



Submission cover sheet

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

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INQUIRY INTO E-PET-077-25: ACCESS TO 11-12 ATAR LANGUAGE COURSES IN 2026

Thank you for the opportunity to make a submission to this inquiry into the petition at the end of 2025 regarding access to 11–12 ATAR language courses in 2026.

As you might be aware, the ACT is one of the few jurisdictions in Australia without a centrally delivered language education program. Government-run programs that allow students to study a language not offered in their day schools have been running for some years in New South Wales, Victoria, South Australia, Queensland and the Northern Territory. These in no way replace school-based language programs; they supplement and complement them.

In her written response to the petition dated 6 February 2026¹, Minister Berry made it clear that the ACT government was not willing to support a similar centrally offered program for senior secondary language study. This is despite the proven practical model - with minimal economic investment - demonstrated in the ACT by the Canberra Academy of Languages (CAL) from 2017 until 2023 and subsequently by CIT Solutions.

Demand for such a program was amply shown by the steady increase in enrolments in CAL courses over the years, the expansion of number of languages offered, and the willingness of families to cover costs. The CAL model also demonstrated how it could enhance day school programs. At least one college used it to enrich curriculum options, which enabled more of their students to complete study of a language at Year 12 level.

The government underestimates the repercussions of their decision not to support the continuation of a centralised language program. The suggestion made to at least one family 'disappointed by the decision' that their child commute from their home college to another for a language program was quite impractical. Even if teleporting were possible, timetabling differences would present considerable obstacles. Equally unsatisfactory was the suggestion that a student uproot themselves from their peer group to enrol in a college elsewhere in the ACT that did offer the desired language.

The decision has far wider ramifications than disappointing a few families. It is quite at odds with the ACT Government's commitment to "an inclusive, equitable and high-quality public education system that recognises the right of every child and young person to learn and benefit from the opportunities that education brings"¹. Languages are a key learning area that benefits cognitive development and academic achievement across multiple domains, including English and literacy. As the 'ACT Language Education Action Plan'² states in the last paragraph of the Introduction (p.2) "Language provision is a critical subject area".

Maximising the range of languages offered at senior secondary level through a centrally delivered program signals that the government recognises and values the subject area. It can also encourage students to continue language study after it becomes optional as they are assured of a pathway through to year 12 regardless of which day school they attend. Studying a language at senior secondary level lays a solid foundation for attaining proficiency in the language and widens options for life and work in an increasingly global environment.

The government decision is at odds with the first three priorities in the 'ACT Language Education Action Plan', which states (p.3) that "an improved model for language provision in ACT schools will

- meet the needs of the community
- provide flexibility and richness in language provision options and delivery
- provide choice for students to pursue language proficiency."

Continuing and further developing the successful model initiated by CAL and building on the interest it has garnered in the community and support from ACT schools and colleges would be completely in line with all three of the above principles and demonstrably improve the current model for language provision in ACT schools.

A final implication of the decision relates to teacher recruitment and retention, an acknowledged challenge for languages education Australia-wide. A centrally offered language program can increase options for the Directorate to offer full-time positions to teachers of

languages in demand rather than a part time position in one college or requiring a teacher to teach outside their specialist area to make up a full-time load. This, plus the attraction of strongly motivated learners willing to study in a program outside of regular school hours, could be a significant factor in the recruitment of, and even more importantly the retention of, qualified and experienced language teachers. Such teachers are key to developing and delivering quality language programs in ACT schools.

In light of all the above, the government should reconsider its decision and undertake to retain and further develop a centrally delivered Year 11 and 12 ATAR languages program. This would increase the flexibility of the ACT education “to meet the increasing demands of a modern global society (Language Education Action Plan p.2), have “a delivery model that is agile and flexible enough to meet student and community needs (ibid p.3), help to attract and retain specialist language teachers and to fulfil the government’s aspiration “for the ACT to be the jurisdiction of choice for languages education, particularly given our national standing as representing Australia’s diplomatic headquarters, major government departments, and multicultural community” (Minister Berry’s response to the petition)

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REFERENCES

1. Minister Berry’s written response to the petition (E-PET-077-25 – Access to 11-12 ATAR language courses in 2026) dated 6 February 2026:

<https://epetitions.parliament.act.gov.au/details/e-pet-077-25/attachment/government-response-e-pet-077-25-access-to-11-12-atar-language-courses.pdf>

2. ‘Language Education Action Plan’. ACT Government. April 2024:

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