



**LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY FOR THE
AUSTRALIAN CAPITAL TERRITORY**

STANDING COMMITTEE ON SOCIAL POLICY

(Reference: [Inquiry into E-PET-077-25: Access to 11-12 ATAR language courses in 2026](#))

Members:

**MR T EMERSON (Chair)
MS C BARRY (Deputy Chair)
MISS L NUTTALL
MS C TOUGH**

PROOF TRANSCRIPT OF EVIDENCE

CANBERRA

TUESDAY, 28 APRIL 2026

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**Secretary to the committee:
Ms K Langham (Ph: 620 75498)**

By authority of the Legislative Assembly for the Australian Capital Territory

Submissions, answers to questions on notice and other documents, including requests for clarification of the transcript of evidence, relevant to this inquiry that have been authorised for publication by the committee may be obtained from the Legislative Assembly website.

WITNESSES

BERRY, MS YVETTE , Deputy Chief Minister, Minister for Education and Early Childhood, Minister for Homes, Homelessness and New Suburbs and Minister for Sport and Recreation	55
BORTON, MR JASON , Executive Branch Manager, Education Programs and Services	55
DRUMMOND, MS NATALIE LISETTE	37
ELLIOTT, MS VERONICA , Executive Officer, ACT Parents	19
H Aidon, MR SHAUN , Principal, Senior Secondary Certificate (Year 12) Program, Canberra Institute of Technology.....	44
HENNESSY, DR BIANCA , Research and Policy Officer, Australian Education Union, ACT Branch	26
JACKSON, MRS ROSLYN LOUISE , Non-executive Director, Canberra Institute of Technology Governing Board.....	44
JUDGE, MR PATRICK , Branch Secretary, Australian Education Union, ACT Branch	26
KEIGHLEY, MR FRANK , Former Convenor, Canberra Academy of Languages....	1
LETHBRIDGE, MR ORION , Member, Australian Education Union, ACT Branch	26
McLEAN, MS JULIE , Policy Officer, ACT Parents.....	19
RAGULAN, MRS APIRAMI , Secretary, Canberra Tamil School.....	12
RAMIAH, MS UMA	1
SPENCE, MS ANGELA , Deputy Director-General, Education Directorate	55
THIRUVATHAWOORAN, MR GOKULARUBAN , North Campus Principal, Canberra Tamil School.....	12
TOURÉ, MR BABA	1
VON GUTTNER, MS GEORGIA , Chief Industry and Innovation Officer, Canberra Institute of Technology	44
WOOD, MS JO , Director-General, Education Directorate.....	55

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Amended 20 May 2013

The committee met at 10.02 am

KEIGHLEY, MR FRANK, Former Convenor, Canberra Academy of Languages
RAMIAH, MS UMA
TOURÉ, MR BABA

THE CHAIR: Good morning, and welcome to the public hearing of the inquiry by the Standing Committee on Social Policy into E-PET-077-25: Access to 11-12 ATAR language courses in 2026. The committee will today hear from the Canberra Academy of Languages, the Canberra Tamil School, ACT Parents, the Australian Education Union ACT, the CIT Board, and the Minister for Education and Early Childhood.

The committee wishes to acknowledge the traditional custodians of the lands we are meeting on, the Ngunnawal people. We wish to acknowledge and respect their continuing culture and the contribution they make to the life of the city and this region. We would also like to acknowledge and welcome any other Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people who may be attending today's event or listening online.

This hearing is a legal proceeding of the Assembly and has the same standing as proceedings of the Assembly itself; therefore, today's evidence attracts parliamentary privilege. The giving of false or misleading evidence is a serious matter and may be regarded as contempt of the Assembly.

The hearing is being recorded and transcribed by Hansard and it will be published. The proceedings are also being broadcast and webstreamed live. When taking a question on notice, it will be useful if witnesses use the words, "I will take that question on notice." This will help the committee and witnesses to confirm questions taken on notice from the transcript.

We welcome representatives of the Canberra Academy of Languages. Do you have any comment to make on the capacity in which you appear?

Ms Ramiah: I am a Tamil teacher who has been teaching Tamil for the last seven years.

THE CHAIR: Mr Touré will be appearing via Webex. We will come back to him shortly. Please note that, as witnesses, you are protected by parliamentary privilege and bound by its obligations. As mentioned, you must tell the truth. Giving false or misleading evidence will be treated as a serious matter and may be considered contempt of the Assembly.

I am looking at documents that I believe you would like to table, Mr Keighley. Do you want to do that? You can speak to those documents, including the costings here.

Mr Keighley: Certainly. One of those documents is feedback relating to the submission by the government, addressing some points that we think are contentious in the government's submission. Another item is a costing that we prepared in relation to the scenario where the government takes on delivery of the programs next year. There are some unknowns in the scenario, of course, because there is currently an enterprise bargaining process underway. The assumptions relating to salary levels could be affected by those negotiations.

THE CHAIR: In this costing, you have assumed 72 students being enrolled.

