



Submission cover sheet

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

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Senior Secondary Languages Central Course Provision

Submission to the Standing Committee on Social Policy, ACT Legislative Assembly

31 March 2026

Context

This submission calls upon the ACT Government to take on the responsibility for delivery of Year 11-12 ATAR language courses through the ACT Education Directorate, commencing with Year 11 students in February. This action is essential to fulfil the government's own policy commitments to language education, preserve pathways for students who have studied languages in Years 7-10, and ensure equitable access to language learning for all ACT secondary students.

The cessation of CIT Solutions' Year 11-12 ATAR language program and CIT's confirmation that it will not accept new enrolments from 2026 creates an immediate gap in provision that directly contradicts the government's stated priorities and strategic commitments to language education. An in-house Education Directorate program would restore continuity of provision and honour the government's repeated commitments to support multilingual education as a core component of the ACT's educational offering.

Recent national research by the Australian Federation of Modern Language Teachers Associations (AFMLTA), culminating in the National Languages Plan and Strategy (NLPS, 2024), identifies the ACT's current senior secondary language gap as a critical equity issue. National standards call for centrally delivered supplementary courses to support language retention beyond Year 10, especially where provision cannot be guaranteed at every local college. These models are acknowledged as best practice for enabling equity and inclusion for all student cohorts.^{1 2 & 3}

The Program Gap

For the 2024 and 2025 academic years, students completing Years 11 and 12 ATAR language courses were able to access provision through CIT Solutions and CIT. In 2026, these programs were delivered only for Year 12 students who had previously been enrolled in Year 11 with CIT Solutions in 2025. Prior to this, from 2017 to 2023, the Canberra Academy of Languages (CAL) provided equivalent Year 11-12 ATAR language courses for students unable to access languages through their local colleges. These programs delivered:

- One two-hour face-to-face lesson per week in a central Canberra location outside normal school hours, along with two hours per week of designated set work, for a total of four hours per week over 13 to 15 weeks per semester (a total of 60+ hours per unit of study, above the mandated 55 hours for a standard BSSS unit of study)
- Flexible, accessible provision allowing students to undertake most studies at their local college
- Six language options: French, German, Japanese, Korean, Spanish, and Tamil
- Equitable access for all Canberra students, particularly those whose local schools do not offer their chosen language

This model addressed a known gap in language education provision, specifically serving students who wish to study a language when their home college does not offer that language.

The Current Situation

On 29 October 2025, CIT CEO Dr. Margot McNeill publicly confirmed in an ABC Canberra Breakfast interview ⁹ that senior secondary language course provision is not a priority of CIT. As a result of this decision, there is no longer a defined pathway to continue their chosen language at ATAR level if their local college does not offer it. The AFMLTA NLPS project confirms that transition discontinuity—especially at Year 10–11—is the strongest national driver of language attrition.¹ Addressing this transition point with accessible, high-quality pathways for Years 11–12 was a central NLPS recommendation. The withdrawal of CIT Solutions provision in the ACT thus represents not only a local service gap but a challenge to national participation and equity benchmarks.¹³

Government Commitments and Policy Foundations

The ACT Government has repeatedly affirmed its commitment to language education through multiple policy statements, strategic plans, and statutory commitments. These commitments directly support the case for maintaining Year 11-12 ATAR language provision.

1. Language Education Action Plan (April 2024)

The Language Education Action Plan, ⁴ published by the ACT Education Directorate in April 2024, states: *“The Future of Education Strategy ... supports the delivery of high quality and innovative language education programs in ACT public schools.”*

The document explicitly recognises that language education provides students with skills to access an increasingly global environment and that “studying language education benefits cognitive function and assists with critical thinking and problem solving as well as making students more culturally aware.”

The Action Plan commits to “Provide access to pathways for proficiency options in high school and colleges to facilitate consistency in language provision across school years. This includes tracking of pathway options and providing advice on pathway options” and to “Forge stronger connections between ACT public schools and community language schools (for example Canberra Academy of Languages) and explore potential ways to include and incorporate more community languages into ACT public schools”

2. The Future of Education Strategy

The Language Education Action Plan explicitly references and is grounded in the Future of Education Strategy, ⁵ which provides the overarching strategic framework. The Strategy's commitment to “excellent, fair and equitable education” and to ensure “all students feel safe, valued and supported to thrive” directly encompasses language education provision.

