT Department of Education data.

For various historical reasons, the NT Government system does not provide secondary schooling in some discrete locations. However, it was not in scope of this Review to consider this provision, or whether this position needed to change. The Review did not consult with these specific schools and communities.

Curriculum

In secondary school, students follow the Australian Curriculum from Year 7 to Year 10 and the Northern Territory Certificate of Education and Training (NTCET) from Year 11 to Year 12. While studying the NTCET, students can also choose to study for an apprenticeship or other vocational education and training (VET).

Year 7 to 10

In a secondary education context, the Australian Curriculum forms the basis of teaching and learning from Year 7 to Year 10. The Australian Curriculum provides curriculum content, an achievement standard in each subject, and options for teachers to personalise student learning and respond to student needs and interests.¹⁴⁰ The Australian curriculum includes:

- eight key learning areas—English, Mathematics, Science, Humanities and Social Sciences, Health and Physical Education, Languages, Technologies and the Arts
- seven general capabilities—literacy, numeracy, digital literacy, critical and creative thinking, personal and social capability, intercultural understanding, and ethical understanding
- three cross-curriculum priorities—sustainability, Asia and Australia's engagement with Asia, and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories and cultures.¹⁴¹

Further, in Year 10, all NT students must complete a Personal Learning Plan (PLP) to inform decisions about their learning and future pathways (including planning for the NTCET). PLP is a compulsory subject through the South Australian Certificate of Education (SACE).¹⁴² PLP is a four-step program, with students expected to:

1. know and understand the seven capabilities (literacy, numeracy, ICT, critical and creative thinking, personal and social, ethical understanding, and intercultural understanding).
2. identify, explore, and develop personal and learning goals, and strategies to achieve them

¹⁴⁰ 'F – 10 Curriculum (Version 9.0)', *Australian Curriculum* (2022), <<https://v9.australiancurriculum.edu.au/>>.

¹⁴¹ Ibid.

¹⁴² 'Personal Learning Plan', *South Australian Certificate of Education* (2023), <<https://www.sace.sa.edu.au/web/personal-learning-plan>>.

3. select and develop at least one capability relevant to achieving their goals
4. reflect on their learning.

Year 11 and 12

The NTCET is the NT's senior secondary school qualification that is typically completed in the final 2 years of schooling (Year 11 and Year 12). The NTCET offers the SACE curriculum through a service agreement with the SACE Board.

A two-stage process is undertaken to obtain an NTCET – stage I (typically completed in Year 11) and stage II (typically completed in Year 12). The NTCET is awarded based on a credit system – with students requiring a minimum of 200 credits in a mixture of compulsory and non-compulsory subjects across the two stages. A year-long study of a subject is typically awarded 20 credits.¹⁴³

The following can contribute to completion of the NTCET:

- Stage I and Stage II subjects: To complete a SACE certificate, students are able to receive credits from Stage I SACE subjects (often taken in Year 11) and Stage II subjects (often in Year 12). Each Stage I and Stage II subjects contributes 10 credits and 20 credits, respectively, to the NTCET.
- micro credentialling: Micro-credentialling recognises students cultural and language knowledge, through community-led learning and self-directed cultural learning.
- VET courses: VET courses can contribute to the complete NTCET. A total of 160 credits can be achieved through VET.
- Duke of Edinburgh: Duke of Edinburgh is a youth development project, that allows schools to assess, support students and sign off completion in undertaking the project. Achievement of Duke of Edinburgh contributes credits towards the NTCET. Specifically, Bronze and Silver awards contribute 10 credits (equivalent of a Stage I course), and the Gold award contributes 20 credits (equivalent of a Stage II course).

Case management of students registered for SACE

The Department's central team provides case management of all students registered for SACE, tracking and providing support to students to complete school and attain their certificate. This approach differs from other jurisdictions. For example, students undertaking a Cert I-III are supported on their VET pathway, including through connections to industry, and support for engagement.

Delivery of boarding in the NT

Currently, in the NT there are two government schools (Dawurr Boarding and Callistemon House) and five non-government schools that provide access to boarding (Haileybury Rendall School, Darwin; Marrara Christian College, Darwin; Tiwi College; Yirara College (Alice Springs), and St Philip's College (Alice Springs). There is funding provided, with plans to build a new boarding facility in Tennant Creek.

In 2019, there were approximately 1,900 NT secondary boarding students, with approximately 1,100 attending boarding providers in the NT and 800 boarding interstate.¹⁴⁴ The students boarding in the NT come from approximately 128 locations in the NT, including the suburbs of Darwin and Alice Springs.

Boarding schools are supported by the Transition Support Unit (TSU) within the Department which liaises between schools and families within the region to assist students seeking boarding enrolment. In 2018, TSU provided support to over 400 students enrolled in boarding schools or schools with boarding facilities (both in the NT and interstate). TSU and boarding models across the NT are explored in further detail in Section 6.3.3.

¹⁴³ 'About NT Certificate of Education and Training', *Northern Territory Department of Education* (2023), <<https://nt.gov.au/learning/primary-and-secondary-students/about-nt-certificate-of-education-and-training>>.

¹⁴⁴ Grant Thornton, *Boarding: Investing in outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students* (report commissioned by the Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet, June 2019) <<https://ieba.com.au/wp-content/uploads/2022/02/investing-in-outcomes-analysis-2019.pdf>>.

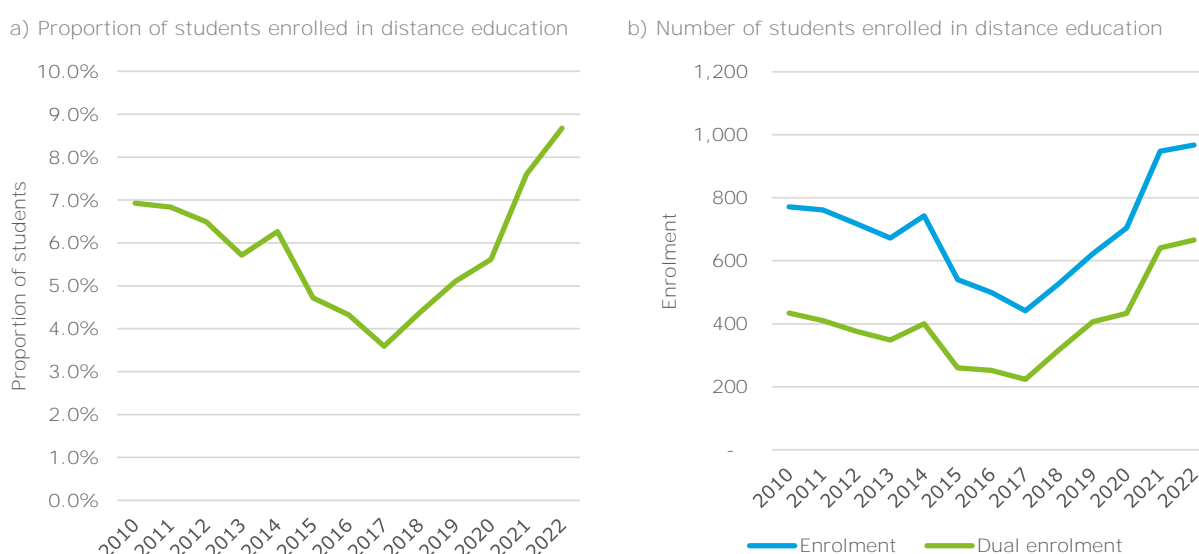
Delivery of distance education in the NT

There are three distance education providers in the Northern Territory. Two providers cater for pre-primary to Year 9 (Alice Springs School of Air and Katherine School of the Air) and one provider caters for Year 10 to Year 12 (NTSDE).¹⁴⁵

The distance education model offers access to students who are unable to attend an educational facility due to geographic isolation or having specific circumstances. Increasingly, providers are catering for growing numbers of students enrolled with additional needs, for example anxiety or mental health challenges. Additionally, dual enrolment is offered for students seeking a broader **range of subject options that aren't offered at their main school**. For example, the NTSDE delivers over 125 Year 10, 11 and 12 subjects across a broad range of learning areas.

