

# Northern Territory Workforce Development Strategy Consultation 2026 Submission

January 2025

## Northern Territory Council of Government School Organisations (NTCOGSO)

The Northern Territory Council of Government School Organisations (NTCOGSO) welcomes the opportunity to contribute to the 2026 Northern Territory Government Workforce Strategy Consultation.

NTCOGSO is the peak body representing families of children attending Northern Territory government schools. We advocate for quality public education that is inclusive of every child, regardless of location, background or ability.

We work with governing school bodies across urban, regional and remote communities to support strong governance, inclusive education and meaningful parent voice.

Our members represent parents and carers from all 152 government schools across the Northern Territory.

### Introduction

From the perspective of families, schools and communities, workforce development is not a downstream issue. It begins in classrooms, is shaped through schooling experiences, and is influenced by the availability of clear, supported pathways into further education, training and employment.

Schools play a foundational role in shaping the Territory's future workforce. Stable education workforces, strong learning environments and accessible post-school pathways are critical to supporting participation, aspiration and long-term workforce capability.

This submission reflects the lived experience of Northern Territory families and school bodies. In relation to workforce, our concerns cover two key areas:

1. **For our schools now:** ensuring our schools have the workforce they need to ensure our students are set up for success
2. **For the future NT workforce:** ensuring families and students have choice, so that they can develop their skills and passions to support the workforce of the future.

## 1. **For our schools now:** ensuring our schools have the workforce they need to ensure our students are set up for success

Northern Territory government schools continue to experience significant workforce challenges that directly affect student outcomes and family confidence in the public education system. Chronic shortages of teachers, school leaders, support staff and specialist professionals are particularly acute in regional and remote areas, but are increasingly being felt across urban schools as well.

High turnover, reliance on short-term contracts, and difficulties attracting and retaining experienced staff disrupt continuity of learning and place additional pressure on remaining staff and school communities. Families regularly report concerns about frequent staff changes, unfilled vacancies, limited access to specialist services (such as learning support, counselling and allied health), and reduced subject offerings, particularly at secondary level.

NTCOGSO strongly supports a workforce development strategy that recognises schools as critical community workplaces and prioritises stable, well-supported education workforces. This includes:

- Long-term, place-based **workforce planning** for schools, rather than short-term vacancy management. This needs to include visa pathways, and advocacy to the Australian Government around prioritisation of teachers. We are pleased to see that for the 2026 school year, international teachers are part of the strategy to support a teaching workforce in the NT. NT COGSO was pleased to support Tennant Creek to pilot this approach, which was successful and is now being expanded across the Territory.
- Improved incentives to **attract and retain staff** in regional and remote communities. This must come from new investment, and must not be at the expense of funding which should be used for school programs and resources.
- Prioritisation of adequate and safe **housing** in regional and remote areas, through a coordinated strategy which addresses government-owned housing, private leasing and supporting ownership so that educators are encouraged to stay in communities.
- Expanded **pathways for local Territorians**, including Aboriginal educators, education assistants and support staff, to train and progress into teaching and leadership roles.
- Investment in professional learning, mentoring and wellbeing supports to **reduce burnout** and improve retention.

A strong, stable school workforce is foundational to achieving the Territory's broader workforce objectives. Without it, students are less prepared, families disengage, and workforce gaps are perpetuated across generations.

## 2. For the future NT workforce: ensuring families and students have choice, so that they can develop their skills and passions to support the workforce of the future

Schools are the engine for the workforce of the future. Students now, are workers of the future, therefore schools play a central role in shaping the future Northern Territory workforce. For families, meaningful workforce development begins early, with access to high-quality education, diverse learning pathways and clear connections between schooling, training and employment.

Students across the Territory, particularly those in regional and remote communities, often face limited subject choice, restricted access to vocational education and training (VET), and fewer opportunities to explore emerging industries or local employment pathways. This constrains aspirations and reduces the likelihood that young people will be well-placed to support their communities as skilled workers.

NTCOGSO encourages a workforce strategy that:

- Strengthens **partnerships** between schools, training providers, industry, community organisations and importantly families.
- **Expands access** to VET, work-integrated learning and school-based apprenticeships across all regions. Location should not be a barrier.
- Supports **culturally responsive pathways** for Aboriginal students that align with community priorities and local economic opportunities
- Ensures career education is consistent, well-resourced and begins early, enabling students and families to make **informed choices**.

Families want their children to have real options, to pursue higher education, trades, local employment or emerging industries without needing to leave the Territory unless they choose to. Investing in schools as engines of future workforce development is essential to building a skilled, resilient and locally connected NT workforce.

## Workforce development: policy levers considerations

In considering the development of a Northern Territory Workforce Development Strategy, NTCOGSO suggests a number of policy levers available to government that could support stronger workforce outcomes.

### Building the future NT workforce through schooling and pathways

*Relevant to Consultation Questions 2 to 5*

Access to subject choice, vocational learning and meaningful senior secondary pathways plays a significant role in shaping young people's aspirations and post-school options.

