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

Submission number: 22

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Career Development Association of Australia

SUBMISSION

Inquiry into E-PET-078-25 and PET-041-26

Make career guidance a right for every ACT Year 7-10 public school student

CDAA Submission | ACT Legislative Assembly Standing Committee on Social Policy | September 2026

CDAA supports equitable access to professionally qualified career development practitioners for ACT public school students, backed by appropriate resourcing, national professional standards and a developmental approach that begins well before senior secondary transition.

Submitted by
[redacted]
Career Development Association of Australia
[redacted]

Executive summary

The Career Development Association of Australia (CDAA) welcomes the ACT Legislative Assembly Standing Committee on Social Policy inquiry into career guidance for ACT public school students in Years 7–10.

Career development is more than helping a student choose a job, course or subject. It is a developmental process that helps young people understand themselves, explore possibilities, make informed decisions, navigate transitions and build the skills to manage learning and work throughout their lives.

The additional evidence considered in this revised submission strengthens the case for early, professionally delivered career development. OECD evidence identifies links between teenage career development and better later employment outcomes, while also showing that career uncertainty, social inequality and misalignment between student aspirations and labour-market demand remain significant challenges. High-quality career development should therefore be understood as both an educational investment and an economic and workforce investment.

CDAA supports a systemic ACT approach that provides equitable access to appropriately qualified career development practitioners; adequately resources those services; aligns roles with nationally recognised professional standards and qualifications; develops the workforce; embeds career development progressively across the secondary years; and evaluates both access and outcomes.

CDAA recommendations

1. Establish equitable access to professional career development services for students in ACT public schools with Years 7–10, within a developmental model that continues through Years 11–12.
2. Require professional career development practitioner roles to be undertaken by appropriately qualified practitioners whose qualifications and practice align with the Professional Standards for Australian Career Development Practitioners.
3. Establish an appropriate staffing and resourcing model, giving serious consideration to the petition's proposed ratio of one full-time equivalent career practitioner per 450 students while allowing flexibility for school context, student complexity and practitioner workload.
4. Provide dedicated funding so investment in career development does not simply displace resources required for other essential educational services.
5. Provide targeted scholarships and supported qualification pathways for suitable teaching and non-teaching staff to gain recognised professional career development qualifications.
6. Embed career development progressively from Years 7–12, with deliberate early intervention in Years 7–10 and appropriately intensive transition support in Years 11–12.
7. Adopt an inclusive and equity-focused service model that recognises that some students require additional or tailored career development support.
8. Support practitioners through continuing professional development, reflective practice or professional supervision, contemporary labour-market information and professional networks.
9. Strengthen connections between schools, families, employers, industry, vocational education and training, higher education and community organisations.
10. Establish an evaluation framework focused on quality, accessibility, career-development outcomes and transition outcomes.

About the Career Development Association of Australia

The Career Development Association of Australia (CDAA) is a national professional association for career development practitioners working across education, employment, government, community services, private practice and other sectors. CDAA supports professional, ethical and evidence-informed career development practice across the lifespan.

CDAA is a member association of the Career Industry Council of Australia (CICA), Australia's national peak body for the career industry. The CICA Professional Standards for Australian Career Development Practitioners provide a national benchmark for qualifications, competencies, ethical practice and continuing professional development.

1. Career development should begin before the point of transition

Years 7–10 are a critical period in young people's career development. Students are forming stronger ideas about identity, strengths, interests and future possibilities while approaching decisions about senior secondary education, subjects, vocational pathways and other learning opportunities.

The economic-benefits evidence provided to CDAA notes that career development is most effective when delivered progressively throughout secondary school. Early intervention can help students connect learning to future opportunities, understand pathways, build aspirations, develop career-management competencies and make more informed subject choices. It also emphasises that Years 11–12 remain important because students are making decisions about university, apprenticeships, vocational pathways, employment entry and industry qualifications.

OECD evidence reinforces this developmental approach. Its 2025 global review reports that participation in career development activities is associated with clearer career plans and better later employment outcomes, and calls for greater investment in systems that begin early in students' educational journeys.