Student enrolment in distance education schools is based on three distinct categories for NT residents: home based, dual enrolment (school based) and special circumstances. At the 2022 Census, there were 967 secondary students enrolled in distance education schools (Chart C.5).

Chart C.5: Secondary students enrolled in distance education, 2010-2022



Source: Deloitte Access Economics analysis using NT Department of Education data.

VET in Schools

The Vocational Education and Training in Schools (VETiS) program provides students with the opportunity to undertake vocational training while still at school. Students can enrol in VET from Year 9, with VET able to be used towards completion of the NTCET. Further, students can choose to study a VET course alongside their regular academic subjects.

Under the VETiS program, students can study vocational courses that are recognised and accredited by the Australian Qualifications Framework. VETiS programs are run by accredited RTOs, which can include TAFE institutes, private training providers, or other approved organisations (including individual schools or through the Department), and students may have the opportunity to completed Certificate I, II, and III courses in a range of industry qualifications.

The Department provides funding for VETiS RTOs to deliver to secondary students across the NT¹⁴⁶. The Department is an RTO, and another is school based (Taminmin College), with clear agreement about their roles. At present, aside from the Department RTO, CDU is the only public provider of VETiS and all other providers across the NT are private or school based.

¹⁴⁵ 'Distance and online learning', Northern Territory Government, (24 May 2022) <<https://nt.gov.au/learning/primary-and-secondary-students/distance-and-online-learning>>.

¹⁴⁶ 'Funding for VET delivered to secondary schools', Northern Territory Government, (2022), <<https://education.nt.gov.au/support-for-teachers/careers-vet/funding>>.

In 2022, 38 providers delivered at least one VETiS enrolment. The three largest institutions were responsible for the majority (70%) of training: Taminmin College as a school-based RTO (28% of student enrolments), Charles Darwin University (28%), and the Department's own operated RTO (14%). Other providers accounted for 42% of enrolments.

VETiS is primarily funded by payments from the Department directly to providers that deliver VETiS. Schools that wish to access VETiS are asked to nominate their preferred VETiS courses and their expected student numbers each year.¹⁴⁷ Schools are to consider local employment and community needs, student interests and availability of pathways to further education or training opportunities when nominating their preferences.

Similarly, RTOs submit their VETiS delivery capabilities including courses, locations of delivery and maximum student numbers to the Department. The Department uses the provided information from schools and RTOs alongside considerations of local employment opportunities and skills needs to decide which VETiS offerings will receive funding and for how many students.¹⁴⁸

Selected VETiS course offerings are funded per annual hours of curriculum.¹⁴⁹ The funding rates for VETiS are aligned with the rates set by the DITT for adult VET and delivered based on milestone targets. These rates differ by industry, while CDU receives a standard rate that is 35% higher.

Course offerings delivered in regional and remote areas also receive an additional loading of 25% and 80% (prior to 2023, the regional and remote loadings were 15% and 75%), respectively, in consideration of the extra costs associated with delivering in these locations.

Funding is also allocated towards VETiS through the Embedded Trainer Grant (ETG) and JobSkills Grant which were allocated approximately \$850,000 and \$600,000 in 2021.

VETiS and the NTCET

For students undertaking VET courses within the Australian Qualifications Framework (AQF), they can receive accreditation to meet NTCET requirements. To complete the NTCET, students need to complete 200 NTCET credits and 160 can be obtained through VETiS. Students must also fulfil the literacy, numeracy and personal leaning in addition to VET credits. To gain credits, students can use a maximum of two qualifications at Cert I level to gain credits towards the completion of the NTCET. There is no limit to the number of Cert II qualifications or higher.¹⁵⁰

All government and non-government school learners from Year 9, who are 14 years old at time of enrolment, are able to enrol in VET delivered in schools to secondary students.¹⁵¹

As outlined in Figure C.2, any nationally recognised VET qualification or unit of competency from a training package or accredited course, which is successfully completed by a secondary learner in Years 9, 10, 11 or 12, can contribute towards the achievement of the NTCET.

Box C.1. School-based apprenticeships and traineeships

A School Based Apprenticeship and Traineeship (SBAT) allows Australian school students to undertake part-time work and gain valuable hands-on experience, whilst still at school. SBATs can

¹⁴⁷ NT Government Department of Education, Accessing VETDSS, (April 2022).

¹⁴⁸ NT Government Department of Education, How is VETDSS Funded?, (April 2022).

¹⁴⁹ Annual hours curriculum (AHC) is the expected number of hours needed to complete a course. The Department uses the Victorian Purchasing Guide created by the Victorian Government to determine the AHC hours for each course.

¹⁵⁰ 'Vocational education and training delivered to secondary students – program handbook', *Northern Territory Government*, (2022) <https://education.nt.gov.au/__data/assets/pdf_file/0016/1072150/vetdss-program-handbook-2022.pdf>.

¹⁵¹ NT Government, Vocational education and training delivered to secondary students -policy (2022), <https://education.nt.gov.au/__data/assets/pdf_file/0005/451085/vet-delivered-to-secondary-students-policy.pdf>.

undertake a traditional trade, or obtain a Certificate, Diploma or Advanced Diploma often leading to ongoing full-time employment with the Host Business.¹⁵²

SBATs allows students to learn hands-on and theory-based workplace skills, while receiving a nationally accredited qualification. SBAT combines paid work, vocational education and training, and school studies or the NTCET. With school-based apprentices or trainees are employed by their host business and paid a wage.

VETiS is often a pathway to SBATs, noting that SBAT is a separate program delivered through DITT and VET programs aimed towards adults. The benefits of undertaking SBAT include opportunities for students to gain industry specific skills, enhance their employability, and make a smooth transition from school to further education or employment.

Figure C.2: VETiS credits and NTCET completion requirements

	Stage 1 (compulsory)	Stage 1 or 2 (free choice)	Stage 2 (compulsory)	
Personal Learning Plan (usually taken at Year 10) 10 credits	10	10	10	10
Literacy From a range of English subjects 10 credits	Subjects and courses from a wide range of options 100 credits		Subjects and courses from a wide range of options 60 credits	
	10	10	10	10
Numeracy From a range of Maths subjects 10 credits	10	10	10	10

Source: Deloitte Access Economics (2023), adapted from NT Department of Education.

Table C.2: Age Requirements for VETiS

Year level	AQF level I	AQF level II	AQF level III	Minimum age at time of enrolment*
Year 9	Certificate I	Not eligible*	Not eligible*	14
Year 10	Certificate I	Certificate II	Not eligible*	15
Year 11 and 12	Certificate I	Certificate II	Certificate III	16

Source: NT Department of Education 'Age requirements for VETDSS' (2022).

Note: Some qualifications have licensing outcomes and industry requirements; therefore, other age restrictions do apply.

¹⁵² 'VET and apprenticeships and traineeships in school', Northern Territory Government, (2022) < <https://nt.gov.au/learning/primary-and-secondary-students/career-advice-for-school-students/vet-and-apprenticeships-and-traineeships-in-school/school-based-apprenticeships-and-traineeships> >.

Homeland Learning Centres

Homelands are small, often remote, Aboriginal communities where people have traditional ownership or historical association. Most homelands are located on Aboriginal land, held by Aboriginal Land Trusts established under the *Aboriginal Land Rights (Northern Territory) Act 1976*. Across the NT, there are approximately 10,000 residents on more than 500 homelands.¹⁵³ Although there are over 500 Homelands in the NT, there are only 46 homelands that have dedicated learning centres.¹⁵⁴

Homeland Learning Centres (HLCs) are not considered standalone schools by the NT government or by the Australian Federal Government, and differ from schools in physical facilities, staffing and administration and curriculum. Operation of HLCs is often very limited due to challenges with funding and costs, this includes hours of instruction and a curriculum often limited to literacy and numeracy.

