Submission cover sheet

Inquiry into E Petition 078-25 and Petition 041-26: Make career guidance a right for all Year 7-10 public school students

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ACT Youth Advisory Council

Submission to the Standing Committee on Social Policy

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

Submission deadline: 15 October 2026

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ACT Youth Advisory Council, October 2026

Introduction

The ACT Youth Advisory Council (YAC) welcomes the opportunity to contribute to the Standing Committee on Social Policy's Inquiry into career guidance for ACT Year 7–10 public school students.

YAC is the ACT Government's youth advisory body, comprising 10 young people aged 12 to 25 at the time of appointment with diverse backgrounds, experiences and perspectives. The Council provides an important link between young Canberrans and the ACT Government, ensuring young people's views, needs, ideas and priorities are heard and considered through consultations, engagement activities and advice to government.

This submission has been developed through a dedicated YAC working group, with opportunities for all Council members to contribute. It brings together young people's perspectives on access to career guidance, the challenges students face when exploring their future options, and opportunities to strengthen support for young people navigating education, training and employment pathways.

Key messages

- Young people need earlier, more consistent access to career education and guidance throughout ACT public high schools.
- Career education should commence in Year 7 and progressively support students to explore their skills, interests, strengths and future pathways before making subject selection and post-school decisions.
- Young people value practical career exploration opportunities, including work experience, workplace visits, career expos, industry engagement activities, and exposure to vocational, trade and non-university pathways.
- Dedicated, qualified career practitioners are essential to providing all students with consistent, personalised and high-quality career guidance, including regular one-on-one support throughout high school.
- Career guidance should be equitable and accessible for all students, supported by proactive school engagement and a centralised online careers platform that provides consistent information about opportunities, programs and pathways across ACT public high schools.

1. Current access to career guidance

What do young people currently receive, when does guidance begin, and do students know where to find support?

The ACT Youth Advisory Council (YAC) recognises the range of career education and pathway opportunities available within ACT public schools. However, through discussions undertaken by the YAC working group, members identified inconsistencies in the visibility, promotion and accessibility of these opportunities across schools.

Working group members reported career guidance is most visible in Year 10, particularly in relation to work experience and planning for future study and employment pathways. Members noted that while opportunities and support exist, they are often accessed primarily by students who are already aware of them or who actively seek them out. Prior to Year 10, career exploration and pathway discussions were perceived to be less prevalent, with limited exposure to career education in Years 7 and 8. Members also observed guidance provided in later years is often focused on academic decision-making rather than broader career exploration and pathway planning.

As a result, members noted young people have limited opportunities to explore the full range of education, training and employment pathways available to them during their early high school years. The working group identified awareness of existing career development opportunities is low among many students and access to information and support often relies on young people proactively seeking it out themselves. Without dedicated career guidance support, students may miss opportunities to explore pathways aligned with their interests, strengths and aspirations.

The working group noted this can disproportionately affect disadvantaged and marginalised young people, who may face additional barriers in accessing information, support and professional networks. Members emphasised that access to career guidance should not depend on a student's awareness, confidence or ability to seek out opportunities independently.

The YAC considers ACT public high schools to have an important role in proactively promoting career development opportunities and ensuring all young people are aware of, and able to access, the support available to them throughout high school.

YAC recommendation: Increase awareness, promotion and equitable access to existing career education and exploration programs through ACT public schools. This should include proactive promotion of programs such as Vocational Learning Programs (VLPs), Work Experience (WEX), Head Start and other pathway initiatives, with particular attention to ensuring disadvantaged and marginalised young people are aware of and able to access available support.

2. Qualified career practitioners

What difference does accessible, knowledgeable and tailored career advice make?

The YAC working group highlighted the important role qualified career practitioners play in supporting young people to explore and navigate education, training and employment pathways. Members noted career practitioners bring specialised knowledge of career development, workforce trends and pathway options, enabling them to provide informed guidance that supports young people to make decisions about their future. Members considered that qualified career practitioners can help students better understand their skills, interests and strengths, and support them to explore a broad range of pathways, including further education, vocational training, trades and employment opportunities.