2. Career development is professional practice

CDAA encourages the Committee to distinguish between career information and professional career development practice. Websites, career quizzes, expos, information sessions and digital tools can all contribute to a comprehensive program, but they do not replace the professional relationship between a young person and a suitably qualified practitioner.

Professional Career Development Practitioners draw on specialist competencies including career development theory, labour-market information, communication, ethical practice, diversity and inclusion, technology and professional practice. National standards provide quality assurance and establish expectations for qualifications, ethical behaviour and continuing professional development.

The comparative jurisdictional information supplied to CDAA shows that school-based career roles across Australia commonly combine education-sector knowledge with specialist career development capability. The document identifies NSW as having the clearest mandatory pathway: a qualified secondary teacher plus an approved postgraduate careers qualification. In other jurisdictions, career development qualifications are commonly described as preferred, highly desirable or increasingly expected. It also identifies a Graduate Certificate or higher as the national professional expectation for career development practice.

For the ACT, this supports a clear qualification framework without unnecessarily limiting the future workforce to a single occupational background. Teachers can become excellent career development practitioners, and appropriately qualified non-teaching practitioners can also bring valuable specialist expertise to school settings.

3. Equity of access

The petitions identify a material access issue: the petition states that three in five Year 7–10 students in ACT public schools do not have access to a qualified career adviser at their school and that 13 of 22 ACT public schools with Years 7–10 do not employ a qualified professional career practitioner in a career adviser role.

A student's access to professional career development should not depend primarily on which public school they attend. OECD evidence indicates that young people from lower socio-economic backgrounds face additional barriers in converting education and skills into successful employment and are less likely to participate in many common career development activities. Effective school-based career development can help address unequal access to trusted information, useful experiences, networks and opportunities.

An inclusive service model should be capable of responding to the diverse circumstances of students, including Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students, students with disability, culturally and linguistically diverse students, neurodivergent students, students experiencing socioeconomic disadvantage and students whose pathways do not follow traditional education-to-employment patterns.

4. The educational and economic case for investment

Investment in qualified school career practitioners should be considered not only as an educational service, but also as part of workforce and economic policy. The economic-benefits paper supplied to CDAA identifies five connected areas of potential benefit: better matching of students to labour-market needs; increased workforce participation; reduced youth disengagement; greater social mobility and economic equity; and stronger national productivity.

High-quality career guidance can help students understand labour-market opportunities, education and training pathways and future workforce demand. Better-informed choices can reduce mismatches between education decisions and employment opportunities and may contribute to stronger returns on education and training investment.

The same evidence highlights the costs associated with disengagement from education, employment or training. Career practitioners can support engagement, pathway understanding, training choices and career-management skills. OECD longitudinal evidence also links teenage career development activities with better employment outcomes in adulthood, including stronger transitions into work and further learning.

These benefits are particularly relevant in a labour market affected by technological change, evolving skill requirements and multiple career transitions. Effective career development can improve individual decision-making while also supporting a more responsive and better-informed future workforce.

5. Appropriate resourcing is critical

Designating a staff member as responsible for careers is not sufficient if that person does not have appropriate qualifications, dedicated time, resources or organisational support. A comprehensive school career development role may include individual career conversations, group programs, career education, pathway planning, labour-market information, engagement with parents and carers, liaison with education and training providers, employer and industry engagement, work-related learning, referral, transition support and continuing professional development.

CDAA supports serious consideration of the petition's proposed benchmark of one full-time equivalent career practitioner for every 450 students. In determining an appropriate model, the ACT Government should also consider school context, student needs and complexity, practitioner workload, accessibility and the breadth of activities practitioners are expected to provide.

Adequate resourcing should enable developmental and preventative work across the secondary years rather than restricting career support to administration or urgent decisions at the end of schooling.

6. Building the ACT career development workforce

CDAA supports targeted scholarships for teaching and non-teaching school staff seeking recognised professional career development qualifications. Building capability within the existing education workforce can be one pathway to expanding access while maintaining professional standards.