Mr Keighley: Yes. If you have six classes running, with an average of 12 students in each class, you are generating a total of 72, as your overall enrolment. The scenarios, for the sake of simplicity, have assumed that classes are uniform in size, but the result financially is the same, as long as the average class size is 12. You could have some classes as small as six, and you might have others that have 18, and they would offset each other, with an average of 12, between those two examples.

THE CHAIR: You have put here a rate of \$1,500 per student. Is that to meet the projected expenses? Where does that rate come from? How does it compare with what, say, the Canberra Academy of Languages was charging—the funding arrangement?

Mr Keighley: The Canberra Academy of Languages charged the same fee over the seven years that we were operational. Towards the end, that was a challenging equation because, obviously, our costs had increased. We were paying an award rate that was governed under the Fair Work provisions for the national school education award.

When we handed over, we said to CIT Solutions, “We would recommend you review that fee structure; otherwise it could affect your viability in running the program as a cost recovery exercise, assuming there is no subsidy from another source.” They increased the fee from \$500 per term to, I think, eventually about \$650, towards the end. I do not know what CIT are currently charging. In the case where the government decided to run full cost recovery, it would be necessary to charge at least \$750 a term, which is \$1,500 a semester.

THE CHAIR: Would these fees be charged to schools, charged to parents, or both options?

Mr Keighley: Both options, yes, or even a mix. Which of those applies would be up to the principal of the school, in negotiation with the families involved. It would not necessarily be one size fits all. We have seen cases where a school said, “We’re going to prioritise this language because we owe a duty to certain students in our school, based on why they are here and their academic record, and we would support them. Anyone else can enrol, but they would have to pay their own way.” There are all sorts of ways of handling that. In this scenario, it would be up to the school to determine that. Given that the government are the custodian that I have in mind for these programs, it could be a government decision as to how they handle that issue.

In other jurisdictions, it is handled at jurisdiction level, in New South Wales, I think, and in Victoria. In South Australia, there is scope for either the school or the family to be the sponsor. That is a bit like the model that we had. The difference in South Australia is that they had a very big subsidy, so the amount that the school or family was sponsoring was quite small.

THE CHAIR: In that case, the government mostly funded the program, but there was a small—

Mr Keighley: Yes, I would say 80 to 90 per cent of the cost, and only 10 or 20 per cent

was borne by the family, except in certain cases. There was differentiation, according to the running costs of the program and the priority allocated by the government. There is at least one jurisdiction where, if a student wants to follow an International Baccalaureate program, they are paying closer to cost recovery for that.

THE CHAIR: In New South Wales and Victoria, it is fully government funded?

Mr Keighley: Again, the rate that is paid varies, and the rate that is paid generally in senior secondary is higher than the rate in high school and primary school. We are not proposing that anything is offered for high school or primary school. The principal reason for that is to keep a small target and make a manageable starting point for programs. But there is another important reason, which is the role of community language schools, which are much more viable up to year 10, and not really viable, for almost any of them, in year 11 and 12, because of the compliance requirements with the Board of Senior Secondary Studies courses.

THE CHAIR: I see you have noted that as an issue with one of the government's proposals in your tabled document.

Mr Keighley: It is a big issue. Compliance is huge. You need to have professionally remunerated staff members, in my view, to address those requirements. The same applies for teachers, because if you have high-stakes assessment, you should not be relying on volunteer teaching. That was advice from Fair Work Australia on that.

THE CHAIR: I want to ask about some of the alternatives and, from a financial perspective, what your assessment is of what works best. Other ideas that have been put forward involve having students travel and take language courses at another college that offers the language of their choice. One of the submissions—we have received at least one—suggests having the opposite arrangement, where teachers would move from college to college and run language classes. Of course, there is the program that has been in place for many years, which is having teachers centralised after hours onsite with students from different colleges. Can you help the committee to understand which makes more sense economically, as well as from a teacher availability perspective?

Mr Keighley: Certainly. The first thing is to look at the implications for a student participating in a program. From my experience, having worked in the college sector, it is very tricky for students to commute across town to do one subject. In one example, for this year's program, it was suggested that one student, who had done French through primary school and high school in her local area, should commute across from her day college to one other college for one subject.

Apart from the fact that, if you add up the travel time, you are arguably looking at more travel time than you have contact hours in the subject. If the destination college has three sessions per week and it takes almost an hour each way, including getting to a bus, waiting, and making sure you are there before it leaves early, which happens sometimes, you are talking about two hours travel time for each session. Some of those sessions might only be one hour, so you have done two hours travel for a one-hour session. Even in the best case, the longest session is likely to be a two-hour session. You have spent as much time travelling as you have been in the class.

That is just not practical, from a student's point of view and a family's point of view. It should be remembered that a lot of students in senior secondary are not yet licensed drivers, so they cannot necessarily just jump in their car, head off and be back in time.

The other issue is timetable clashes. The model assumes that the two colleges have 100 per cent compatible timetables for the particular subject that you are looking at enrolling in. That almost never happens. When I was at Hawker, we had an arrangement with Lake G; we did this in sociology, where we sent a student across to Lake G and we hosted a student from them for French. It did not work well for them because there was always at least one session that clashed with what they had on their timetable in their main college. It is not a practical proposition to be doing that.