HLCs are often built at low cost as a single classroom, with some facilities not having running water. Noting this, HLCs fall under the duty of the care of the NT Department of Education and are often delivered as a hub and spoke model, and overseen by one school which auspices all homelands. There are more HLCs in the Top End and East Arnhem region than in the Barkly and Central Regions.

Funding

Under the student needs-based funding system, NT government schools are funded based on student needs loadings, which allocate higher funding for secondary students, remote schools, and various other student characteristics. NT government schools generally attract higher levels of funding and resourcing relative to the rest of Australia, with more students living in remote or very remote areas, combined with comparatively high levels of disadvantage. This is reflected in the **NT's** schooling resource standard (approx. \$29,000 per student in 2020), which is considerably higher than every other state or territory (with the second highest per student rate of \$19,000 being in Tasmania).¹⁵⁵

By 2029, the Commonwealth Government expects to fund 20 per cent of SRS costs for Australian public schools, with the remaining 80 per cent funded by state and territory governments. In moving towards this target, the NT Bilateral Agreement, signed in December 2018 as part of the National School Reform Agreement, outlined an increasing share of the **NT's SRS to be funded by** the NT Government.

Recurrent funding from the NT Government for schooling is the highest in Australia at approximately \$15,100 per student in 2020.¹⁵⁶ Total net recurrent income (which includes Australian Government funding and other sources of income) is on average \$23,500 per student – also the highest amount in Australia. However, NT Government schools are also funded at the lowest proportion of their estimated SRS in the country.

Summary of past reviews

This section outlines the history and legacy of past reviews which shape the background to the existing policy settings underpinning current secondary education delivery in the NT. Previous reviews have recommended specific developments in secondary education delivery which are considered in this report.

¹⁵³ **'Homeland Services'**, Northern Territory Department of Territory Families, Housing and Communities (May 2023).

¹⁵⁴ Laynhapuy Homelands Aboriginal Corporation, *Homeland Community Perspectives on Education and Schooling in Remote Northeast Arnhem Land* (November 2018).

¹⁵⁵ Senate Standing Committees on Education and Employment No. *SQ20-000151*. (2020) <<https://www.aph.gov.au/api/qon/downloadattachment?attachmentId=0b08e9a1-817f-4b34-aaeb-63aa240987c7>>.

¹⁵⁶ ACARA, *School income and capital expenditure for government and non-government schools* <[https://www.acara.edu.au/reporting/national-report-on-schooling-in-australia/school-funding/school-income-and-capital-expenditure-for-government-and-non-government-schools-\(calendar-year\)](https://www.acara.edu.au/reporting/national-report-on-schooling-in-australia/school-funding/school-income-and-capital-expenditure-for-government-and-non-government-schools-(calendar-year))>.

Northern Territory Reviews

An independent review of Indigenous education was undertaken by the Honourable Bob Collins: *Learning Lessons – an independent review of Indigenous education in the Northern Territory (Collins 1999)*¹⁵⁷. The review was commissioned in response to a system-wide examination of NT government functions which identified key areas for improvement in education, particularly for Indigenous students. Through extensive consultation with stakeholders, the review set out to determine the educational aspirations of Aboriginal communities, factors impacting the academic achievements of Indigenous children, and strategies to improve educational outcomes. The review highlighted the significant disparities between Indigenous and non-Indigenous **children’s** educational outcomes by outlining a range of issues faced by Indigenous students. Further, it identified a range of factors that contribute to these issues, including inadequate funding, a lack of teacher training in Indigenous education, and a lack of culturally appropriate resources. Regarding secondary education, the Review noted that Indigenous students in the NT have lower rates of participation in secondary education than non-Indigenous students and those who do participate often face significant barriers, including inadequate resources and support, a lack of culturally appropriate curriculum, and high levels of mobility and disruption. The recommendations were aimed at improving Indigenous education in the NT, including increasing funding, improving teacher training, and providing more resources for Indigenous students.

The NT secondary education system has not been reviewed since *the Report on future directions for secondary education in the Northern Territory (Ramsey, 2003)*¹⁵⁸, marking its importance to establish and design solutions for high-quality options going forward. The Ramsey Review focused on the **NT’s** delivery of secondary education for young people. The report analysed the issues associated with secondary education in the NT, including identified weaknesses in the delivery of education, particularly in remote locations, emphasising the importance of identifying alternatives and solutions to address the needs of remote communities. At the core of the review and its recommendations was transforming the schooling framework and the structure of secondary schooling in the NT. As a result of the 2003 Ramsey review, middle schools from Year 7 to Year 9, and senior secondary from Year 10 to Year 12 were established in some areas of the NT. The middle schools aim to prepare and support the transition of students to the senior years.

The 2014 Wilson Review - *A share in the future - Review of Indigenous Education in the Northern Territory (Wilson, 2014)*¹⁵⁹ underpins the *Indigenous Education Strategy (2015-24)* currently implemented by the Department of Education. The Wilson Review analysed the current state of education for young Indigenous people in the NT system. The Review discussed issues concerning workforce planning, cultural considerations, existing education programs, schools in rural and remote locations and low enrolments. The Review supported an explicit focus on improving outcomes for Indigenous students with several recommendations for future policy settings. The major structural reform resulting from the Wilson Review was a shift away from the provision of senior secondary education in very remote areas to a preference for delivery in urban areas for remote students (facilitated through the development of residential boarding facilities).

As a result, the NT Department of **Education’s Transition Support Unit (TSU) was established in 2015, with the Department’s focus on delivery in urban areas and boarding facilities. TSU aims to provide support to families and communities where students travel off-country to boarding schools.**

Commonwealth Government Reviews

Recently, the Commonwealth Government has undertaken reviews relating to secondary education; this includes in regional, rural, and remote education, and senior secondary pathways.

¹⁵⁸ G Ramsey, *Report on future directions for secondary education in the Northern Territory* (commissioned by the Northern Territory Department of Education, 2003).

¹⁵⁹ B Wilson, *A share in the future - Review of Indigenous Education in the Northern Territory* (commissioned by the Northern Territory Department of Education, 2014).

The *Independent review into regional, rural and remote education - Final Report (Halsey, 2018)*¹⁶⁰ The Review recommended a national approach to enhance access to regional, rural and remote education, building resource capability and improving the availability of Information and Communication Technology to open up new opportunities to address challenges experienced by regional, rural and remote educators and students.

The *National Regional, Rural and Remote Tertiary Education Strategy (Naphine, 2019)*¹⁶¹: The Review responded to and built on the work of the Halsey Review. The Review made several recommendations to support equal opportunity and access for students in regional, rural and remote areas, and to improve participation and outcomes for students from equity groups. The Review recommended improving access to tertiary study options, financial support for students, and improving the quality and range of student support services. The Review also suggested several actions to improve career advice and the support available to schools to better prepare students for success.

The *Looking to the future – Report of the review of senior secondary pathways into work, further education and training (Shergold, 2020)*¹⁶² responded to the complexities of senior secondary education, specifically challenges of delivery, globalisation and increasingly complex range of options and pathways into further education and training. The review provided advice and recommendations on how senior secondary students can be better supported to choose the pathway into work, further education and/or training that is right for them. The Review suggested that the historically academic focus of secondary education is not well suited to ensuring all students succeed post-schooling. The Review recommended identifying avenues to **certify students' strengths, capabilities and achievements (i.e., through Learner Profiles)** and supporting a range of pathways for students.

¹⁶⁰ J Halsey, *Independent review into regional, rural and remote education - Final Report* (commissioned by the Commonwealth Department of Education, 2018).

¹⁶¹ Commonwealth of Australia, *National Regional, Rural and Remote Tertiary Education Strategy* (2019).

¹⁶² Council of Australian Governments Education Council, *Looking to the future – Report of the review of senior secondary pathways into work, further education and training* (2020) <<https://www.education.gov.au/quality-schools-package/resources/looking-future-report-review-senior-secondary-pathways-work-further-education-and-training>>.

Appendix D: Indicative secondary student small school loading

This appendix provides an overview of the indicative secondary student small school loading presented in Section 8.1.4.

