



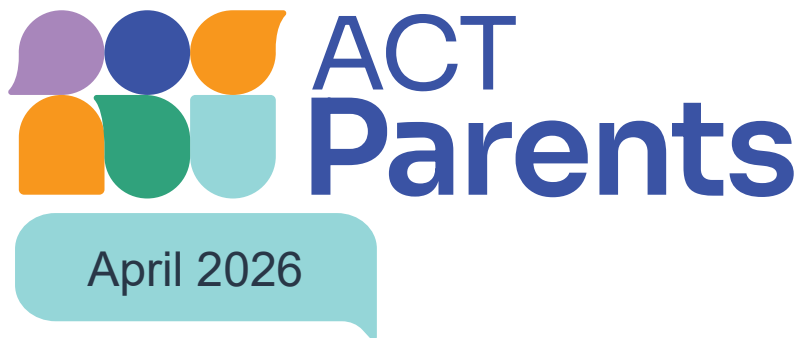
Submission cover sheet

Inquiry into E-PET-077-25: Access to 11-12 ATAR language courses in 2026

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Submission to the ACT Legislative Assembly inquiry into E-petition 077-25: Access to 11-12 ATAR language courses in 2026



We are the peak body for parent associations, representing over 60,000 parents in ACT public schools. Authorised by Veronica Elliott for ACT Parents.

We acknowledge the traditional custodians of the lands where we live, work and learn, and pay our respects to elders past, present, and future.

Introduction

ACT Parents is the peak body representing parents and carers of children in ACT public schools. We advocate for quality, inclusive, and accessible education, and support a network of volunteer-run Parents and Citizens (P&C) Associations across the Territory. Our work includes capacity-building for P&Cs, advising government on system-wide public-school issues, and amplifying the parent voice in education policy.

We welcome this inquiry as an opportunity to shine a light on language education in ACT public schools and urge the Committee to consider this petition in the broader context of the entire ACT public school system.

Background

Language education in ACT public schools has been a policy issue for a number of years. In 2018, the ACT Legislative Assembly passed a motion calling for the development of an action plan to encourage, improve and support language education in Canberra schools as part of the Future of Education Strategy.

In 2022, ACT Parents participated in a subsequent consultation process on language education in ACT public schools, including providing feedback on discussion materials and proposed actions. That process considered issues such as workforce planning, pedagogy and delivery models, curriculum, policy settings and partnerships. Our feedback at that time highlighted concerns about uneven provision across the ACT and the lack of clear, consistent pathways for students to continue language learning across different stages of schooling. At that time, mapping undertaken by the Education Directorate showed that there were 14 ACT public schools that did not offer any language education, and these schools were concentrated in certain areas of the Territory.

ACT Parents has consistently raised concerns that access to language education remains uneven across the ACT public education system. Many students do not have consistent opportunities to study a language in their local primary or high school, despite languages being a mandated part of the Australian Curriculum. As a result, opportunities to commence and continue language learning, including into senior secondary schooling, are not equitably shared across the system.

This is an important equity issue. Access to language education should not depend on where a student lives or whether their local school is able to attract and retain language teachers. Yet differences in provision mean that some students are able to build sustained language learning pathways, while others have little or no opportunity to do so.

The current inquiry should therefore be understood in this broader policy context. While the immediate focus of the E-petition is access to 11–12 ATAR language courses in 2026, the

underlying issue is the need for a more equitable, system-wide approach to language education across ACT public schools.

Discussion

Before discussing the current issues facing ACT public schools in the delivery of language education, it is important to acknowledge the benefits that language education provides to students. Language education offers important educational, social and cultural benefits for students. It supports communication skills, intercultural understanding and engagement with the linguistic and cultural diversity of Australia and the broader world. The Australian Curriculum recognises languages as supporting communication, reflection on language, and intercultural understanding, and notes that language learning broadens students' horizons in relation to personal, social, cultural and employment opportunities.

Continuity of access at college level

In addressing the specific issues raised in the E-Petition, ACT Parents acknowledges the importance of language pathways to enable students to continue and progress in their chosen language and achieve a level of proficiency. However, we also note that while students and families may be disappointed when a preferred subject is not available at their local college, they do have the option to apply to an out of area college. We note that particularly at college level, students make decisions about where to enrol based on subject offerings, specialist programs and pathway options. ACT Parents notes that existing enrolment arrangements allow out-of-area applications to be considered where a curriculum choice is not available at a student's Priority Enrolment Area school, including at college level.