The counterpoint is where you have a shared teacher across campuses. The problem is that you are using a lot of teacher time for commutes that are not paid for. I have not seen an offer in any EBA in the ACT for teachers who have to commute across campuses to be compensated for their travel cost and the extra time. That is assuming, again, that the two organisations have compatible timetables.

Again, when I was at Hawker, a bit of that was attempted with the local Belconnen High School. I have with me a submission from a former Belconnen high principal, which I can table. I have four copies of that for you. It is a very short one. Dennis Flannery has experience with that. It is not specifically mentioned in his submission here.

The point is that timetable compatibility is very tricky, and it is particularly tricky between different levels of schooling. The whole design of a college timetable is usually different from the design of a high school one. For a start, normally, in a college you have slightly longer sessions, and fewer of them in a day. Immediately, you have a problem in terms of lining those timetables up. What do you do with the class in the hiatus when the teacher cannot be there, because they are finishing their class in the other school? That is a very tricky proposition. Was there another part to your question?

THE CHAIR: I want to give other committee members an opportunity to ask questions. How does a centralised program resolve those issues? Is it where you have one two-hour session per week? Obviously, students still have to travel for it and find a way to get there and back. There is enough demand that it has happened in the past, and it is outside school hours, so there is no issue with scheduling.

Mr Keighley: Timetables; that is right.

THE CHAIR: Teacher availability was the other point that I was asking you about. Is that a concern? I believe it is something that the government has raised as an issue.

Mr Keighley: Yes, the government is concerned about that. The teacher availability issue impacts day schools intensively and increasingly. It did not prevent us from staffing any of our programs in the whole seven years that we were running them. Part of the reason for that is your catchment to employ someone for those programs is the whole system. Anyone from any school in the daytime programs can come in, in the evening, and deliver the evening program, so staffing is so much easier. Also, it can deliver a benefit to the system in the day school programs because if you can offer 0.2

additional, as part of the overall picture in somebody's employment for language teaching, it is more of an incentive for them to stay in language teaching.

One of the issues, again, that I found at Hawker College was that if I could only offer 0.2 to someone, it was not a living wage. I had one of the best-qualified French teachers I have seen, aside from Baba, who is an outstanding French teacher, and who has been involved in Narrabundah College programs, CAL programs and CIT Solutions. She said, "Frank, it's just not worth my while; I'm going to the public service." We lost her. We need not have; if the CAL model or the CIT Solutions model had been in operation, it is quite conceivable that she might have stayed in the profession, but she has not. And that is a common story.

Staffing it is straightforward. For students and families, one of the great advantages of the way it was structured was that it was a hybrid onsite and set-work program. It is not unique. It has been used in other subject areas, even within the college system, where you might do half your hours equivalent face to face and the other half as supervised set work that is monitored. Science is another subject where it has been done, and it has been a very good way to minimise the impact for families in terms of commutes, and minimise the night-time travel involved for students.

One of the things that we were impressed by, in terms of this model, was that even students from outlying areas, from Tuggeranong College or Erindale College, could get to our programs in time for the start of classes, using public transport. That meant busy parents who had not yet finished their working day did not need to worry about getting their students to the venue. By the time the classes were finishing, almost all the parents had finished their working day, and they could easily pick them up. It was no longer an issue for transport.

THE CHAIR: That was at Ainslie School?

Mr Keighley: That was at Ainslie School. That is a key reason for the choice of a very central location. Ainslie is the best option that I can think of. I still have not thought of a better location, in terms of access to public transport, because it is near the city bus interchange and the light rail terminus.

MS BARRY: I have a few questions. Thomas has asked a few of my other questions. The Australian Education Union, whilst they accept that this model is trying to solve a problem that exists, talk about the inequity, essentially, of the model. In their submission they said this was solely the responsibility of the education department. Why do you think this model should exist, noting the inequity issues that have been addressed in the Australian Education Union's submission?

Mr Keighley: Equity is not an intrinsic issue in the model. The decision about funding is entirely in the hands of government. The cost of making equity not an issue would be the cost of funding those student places in the program. It is not a big cost. You have looked at that scenario. If you look at the bottom line for it, it is not a big number. Compare that to light rail. It is a small number of dollars to make this happen, without charging students and families, and your equity question goes away.

In terms of equity, my problem about equity currently is that your postcode or your day

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school address determines your curriculum choice. One person wrote in and said to me, “That’s all very well, but what if every student with a particular subject interest wants a central delivery model for that subject?” That is not what I am proposing. It is not what has happened in other jurisdictions. It is specific to languages, and I cannot think of an example in any other jurisdiction where the central delivery model has been necessary in relation to another subject area.