An overview of the indicative secondary student small school loading

A conceptual overview of the secondary small school loading is displayed in Box D.1 below. This describes how schools are allocated funding through the loading to ensure that a deemed sufficient level is received to support the delivery of secondary education in remote settings.

Assumptions and parameters underlying the modelling are explained in the following section.

Box D.1. The secondary small school supplement across three types of schools

<p>1. Small school with no secondary students (51 enrolments or less)</p> <p>Small schools with no secondary students are allocated funding up to a <i>deemed sufficient funding</i> amount. The small school supplement is the difference between the <i>deemed sufficient funding</i> amount and SNBFF funding received by a school.</p>	
<p>2. Small school with secondary students (51 enrolments or less)</p> <p>Small schools with secondary students have a higher <i>deemed sufficient funding</i> amount. Therefore, small schools with secondary students receive an additional secondary student loading on top of the small school supplement to equate total variable funding to the <i>sufficient</i> level.</p>	
<p>3. Small school with secondary students (more than 51 enrolments)</p> <p>Schools with secondary students with more than 51 enrolments do not receive the base small school supplement. Therefore, the secondary student loading for these schools is larger to ensure variable funding meets the <i>deemed sufficient funding</i> amount.</p>	

Source: Deloitte Access Economics analysis (2023).

Calculating sufficient funding for secondary education delivery in the NT

The indicative secondary student small school loading is based on an estimate of sufficient funding required to support the delivery of secondary education in a small school setting.

These estimates were developed by using three years of student-level enrolment data (2019-2022), and assumptions on classroom sizes and mixed-grade education delivery to identify the average number of teacher FTE required per each level of enrolment across schools in the NT to deliver secondary education from an adequately resourced teaching cohort. Key assumptions of this analysis are presented in Table D.1.

Table D.1: Assumptions informing sufficiency funding estimates

Parameter	Assumptions	Comments
School grades considered	Grade 7 to 12.	Only secondary students are considered.
Student-teacher ratios	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> one-grade class: 19:1 two-grade mixed class: 18:1 three-grade mixed class: 15:1 four-grade (or more) mixed class: 12:1 	<p>It is assumed that mixed-grade classrooms have a small teacher-student FTE to allow teachers to support the delivery of a broader curriculum.</p> <p>It is assumed that grade-mixing between primary and secondary students does not occur.</p>
School costs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Classroom teachers Principals (including teaching time) Overhead costs (including operational costs, bureau costs and administration). 	<p>All costs are sourced from the NT small school supplement model, 2022.</p> <p>The FTE costs of a teacher do not consider any additional costs associated with resourcing, such as relief teacher costs, staff benefits that are not included in the base wage rate, allowances, and housing costs.</p>

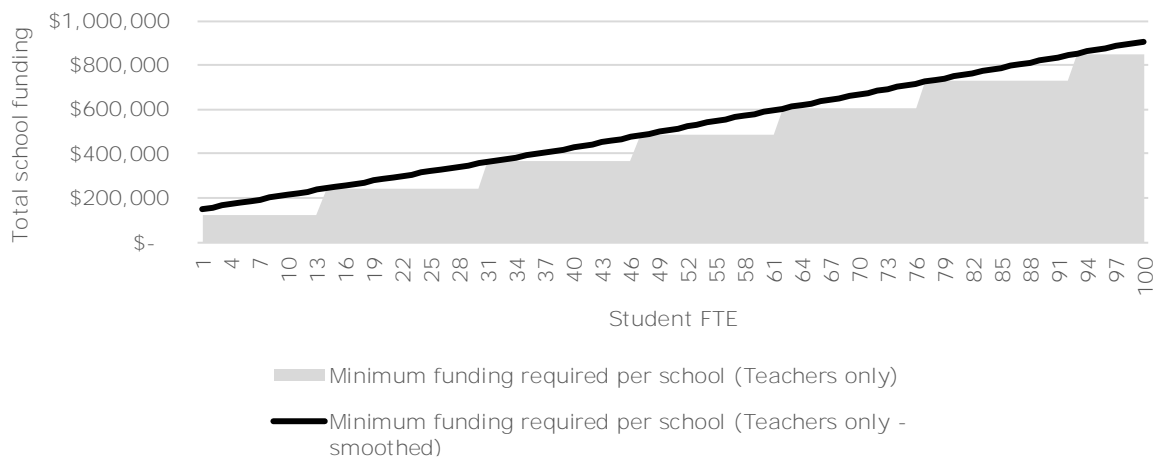
Source: Deloitte Access Economics (2023).

The output of the analysis is presented in Chart D.1 (overleaf). This analysis shows the average funding required per enrolment level to adequately staff teachers to deliver secondary education.¹⁶³

The funding amount is smoothed for the purposes of the indicative secondary student small school loading, to ensure that funding received by schools increases per additional enrolment added by schools. The intention of the smoothing process is to provide incentives to schools to add enrolments.

¹⁶³ The analysis displayed in Chart D.1 shows the estimated minimum funding required for classroom teachers only. It does not show additional funding required to cover overheads.

Chart D.1: Estimated minimum funding required to support delivery of secondary education



Source: Deloitte Access Economics (2023).

Calculating the secondary student loading amount

As mentioned in Section 2.5.1 and Section 8.1.4, the indicative secondary student small school loading amount provided to schools is estimated as the difference between the base level of revenue per secondary student and the smoothed minimum level of funding required to support a given number of secondary students.

Base revenue for a secondary student is the amount received by a student to meet general educational needs. For a secondary student, it is assumed that the base revenue per student is \$9,288. This equates to base funding per student FTE of \$7,200, SWaN funding of \$880 per student, plus the average secondary education loading per students across the NT in 2022.

Appendix E: Policy background

The review of any education system should be conducted with reference to the system's objectives, and applicable policy and legislative frameworks.

In Australia, a young person's right to secondary education is enshrined in the *International Covenant on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights* (ratified by Australia in 1975):

"Secondary education in its different forms, including technical and vocational secondary education, shall be made generally available and accessible to all by every appropriate means, and in particular by the progressive **introduction of free education.**"¹⁶⁴

Under the Commonwealth Constitution, state and territory governments are responsible for most aspects of secondary education, including the provision of schooling and most of the funding. Additionally, state and territory governments regulate school policies and programs, and determine curricula, course accreditation, student assessment, and awards for both government and non-government schools. State and territory governments are also responsible for the administration and majority funding of vocational education and training (VET) and legislation relating to the establishment and accreditation of certain higher education courses.¹⁶⁵

Commonwealth Government policies

The Commonwealth Government provides significant funding for schools and is involved in the setting of national education policies. For example:

- *The Schools Assistance Act 2008* provides financial assistance to the States and Territories for non-Government primary and secondary education
- *The Indigenous Education (Targeted Assistance) Act 2000* provides targeted financial assistance which is intended to advance the education of Indigenous persons.¹⁶⁶

The NT Government's commitment to become the most improving education system in Australia is underpinned by the national vision and commitment of the Declaration. The Declaration sets out the national vision for education and the commitment of Australian Governments to improving educational outcomes. The Declaration places students at the centre of their education by emphasising the importance of meeting the individual needs of all learners, and outlines education's role in supporting the wellbeing, mental health, and resilience of young people.¹⁶⁷

Through the Declaration, Australian Governments also renewed their commitment to celebrating and learning from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures, knowledge and histories and ensuring that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples are supported to imagine, discover and unlock their potential.¹⁶⁸

¹⁶⁴ *International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights Article 13* (1966).

¹⁶⁵ 'How schools are funded', *Department of Education* (2023), <<https://www.education.gov.au/schooling/how-schools-are-funded>>.

¹⁶⁶ 'Right to education – Public sector guidance sheet', *Attorney-General's Department*, <<https://www.ag.gov.au/rights-and-protections/human-rights-and-anti-discrimination/human-rights-scrutiny/public-sector-guidance-sheets/right-education>>.