In circumstances where a student cannot study their preferred language at their local college, but can access that subject through another ACT college, the issue is better understood as one of preference, rather than complete loss of access. This is not to dismiss the practical difficulties that can arise when students may need to attend an out of area college in order to study their preferred subjects. Rather, it is to note that the language may still be available, but not necessarily through a direct pathway from an in-area high school to an in-area college.

ACT Parents acknowledges that the offering provided by CIT Solutions enabled students to attend their local college as well as continue their language pathway outside of normal school hours. This provided a valuable option for some students. We acknowledge that the cessation of this program may have resulted in some students having to make difficult decisions about where and what to study. Again, we note that often students make decisions on where to study at college based on the subject offerings of their choice.

The broader issue: unequal access to language education and language pathways across the system

In ACT Parents' view, the more pressing policy issue is not only senior secondary access, but the uneven provision of language education across the ACT from the primary years onward. Many students in ACT public schools do not have any access to language education in either primary school or high school, despite languages being mandated in the Australian Curriculum. As a result, many students never have the opportunity to develop the skills and interest necessary to continue a language into senior secondary studies.

This broader inequity should be central to the Committee's consideration. The key question is whether the ACT education system is providing all students with fair and meaningful access to language learning throughout their schooling.

ACT Parents is particularly concerned about the uneven distribution of language opportunities across the ACT. Tuggeranong and some parts of Belconnen appear to be especially affected by limited access. Where students are unable to access language learning in their local school communities, their future choices are constrained long before they reach college.

The example provided in the petition illustrates a student who has had the benefit of language education through earlier years of schooling and who, still has, at least in principle, a pathway (through an out of area enrolment) to continue at senior secondary level. Many other students across the ACT have not had the same opportunity. For those students, the issue is not whether a language is available at a preferred college, but whether they have had any meaningful chance to study a language at all.

A related issue, and one that sits at the heart of this inquiry, is the coherence of language pathways across the ACT public education system. Consultation papers from 2022 showed that even where schools were able to offer a language there was not always an opportunity to continue that language from primary school to high school or high school to college. For some students changing language at key transitions may provide an opportunity to try something new and learn about a different culture, however, it reduces the opportunity for students to gain proficiency in a language. Continuity matters because language learning is cumulative. Where students are required to change languages at key transition points, or where no continuation pathway exists, the opportunity to build proficiency is reduced.

In order to better understand the provision of language education and the language pathways across the ACT, an up-to-date mapping process should be undertaken which shows what languages are offered at each school connected by pathways to the corresponding high school and college.

A system-wide response is needed

ACT Parents submits that the Committee should view the current inquiry as part of a wider question about language education provision across the ACT public school system.

While immediate arrangements are needed to ensure that students already studying a language can continue into Years 11 and 12, a longer-term response must focus on building language education capacity across the system. This includes ensuring access from primary school, supporting continuity between school stages, and addressing inequities in provision between different geographic areas and school communities.

A system in which only some students can access language learning in primary or secondary school will inevitably produce inequitable outcomes at college level. Expanding equitable access earlier in schooling is therefore essential to ensure all ACT public education students have the opportunity to continue language education into the senior secondary years.

Recommendations

ACT Parents recommends that the ACT Government:

1. ensure that students who have commenced studying a language have a viable pathway to continue that language in Years 11 and 12, including through out of area enrolment or other flexible delivery arrangements;
2. undertake and publish an up-to-date mapping of language education provision across ACT public schools, including pathways for continuity from primary school to high school and from high school to college;
3. prioritise investment in language education capacity across the ACT public education system, particularly in areas where access is currently limited, including Tuggeranong and parts of Belconnen; and
4. develop a long-term strategy to ensure all ACT public school students have access to language learning, so that learning a language does not depend on postcode or the ability of principals to secure a language teacher.

Conclusion

ACT Parents supports continued access to language learning for students in Years 11-12. We acknowledge the example provided in the petition and understand the disappointment faced when a preferred option is no longer available. However, our concerns about language education in the ACT are broader and more systemic.

The central issue is whether all ACT students have fair and meaningful access to language education from primary school, and whether the system is structured to support continuity of learning through to senior secondary level.

ACT Parents encourages the Committee to recommend both short-term measures that preserve continuation pathways for current students, and longer-term reforms that build language education capacity across the ACT public education system as a whole.

This inquiry presents an important opportunity not only to address immediate continuation issues for current students, but also to strengthen language education as a genuine system-wide entitlement for all ACT public school students.