3. Independent Review of Investment in ACT Community Language Schools (2021)

In December 2021, the Independent Review of Investment in ACT Community Language Schools, ⁶ commissioned by the ACT Government and presented to the Assembly by the Minister for Multicultural Affairs, documented the critical importance of language education and recognised the government's role in supporting it. The review noted that *“Studies have demonstrated that people who speak more than one language have improved memory, problem-solving, and critical-thinking skills [and] ... in an increasingly interconnected and interdependent world, proficiency in another language gave students a vital skill to engage with the world in a more meaningful way while better preparing them to compete and succeed in the global economy.”*

4. Review of Languages in the ACT Senior Secondary Curriculum (2016)

The Report of the Review of Languages in the ACT Senior Secondary Curriculum (2016) ⁷ established that:

- The ACT Board of Senior Secondary Studies (BSSS) makes provision for a range of language courses at beginning, continuing, and advanced levels.
- Multiple pathways exist for students to study languages.

- The system is designed to provide flexibility and inclusivity for diverse language learners.

The review confirmed that the ACT senior secondary system was intentionally structured to “enable students to study languages,” supporting the principle that access to language pathways is fundamental to the system's design.

5. ACT Multicultural Framework and Action Plans

Implementation of the proposal in this submission would help in achieving outcomes recommended in the ACT Multicultural Framework and Action Plans.⁸ These include objectives listed in the Second Action Plan:

- Accessible and responsive services
- Enhanced citizenship, participation and social cohesion
- Capitalising on the benefits of our cultural diversity.

The Identified Need: Filling a Known Gap

Importance of language learning recognised in key reports

The importance of language learning is widely recognised and is documented in key reports in Australian and international contexts. These include:

- Towards a National Plan and Strategy for Languages Education in Australia (NLPS, AFMLTA, 2024)⁹
- The Benefits of Learning Additional Languages (IBO, 2025)¹¹
- Learning from high-performing jurisdictions to support the development of a clear rationale for languages learning (Fernandez & Gearon Department of Education and Training Victoria 2011)¹⁴
- Senior Secondary Languages Education Research Project: Policy and Literature Review (Kohler & Curnow Uni SA 2014)¹⁵
- Senior Secondary Languages Education Research Project: Final report (Asialink & University of Melbourne 2014)¹²
- Learning from high-performing jurisdictions to support the development of a clear rationale for languages learning (Fernandez & Gearon Department of Education and Training Victoria 2011)¹⁴

Refer to the References section at the end of this submission for internet links.

Recognition of the Gap

The Language Education Action Plan, issued in April 2024, explicitly acknowledges a provision gap. Action 7 commits to providing “access to pathways for proficiency options in high school and colleges to facilitate consistency in language provision across school years.”

The CAL and CIT Solutions programs directly addressed this gap by serving:

1. Students whose senior secondary day schools do not offer courses in their chosen language
2. Heritage language learners seeking to maintain proficiency in their family or cultural language
3. Students with diverse linguistic
4. All ACT students, regardless of which college they attend or where they live within the Territory

National longitudinal data demonstrate that students forced to discontinue language education after Year 10 are highly unlikely to re-engage with language study at university. Such discontinuities disproportionately affect students in less populous subjects and those whose local colleges lack specific language offerings relevant to students’ own learning priorities. Guaranteeing ACT-wide pathways for all students wishing to continue their languages to Year 12 is a critical equity imperative and directly aligns with NLPS priorities.⁹

Metrics demonstrating deficiency in system performance

The ACT school system is performing poorly in terms of capacity building in language skills at a working knowledge level. These are skills that can form the basis of a meaningful contribution in work or community

interaction with counterparts (including overseas work counterparts) whose first language is the target language of learning for the ACT graduating student. This is especially evident in the proportion of Year 12 graduating cohorts completing a language major at continuing level.