¹⁶⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁶⁸ *Ibid.*

Northern Territory Government policies

The NT education system is governed under the *Education Act 2015* (The *Act*) and regulated under the *Education Regulation 2015*. The new legislation replaces the existing NT Education Act 1979 which has provided the foundation for education in the Northern Territory for almost 35 years.¹⁶⁹

The *Act* aims to provide a strong foundation for the NT's education system and support modern, and teaching-learning methods and incorporates a broad range of education delivery methods and clarifies the end point of schooling. It also increases the range of options available to principals in managing the behaviour and wellbeing of students and allows more opportunities for parent and community involvement in schools.¹⁷⁰

Furthermore, under the *Act* young people must complete Year 10 of secondary education. After Year 10, they must stay at school or continue to participate in approved education, training or employment, or a combination of these (eligible option), until they are 17 years of age.¹⁷¹

The *Act* states (in section 38(9)) that:

Regulations may provide for the following:

- (a) when a child completes year 10 of secondary education;
- (b) when a child is participating in an eligible option.

Indigenous Education Strategy (2015-24)

The Northern Territory's *Indigenous Education Strategy* (2015–24) drives the approach of the NT in delivery of educational services to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students in remote and very remote areas, with the aim of improving educational outcomes. The Strategy was developed in response to recommendations of *A Share in the Future: Review of Indigenous Education in the Northern Territory* (2014). The Strategy has a focus on five key elements:

- foundations: Improving school readiness of primary school-aged Aboriginal students through the Families as First Teachers (FaFT) program
- essentials: Improving primary school performance of students (activities are funded outside of NTRAI agreement by the NT Government)
- pathways: Improving access to workforce and higher education pathways through transition to boarding school supports for those that attend schools that do not offer a NTCET
- engagement: Improving engagement and attendance to schools through the creation of a unit focused on engagement with attendance and compliance staff and an engagement framework that targets families to improve attendance
- workforce: Development of an Aboriginal education workforce to improve student engagement and outcomes.

The Northern Territory and Commonwealth Governments have agreed on and jointly invest in the delivery of these outcomes through the National Partnership on Northern Territory Remote Aboriginal Investment (NTRAI), which is currently under review. The Children and Schooling Implementation Plan (CSIP), which forms part of the NTRAI agreement, details the Commonwealth **Government's investment and is a mechanism for the implementation of the *Indigenous Education Strategy***. It is focused on improving the school readiness, attendance, attainment, engagement and educational achievement of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students from remote and very remote communities.

¹⁶⁹ 'Legislation', Northern Territory Department of Education (2016), <<https://education.nt.gov.au/publications/legislation>>.

¹⁷⁰ *Education Act NT* (2015).

¹⁷¹ 'Age your child attends school', Northern Territory Government, (30 March 2022) <<https://nt.gov.au/learning/primary-and-secondary-students/age-your-child-attends-school>>.

The Engagement Strategy (2022-31)

In 2021, the Northern Territory Department of Education released its *Engagement Strategy*, with the aim of engaging all children and students in their learning.

The Strategy underpins the system's intention to place learners at the centre, provide opportunities for meaningful learning, deliver culturally relevant teaching and learning, and work together to ensure a quality education for learners. The development of the *Engagement Strategy* was informed by 72 consultations with over 950 people across urban, regional, and remote communities.

The *Engagement Strategy* highlights four foundations to lead to improve engagement: relationships with peers and educators, wellbeing and inclusion that is fostered through a safe, supportive and welcoming learning environment, culture and identity that is valued, celebrated and embedded in learning, and placing **students' beliefs and motivations at the centre of learning**. Consultations undertaken heard that local communities desire more options for the local provision of secondary education, and the need to focus and invest in schools in more urban, remote and very remote areas.

Education NT Strategy (2021–25)

In 2021, the Department of Education released the *Education NT Strategy 2021-2025* which outlines the goals, ambitions, and commitments of the NT education system.

The *Education NT Strategy* outlines seven system priorities. Each of the priorities identified in this strategy will work together to support the child and student at the centre. The seven priorities and key strategic actions are outlined below:¹⁷²

1. Strengthen instruction for young Territorians - *Strengthening instruction in every classroom across the Territory will deliver the curriculum through effective teaching practice and a student-teacher relationship where each of our learners is known. This will engage our students and improve their learning outcomes.*

Strategic actions:

- Implement the Framework for inclusion 2019-2029 to ensure all students' wellbeing and equitable access to learning
- Renew a Territory-wide approach to curriculum delivery and assessment across all stages of schooling, from birth to Year 12
- Embed system-wide guidance and support for curriculum, pedagogy and assessment, which is inclusive and culturally responsive to Aboriginal students
- Define and deliver high quality instruction from birth to Year 12 and achieve this through strong instructional leadership in schools and whole-of-system support

2. Improve cultural responsiveness - *Across every aspect of the Northern Territory education system, we will value, and mobilise as resources, the cultural identities and knowledge that students and staff bring to the learning relationship. This will create a safe environment in which children and young people belong and will make learning more relevant.*

Strategic actions:

- Develop and implement a Cultural Responsiveness Framework to increase cultural understanding and practices for corporate and school staff
- Increase the relevance of early childhood and school education programs to local communities by expanding Local Decision Making and strengthening governance skills of school board, council and committee members
- Enhance advisory and leadership roles of Aboriginal students, staff and community members to inform agency wide policy and programs

¹⁷² Northern Territory Government, *Education NT Strategy 2021-2025* (2021).
<https://education.nt.gov.au/__data/assets/pdf_file/0007/1061386/education-NT-strategy-2021-2025.pdf>.

3. Engage every child and student in learning - *Territorians from birth to Year 12 will be actively engaged in learning which interests and motivates them. This will improve attendance, facilitate deep learning and lead to successful transitions beyond schooling.*

Strategic actions:

- Implement the NT Education *Engagement Strategy* to create the foundations for engagement locally, regionally and across government
- Develop a system-wide approach to empowering student leadership, voice and agency in partnership with young Territorians
- Develop systems so that quality data follows each child as part of a tailored education experience as students move geographically, through stages of schooling, and across flexible education settings
- Provide case management support for students who are disengaged, have additional needs or are identified as vulnerable

4. Build the foundations for learning - *Through participation in quality early learning services and programs, children will have a strong sense of identity and wellbeing, and start their journey as confident and involved learners. This will strengthen the transition of all children into the early years of learning and improve the achievement of foundational skills and engagement through later years of schooling.*

Strategic actions:

- Design and implement a contemporary early childhood system for Territory families, to provide equitable access to quality services
- Extend access to quality early learning to ensure all children are able to access two years of quality early learning in the years before school, following the Early Years Learning Framework and delivered by qualified staff in partnership with families
- Strengthen transitions to school through early identification of children with additional needs and collaboration with other Northern Territory Government agencies to provide timely wrap around support

5. Support successful transitions beyond schooling - *The secondary years of schooling will provide academic, vocational and flexible pathways to **enable students' success. Students will have the capabilities and certification needed to take their next steps beyond schooling.***

Strategic actions:

- Review and strengthen secondary education (Years 7–12) with a focus on increased participation, retention and completion, particularly in remote areas
- Expand options (including both courses and mode of delivery) to deliver equitable and flexible access to the curriculum, particularly for remote secondary students
- Strengthen support for each student, including boarding school students and those with additional needs, through the implementation of learner profiles for students working towards Year 12 completion (or equivalent)
- Follow and support the transition of students into secondary schooling and beyond into further education, employment or training, in partnership with local communities, industry, government and non-government organisations.

