



Submission cover sheet

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

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Access to 11-12 ATAR Language Courses in 2026

Submission to the Standing Committee on Social Policy

Introduction

Thank you for the opportunity to make a submission to this inquiry. The discontinuation of ready access to external, ATAR level language learning for ACT college students in 2026 has **directly impacted our family, and in particular our daughter** [REDACTED]

[REDACTED], and in fact her entire year cohort, has been disadvantaged by this decision, and continues to be disadvantaged by trying to study Italian via distance education. Choice of college is incredibly limited in the ACT. As most colleges only offer two or three languages it is unlikely that all students will have access to a language they are interested in learning. One assumes there will be many students who simply chose to not study a language they wanted to study for Years 11 and 12 due to a lack of access.

[REDACTED] has been planning to study **Italian** during her senior secondary schooling for many years. [REDACTED] is currently in Year 11 at Hawker College, where Italian is not offered. A child cannot be enrolled in a school of choice based on subject requirements in the ACT. Instead, the restrictive policies guiding school enrolments mean that college students cannot enrol into a college that best fits their subject requirements unless their parents choose to live in the 'correct' suburb, a choice a child has no control over - even less so in a military family such as ours. If a government removes the ability for a student to choose a college that best caters to their subject needs then the government must make provisions for children to access to these subjects another way, especially for a subject that is declared 'critical', 'valuable' and 'increasingly important' by multiple levels of government. Both National and Territory education policy regarding language study stress the importance of learning foreign languages at school, but these policies are not matched by provision of services in the ACT.

Policy Statements

National Language Policy:

"The Australian Government believes that **all students should have the opportunity** to develop their creative and linguistic skills, which are increasingly important in a globalised world."

Support for Arts and Languages, 2025, Australian Government Department of Education,
<https://www.education.gov.au/australian-curriculum/support-arts-and-languages>

ACT Language Policy:

Priority Statement - Introduction

“Canberra is a vibrant and multicultural city and remains one of the best cities to learn an additional language.

The Future of Education Strategy (the Strategy) provides the strategic framework for the delivery of language education in our public schools and closely supports the **delivery of high quality and innovative language education programs in ACT public schools.**

All ACT public schools teach the Australian Curriculum version 9. Languages are one of the eight learning areas under the Australian Curriculum and provide **valuable learning for ACT students.** Language education provides students with skills to access an increasingly global environment. Studying language education benefits cognitive function and assists with critical thinking and problem solving as well as making students more culturally aware.

ACT public schools currently have a range of mechanisms in place to support the provision of **high-quality language learning.** Supports include language teaching assistant programs, and funding language teacher networks in each of the **eight priority languages:** Chinese, French, German, Indonesian, **Italian**, Japanese, Korean, and Spanish.

In the broader language context, the Directorate supports the development of student mother tongue and other language programs through the Canberra Language Network, the Community Language Schools Association and the provision of professional learning for community language school teachers. The ACT is well positioned to provide a rich language program with access to embassies, universities and the broader community language sector.

The ACT education system is consistently evolving and improving. It needs to be flexible to meet the increasing demands of a modern global society. **Language provision is a critical subject area.”**

Language Education Action Plan, 2024, https://www.act.gov.au/_data/assets/pdf_file/0011/2879885/Language-Education-in-ACT-Public-Schools-Action-Plan.PDF

Putting aside the amount of time spent finding alternate solutions to this problem, the models now available for language study in college have been found to be less than ideal, and certainly do not provide the best learning environments for our children. They therefore cannot provide the best outcomes. There is a huge gap between ACT Education Directorate policy on language importance and the actual provisions made for access to language study for students for this year. I will outline the difficulties we have personally had in sourcing, enrolling, administering, accessing and overall studying of Italian for [REDACTED]

Finding a College

- Our daughter, [REDACTED], has been very clear about what subjects she wanted to study for college for many years. She heavily researched colleges so she could make an informed choice.
- One college offered all of the subjects [REDACTED] wanted to study for college and her ATAR - Gungahlin College. Had she been able to attend Gungahlin she would have been able to study all of the subjects she wanted to study for her intended career - including Italian - within the one setting, and this submission would not be required. However, Gungahlin

College is a Category A school and we do not reside within the catchment area, so her application for enrolment was rejected on those grounds.

- The next best option for ■■■ was Hawker College, where she was able to study all of the subjects she needed except for Italian. She was offered a place there mid-2025 and accepted. ■■■ plan was to study Italian through CIT.