The working group identified students value career guidance that is tailored, impartial and responsive to their individual circumstances. Members noted young people want to feel heard, guided and supported when discussing future pathways and require clear, practical and jargon-free information to help them understand the options available to them.

The working group also observed career guidance is often provided by teachers alongside their existing teaching responsibilities. While teachers play an important role in supporting students, members considered this can limit the capacity for consistent and specialised career support. Members indicated regular access to dedicated career practitioners would provide greater continuity of support and help ensure young people receive timely and personalised career advice.

The YAC considers all young people should have access to qualified career practitioners throughout high school. This is particularly important for disadvantaged and

marginalised young people who may experience additional barriers in accessing career information, guidance and support outside of school.

YAC recommendation: Establish dedicated, full-time qualified career practitioner positions within ACT public high schools to provide consistent, specialised and student-centred career guidance.

3. Career education in Years 7–10

When should students first explore their interests, skills and options, without pressure to decide on one career?

The YAC working group highlighted the importance of introducing career education earlier in high school. Members noted career development should begin with helping young people understand their skills, interests, strengths and aspirations, rather than focusing solely on a specific occupation.

The working group considered introducing self-awareness and career development concepts from Year 7 would help young people build confidence, better understand their place within the workforce and broader community, and recognise how their choices and experiences at school can influence future education, training and employment opportunities.

The YAC members also highlighted the importance of practical, hands-on career exploration opportunities throughout high school. Members considered young people benefit from experiencing different industries and workplaces firsthand through opportunities such as Try-a-Trade programs, workplace visits, and other practical activities. These experiences help students build confidence, develop work-readiness skills and gain a better understanding of potential career pathways.

The working group identified the need for a staged approach to career education. Members considered that Years 7 and 8 should focus on self-development, work-readiness skills and exposure to different industries, before progressing to more targeted career guidance, pathway planning and subject selection support in Years 9 and 10.

The YAC members believe earlier and more structured career education would help students make informed decisions about subject selections, future study and employment pathways, while reducing the stress associated with pathway planning.

YAC recommendation: Embed staged career education and exploration throughout Years 7–10, commencing in Year 7 with a focus on developing students' understanding of their skills, interests, strengths and aspirations. This should include practical work-readiness skills and hands-on career exploration opportunities, such as Try-a-Trade programs, industry experiences and workplace exposure, before progressing to targeted pathway planning and subject selection support in Years 9 and 10, including college package selection.

4. Equity and inclusion

How can career guidance be accessible and useful regardless of school, circumstances or background?

The YAC working group identified access to career guidance is not experienced equally by all young people. Members noted Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people, young people with disabilities, LGBTQIA+ young people, young carers, young people experiencing financial hardship, and those living in regional or geographically isolated areas may face additional barriers to accessing career guidance and career development opportunities.

The working group considered relying on students to independently seek support can create further barriers for those already experiencing disadvantage. Members emphasised the importance of a proactive approach to career guidance that ensures all young people can access personalised support, regardless of their background or circumstances.

The YAC members also highlighted that all students should have access to one-on-one career guidance throughout high school. Members considered regular individual sessions with a qualified career practitioner should form part of every student's educational journey, ensuring they have the opportunity to discuss their interests, strengths, aspirations and future pathways. Members also emphasised the importance of schools taking a more active role in connecting students with career exploration

opportunities and encouraging participation in activities that build awareness of education, training and employment pathways.

The YAC considers career guidance should be inclusive, accessible and responsive to individual needs, with additional support available for young people who face barriers to participation.

YAC recommendation: Implement a proactive and inclusive model of career guidance, supported by dedicated full-time qualified career practitioners in ACT public high schools. This should include mandatory one-on-one career guidance sessions for all students throughout high school, ensuring equitable access to personalised advice, pathway planning and career exploration opportunities. Additional support should be available for students who face barriers to participation, with schools taking an active role in engaging young people in career development opportunities.

5. Exposure to different career pathways

What practical experiences help students understand their options beyond reading about them?