One of the reasons for the languages one is that you are not just studying a generic language; you are studying a particular language. When I was at Hawker, again, I looked at the implications of putting on a small class, because I had a few people in the community who wanted their language offered by Hawker. I could not justify it on my staffing budget. I could not put three or four kids into a class and fund that. I needed a central delivery option outside the college to supplement what I could do inside the college. When I finished at Hawker and retired from there, I thought, “This is something that we need to address in the system.”

That is why Ros and I established CAL. It was to address that fundamental problem in language program delivery at college level—that where you go to school determines what your choices are. That does not have to determine your choices. If you choose to say, “On balance, it’s more important for me to do some other subjects; I’m not prepared to make the commitment for a commute once a week,” that is fine; you do not have to. No jurisdiction compels anybody to commute, to do these centrally delivered courses. People make the choice. So it is available.

In terms of the funding options, there is another funding possibility that I did explore; that is, where the fees were a deal-breaker for a family, and they could not manage those fees, looking at philanthropy as a way of bridging that gap in those cases where that occurs. I am glad that we did not progress that too far before the collapse of CIT Solutions, because it was during that period that I was exploring these options. If we have a safe pair of hands and a program provider that we can depend on in the long term, that becomes a possibility to talk about as well. That is a third way of looking at it. You have the family- or school-sponsored model, you have the government-sponsored model, which is the standard one in other jurisdictions, and you have that hybrid that I have just talked about.

MS TOUGH: Thank you for coming in, Frank. Your submission has been really interesting. I think you have covered this already. CAL operated outside school hours. Do you know how CIT Solutions have been operating it—what hours of the week?

Mr Keighley: They have operated in the same way that we did.

MS TOUGH: In a central location?

Mr Keighley: They used, very largely, the operating processes that we did. I have to acknowledge as well that we, in turn, replicated in many respects the operating processes of the South Australian School of Languages, and they were very helpful to us in 2016, the year before we launched. They gave us a lot of time to help with advising how to get started. We did not have to start from scratch in that respect.

MS TOUGH: I was going to ask how your model came about, so it is really helpful to

understand the South Australian personal connection.

Mr Keighley: The other thing I should mention is that the colleagues involved in those kinds of programs interstate are really helpful. They have an annual conference, which was very useful to attend, because you could get the perspectives of different providers and see how they were addressing different questions that were coming up at the time. The Australian Network of Government Language Schools has an annual conference, and I would strongly support continuing the engagement with that group for the new provider coming in.

MS TOUGH: Some other jurisdictions, like New South Wales, have online study models. New South Wales has the School of Languages. I know there are other courses for senior secondary studies in New South Wales whereby, if your school does not offer it, there is a way to enrol by distance education. What are your thoughts on an online model?

Mr Keighley: Absolutely. The same is true in other jurisdictions, like Victoria, South Australia and Queensland. It is not the only model. For many families and students, their preferred model is where they can have some face-to-face, regular interaction. When I was at Hawker, we had some students who enrolled in a subject that we could not offer and that was not available through any other channel at the time. It has been suggested that this would be a way to go—accessing New South Wales distance education facilities for ACT students. Can I comment on that?

MS TOUGH: Yes, please. That was going to be my follow-up question.

Mr Keighley: First, we have no guaranteed access to the New South Wales programs. It is a favour to an ACT family, and they are last in line because they are not the taxpayers who are funding that in New South Wales; it is the New South Wales taxpayers who fund that, and the Department of Education of New South Wales is in control of it. Second, the timelines for enrolment are very tricky, and they cross that threshold between high school and college, when our students are least in a position to manage all the complexities of getting an interstate subject into their college timetable. It is very tricky.

Third, for the college—and I have had the experience of supervising students participating in these programs—it is a lot of work. It is almost like having another class that you have to deliver, except you are not paid for it and you are not funded for it. At any time, it is within the remit of the New South Wales minister for education to say, “No, there’s no reason why we should be helping you guys out. We haven’t got enough places for our own students.”

When we were looking at helping some students who wanted one particular language that we were not offering, we went cap in hand to every distance ed facility in New South Wales, and they all said, “Sorry, we’re full. and you’re not a priority, anyway; you’re ACT.” I had direct experience of it. And that is before we even start talking about the educational model of distance ed. The fact is that some students can engage with that successfully; it is not every student who can. It has a whole extra set of demands, in terms of personal organisation, engagement, diligence and stickability that you cannot necessarily assume every student can bring to the table.

MS TOUGH: That is really helpful; thank you.

MISS NUTTALL: On page 3 of your submission, you state:

National longitudinal data demonstrate that students forced to discontinue language education after Year 10 are highly unlikely to re-engage with language study at university.

I am interested in that data, where it comes from and what we have seen in terms of that lack of re-engagement if students do not have language options in years 11 and 12.

Mr Keighley: There has been a lot of work done as a national project by the AFMLTA, which is the Australian Federation of Modern Language Teachers Associations. It is referenced in the list at the end of that submission. It is not the only source relating to it. There has been work done over a long period of time on these kinds of questions. Professor Jo Lo Bianco, who is based in Victoria, has done longitudinal studies on language learning.