The system cannot claim to build meaningful capacity at the requisite level through beginning language courses, because most students in these courses realistically will not achieve working knowledge at a level sufficient for meaningful interaction of any complexity in the target language.

Nor can it claim credit for building capacity for most students completing a major in advanced language courses, because most students deemed eligible to enrol in these courses have achieved working knowledge of the target language prior to commencement in their senior secondary studies, through family background or extended stays overseas. The notable exceptions are those who have progressed through the bilingual French program at Telopea Park School.

Completion rates for continuing level senior secondary language majors or the equivalent in ACT government schools do not compare well with those for non-government ACT schools. Overall ACT figures also are lower than those for NSW schools and they are much lower than rates in South Australia. The table below compares the figures for completions of language majors at continuing level in the ACT (overall, government and non-government) with the figures for NSW in 2025. Victorian data for 2025 is not yet available (latest is 2024). As the seat of national government, Canberra’s senior secondary completion rates in languages should be well ahead of other Australian jurisdictions, but they are not.

Category	Pct of cohort who completed language majors at continuing level (2025)
ACT overall	4.34%
ACT government schools	3.67%
ACT non-government schools	4.96%
NSW overall	4.61%
South Australia overall	6.69%

Evidence of ongoing community demand and commitment

The increased uptake throughout the years of operation of the Canberra Academy of Languages (CAL) from 2017 to 2023 and continued operation of these programs through 2024 and 2025 demonstrates ongoing demand. The submission of a petition to the ACT Legislative Assembly in October 2025, calling for the restoration of this provision, further evidences the community's recognition of the need and the gap created by CIT's withdrawal.

The number of languages taught increased from one in 2017 to six in 2022-23. Languages taught in the final two years were French, German, Japanese, Korean, Spanish and Tamil.

At a glance – CAL students, schools, languages:

2017: 2 students, 2 schools, 1 language

2018: 5 students, 4 schools, 1 language

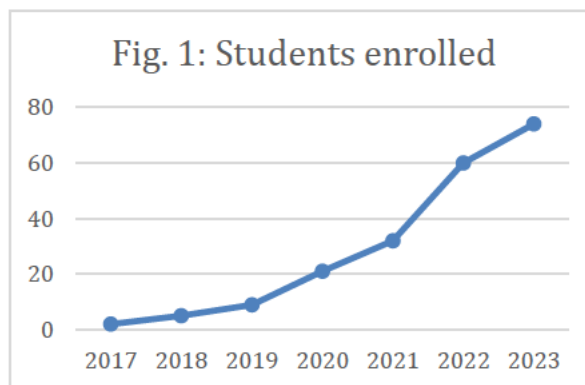
2019: 9 students, 6 schools (incl. CIT), 2 languages

2020: 21 students, 12 schools, 4 languages

2021: 32 students, 13 schools, 5 languages

2022: 60 students,* 19 schools, 6 languages

2023: 74 students,* 19 schools, 6 languages



* The figure for 2022 is the average of enrolments in the two semesters. For 2023, it is based on Semester 1.

Systemic Benefits

Research cited in government documents demonstrates that language learning:

- Enhances cognitive function and critical thinking
- Improves academic outcomes across all subject areas, including English
- Develops cultural competency and global awareness
- Prepares students for participation in an interconnected global economy
- Supports identity formation for students from multilingual backgrounds

Broader Economic, Social and Cultural Benefits

Attached to this submission is an Appendix, which is a Research Summary of the Benefits of Language Education in Secondary Schools. Extensive research since 2010 shows that secondary-level language education delivers substantial benefits across educational, economic, social and cultural dimensions. These benefits extend from individual cognitive development to broader societal advantages, positioning language education as a strategic investment in human capital and social cohesion.