The comparative state and territory information indicates there is no single national staffing model. NSW requires a secondary teaching qualification and approved postgraduate career qualification for its Career Adviser pathway, while other jurisdictions commonly use combinations of teachers, specialist practitioners, pathways coordinators, VET staff and transition officers, with career development qualifications variously required, preferred or highly desirable.

Indicative comparison of school-based career practitioner requirements

Jurisdiction	Career development requirement described	Teaching requirement described
NSW	Qualified secondary teacher plus approved postgraduate careers qualification	Teaching and teacher registration required
ACT	Career development qualification preferred in the supplied comparison	Teaching/registration usually expected in existing school models
Victoria	Registered teachers or specialist career practitioners; CICA-endorsed career qualifications commonly recognised	Teaching preferred; registration required for teaching positions
Queensland	Career development qualification highly desirable or required	Secondary teaching experience and registration generally required
South Australia	Postgraduate career development or counselling qualification preferred	Teaching commonly expected
Western Australia	Career development qualification preferred	Teaching/registration preferred
Tasmania	Career development training and CICA-aligned qualifications increasingly expected	Qualified educators commonly sought
Northern Territory	Career education/development training preferred	Teaching experience and registration required in the supplied comparison

The comparison is indicative rather than a substitute for current jurisdictional recruitment policy. Its key value is that it demonstrates the range of models available to the ACT while reinforcing the importance of specialist career development qualifications and professional standards.

7. Career development should connect the school, family, employers and community

Professional career development is most effective when connected to the broader educational experience of students. Qualified practitioners can provide specialist expertise while collaborating with teachers, school leaders, wellbeing teams, vocational education staff, and other professionals.

Parents and carers are important influences on young people's career thinking and can benefit from contemporary information about education, training, occupations and labour-market opportunities. Connections with employers, industry, universities, vocational education and training providers and community organisations help students understand the relationship between education and the world beyond school.

OECD evidence gives particular weight to meaningful employer engagement and first-hand exposure to the world of work. Career conversations, workplace visits, job fairs, work experience, volunteering and internships are among the forms of activity associated with stronger later employment outcomes.

8. Technology should enhance, not replace, professional practice

Digital tools and artificial intelligence can improve access to information, help students explore options and support efficient service delivery. However, career decisions are rarely simply information problems. They involve identity, values, interests, capability, opportunity, uncertainty, family and social influences, barriers and aspirations.

Professional practitioners help young people interpret information, reflect, make meaning, challenge assumptions and develop the capacity to make informed decisions for themselves. Used appropriately, technology can complement professional practice and reduce some information-gathering and administrative demands, allowing practitioners to devote more time to relational, reflective and developmental work.

9. Quality, accountability and evaluation

If additional public investment is made in career development services, implementation should include a clear quality and evaluation framework. Measures of success should extend beyond participation numbers or the number of career events delivered.

Evaluation should consider whether students have meaningful access to a qualified practitioner; develop career-management capability; understand a broader range of education, training and employment pathways; can identify and evaluate reliable career and labour-market information; feel better equipped to make informed decisions; connect learning with future possibilities; and receive effective support at significant transition points.

Over time, the ACT should also examine transition indicators such as participation in education, training and employment, career uncertainty, pathway changes and disengagement, while recognising that these outcomes are influenced by many factors beyond career services alone.

Conclusion

CDAA welcomes this inquiry as an opportunity to establish a stronger and more equitable approach to career development for young people in the ACT.

The evidence considered in this revised submission strengthens three central propositions. First, career development should begin early and continue progressively through secondary school. Second, quality matters: career information alone is not equivalent to professional career development delivered by appropriately qualified practitioners. Third, investment in career development has significance beyond individual subject or

course choices because it can support better education-to-work transitions, workforce participation, social mobility and alignment between young people's aspirations and labour-market opportunities.

CDAA therefore supports an ACT model that combines equitable access, appropriate staffing, recognised professional qualifications, dedicated resourcing, inclusive practice, strong employer and community connections and meaningful evaluation.

CDAA would welcome the opportunity to provide further information to the Standing Committee or participate in a public hearing as part of this inquiry.

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Submission contact

[redacted]
Career Development Association of Australia
[redacted]