Where pathways are limited, inconsistently delivered or unavailable locally, students and families experience constrained choice, reduced confidence and increased pressure to leave their community or the Territory to pursue education and employment opportunities.

Strengthening pathways through schooling is central to long-term workforce development and participation.

- Improving consistency in senior secondary subject and VET offerings across regions, so location does not determine access to pathways.
- Supporting flexible delivery models that enable students in regional and remote communities to access subjects and qualifications not available locally.
- Strengthening alignment between school subject availability, VET offerings and identified local and regional workforce needs.
- Improving visibility of post-school pathways for students and families through clear pathway mapping linked to real employment opportunities.
- Supporting schools to partner with local employers, training providers and community organisations to create meaningful work-integrated learning opportunities.
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### Supported pathways and transitions

*Relevant to Consultation Questions 2 and 3*

School-to-work transition is as an area requiring stronger coordination between education, training and employment systems.

While transition outcomes are recognised as important, they are not routinely embedded within program accountability frameworks in a way that enables consistent monitoring or targeted intervention.

Post-school outcomes sit across multiple systems, including education, training, employment and social services. Unless datasets are deliberately linked, outcomes remain difficult to track.

As a result, visibility of whether school-based learning translates into sustained employment is limited.

Strengthening supported entry, progression and retention mechanisms represents a practical approach to improving workforce transitions.

## Schools as the foundation of the future workforce

*Relevant to Consultation Questions 2, 3, 12 and 13*

Students in Northern Territory schools are the Territory's future workforce. Workforce development begins well before entry to employment and must consider the quality, stability and equity of educational experiences across the schooling years.

Ongoing workforce shortages, high turnover and difficulty attracting and retaining staff in schools continue to affect continuity of learning, student engagement and family confidence, particularly in regional and remote communities. These challenges have long-term implications for workforce participation, as students' access to opportunity is directly influenced by the stability of the education system that supports them.

A workforce strategy that seeks to strengthen participation, capability and productivity must recognise schools as critical workforce environments and education as a core pillar of workforce development.

Workforce stability in schools also plays an important role in the retention of families within communities. Frequent staff turnover, disrupted learning programs and reduced access to specialist supports can influence family decisions about whether to remain in a community, particularly in regional and remote locations.

Where families relocate due to education instability, this contributes to population movement, reduced workforce participation of parents and carers, and long-term impacts on community sustainability.

Strengthening workforce stability in schools supports not only student outcomes, but broader family retention and workforce participation across the Territory.

To support workforce participation and long-term capability, the Workforce Development Strategy should recognise education workforce stability as a foundational system requirement.

- Prioritising education workforce stability as a driver of student engagement and family retention.
- Strengthening cross-government coordination to support continuity of education services in regional and remote communities.
- Embedding school workforce stability as a contributor to long-term workforce participation outcomes.

## Workforce attraction and retention

*Relevant to Consultation Questions 12 to 15*

Evidence across education and training sectors demonstrates that early career experience strongly influences workforce retention.

- Pilot support for new (early career) educators to aid their professional transition, quality teaching and retention
- Improve incentives to attract and retain staff in regional and remote communities

In the Northern Territory, retention is also influenced by system timing and administrative arrangements. Educational leadership positions are often advertised late in the calendar year, despite national employment markets operating earlier. Many principals and senior leaders seek to secure positions by Term 4 to enable relocation, housing arrangements and family planning prior to the commencement of the school year.

Housing arrangements further affect retention, particularly in regional and remote communities where Government Employee Housing is essential. Misalignment between lease cycles, inspection processes and workforce commencement periods can delay access to housing and contribute to early attrition.

Aligning recruitment timelines and housing processes with education workforce cycles would support smoother transitions, improve certainty and strengthen retention outcomes.

## Foundation skills as participation enablers

*Relevant to Consultation Questions 6 and 7*

Foundation skills including literacy, numeracy and digital capability underpin workforce participation across all sectors.

Strengthening educator capability in foundation skills delivery, particularly through community-based and regional models, supports engagement in training and employment and improves participation outcomes.

## Place-based workforce approaches

*Relevant to Consultation Questions 6 to 11*

Place-based workforce planning is fundamental in the Northern Territory context.

Approaches that are co-designed with communities, recognise local labour markets and enable training and employment without relocation are more likely to support sustainable workforce outcomes, particularly in remote communities.

## Evaluation and learning

*Relevant to Consultation Question 1*

Workforce development initiatives benefit from clear evaluation frameworks that enable learning, refinement and supports evidence-informed decision-making and long-term workforce sustainability.

## Improving connectivity and practical access

*Relevant to Consultation Questions 8 and 9*

Improving connectivity must address barriers that limit students' practical access to education, training and employment pathways.

Connectivity is also affected by practical enablers such as driver licensing. In many communities, students leave school without access to lessons, supervised driving hours or understanding of licensing pathways. Where public transport is limited, the absence of a driver licence can restrict access to training and employment.

Addressing these barriers would strengthen school-to-work transitions and improve workforce participation outcomes.

## Families, pathways and navigation support

*Relevant to Consultation Questions 2, 3, 6 and 7*

Workforce development is a whole-of-system responsibility that extends beyond schools. However, for families and young people, engagement with workforce pathways most commonly begins during the schooling years.