Alignment with Government Commitments: Central ATAR Language Provision To Complement Day School Programs Fulfils Stated Principles

Central provision of Year 11-12 ATAR language program complementing day school programs directly implements the government's own stated principles and commitments:

Government Commitment	How Proposed Program Fulfils It
“All students have access to options for language proficiency”	Program provides equitable access to all students regardless of their home college's offerings
“Consistency in language education programs” across school years	Program preserves continuity of language pathways from Years 7-10 to Years 11-12 ATAR
“Pathways for proficiency options in high school and colleges” with “tracking of pathway options”	Program offers defined pathways and clearly communicates options to students and parents
Language education as “one of the eight learning areas”	Program recognises languages as a core curriculum area deserving dedicated provision
“Flexible and innovative solutions for students wishing to undertake a pathway for proficiency”	One 2-hour weekly session outside school hours allows students to pursue languages flexibly
“Forge stronger connections... with community language schools”	Program may leverage expertise from CAL and existing language provider networks
Support for “students from schools across the Territory”	Program provides Territory-wide accessible provision, not limited to specific locations or colleges

The Model: Proven, Sustainable, and Ready to Implement

Design and Delivery

The AFMLTA’s required program standard for languages education specifies 240 minutes per week in the senior years as ideal, distributed over at least three sessions.³ While the ACT’s interim model blends a central face-to-face group session with significant independent work, it aligns with national best practice when properly structured, adequately resourced, and BSSS-accredited.²

The proposed program replicates the proven CAL (2017-2023) and CIT Solutions (2024-2025) model:

- Location : Central Canberra location, accessible via public transport
- Timing: One two-hour face-to-face lesson per week, scheduled outside regular school hours, supplemented by two hours per week of designated set work
- Languages: French, German, Japanese, Korean, Spanish, Tamil (initially; expandable, for example to cater for additional languages such as Hindi or Punjabi for which demand has been identified)
- Proficiency Levels: Beginning, Continuing, and Advanced to accommodate diverse student cohorts
- Assessment: BSSS-accredited assessment contributing to official ATAR calculation
- Accessibility: Open to all ACT students regardless of home college or residential location

National evaluations recognize the merit of out-of-school, after-hours, and hybrid models in supporting student retention where college-based options are unavailable.³ However, robust group learning remains essential: these alternatives should supplement, not replace, quality face-to-face provision. Ongoing support, teacher professional development, and formal recognition are critical to program success.³

Implementation Timeline

Immediate Actions (June/July 2026):

- Government announces a commitment to establish program within Education Directorate
- Allocation of budget (a significant portion of the required funds coming from cost recovery via enrolment fees or from per capita student funding allocations)
- Confirm the continuation of the cross-sectoral model used by CAL and CIT, where students from government secondary colleges as well as Catholic and independent schools can participate, thereby enhancing the viability of the program, as in other Australian jurisdictions

Preparation Phase (July 2026 to January 2027):

- Recruitment of language teachers (6 x 0.2 FTE equivalents, most of whom are known to be available for transition from the existing program)
- Confirm venue with appropriate facilities (the existing venue at Ainslie School has the required classroom spaces and audio-visual equipment, and is strategically located adjacent to the transport hubs in Central Canberra)
- Marketing and student enrolment
- Development of course schedules and assessment frameworks

Program Commencement and building future student intakes:

- February 2027: Delivery begins for Year 11 students, along with provision for Year 12 students who will be completing their language majors in 2027
- March and September 2027: Information sessions for prospective students to commence in Term 2 of 2027 and from the start of the 2028 school year

Resource Requirements

Estimated annual cost: Less than \$250,000 (covering teacher salaries, venue costs, materials, and administration). This is:

- Modest in comparison to the overall Education Directorate budget, and a significant portion of the amount can be recouped through enrolment fees or allocation of per capita funds as noted above, if there is effective communication with stakeholders, including students, families, day schools and the wider community, about the availability of the program
- Less than the government's current annual investment in community language schools (\$275,000+)

- Recoverable through targeted government investment in language education as outlined in the Language Education Action Plan

Addressing projected teacher workforce shortages and enabling ongoing upskilling are both national and local priorities. The AFMLTA's NLPS project recommends regionally targeted professional learning, incentives for upskilling, and strengthened initial teacher education as the foundation for sustainable growth in senior language provision. ³ The ACT is well-placed to model and trial these national solutions. ²

Why This Must Be an Education Directorate Initiative

CIT's Position

CIT CEO Dr Margot McNeill has clarified that Year 11-12 ATAR language courses are “not a priority” for CIT. As CIT is primarily focused on post-school qualifications, it is inappropriate to rely on CIT for secondary education provision. The CIT is currently a reluctant custodian of the senior secondary languages program. The CEO's statement indicates that CIT will not voluntarily continue this program.