The point that we need particularly to be aware of is that continuity of language learning builds competence and capability. If you have discontinuity in language learning, you have a fractured experience of engagement with the language, the target language, and the outcomes will be compromised to some extent, inevitably.

To put some numbers on it, the American Foreign Service Institute has a set of ratings of classroom teaching contact time required to become functionally competent in a workplace for the use of a target language. It ranges from about 700 hours for languages like French, Spanish and Italian, that have high cognate content compared to English—many words similar. German is a bit harder because of the grammar, but a bit easier because of the base language terms that relate to Anglo-Saxon. You can get up to 2,000 hours for subjects like Japanese and Mandarin.

In a college program, the mandated hours, contact time, are only 55 hours per semester; that is 220 hours over an entire major in a language. I have focused particularly on the completion rates for a major at continuing level for a good reason, which is that, unless they have the base learning through the high school years, leading into their college studies, most of them will not be coming out at the end of year 12 with skills that you can deploy in a workplace in the target language.

The only way that we can claim that we are building real capacity for workplaces is by getting kids through their high school and college years with continuity. If you do not have that, you are not ready for any workplace to use the target language in dealing with your counterparts—for example, in an overseas foreign affairs, defence or immigration role. You just cannot.

In all the time, I think Baba is the one who has seen a student at beginning level who built the capacity in an extraordinarily short time, just through the college years. But she is—I think Baba would agree—the exception.

The other thing that the education system cannot claim credit for is the completers, most

of them at advanced level, because their capacity does not come from school; it comes from home or it comes from overseas experience. With most students completing an advanced major, we have not built that capability. Other contexts are the source of that capability. The numbers that matter, in comparing how we are doing, how we are performing as a jurisdiction, are the students who have completed a major at continuing level in a language.

MISS NUTTALL: Thank you; that is really helpful. Looking at the figures for the growth of Canberra Academy of Languages from 2017, what are your theories as to why the uptake increased so rapidly to 74 students in 2023? What do you attribute that to?

Mr Keighley: Two words: unmet demand. Not only that; the kinds of families and kids that were coming to us were the ones who had a commitment to and a belief in the value of it. If you just provide a program option that meets that desire to learn about languages, to learn languages and to get intercultural understanding, they will come to you. If there is a fee, there is a fee, and most of them will not be stopped by that. The only challenge that we had was in getting the message out that this existed. We had to be very focused on communication channels with the families, with the schools and with the students. The schools were a crucial part of that partnership, and many of them really valued the fact that they did not have a big headache about delivering every language that every family wanted in their school.

THE CHAIR: Ms Ramiah and Mr Touré, from your perspective as teachers, I would be curious to understand more about whether you were concurrently teaching in the public system and the private system, the non-government school system, and how this was beneficial. We have heard about the students and the specifics of the model, but how was this beneficial for you, as language teachers?

Ms Ramiah: Currently, I am teaching in the public system. I have also been teaching in CAL, CIT Solutions and CIT. The current situation here, especially for the Tamil language, is that it has come to a point where this particular language course will not be offered anymore in the ACT, because there is no college that is ready to enrol students for that particular language.

That is the reason why, when I was working seven or eight years ago, we introduced Tamil. After approaching a few colleges, we realised that colleges only accept courses when there are enough numbers. That is when I approached Frank to get Tamil started in the Canberra curriculum of languages. There is huge support from the Tamil community, and the students are very keen to do the course, regardless of the after-school hours, the fees they have to pay, and things like that.

When we started, there was an early entrance program for all courses in the ACT, so the students were allowed to do a year 11 and 12 Tamil course in years 9 and 10, but that was stopped in 2025, even though the students were keen to continue Tamil in the years 11 and 12 ATAR program. Currently, the community is in a bit of shock, I would say, and they are even thinking about getting a specialist education provider licence to get it done.

As we have seen, with the history of what has happened with any specialist education

provider, it is quite hard to sustain in the long run, especially without government funding. It will be very hard for any individual private organisation to continue. Also, with the technicalities involved and the workload, it is a pretty challenging and enormous task for any community schools to do it. I think the students have benefited all the while. You might have seen the many submissions from Tamil parents and students who are very keen. They are very focused on wanting the course to continue.

I am only here expressing myself in a personal capacity. In my personal opinion, offering a course in the curriculum is great, but if it is not delivered, it does not mean anything to the students or the community. So far, for the Tamil program, it has always been up to the specialist education providers or individuals to continue the course. It has now come to a point where it should be run by the government in ACT colleges—at least in a few colleges in the ACT—or the centralised model would be a better solution. As we have seen with CAL and other special education providers, even though some languages, like French and German, are offered in colleges, there are still students who are doing this course, because there might be a timetable clash there, or they might want to do some other subject which the college is unique in offering.

The students are very keen. With very minimal advertising, the numbers in CAL were growing. From the point of view of the Tamil students, the best thing we expect is for the course to continue as an ATAR course, because the courses offered by community language schools in the ACT are not recognised by any government or any department. That is a big thing. For the last seven years, once it had been introduced as an ATAR course, the community has started involving the students in a very keen manner, because they can complete their course in a recognised form. Studying in community schools is not providing them with the acknowledgement that they need. Running it in years 11 and 12 is a great option.