Impact of Discontinuing CIT Language Provision

- When it was announced in late 2025 that CIT was not providing languages for college students in 2026 we set about finding another pathway for ■■■ to be able to study Italian. The **options** we found were:
 - to **not study Italian** at all;
 - a **dual enrolment** with another ACT college; or
 - study through **Finigan Distance Education** (NSW Department of Education).

- **Not studying Italian at all:**

■■■ had wanted to study Italian during her secondary schooling since studying it during primary school in Sydney. The option of dropping Italian altogether wasn't an option she wanted, and we fully supported her decision to find a way to make it work whether or not the ACT Education Directorate secured other means of delivering languages or not.

- **A dual enrolment through another ACT College:**

■■■ was offered a Italian at Narrabundah College with a dual enrolment, maintaining Hawker College as the primary enrolment. The requirement for attendance through this model was for ■■■ to attend Narrabundah for Italian lessons four days per week. This would involve driving from Hawker and travelling 25-30 minutes to Narrabundah, doing the Italian lesson at Narrabundah for 60 minutes, then travelling the 25-30 minutes back to Hawker. Effectively, this would mean ■■■ would miss two hours of the school day at Hawker College four days per week, or almost a quarter of the school week. Although a face-to-face model was highly preferable, this much disruption to her other subjects was not acceptable. Sacrificing one subject for another is counterproductive.

- **Study through Finigan Distance Education:**

We applied to Finigan Distance Education and ■■■ was accepted there. The application process was really stressful as the cut off date to apply had already passed when CIT announced they were not going to offer languages for college students in 2026. Finigan relaxed their rules for late applications due to the late notification of discontinuing languages through CIT. The model for studying through Finigan is ostensibly one group video call a week and the rest of the work done individually. While this is not a preferable mode of learning a language it was the best option we found.

The Reality of Studying Languages via Distance Education

The following is a list of issues we have found in pursuing Italian by a provider outside the traditional school setting:

- **Finding options to study Italian outside of Hawker College:**

My expectation was that someone at school would know what was happening in the language space for ACT college students, given CIT language provision was discontinued, but this was not the case. I was advised by a teacher at Hawker that studying Italian outside of Hawker College wasn't possible, which I knew to be incorrect. I feel that many teachers, including year coordinators, are not even aware of the options

that are still available to students for language study. [REDACTED] would not have been given the opportunity to study Italian for college had I not known prior to receiving that information that distance education and dual enrolments were available to language students. During November and December of 2025, and as [REDACTED] parent, I was the person that did a lot of the legwork to find options for [REDACTED] to study Italian for college this year. I spent even more time following up with Finigan in January and early February to ensure [REDACTED] enrolment was finalised, to sort out online access, etc. The amount of time I spent figuring out what I expected a school to be aware of was onerous, and far beyond what I think is reasonable for a “priority” language commonly studied. The number of times I received information about studying Italian as an ATAR subject that conflicted with other information I’d received, or information that was partially or wholly incorrect was frustrating. I spoke to other colleges around the ACT about possible dual enrolments, non-school educational services offering Italian, the ACT Education Directorate, Finigan, even the Italian consulate. I did a lot of research online searching for any option that would fulfil the requirements for using Italian for an ATAR. I took what I had found in that search to Hawker College and worked with the Deputy Principal, Ms Yasmin Noonan, to refine the options and work out which would actually work for [REDACTED] and Hawker College. Ms Noonan was exemplary in her assistance with this endeavour and without her help I’m certain this would not have worked for [REDACTED]. Had another less accommodating teacher been in her position they could have easily said no. She applied to three other colleges on behalf of [REDACTED] for a dual enrolment, and only Narrabundah College responded. If I had been working during this time there is no way I would have had the time to find these options. This seems to me to be basic information that schools could and should provide, centrally provided by the Education Directorate. If colleges are kept informed of options for language study, given the sudden exit of a primary language study provider, not only would students and teachers be aware that they have the opportunity to study other languages, but parents and carers would not be sacrificing huge amounts of their time to find out this information.

