



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 Standing Committee on Social Policy

Inquiry into E-Petition 077-25: Access to Year 11–12 ATAR Language Courses in 2026

1. Introduction

As the Languages Board of Studies at the Australian National University, we represent language teaching across the College of Asia and the Pacific and the College of Arts and Social Sciences. ANU tertiary language teaching represents one of the university's most significant contributions to Australian society, encompassing a range of languages not taught elsewhere in Australia and in some cases the Southern Hemisphere. Language teaching remains an integral part of our responsibility to the ACT and surrounding region, and on this basis we write to express our deep concern and support for the issues raised in **E-Petition 077-25**. This submission addresses the Standing Committee on Social Policy's inquiry into E-Petition 077-25, concerning access to Year 11–12 ATAR language courses in the ACT from 2026, and the implications that inadequate language teaching in the ACT school system has for equitable access, continuity of learning, and system-wide language education outcomes in the ACT.

The submission supports the petition's requested action: that the ACT Government replicate the Year 11–12 ATAR language course model within the ACT Education Directorate, commencing with Year 11 students in the shortest time frame possible, noting that the delays already sustained through inaction have already significantly impacted access and educational outcomes for ACT students.

2. Role and Significance of CAL and CIT Solutions (2017–2025)

From 2017 to 2023, the Canberra Academy of Languages provided a centrally delivered mechanism that enabled senior secondary students to continue ATAR-accredited language study when such courses were unavailable at their local colleges. In 2024 and 2025, this function was partially replicated through CIT Solutions.

These models fulfilled a clearly identified system gap. They supported students who had commenced language study in Years 7–10 and wished to continue to Year 12, particularly where geographic, staffing, or enrolment constraints prevented colleges from offering those languages onsite. The courses were accessible, centrally located, complementary to students' local college enrolment, and consistent with arrangements operating in other Australian jurisdictions.

The confirmation that CIT will not accept new enrolments from 2026 removes the ACT's only system-level mechanism for addressing this gap. The subsequent refusal of the Minister of Education to direct any action to mitigate or fill this gap has exacerbated a problem already endemic in the ACT public education system, which is characterised by poorly funded and poorly planned language education.

3. Impact of Non-Provision of Year 11–12 ATAR Language Courses in 2026

The absence of a replacement model from 2026 will have immediate and foreseeable consequences:

- **Loss of educational continuity:** Students who have invested several years in language study during compulsory schooling will be unable to complete that sequence at ATAR level.
- **Geographic inequity:** Access to language study will depend on where a student lives and which languages their local college happens to offer, rather than on student choice or prior study.

- **Reduced participation and viability:** Fragmented provision suppresses enrolments, in turn making it more difficult for colleges to justify offering languages, exacerbating a cycle of decline.
- **Narrowing of post-school pathways:** Senior secondary language study is a key feeder into university language programs, teacher education, and advanced regional and cultural expertise.

These effects are not hypothetical; they are already evident in declining senior secondary and tertiary language enrolments nationally and locally.

4. Equity and Access Considerations

The withdrawal of a centrally delivered Year 11–12 ATAR language model disproportionately affects students in the public system. Students in non-government schools are more likely to have stable, vertically integrated language pathways, while many public-school students face structural barriers unrelated to aptitude or motivation.

Language education, particularly in Asian and community languages, risks becoming an elite or privately accessed option rather than a public good. This outcome is inconsistent with the ACT's commitments to equity, multicultural inclusion, and educational opportunity. Perhaps more starkly, it also fails to acknowledge that many career paths available to students in Canberra require a language fluency that the public education system does not support.

5. Alignment with Community Demand and Comparable Jurisdictions

The petition reflects demonstrated community demand. Consultation processes conducted in the ACT, including recent engagement around the introduction of Hindi and Punjabi, show strong interest in language education when meaningful pathways are offered.

Importantly, the CAL/CIT model is not exceptional. Similar government-run supplementary language programs operate in other states and territories to address precisely the same structural issues. The ACT's previous participation in this approach indicates both feasibility and precedent.

6. Requested Action and Conclusion

Consistent with the Terms of Reference and the petitioners' request, this submission supports the establishment of a centrally coordinated, ACT Education Directorate-run Year 11–12 ATAR language program commencing in 2026, beginning with Year 11.

(Re)instating such a model would:

- Restore continuity for current students;
- Provide equitable access regardless of location or college offerings;
- Stabilise enrolments and staffing;
- Align the ACT with national best practice; and
- Protect the long-term viability of language education in the public system.

Failure to act will entrench fragmentation, constrain student choice, and undermine the ACT's broader educational, cultural, and strategic objectives. The opportunity for timely intervention remains, but it is narrowing rapidly.

The Languages Board of Studies acknowledges that the ACT Education Directorate is not isolated in this regard. Evidence provided by multiple sources to the federal government Inquiry into Building Asia Capability in Australia through the education system and beyond (including from ANU representatives) shows that education systems across the country are failing to provide the skills required for Australia's sovereign capability in bilateral and multilateral foreign relations, as well as those of non-government and business sectors. As a small jurisdiction and seat of government, the Australian Capital Territory has not only the opportunity, but also the responsibility to lead the nation in redressing these deficits.