THE CHAIR: We will go to you, Mr Touré. I do not think we are going to hear from any other teachers throughout the day. Before we go to our next witnesses, I am curious to hear about your experience as a teacher in the centralised program and what impact it would have on teachers not to replace this program or have it brought in-house by the ACT government.

Mr Touré: I am a teacher in the ACT public school system, and I have been involved in the CAL program as well as CIT. As my colleague Uma said, the program has been highly beneficial for students on many levels. It provides a more effective and supportive language learning environment due to the smaller size of the class. It also provides an environment in which students can interact. As someone who has been in the public system for a long time, there are many advantages I could see that the CAL or the previous CIT program would offer.

The structure of the program also gives greater responsibility to students for their learning, given that they have to complete some parts at home and at uni. From the testimony I have had from students, many students have been able to go to France for immersion programs. They recount how the program was beneficial to them. Some of them recount how confident they are, given the small numbers in the classroom that they would not have had in the general classroom setting.

In my view, maintaining the program is essential. It would ensure equity of educational

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opportunity for all ACT students. I remember having students from Tuggeranong who would not have been able to study French if they did not do the program. I also remember a student who was doing the IB program at Narrabundah. The student had Italian, and she wanted to do, I think, two or three languages. The Italian class clashed with her French class, because Narrabundah offers French as well. Luckily, CAL was there, and she was able to accomplish her educational aims by coming to CAL and doing the program.

From both a teacher's point of view and from what I heard from students, after teaching in the program for four years, it has only been a positive experience for me and for the students as well.

Mr Keighley: Can I make one point about the government submission?

THE CHAIR: Sure. Quickly, if you do not mind.

Mr Keighley: The numbers that are quoted for the CAL or CIT program enrolments versus enrolments in the public college system are, I think, misleading because they are not comparing apples with apples. If they are going to do that, they should compare the numbers in the CAL or CIT program with the numbers in language programs in the public college system, and that would have been a valid comparison. That was not provided in that submission. There is a big difference.

THE CHAIR: Or language rates in government schools compared to non-government schools, which you have mentioned in your submission.

Mr Keighley: Yes, that is another one. There is a range of other things. I have put them in my notes that you have as a tabled document. I have a couple of other documents to table, which I can leave with the secretariat before I go.

THE CHAIR: Yes. On behalf of the committee, I thank you for your attendance today, for your work in this area, and for the detail in the submissions that you have provided. It is greatly appreciated by the committee.

RAGULAN, MRS APIRAMI, Secretary, Canberra Tamil School
THIRUVATHAWOORAN, MR GOKULARUBAN, North Campus Principal,
Canberra Tamil School

THE CHAIR: We welcome witnesses from the Canberra Tamil School.

Mr Thiruvathawooran: I am the north school principal of Canberra Tamil School, and I am an executive member of the Canberra Tamil Association as well.

THE CHAIR: Please note that, as witnesses, you are protected by parliamentary privilege and bound by its obligations. You must tell the truth. Giving false or misleading evidence will be treated as a serious matter and may be considered contempt of the Assembly.

We will go directly into questions. We just heard from our previous witnesses about the lack of a Tamil option at colleges across the ACT, and that the centralised program offering addresses that gap. Do you see another solution emerging to provide Tamil to college students in the ACT without the continuation of the external languages program? And if you do see another option, why is that more or less viable than retaining the centralised program that has already been offered?

Mr Thiruvathawooran: The number one thing is how to make sure that we are in line—providing education, through what Mr Keighley was saying. Without that—that is where we are coming into this picture. In our community at the Tamil school, they are taught from preschool to year 10. There is a platform in place, and we have organically grown. The Tamil school has 100 students currently. At the north school we have got 70 students and another 30 students in the south campus as well. This has been grown by the ACT government.

Two years ago, we brought in a teacher from CIT and told the parents that there is this viable option—that they can continue their studies, and they can progress through. These are things that you have to make sure the parents understand and are educated about as well, in terms of the options they have got, because these kids need to be trained at a young age or provided education at a young age at that standard so that they are ready for these options. So we have done that so far. The school was established in 1992, and we have been running it for 35 years now.

Naturally, now it has come to a point for the students where there is a lack of motivation due to the pathway not being available. Our point is that we would like the government to have an established group to provide this. If that is not viable then, as a community, we are happy to take on that responsibility. We are currently talking to BSSS, and we are making inroads on what the requirements are and what we need to provide in terms of health and safety for students. But it is an onerous task on the community. We have TQI teachers; we have parents who are committed. At the same time, we want to make sure that we are on a level that, if there is no other viable option, we are ready to take it on—that is number one. Did I answer the question?

THE CHAIR: You did, yes; thank you. Were you consulted? You mentioned that the ACT government has supported more Tamil students up to year 10. Were you consulted at all on the winding-up of CIT Solutions? And at what point did the government engage

with the Tamil school, if at any point, about what would be in place for year 11 and 12 students moving forward?

