Submission cover sheet

Inquiry into E-PET-078-25 and PET-041-26: Make career guidance a right for every ACT Year 7–10 public school student

Submission number: 006

Submitter: ACT Parents

Date authorised for publication: 13 October 2026

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September 2026

Submission to the ACT Legislative Assembly inquiry into E-PET 078-25 and PET – 041-26 – Make career guidance a right for every ACT Year 7-10 public school student

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.

ACT Parents supports a strong and equitable public education system in which all students have access to the opportunities and support they need, regardless of the school they attend. The One Public Education System reforms aim to strengthen coordination and consistency across ACT public schools and provide an important broader context for this inquiry. The potential benefits of greater access to careers advice should therefore be considered alongside the other significant needs facing the public school system and the priorities identified by students, families and schools.

Discussion

The value of career guidance

ACT Parents recognises the value of high-quality career education and guidance. Students benefit from support to understand the range of further education, training and employment pathways available to them and to make informed decisions about their futures. Qualified careers advisers can make an important contribution by providing specialist knowledge and individual guidance, and their presence in schools is welcomed by many students and families.

While qualified careers advisers can provide valuable support, this does not necessarily mean that employing a dedicated adviser in every high school should be an immediate priority for additional investment. That question needs to be considered in light of students' needs at different stages, the career education already available and the broader pressures facing the ACT public school system.

ACT Parents notes that the petition focuses on students in Years 7–10. It is ACT Parents' understanding that ACT public colleges employ careers advisers, meaning that access to specialist advice is more established in Years 11 and 12, when students are making more immediate decisions about further education, training and employment. The petition states that 13 of the 22 ACT public schools enrolling students in these year levels do not employ a qualified career practitioner in a careers adviser role. The absence of a dedicated qualified practitioner does not necessarily mean that students receive no career education or guidance. Schools may provide career-related learning, work experience, pathway planning and information about further education and training through teachers or other staff. The petition's figures therefore identify differences in staffing arrangements, but do not establish that students at the remaining schools receive no careers support.

The type and intensity of career guidance students need is also likely to change as students progress through secondary school. In Years 7 and 8, career education may be most appropriately focused on broad exposure to different occupations, helping students recognise their interests and strengths, and connecting classroom learning with the world beyond school. Much of this can be embedded across the curriculum and delivered by teachers without requiring individual guidance from a qualified careers adviser.

The need for more targeted advice is likely to increase in Years 9 and 10, particularly as students make decisions about work experience, senior secondary subjects and vocational education and training. Year 10 may therefore be an important point for students to have access to more specialised guidance. In Years 11 and 12, when students are making increasingly consequential decisions about further education, training and employment, the case for ready access to a qualified careers adviser is clearer.

This suggests that the inquiry should not treat Years 7–10 as a single group with uniform needs or assume that employing a full-time qualified practitioner in every high school is the only way to provide effective support. A proportionate model could combine career education across the curriculum in the earlier years with more targeted access to specialist advice as students approach key transition points.

Priorities in a constrained system

ACT public schools are operating in a constrained environment, with many worthwhile initiatives competing for limited funding and workforce capacity. In this context, it is necessary to distinguish between services that would be valuable and those that parents are identifying as the most immediate priorities for investment.

The petition states that “young people, the school community, industry, business, parents and higher and tertiary education institutions are calling out for high schools to make employment of careers advisers a priority”. As the peak body representing parents and carers of children in ACT public schools, ACT Parents considers it important to respond to the inclusion of parents in this statement.

In late 2025 and early 2026, ACT Parents undertook a broad survey to inform the ACT Public School System Resourcing Review. The survey sought parents’ and carers’ experiences of the public school system and their priorities for its future. The availability of careers advisers did not emerge as a concern through that consultation. This does not establish that parents do not value careers advisers, particularly as the survey did not ask a specific question about careers guidance. However, it does provide an indication of the issues parents raise when invited to identify what matters most to them.

The strongest and most consistent concern was the capacity of schools to provide effective classroom teaching. Almost 98 per cent of respondents considered having a qualified teacher in front of every class every day to be a “must have”. Parents also reported split or collapsed classes, students being supervised rather than taught, and reduced access to subjects and programs because appropriately qualified staff were not available.

The effects of these shortages were evident in parents' comments. One parent described the experience of a Year 8 cohort that did not have a specialist mathematics teacher:

"My daughter in Year 8 did not have a maths specialist teacher for her class for the entire year. None of the classes in this year group had a maths teacher … No feedback, other than final reports, was provided to Year 8 students on their learning in maths. It has been a significant source of stress for students and parents."

Another parent described regular split or collapsed classes across both primary and secondary school, explaining that in secondary school this had resulted in students being assessed on content they had not been taught. Other respondents called for greater investment in specialist teachers in Years 7–10, particularly in mathematics, science and literacy, and for greater recognition of the workforce challenges facing high schools.

Parents also consistently raised the need for effective support for students with disability and additional needs; safe, accessible and fit-for-purpose infrastructure; student wellbeing; and equitable access to subjects, specialist programs and other learning opportunities across schools.

These findings do not diminish the value of career education or suggest that individual parents do not strongly support the petition. They do, however, indicate that the employment of careers advisers is not currently being raised with ACT Parents as a priority comparable to ensuring that students have qualified teachers, appropriate specialist teaching, inclusive support and suitable learning environments.

In ACT Parents' view, these immediate pressures should be addressed first. The One Public Education System reforms provide an opportunity to establish a more equitable and consistent approach to the education, services and support students receive across ACT public schools. Consideration of careers guidance should occur within this broader system context and alongside other identified needs, rather than as an isolated staffing priority.

Recommendations

ACT Parents recommends that the Committee:

1. **Consider careers provision within the broader priorities of the public school system.** Any recommendations should take account of the more immediate staffing, inclusion, infrastructure and learning needs being raised by parents, as well as the opportunity cost of directing limited funding and workforce capacity to additional careers adviser positions.

2. **Adopt a coordinated and equitable system-wide approach.** Consider career education and guidance as part of the One Public Education System reforms, with the aim of improving consistency and equity across ACT public schools rather than considering careers advisers as an isolated staffing initiative.

3. **Establish the nature and extent of any unmet need.** Examine the career education and guidance currently provided across ACT public high schools, whether students are being disadvantaged by gaps in provision, and at what stages specialist advice is most needed.

4. **Focus on access to effective career education and guidance rather than establishing a right to a dedicated careers adviser.** Recognise that students' needs differ by year level and that high-quality career education may be provided through a combination of curriculum-based learning, school staff and targeted access to qualified practitioners.

Conclusion

ACT Parents recognises the value of effective career education and guidance and the contribution qualified careers advisers can make. However, the petition's characterisation of careers advisers as a priority for parents does not reflect what ACT Parents is hearing through its engagement and consultation. Parents are raising more immediate concerns about teacher availability, subject-specialist teaching, inclusion and school infrastructure. We urge the Committee to consider career guidance within the broader priorities of the public school system and the work to deliver a more consistent and equitable One Public Education System.