6. Build an expert education workforce - *All educators, school and early childhood leaders, allied health and other education system staff develop, maintain and share expertise relevant to the strategic priorities, our values and ways of working.*

Strategic actions:

- o Develop and implement a plan to ensure we build an expert education workforce with a focus on children and young people at the centre of our work
- o Implement a leadership strategy and leadership pipelines, enabling school and system leaders to be identified, developed and supported through each stage of their careers
- o Prioritise an agency-wide commitment to voice, collaboration across teams and health and wellbeing for all staff

- o Fulfil our commitment to develop and implement an Aboriginal Employment and Career Development Strategy to retain, develop and increase the number of Aboriginal staff delivering early years and education services
7. Differentiated support for Early Childhood Education and Care services, schools and communities - *Listening to services, schools and communities about what they need, and using an inquiry-led process based on evidence, to provide differentiated support.*

Strategic actions:

- Embed the use of evidence-based strategies in school and early childhood service planning, with support from the system providing culturally responsive resources to guide delivery
- Develop and implement a service model for differentiated support to schools and early childhood services to ensure universal, targeted and focussed support is provided in response to local need
- Enhance the responsibility of regional and local staff to enable place-based, community led and multi-agency approaches to support children, young people and their families

The NT's progress against these priorities will be measures through six headline improvement measures – school survey, Foundation for Early Literacy Assessment NT, Attended days, NAPLAN growth, A-E grades and Year 12 achievement.¹⁷³

Education Leadership Strategy (2021-2024)

The NT Department of Education developed its Education Leadership Strategy to support continuous school improvement across the system, with an expert education workforce critical to the success of the *Education NT Strategy*. The strategy informs how the Department identifies, develops, and supports expert education workforce at each stage of their career.

The strategy was informed by extensive consultation with school and system leaders across the NT. It includes four strategic actions:

1. Create a common understanding of improvement: Identify the critical leadership practices that will drive school, Early Childhood Services and system improvement and embed inquiry as a way of working across the department.
2. Establish a clear leadership pipeline: Establish a leadership pipeline to identify, develop and support education and system leaders throughout their careers. The Department will develop and offer targeted leadership development opportunities at each stage of the pipeline.
3. Improve the impact of leadership development programs: Improve the impact of leadership development programs by developing principles of effective program design, delivery and evaluation.
4. Engage Aboriginal leaders and remote staff to both participate in and shape leadership development opportunities: Work with Aboriginal and remote staff to ensure they have opportunities, both to participate in and shape the leadership development pipeline, as well as to improve cultural responsiveness across the Department.¹⁷⁴

¹⁷³ Ibid.

¹⁷⁴ NT Department of Education, *Education Leadership Strategy 2021 – 2024* (2021), <https://education.nt.gov.au/__data/assets/pdf_file/0005/1064606/leadership-strategy-2021-2024.pdf>

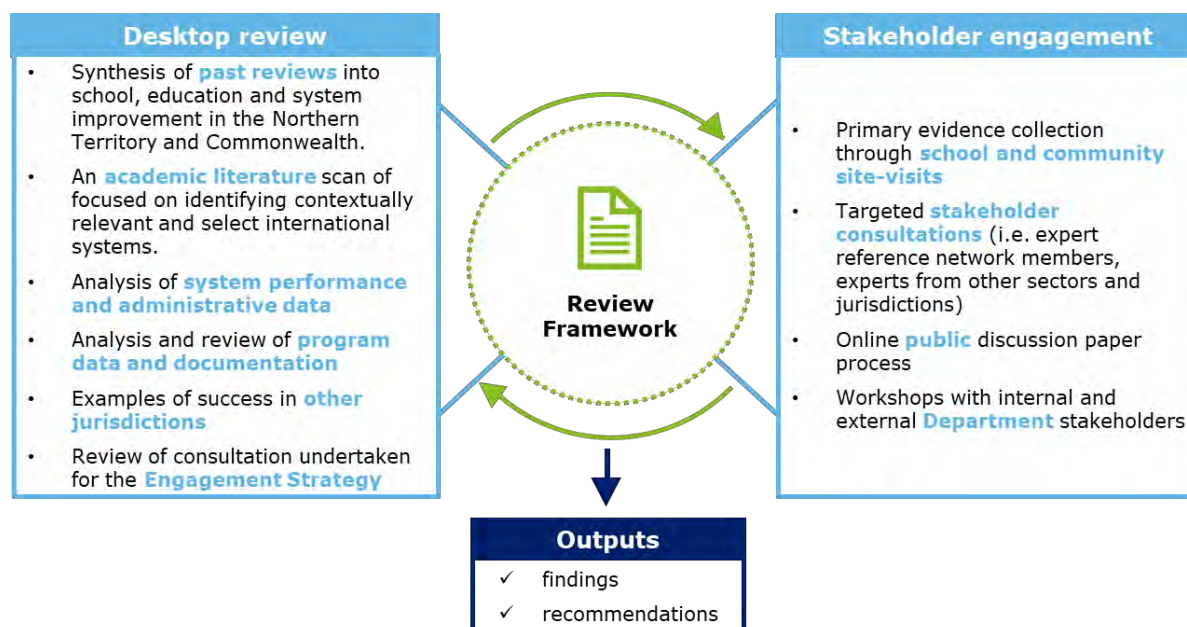
Appendix F: Review approach

Deloitte Access Economics in collaboration with the Northern Institute at Charles Darwin University, conducted the Review between November 2022 and October 2023, with the majority of engagement and analysis occurring from February-July 2023.

The Review followed a multi-phase and mixed-methods approach. This involved a comprehensive desktop evidence review, research and analysis of policy documentation, analysis of secondary data, as well as multiple rounds of stakeholder engagement with schools, policymakers, representatives of peak body organisations, other jurisdictions and subject matter experts.

The Review’s approach was undertaken in several substantive activities and phases, as outlined in Figure F.1 and in subsequent sections. The approach was guided by an overall Review Framework setting out the scope and focus for the Review, as described below.

Figure F.1: Overview of methodological approach



Source: Deloitte Access Economics.

Review Framework

A Review Framework was developed to guide the scope and key lines of enquiry for the Review. The Review is anchored to the key strategic directions set out by the Northern Territory Government, and the key outcomes it seeks to achieve.

The Review Framework was developed with consideration to the Department’s strategic priorities and key outcomes it seeks to achieve.¹⁷⁵ This gave rise to the objectives and focus of the review, organised according to five domains and key lines of enquiry (Figure F.2 overleaf).

¹⁷⁵ Key outcomes, as set out in the *Education NT Strategy (2021-25)*, include Year 12 completion, effective transitions into and beyond secondary schooling, and student engagement. This also includes an action to review and strengthen senior secondary education and expand options to deliver equitable and flexible access to curriculum, particularly for remote secondary students.





Figure F.2: The Review Framework



Source: Deloitte Access Economics.

The Review Framework is comprised of the following components, outlined in Table F.1.

Table F.1: Components of the Review Framework

Domain	Description
 <p>Review anchor</p>	<p>This outlines the objectives of the Review as it relates to the NT strategy, its key outcomes, and associated Headline Improvement Measures that the Review is anchored to.</p>
 <p>Review domains Key lines of enquiry</p>	<p>Five key domains that define the scope and focus for the Review and articulate the key lines of enquiry that will be addressed through the current state analysis and co-design. The domains are developed from key strategic documents and objectives of the Review.</p> <p><i>These domains are reviewed against the:</i></p>
 <p>Analytical methods</p>	<p>The basis upon which the analysis will be conducted against data and evidence.</p> <p><i>These analytical methods and lines of enquiry, against the key domains, give rise to:</i></p>
 <p>Recommendations for secondary education delivery in the Northern Territory</p>	<p>These are governed by a set of design principles. These are underpinned by success features which are the foundations of success for a system to achieve key outcomes for students.</p>

Domains and lines of enquiry

There are five Review domains that set out the key lines of enquiry for the Review. These domains provide a structured framework for analysis, finding and recommendations. The five domains with the subsequent lines of enquiry underpinning the Review are outlined below in Table F.2.