Mr Thiruvathawooran: We were not consulted, no; I do not think so.

Ms Ragulan: I do not think; no.

Mr Thiruvathawooran: Unfortunately, our Principal Co-ordinator is not in town; he is overseas, so we are representing the school. I am not aware that they were consulted.

THE CHAIR: Okay. Just quickly, those Teacher Quality Institute—TQI—qualified teachers that you have at the school: have they been teaching at CIT Solutions as well?

Mr Thiruvathawooran: No, they have not.

THE CHAIR: So there are teachers there if there is a need?

Mr Thiruvathawooran: Yes. We have had conversations with the community as well in terms of moving forward, and there is an interest. As I said, the Canberra Tamil Association is our parent body, and we have been talking with them, and with Victorian state education providers, as well as with New South Wales providers, on how they provide their education system. So the work has been happening, and if everything fails, then we will be pushing, through BSSS, our framework.

THE CHAIR: It does seem less efficient though—if you have got all the languages having to do the same thing—than just having one program.

Mr Thiruvathawooran: Yes, that is right. Also, we have to make sure that this is a community organisation, and it is a lot of pressure on the community to provide the infrastructure. And we will be pushing ourselves, because all of us have a full-time job. It will be a burden on us. But for the sake of the students and for the future, we would like to take on that.

THE CHAIR: Ms Barry?

MS BARRY: Thank you. I have got a few questions on what conversations you have had. In your submission you talked about the infrastructure gap, and you said you cannot offer ATAR-accredited classes because there is no centralised directorate-level system to moderate and recognise this learning. What conversations have you had with the government or the Education Directorate about that, if any?

Mr Thiruvathawooran: We will have to take that on notice.

MS BARRY: Thank you. You also talked about the TQI accredited teachers. How many have you got?

Mr Thiruvathawooran: Currently we have got two.

MS BARRY: Two.

Mr Thiruvathawooran: That is right. But the education providers are assistant teachers from public schools. We have got early education providers and professionals like me, as well, included in our workforce.

MS BARRY: And just for my benefit so that I understand the types of students you have, one argument that has been made about languages in schools is that for someone like me, who migrated, I do not need to study language. It is mostly for the younger children but, importantly, more broadly for the community. I want to understand your student demography. Is it just people from the Asian background, or is it other students as well from across the community? Do you have other students? Do you have people who are like me who are studying the language, or is it specifically students from the South Asian background?

Mr Thiruvathawooran: Currently from the Asian background—save that there are students who have parents from different backgrounds.

MS BARRY: Right, okay.

Mr Thiruvathawooran: So there might be an Asian parent, and the other parent is from another background.

MS BARRY: So, it is anyone who has interest in studying Tamil. It is open to anyone who has interest?

Mr Thiruvathawooran: Open to anyone, yes.

MS BARRY: Right.

Mr Thiruvathawooran: The most important thing we are trying to instil is the values. So, it is not about the language itself: it is about the culture; it is about the upbringing. It is a saying—and I will take me as an example—in the Sri Lankan community, in Tamil: “A child’s duty is to make a mother and his mother country proud.” Things like that are what we try to teach them. I myself finished my degree and made my mother proud, and I joined the army and worked for the army; for eight years I served this country. So these are the things we are trying to make the community understand.

Back in the day, we had religion, and my parents had religion to tell their kids the values: “These are the norms. This is how the community works.” These days you have language, and I think it is really important these days that we teach that to the kids and let them understand that, at the language level, we come together and we take part in the community as well. That is what we are trying to teach the kids—being a part of the community and being able to provide to their community as well, in any shape or form. That recognition comes through language, and that recognition is something the government needs to provide us so that we can build a pathway moving forward. Another way of saying it is: we have got the teachers; we have got the infrastructure; we have got everything in place; so, with the recognition, there is a road for us to drive our car. That is what we are wanting from here.

MS BARRY: So it is not just about studying language—

Mr Thiruvathawooran: No.

MS BARRY: It is also about values that you instil in children to ensure social cohesion.

Mr Thiruvathawooran: That is right, yes.

MS BARRY: Excellent. Thank you.

MS TOUGH: Thank you. I am building on Ms Barry's question. How many students who are at the Canberra Tamil School are also able to study Tamil at their local school? Or is it that the majority of students do not have a pathway in their local school and that is why they are at the Canberra Tamil School?

Mr Thiruvathawooran: That is right, yes.

MS TOUGH: For primary school and high school?

Mr Thiruvathawooran: Yes. There is no pathway moving forward. As well as the students currently, the parents have come to us to say that there is a need for this. Parents of students who are in year 8 and year 9 are seeing that there is no pathway forward. And as a community, it is hard to build a school when there is no pathway or moving forward—a way so that they can fulfil the requirements that they have got.

MS TOUGH: Are there many schools across Canberra in the primary school age and high schools offering Tamil?

Mr Thiruvathawooran: No, there is not.

MS TOUGH: Are there any? Do you know?