Other potential providers ruled out

Extensive consultations have taken place with other potential providers. The Australian National University, University of Canberra and University of NSW Canberra Campus have all concluded that, as organisations with tertiary education as their focus, they could not commit to delivering these senior secondary programs, which are different from H courses in their design and intent. The governing committee of the Community Language Schools Association concluded that the CLSA is not appropriately placed in terms of its charter, its organisational structure and its facilities to conduct such programs, particularly given the onerous curriculum and assessment requirements for senior secondary course delivery. Furthermore, in every other Australian education jurisdiction where such programs exist, they are government-run.

Education Directorate Responsibility

Language education for Year 11-12 students is a core responsibility of the ACT Education Directorate. The Language Education Action Plan places responsibility for language provision squarely within the Education Directorate's remit. Bringing this program in-house would:

- Align delivery with government policy and priorities
- Ensure program sustainability and continuity
- Allow integration with existing secondary curriculum and pathways planning
- Provide stability for students and teachers
- Enable consistent quality assurance and outcomes measurement

Strategic Positioning

Implementation within the Education Directorate would:

1. Demonstrate government commitment to its stated Language Education Action Plan principles
2. Fulfil the government's own policy mandates regarding access to language pathways
3. Ensure sustainable, long-term provision rather than reliance on external providers
4. Position the ACT as a leader in languages education nationally
5. Contribute to the government's investment in the cognitive and cultural development of all ACT secondary students

Call to Action

Immediate Announcements Required

We urge the ACT Government to:

1. Immediately announce the government's commitment to establish Year 11-12 ATAR language courses within the ACT Education Directorate
2. Confirm that these courses will resume in February 2027 for ACT senior secondary students
3. Allocate necessary budget from existing Education Directorate resources and/or participant fees
4. Commit to ongoing funding and/or fees schedules to ensure continuity and expansion
5. Publicly affirm that language education is a priority for the ACT Government.

Rationale for Urgency

Students transitioning into senior secondary education in future years deserve certainty and clarity regarding their language learning pathways to study their chosen languages. Parents who seek to support those students in pursuing their learning goals require dependable, effective pathways for that learning. Teachers recruited to deliver language programs deserve the security of government backing.

The government has already articulated its commitment to language education through the Language Education Action Plan. The immediate establishment of this program would transform that commitment into action and demonstrate government responsiveness to community needs.

Conclusion

The ACT Government has repeatedly and clearly committed to language education as a priority, recognising its cognitive, cultural, and economic value. The government has explicitly acknowledged the need for flexible, accessible pathways to language proficiency for all students. The government has promised to provide “pathways for proficiency options” and to deliver “flexible and innovative solutions.”

The Year 11-12 ATAR language program, previously delivered by CAL and CIT Solutions, directly implements these commitments. Its discontinuation represents a departure from stated policy and disadvantages students whose schools do not offer their chosen languages.

By immediately restoring centrally coordinated, accessible ATAR-level language courses under the ACT Education Directorate, the Government would address both urgent local needs and explicitly advance national best practice as outlined by the National Languages Plan and Strategy (AFMLTA, 2024).³

The ACT Government should honour its commitments by immediately announcing the establishment of Year 11-12 ATAR language courses within the ACT Education Directorate, commencing February 2026.

The action is warranted by government policy, necessary to meet identified needs, feasible within existing resources, and aligned with the government's stated strategic direction for education in the ACT. As noted in the section on system performance above, As the seat of national government, Canberra's senior secondary completion rates in languages should be the best in Australia, and currently they are not. We look forward to the government's positive response to this essential call to action.

Frank Keighley

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I would like to talk to the committee at a hearing.

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