Table F.2: Five Review domains and lines of enquiry

Domain	Lines of enquiry
<p>Domain 1: Recognition of learning Recognising and certifying a range of student learning success and capabilities.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • definition of success • Learner Profiles • credentialing of learning.
<p>Domain 2: Transitions between and beyond school Supporting effective transitions to ensure students' success in further study, employment, or training.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • design of academic, vocational and cultural pathways • middle school and senior secondary delivery.
<p>Domain 3: Learning access and design Driving equitable and flexible access and delivery of learning through delivery modes and courses.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • blended and online learning • regionalised delivery • boarding • flexible and specialised learning options • school programs.
<p>Domain 4: Partnerships and engagement Ensuring the success of students, in partnership and through engagement.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • school and community engagement • partnerships with local industry and community organisations.
<p>Domain 5: System of supports Providing a foundation of support to enable successful delivery of secondary education, and ensuring flexible, culturally safe, and supportive learning environments and experiences for students.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • people and processes • technology and infrastructure • system-wide guidance and supports • funding.

Design principles

The Review Framework comprises of a set of design principles, that have been agreed with the Department of Education, and which are applied to appraise and inform and develop recommendations for change. The guiding principles are to ensure the recommendations are:

- strategically aligned: recommendations should be clearly aligned with the key priorities and goals of the NT Department of Education
- coherent: recommendations are consistent and work in alignment to support the delivery and achievement of other system priorities
- sufficient: recommendations should be sufficient for supporting the provision of high-quality secondary education provision
- effective: recommendations should be calibrated to support the system to achieving its overarching outcomes and objectives
- efficient: recommendations should be cost-effective and achieve desired outcomes by optimising and utilising existing resources
- sustainable: recommendations should support the sustainability of structures, systems, processes and relationships over time
- tailored to local context: recommendations can be appropriately tailored to the unique contexts across the NT.

Desktop review and data analysis

A desktop review was undertaken to inform the Review, which involved data gathering and evidence synthesis activities for the Review. In addition, the review framework was informed by insights from current schooling system stakeholders, contemporary relevant literature and features of models of other Australian and international jurisdictions.

The desktop review was underpinned by a mixed-methods approach, including numerous qualitative and quantitative data sources. Further, the desktop review was conducted by focusing on the current delivery models, funding model, and secondary data analysis in the NT, and by drawing on comparative approaches and analysis of reform options across other jurisdictions and sectors in similar delivery contexts.

The desktop review comprised of:

- synthesis of past reviews into school, education and system improvement in the Northern Territory and Commonwealth, to understand the current state and policy directions arising from recommendations and interdependencies between reviews
- academic literature: A literature scan of focused on identifying contextually relevant and select international systems to indicate opportunities and to develop a comprehensive understanding and make informed recommendations
- analysis of system performance and administrative data: with a focus on the current state of delivery and the outcomes that the system is achieving
- program data and documentation: Analysis and recommendations in the report are based on the findings from a document review of policy, procedures and other supporting guidance or information
- examples of success in other jurisdictions: The work drew on public documentation which referred to what provision of secondary education and what delivery models look like in other jurisdictions, and
- review of consultation undertaken for the Engagement Strategy: The work recognised the significant depth of insight was provided by stakeholders through the process of developing the *Engagement Strategy* and drew on inputs to inform the analysis.

Stakeholder engagement

Stakeholder consultations

The Review team conducted a series of consultations with key Department, government, university, and school education stakeholders over the course of the Review.

A series of school site visits were held across all regions of the NT to gather a breadth of insights on the strengths, challenges, and opportunities for secondary education reform. Site visits included

a range of stakeholders at each site, including school leaders, teachers, secondary students, School Council and/or Local Engagement and Decision Making (LEaD) Committee representatives.

In total, 25 site visits across all regions of the Northern Territory were conducted for the Review, with a total of 363 school stakeholders consulted.

In addition to these school site visits, a series of interviews, workshops and other engagement activities occurred with education system stakeholders, including those internal and external to the Department of Education. It is estimated that a total of at least 600 individuals were consulted with directly over the course of the Review.

The details and sampling approach to the school site visits can be found in Appendix A, along with details of consultations with school leaders, and other key stakeholder groups including experts, sector stakeholders, Aboriginal community-controlled organisations, and peak bodies.

Public consultation process

A public consultation process was conducted to support consultation with external stakeholders. The process involved preparation of a discussion paper which was released through a **public 'have your say' process**. The discussion paper provided an overview of emerging key themes from stakeholder consultations that had been undertaken in the earlier phases of the Review. It included several discussion questions to seek views from the general public, including students, parents, families, educators, school staff, communities, and non-government organisations to inform the Review process.

Members of the public were able to respond via an online questionnaire or through a written submission. A total of 60 responses were received through the online questionnaire, and 29 written submissions (further details are provided in Appendix B).

Analysis approach

Consultation outputs were transcribed as verbatim notes and subsequently cleaned to address any issues or errors that may have occurred during data collection or transcription. To make sense of qualitative data gathered in consultations, a combination of a deductive and inductive approach was used to analyse the qualitative data. Initially, a deductive approach was used to develop a coding framework which aligned with the Review domains and thematic ideas arising from initial stakeholder consultations. The coding framework functioned as an established set of codes which were applied to analysis of the qualitative data gathered. Further, an inductive approach was employed during the qualitative analysis which involved allowing codes and themes to emerge through an iterative process of coding and categorisation, without predefined codes.

Appendix G: School types of delivery

The Territory comprises a variety of delivery school types and pathway offerings that would benefit from being further systematised and strengthened.

Through the Review, four different school types within the NT were observed. These are organised against the school types within the Delivery Model (Section 3.2).

- Type 1: Strong spine of schools delivering secondary education
- Type 2: Localised delivery of specialised pathways
- Type 3: Regionally supported delivery of select pathways
- Type 4: Delivering to a guaranteed standard of literacy and numeracy

These stylised school types are explored through in the following section, drawing upon several illustrative school case studies with further discussion of the implications for the Review recommendations. A summary is provided in Table G.1. Further detail is outlined in Section 3.2.

Table G.1: Overview of school types in the NT

School type	Example school
<p>School 1: Strong spine of schools delivering secondary education</p> <p>Urban or regional centre schools playing a systemic role as a regional hub, and leveraged by schools to access diverse delivery modes, specialised options and infrastructure</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Katherine High School
<p>School 2: Localised delivery of specialised pathways</p> <p>Larger remote or very remote schools and homeland learning centres offering specialised pathways, in the local community to NTCET completion.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Maningrida College
<p>School 3: Regionally supported delivery of select pathways</p> <p>Remote and very remote schools providing pathway options, accessed through the regional model and/or distance education, that contribute towards NTCET completion.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ntaria School
<p>School 4: Delivering to a guaranteed standards of literacy and numeracy</p> <p>Isolated small and very remote school delivering defined and select pathways to a guaranteed standard of core literacy and numeracy skills (or working towards) and NTCET completion.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mount Allan School

School type 1: Strong spine of schools delivering secondary education

Type 1 schools are urban or regional centre schools playing a systemic role as a regional hub, and leveraged by schools to access diverse delivery modes, specialised options and infrastructure.

This school type may have a deliberate focus on resource sharing and supporting other schools (school type 3 and 4) to deliver. The key characteristics of school type 1 are outlined in Section 3.2.

One example of school type 1 – Katherine High School - is highlighted here as a reference.

Katherine High School

Katherine High School is a large secondary school (Year 7 to 12) located in Katherine, with approximately 500 enrolments. Katherine High School is the only government high school in Katherine and services a region larger than the state of Victoria. Katherine High School has the scale, infrastructure, connectivity, and flexible to offer all pathways. Specifically, they offer intentional core literacy and numeracy, academic, and vocational pathways through VET programs, NTSDE (including HEAL), or their specialist academic programs. However, there are some barriers to their success including difficulty in recruiting retaining and staff, shortages of teacher housing, and limited provision of technology.

Katherine High School offers a diverse range of Stage I and Stage II for students to receive a NTCET and complete Year 12 with an ATAR and pursue a more academic pathway. Additionally, Katherine High School supplements their course offerings with NTSDE courses.

Additionally, through NTSDE, Katherine High School provides the HEAL program to support students in gaining Health, Numeracy, English and Literacy skills (discussed further in Section 6.1.3 and Section 6.3.4).