Workforce development is more effective when families understand, trust and are able to engage with education, training and employment systems while their children are still at school. Early engagement supports informed decision-making and smoother transitions.

Current approaches to communication often rely on families navigating complex agency websites that present information in continuous text formats. This can limit accessibility and understanding.

Government school websites also vary in the quality, currency and completeness of pathways information, with responsibility often falling to individual schools.

- A system-level approach would improve equity of access through:
  - Standardised pathways information developed centrally by NTG and made available across all government school websites.
  - Consistent pathways pages across government schools.
  - Clear identification of local contacts for pathway support.
  
- Early and ongoing engagement would be strengthened through:
  - Coordinated NTG agency led information and feedback sessions delivered in partnership with schools.
  - Progressive delivery of pathways information over time.
  - Repeated messaging at key transition points.
  - Recorded webinars accessible to all families.

Supporting families to understand pathways strengthens student confidence, improves decision-making and increases the likelihood of successful transitions into training or employment.

## Contact:

NTCOGSO was invited by the Minister to participate in the closed roundtable held on Thursday 20 November. Unfortunately, no online participation option was provided, which excluded our Executive, the majority of whom reside outside Darwin.

It was disappointing that the roundtable did not include regional voices, given the significance of workforce development for regional and remote communities.

We have written to Minister Cahill seeking a meeting to discuss our insights to inform the development of the Strategy.

An appendix follows, outlining consolidated policy levers aligned to the consultation questions.

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Appendix A following

## Appendix A

# Workforce development policy lever considerations

*Grouped by consultation question reference*

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### **Governance, coordination and evaluation**

#### **Relevant to Consultation Question 1**

- Embed evaluation frameworks in workforce initiatives from inception.
  - Measure transition outcomes, not only commencements.
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#### **Consultation Questions 2 to 5**

#### **Schooling, pathways and future workforce development**

- Improve consistency and access to senior secondary subject and VET offerings across all regions.
  - Support flexible and blended delivery models to expand pathway access.
  - Strengthen alignment between school subject availability, VET delivery and local labour demand.
  - Improve visibility of post-school pathways through clear pathway mapping linked to real employment opportunities.
  - Support work-integrated learning partnerships between schools, employers and training providers.
  - Ensure career education is consistent, well-resourced and begins early.
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#### **Consultation Questions 2 and 3**

#### **Supported pathways and transitions**

- Strengthen partnerships between schools, families, training providers, industry and community organisations.
- Coordinate transition planning between schools, training providers and employers.
- Support culturally responsive pathways for Aboriginal students aligned with community priorities and local economic opportunities.
- Establish structured handover arrangements for students transitioning from school into training or employment.
- Establish local transition coordination roles to assist students and families to navigate

post-school pathways.

- Embed transition outcomes as measures of success within relevant programs.
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## **Consultation Questions 6 and 7**

### **Participation, equity and foundation skills**

- Strengthen educator capability in foundation skills delivery.
  - Improve adult literacy, numeracy and digital capability as workforce participation enablers.
  - Support excellence and development of the Adult Community Education workforce.
  - Support re-engagement pathways for parents and carers.
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## **Consultation Questions 6 to 11**

### **Place-based workforce approaches**

- Implement place-based workforce planning across regions and remote communities.
  - Support community-led workforce design and priority setting.
  - Enable training and employment pathways that do not require relocation.
  - Embed Aboriginal workforce development across place-based initiatives.
  - Expand pathways for local Territorians, including Aboriginal educators and education support staff.
  - Support local employers and community organisations to act as trainee and apprentice hosts.
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## **Consultation Questions 8 and 9**

### **Connectivity and practical access**

- Support supervised driving programs for secondary students.
  - Recognise driver licensing as a workforce participation enabler.
  - Improve transport and accommodation supports linked to training, work experience and employment.
  - Align education, training and transport planning to reduce participation barriers.
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## Consultation Questions 12 to 15

### Workforce attraction and retention

- Pilot early career support programs for educators.
  - Improve induction and mentoring in regional and remote communities.
  - Improve incentives to attract and retain staff in regional and remote areas.
  - Prioritise adequate and safe housing in regional and remote communities.
  - Invest in professional learning, mentoring and wellbeing supports.
  - Align recruitment timelines with national employment markets.
  - Improve Government Employee Housing lease alignment with school-year cycles.
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### System-level workforce levers

- Strengthen Territory-level implementation of existing VET workforce commitments, ensuring pathways are visible, accessible and informed by the experiences of students, families and schools.
- Strengthen and expand industry professional to VET educator pathway models within existing agreements, with a focus on regional and remote delivery and local workforce sustainability.
- Strengthen local workforce pipelines into education and training roles.
- Recognise education workforce stability as a contributor to family retention.
- Prioritise schools as workforce infrastructure within the Territory economy.

**KEY:** Embed family and community engagement as a core workforce system function, recognising that effective participation in education, training and employment pathways depends on families' understanding, trust and ability to navigate the system during the schooling years.