



Submission cover sheet

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

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Terms of Reference Inquiry into E-Petition 077-25: Access to 11–12 ATAR language courses in 2026

Submitted by: Parent of CAL/CIT affected student

Date: 8 April 2026

Summary

This submission draws on my experience as a parent whose children committed to long-term language study in good faith, with the reasonable expectation that this pathway would continue through to Year 11–12 ATAR-accredited courses. I believe the loss of these courses will disadvantage ACT students, undermine years of prior learning, and reduce access to competitive university pathways at a critical stage of educational planning. I support the replication of the program within the ACT Education Directorate from 2026 to ensure continuity, fairness, and meaningful language learning opportunities.

Background

Thank you for the opportunity to consider my submission. By way of background, I am a father of two daughters. My eldest daughter graduated from Hawker College in 2024 and was a student who utilised the Canberra Academy of Languages (CAL)/CIT to study Japanese. Japanese was a continuation of studies at both primary school at St Matthew's in Page, and high school at St Francis of Xavier in Florey, for a collective period of approximately 10 years. She excelled at this subject, and Japanese was used in the calculation of her ATAR. She received university offers at both the ANU and the University of Canberra and is currently studying a degree in Built Environment at UC.

My youngest daughter entered Hawker College in 2026, and similarly to her sister, had studied Japanese in primary school and again at high school. She intended to do Japanese as a continuation of strong academic performance from SFX where she received consecutive years of academic merit awards in this subject.

As a parent who opted to send their children through the Catholic education system, Hawker College was the first opportunity for my children to participate and use public education in the ACT. The pattern and choice of schools undertaken reflected my own education pathway as a Canberran who completed studies at Hawker College in 1989, of which I am very grateful and was then a common path to tread for Belconnen-located students. I believe as parents we planned responsibly, trusted the system we enrolled our daughters in encouraged long-term language study, and there would be stability and consistency in offerings.

My work background is in university admissions processes, which I have overseen for more than 25 years at universities in the ACT and NSW. This includes working at tertiary admission centres such as the Universities Admissions Centre (UAC). I have expert knowledge in university admissions processes, the calculation of ATARs and selection ranks, and how adjustment factors (bonus points) are used – and how this affects the choices students make, and the courses they can gain admission into.

For myself as a backpacker many years ago who was fortunate to travel extensively (albeit on the smell of an oily rag), the challenge and joy pre-internet/smartphones of spitting out clumsily a few words of local language to communicate and get a message across was a thrill and a pleasure. I wanted to ensure 2nd language acquisition was something my children participated early on in life. I saw it as a sound investment for the enrichment of their lives, recognising while it is not effortless - the relative ease in learning a language as a child vs trying to pick up a 2nd language as an adult is markedly different.

Student commitment

Participation in CAL/CIT language courses required a significant commitment from students and families. My eldest daughter usually made her own arrangements via public transport to get to her Japanese studies in Ainslie School outside of normal school hours. This meant additional costs, time and effort but was something she enjoyed, was beneficial to her language skills, and I feel encouraged the development of time-management skills and autonomy with her learning. Undoubtedly her dedication to these studies provided a lesson that achievement in things takes effort and commitment.

I believe the discontinuation of these courses removes a proven pathway that enabled motivated students to pursue rigorous academic study beyond what was available at their local colleges. For students who have already invested many years in learning a language, the loss of this pathway effectively wastes their prior learning and discourages long-term educational commitment and further 2nd language development.

Lack of Promotion

Based on my experience across two enrolment cohorts at Hawker College, information about CAL/CIT language pathways was not systematically communicated to students or families. Even at formal enrolment sessions, there appeared to be limited awareness that languages such as Japanese could be continued externally.

To me, it was never promoted or marketed strongly, and I cannot recall seeing a poster or brochure, or other prominent advertising material. I think CAL was a passionate and very well intended endeavour, but it had more of a family/community type word-of-

mouth approach. I assumed the transfer to CIT would have propelled this option into a more widely used and profitable operation, including use of more accessible CIT campuses but clearly not.

I find it very hard to believe there is not wide-spread desire to do these languages in Canberra – and in the case of Japanese, the country is now Australia's preferred overseas destination of choice. I challenge the committee to not find an annoying work colleague who has just come back from a trip to Japan! There is clearly a desire to connect culturally, recreationally, and socially to this country, as with many others.

To that end, I believe the promotion of the CAL/CIT language option has contributed to the decision made - and given the strong participation in language learning in Years 7–10, it is reasonable to conclude that a viable student cohort exists that has not been engaged with.

Adjustment factor (bonus point) subject schemes for university admission

Such is the value of foreign language knowledge and the academic skills required, many Australian universities provide an increase in selection rank for students who have completed studies in foreign languages (Languages Other Than English).

These adjustment factors (essentially bonus points) are added to the student's ATAR and make them more competitive for admission. This may mean the difference between gaining admission to a preferred course and university, or forcing the student to make alternate and less desirable plans.

A cursory glance at university websites and tertiary admission centres show across the board throughout Australia, language studies are recognised for the inherent intellectual and cognitive capability they require, and for those that do them reward by increases in their selection ranks. Some of these include UC, ANU, UNSW, UTS, ACU, Macquarie, Monash, UQ, QUT, Adelaide Uni, UWA, and CDU.

Bottom line there are students now who will not be able to continue their language studies from their earlier schooling, losing their investment of years of study and skills in 2nd language acquisition. These students will also be disadvantaged in the selection processes for universities because they cannot draw upon and leverage their aptitude and achievement in these subjects – neither in the calculation of the ATAR, or the adjustment factor (bonus points) to their selection ranks.

Sure.... they can switch attention and efforts and seek achievement in other areas such as Maths and Science - but for some students who may be more creative, have strengths in humanities or more liberal arts-minded areas, they may not realise the same sort of academic performance and enjoyment as they would with a language. The reality is the more you like something, the better you do at it!

Recommendations

I recommend that the Committee:

1. Support the immediate replication of Year 11–12 ATAR language courses within the ACT Education Directorate from 2026.
2. Ensure courses are centrally delivered and accessible to students from all ACT colleges.
3. Require systematic promotion of available language pathways to Year 10 students and families.
4. Consider the ATAR and tertiary admission impacts when assessing the educational consequences of program cessation.

Thank you for consideration of this submission. In times of increasing global uncertainty and conflict, I would hope we want Canberrans to be culturally aware, internationally exposed, and able to communicate beyond our own limited borders. The study of languages fosters these qualities – and access to these opportunities must therefore remain a valued part of that consideration.

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