To support in the delivery of vocational courses, Katherine High School partners with the Department of Education RTO to offer Certificates on the school campus from trainers. Skill sets are offered to Year 9 with formal Certificate I and Certificate II qualifications offered to Senior Years students across Automotive, Building and Construction and Engineering and Manufacturing Pathways. Katherine High School also partners with CDU to deliver additional Certificates, including Certificate II in Rural Operations. Students have the opportunity to learn at the CDU rural campus with the majority of the training and assessments completed in two-week blocks at the end of each term.

Additionally, Katherine High School has as annex and secondary campus, Katherine Flexible Learning and Engagement Centre which provides a tailored experience for students who are disengaged in mainstream schooling.

Given a range of factors such as its size, infrastructure and the role it is already playing within the region, there are further opportunities for Katherine High School to operate as **a 'hub' in a 'hub and spoke' model and provide support to smaller schools in the Big Rivers region** – a role that the school similarly expressed a desire to become.

"A school like Katherine High needs to be promoted as a hub. We have the facilities to be a hub." – *School leader*

This may include providing an outreach model, sharing resourcing arrangement, sharing curriculum scope and sequence, and offering auspiced model of delivery, and being leveraged through the regional office to play this role. However, if the school is to be designated as a hub, there would be a need to consider and establish the appropriate structures, governance and consider the additional funding, staffing requirements and central supports required to enable this.

School type 2. Localised delivery of specialised pathways

School type 2 refers to larger remote or very remote schools, and homeland learning centres, with capacity to deliver offering specialised pathways, in the local community to NTCET completion.

Schools within this type may provide support or lend capacity to schools in school type 3 and 4, i.e., through clustering or auspice arrangements. The key characteristics of school type 2 are outlined in section 3.2. One example of school type 2 – Maningrida School - is highlighted here as a reference.

Maningrida College

Maningrida College is a large very remote school located in Maningrida (Manayingkarirra and Manawukan), an Aboriginal community 500km east of Darwin. It has approximately 450 students from preschool to Year 12.

Maningrida College has the scale, infrastructure, and capacity to deliver a range of pathway options that contribute towards NTCET completion and provide support to small schools. Specifically, Maningrida College provides two intentional pathways - cultural and vocational

pathways, as well as providing education services to approximately 13 Homeland Learning Centres.

Maningrida is part of the SACE pilot program to accredit cultural learning to contribute towards the NTCET. Maningrida College participates in the Learning on Country program, which contributes to SACE credits and assists students in completing Year 12 and delivering post school pathways. Specifically, it provides:

- Certificate I and II Conservation and Land Management course (including a ranger internship program)
- Indigenous Land Management provides 20 SACE credits.
- Day trips and camp support for the Maningrida College language and culture team.
- Grade 2 Maritime coxswains training and accreditation.

Learning on Country is delivered in partnership with Bawinaga Rangers. When students complete the Certificate II Conservation and Land Management course and graduate Year 12, they are offered a 6 to 12-month internship which potentially progresses to full-time employment.

Additionally, the Learning on Country program has partnered with CSIRO and NAILSMA with research programs relating to the Certificate II Conservation and Land Management Course.

Maningrida College also provides vocational pathways and a range of courses, including maritime, barista training, and conservation and land management.

Maningrida College provides education services to approximately 13 Homeland Learning Centres, the Centres are varying distances from Maningrida and have varied accessibility. Currently, Maningrida College teachers visit Homeland Learning Centres one day per week for an average of 4 hours. In consultation, it was noted that additional teaching time is required in support of student outcomes, however due to accessibility, limited time, infrastructure and connectivity restraints, and limited resourcing it is not possible.

School type 3. Regionally supported delivery of select pathways

School type 3 refers to a remote or very remote school providing pathway options, accessed through the regional model and/or distance education, that contribute towards NTCET completion..

These schools may operate under a form of group school model approach, including clustered delivery approaches with schools in school type 1 or 2, or auspiced delivery. Schools within this type should be supported to move towards school type 2, noting however that this may be not possible due to a range of fixed constraints. The key characteristics of school type 3 schools are outlined in section 3.2. One example of school type 3 – Ntaria School - is highlighted here as a reference.

Ntaria School

Ntaria School is a medium-sized school in Hermannsburg (Ntaria), an Aboriginal community 125 kilometres south-west of Alice Springs. The school provides education from preschool to Year 12 with approximately 120 students enrolled. Ntaria School offers several pathways, however, these are not currently leading to NTCET completion. The predominant pathways offered include boarding, core literacy and numeracy, and vocational pathways.

Ntaria School is part of the Trade Training Centre in school program in which schools receive funding to develop or refurbish facilities to support the delivery of vocational programs.

Specifically, Ntaria School's campus includes a leather workshop and welding space. Currently, trainers from RTO visit the school.

Ntaria senior secondary students can access the NTSDE HEAL program to support the development of literacy and numeracy, providing students a pathway to literacy and numeracy. However, the majority of secondary students attend boarding schools in Alice Springs from Year 7.

Due to Ntaria School's relative proximity to a regional centre and existing infrastructure, there is potential for Ntaria School to deliver a range of intentional pathway options and specialised delivery that contributes to NTCET completion, for example through hub models.

School type 4. Delivering to a guaranteed standard of literacy and numeracy

School type 4 refers to isolated small and very remote schools Delivering defined and select pathways to a guaranteed standard of core literacy and numeracy skills (or working towards) and NTCET completion. This level of provision is the result of the current policy position and there being no senior secondary provision in many contexts. For secondary aged students in small and remote communities, the three pathways to Year 12 are to (1) leave the community to attend **boarding school**, (2) **stay in the community and attend the "secondary top" class** in their local primary school, or (3) enrol in distance education.

Some schools do not have the capacity to manage or deliver these pathways or face constraints such as connectivity or distance. With SACE being a flexible senior secondary certificate, and with additional coordination and resource sharing, it is possible to design for a system where all students have a pathway to year 12 completion no matter which context. The system needs to provide the resourcing and support for them to overcome these barriers.

In these contexts, a key consideration for the system is how it can support schools in this context to deliver to a guaranteed literacy and numeracy standard, which is not only critical to schooling success, but also in achieving their aspirations and interests post-schooling – and over time, support them to provide viable pathways to Year 12 completion.

Schools within this type should be supported to move towards school type 3 (through addressing key barriers, though acknowledging there are fixed constraints). **This may require a 'group school model' approach, including clustered delivery with schools in** school type 3 or school type 2 (i.e. as a solution for accessing VET). The key characteristics are outlined in section 3.2. One example of school type 4 – Mount Allan School - is highlighted here as a reference.

Mount Allan School

Mount Allan School is a small very remote school located in Yuelamu, an Aboriginal community 300-kilometres north-west of Alice Springs. The school provides education from pre-primary to Year 12 with approximately 70 students enrolled. There are three classrooms: a primary classroom up to Year 6, and a secondary classroom from Year 7 – 10 (with approximately 22 students enrolled as of 2023).

In Yuelamu, there are limited options for students to complete secondary school and limited intentional pathways. This is predominately due to an isolated and distanced location and lack of connectivity. Noting, that students in Year 11 to Year 12 are welcome to attend Mount Allan School, however, there is no delivery of Stage I and Stage II subjects. Further, due to lack of internet connectivity students are unable to access distance education through NTSDE. Therefore, there are limited opportunities for students to stay in community and complete Year 12.

For students to access secondary education pathways, there is a pathway to boarding school. However, in consultation, it was noted that there are some challenges with students attending boarding schools, including examples where students who are enrolled in boarding schools are placed on a waiting list. The primary school expected to support students in the interim but not being appropriately supported or funded to do so.

The school has a strong connection with the Elders in the community and the potential to offer cultural pathways alongside core literacy and numeracy learning at the school. Cultural pathways offered should be determined in consultation with the local leaders. In consultation, it was noted that students are taken into the bush regularly for cultural training and learning of their clan and kinship. The school expressed for a desire to leverage block intensive models or a network of schools to support the delivery of pathways to Year 12.

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