The YAC working group identified practical career exploration opportunities as among the most effective ways for young people to understand the range of education, training and employment pathways available to them. Members consistently highlighted the value of engaging directly with workplaces, employers and industry representatives, rather than relying solely on classroom-based information.

The working group noted work experience is a highly valued opportunity that enables young people to explore career interests, develop workplace skills and gain a better understanding of different occupations. However, members reported awareness of work experience opportunities can be limited and access can vary between schools. The working group considered a more structured and proactive approach to promoting work experience would assist students to identify and access opportunities. Members also suggested extending work experience opportunities to Year 9 students would support earlier career exploration and help inform subject selection and future pathway decisions.

YAC members also emphasised the importance of exposing students to the full range of post-school pathways available to them, including university, TAFE/CIT, Vocational

Education and Training (VET), Australian School-Based Apprenticeships (ASBAs), apprenticeships, traineeships and direct employment. Members noted greater exposure to these options through school-based programs, workplace visits, Try-a-Trade programs and industry engagement activities would support students to make informed decisions based on their interests, strengths and aspirations.

Career expos were also identified as a valuable opportunity for young people to explore future pathways in an engaging and accessible environment. Members considered regular access to career expos, industry events and workplace visits throughout high school would increase awareness of potential career options and provide students with opportunities to engage directly with employers, training providers and education institutions.

The working group further considered exposure to these opportunities should commence from the early years of high school to support career exploration prior to subject selection and pathway planning decisions.

YAC recommendation: Increase awareness and accessibility of work experience opportunities through clearer promotion, improved access to information on available placements, and extending access to work experience for Year 9 students. This should be supported by a centralised online careers platform used across all ACT public high schools, providing consistent access to information about work experience, career pathways, programs and opportunities.

YAC recommendation: Embed practical career exploration opportunities throughout Years 7 to 10, including work experience, career expos, workplace visits and industry engagement activities, to support informed subject selection and pathway decisions.

YAC recommendation: Increase awareness and access to vocational, trade and non-university pathways through school-based programs, including Try-a-Trade initiatives, VET courses, TAFE pathways and Australian School-Based Apprenticeships (ASBAs).

Consolidated recommendations

Recommendation 1: Increase awareness, promotion and equitable access to existing career education and exploration programs through ACT public schools, such as Vocational Learning Programs (VLPs), Work Experience (WEX), Head Start and other

pathway initiatives, with particular attention to ensuring disadvantaged and marginalised young people are aware of and able to access available supports.

Recommendation 2: Establish dedicated, full-time qualified career practitioner positions within ACT public high schools to provide consistent, specialised and student-centred career guidance.

Recommendation 3: Embed staged career education and exploration throughout Years 7–10, commencing in Year 7 with a focus on developing students' understanding of their skills, interests, strengths and aspirations. This should include practical work-readiness skills and hands-on career exploration opportunities, such as Try-a-Trade programs, industry experiences and workplace exposure, before progressing to targeted pathway planning and subject selection support in Years 9 and 10, including college package selection.

Recommendation 4: Implement a proactive and inclusive model of career guidance, supported by dedicated full-time qualified career practitioners in ACT public high schools. This should include mandatory one-on-one career guidance sessions for all students throughout high school, ensuring equitable access to personalised advice, pathway planning and career exploration opportunities. Additional support should be available for students who face barriers to participation, with schools taking an active role in engaging young people in career development opportunities.

Recommendation 5: Increase awareness and accessibility of work experience opportunities through clearer promotion, improved access to information on available placements, and extending access to work experience for Year 9 students. This should be supported by a centralised online careers platform used across all ACT public high schools, providing consistent access to information about work experience, career pathways, programs and opportunities.

Recommendation 6: Embed practical career exploration opportunities throughout Years 7 - 10, including work experience, career expos, workplace visits and industry engagement activities, to support informed subject selection and pathway decisions.

Recommendation 7: Increase awareness and access to vocational, trade and non-university pathways through school-based programs, including Try-a-Trade initiatives, VET courses, TAFE/CIT pathways and Australian School-Based Apprenticeships (ASBAs). This should be supported by dedicated, qualified career practitioners who can provide specialised guidance and actively connect students with these opportunities.