- **Enrolment with Finigan Distance Education (NSW Department of Education):**

Ms Noonan, on behalf of Hawker College, had filled out those parts of [REDACTED] application to be filled out by the home school. I had filled out the rest, which was the vast majority of the application, and I emailed the application form to Finigan on 23 November 2025. On 10 December 2025 I had not heard anything from them, not even an acknowledgement of receipt, so I rang to follow up and ensure the application had come through. I was informed that because the application had been sent from my private email address and not an official school staff email address that [REDACTED] application had not been processed, in spite of having an official representative of the school complete the required section of the form sent in the email. I wasn’t even extended the courtesy of an email to advise me of this administrative ‘problem’, because their policy was to not respond at all to such an email. I literally emailed Ms Noonan the same document I had previously sent to Finigan, so she could send it, unaltered, from an official school staff address. The deadline for applications to Finigan had now long passed, and I had to advocate very firmly and speak to someone much higher up the administrative chain to have [REDACTED] application considered. This was unnecessarily bureaucratic and stressful. We were informed verbally very late in Term 4 of 2025 that there was no reason that [REDACTED] enrolment would not be accepted, and that Finigan would be delighted to have her, that it was just a matter of having the executive sign off on the approval because the application was so late. Nevertheless, it was not officially accepted until the Week 2 of Term 1 of 2026. This caused significant stress for [REDACTED] not knowing what was happening and if it was going to

be approved. The lack of communication around the enrolment process and the bureaucratic insanity of it was incredibly frustrating. Again, had I not had the time to spend figuring all of it out and ticking boxes for public institutions, [REDACTED] would not have been given the opportunity to study Italian. This information regarding processes between educational institutions is information I expected a public school to be across when the simpler option of CIT was removed.

- **Costs:**

After a full term of [REDACTED] studying Italian we are still unsure about whether there are any costs involved. If there are costs involved we do not have a straight answer about who pays the fee. Multiple times we have been advised that there is an \$800 fee. I don't have that in writing anywhere, and I can't remember if it was per term or per year, but I do remember the fee amount. We have variously been advised that the \$800 fee is to be paid by the family, by Hawker College and by the ACT Education Directorate. Other times we have been advised that there is no cost at all. [REDACTED] supervising teacher at Hawker College has not been advised that there is any fee involved. Any actual fees relating to [REDACTED] studying Italian through Finigan that we as parents are responsible for are unknown to us, but having the possibility of having to pay a large sum at some point is an added stress. Again, this seems to be factual information that should be known by someone.

- **Access to learning materials and technology issues:**

[REDACTED] ACT Education Directorate provided Chromebook has restrictions on it, as all Education Directorate Chromebooks do. Restrictions, however, precluded her from accessing the Finigan website as well as other websites and applications that she needed to access for classwork. It did not seem to be a straightforward process to gain access to these sites. It took a few weeks to get it sorted out, after [REDACTED] enrolment was finalised in Week 2. The end result of this is that [REDACTED] started a few weeks behind, and she has found it really difficult to catch up. She is still behind at the end of the term.

- **Learning barriers:**

The distance education model for languages is far from ideal. Once all of the technology barriers were settled, the barriers in learning processes became evident. Even though there is one online learning class a week the scheduled day and time of that class alternates each week between two different slots. [REDACTED] is only available for one of those slots, so she only sees her teacher once a fortnight via a video classroom. The other slot is during another of her subject classes, so she has to watch the recording of that online Italian class back at a later time. One of the most important parts of learning a language is exposure to listening and responding in the language. This model does not provide sufficient opportunity to do this, and therefore is not the most effective model for learning a language. In the absence of any other realistically achievable model [REDACTED] will persevere, but we are now looking for a tutor to help her with basic classwork. Rates for a private tutor start at \$80 per hour. This is not affordable as a regular or long term strategy.

Recommendations:

- Align language subject provisions with government policy, and until this happens provide support for students to study languages through other means.
- Ensure an external provider of languages with an effective model of delivery is in place well before 2027 so that students are no longer disadvantaged by a lack of subject choice, and so that teachers and students have time to plan, apply, etc. Alternatively, provide classes outside of school hours at hubs. For example, provide Italian lessons for

students at selected schools, perhaps one northside and one southside, that students from any ACT school can attend.

- Provide assistance for current language students to access tutors, specifically those students that have been forced to find alternate ways to fill the gap for ATAR qualifying language study, either by providing a tutor service available outside of school hours, or by subsidising these students for the costs involved in engaging a tutor.
- Collate a comprehensive guide (not a brochure) on options students have for studying outside of the traditional classroom setting. This applies to all subjects and all options available to students. Provide this to all ACT public schools, teachers and Year 10 and 11 students so they can make informed choices around their studies.
- Develop a long term strategy for language provision that cannot change from one year to the next. The lack of certainty around languages is disadvantaging the next generation of Canberrans, and in the long run it will be our society that suffers for it.