Mr Thiruvathawooran: I have not—

MS TOUGH: Sorry—fair enough. So, all students who are interested in Tamil, or their families, are coming to the Canberra Tamil School?

Mr Thiruvathawooran: The Canberra Tamil school, yes.

MS TOUGH: Yes.

Mr Thiruvathawooran: We work with ACT CLSA—the Community Language School Association—and they have been a cornerstone for us moving forward, and in helping us. We have grown from strength to strength now. And in terms of finance, we have \$20,000 in our fixed deposit account. We have got cash in hand, so we are—

MS TOUGH: You are doing well.

Mr Thiruvathawooran: Yes.

MS TOUGH: Do you operate after school hours, weekends or a mix of both?

Mr Thiruvathawooran: It is weekends—on Saturdays from 3.00 pm to 5.00 pm. The north campus is at Harrison school, and the south campus is at Melrose.

MS TOUGH: Melrose, yes; wonderful. Thank you. And it is really just the administration—there is no-one in the directorate to talk to to become accredited, from what you were saying.

Mr Thiruvathawooran: Sorry?

MS BARRY: They said they were taking it on notice.

MS TOUGH: Yes, taking it on notice—wonderful, thank you.

Mr Thiruvathawooran: Yes.

MISS NUTTALL: I know a few submitters have raised concerns about equity of access. Do you observe that students accessing your program come from particular regions or schools in Canberra across primary school and high school? Do you know where their home schools tend to be?

Mr Thiruvathawooran: We could get that information to you. We have, like I said, the north Campus and south Campus. The north Campus has the majority of 70 students, and the south Campus has 30 students. And we have also got, in Canberra, a Chennai Tamil School as well. They have around, I think—I am guessing—50 to 60 students as well; that is just a guess. So there is a need.

MISS NUTTALL: That is really helpful to know, thank you. I know some people have suggested a model of language teaching where, rather than having full-time language teachers, there is a team who can float between different colleges on different days and times as needed. I am wondering if, for Tamil language offerings in primary school and high school, that provides a road to make Tamil language education available to students in primary school and high school. Do you have any thoughts on a model like that and whether it would work, or do you think it is better offered as it currently is?

Mr Thiruvathawooran: I think it is better offered, as currently, in a centralised location, giving the students more accessibility. The language is something that you learn within a group of people. That is also distance education, but it is more that you stay in a place, and you talk to people—that is how you correct yourself. Language is something that you speak and you get better at; it is not something you learn. In that aspect, I would like it to be a centralised location where students can mingle and get to know each other and their values.

MISS NUTTALL: Thank you very much.

THE CHAIR: Without that kind of centralised offering, what would be your estimate, at a given school and in a given year level, of how many Tamil students would be the absolute most in a cohort—three or four at given school?

Mr Thiruvathawooran: From Canberra Tamil School, we have got seven students who have shown interest from year 8. Like I said, we have 100 students, so even if you

halve it, you have got 50 students coming into the—

THE CHAIR: Who might be keen to continue, yes.

Mr Thiruvathawooran: Also, we are, with CIT, currently encouraging the parents, as well, to join in. And it is, like I said in the beginning, work that you have to start at the beginning. It is not something that, in year 8, you say, “You know what? I’m going to learn this language.” No; it is something that you build up. You can say two plus two, but you first teach them what is two, and then you have to teach them the other aspect on top of it. So now is the time that more parents are getting involved with their children in teaching. There are more people who are interested because of this.

THE CHAIR: Is there a concentration of Tamil language learners in any particular schools? I am imagining at the college level. There is no college that currently offers Tamil, which is why the centralised program has been great. What is the most that you could imagine at a given college for a year 11 cohort? Might it just be two or three Tamil students in a specific college? Do you understand my question?

Mr Thiruvathawooran: A specific college, maybe 10, from north—

Ms Ragulan: I think you are asking, if we had to pinpoint one college, how many students of Tamil background, or Tamil students, would be in that college who would—

THE CHAIR: Yes—who would want to learn a language.

Ms Ragulan: Yes. We probably do not have that at hand, but that is something that we can get.

THE CHAIR: Would it be possible to take that on notice?

Ms Ragulan: Yes, we can.

THE CHAIR: Maybe just a range. You have got your year 10 group, and they are going into year 11 at different colleges. Which college has the largest number of incoming students who might want to continue learning Tamil language, and how many students are in that cohort? A bit of a range, I think, would be helpful for the committee.

Mr Thiruvathawooran: Yes, okay. We can take that.

THE CHAIR: Thank you. We might wrap it up there, if that is okay, and we will bring in our next witnesses.

Mr Thiruvathawooran: Yes.

Ms Ragulan: Just one other thing, probably—

THE CHAIR: Please, yes.

Ms Ragulan: The cultural immersion. We spoke about learning the language, but in the Canberra Tamil School, we have lots of events in the year. We have just had Tamil

new year, where that is taught in school—the traditions of our language. Then, every year, students are given the opportunity to present their learnings; they do drama or speak their language on stage for everyone to see. That happens yearly—all this cultural immersion. It would be nice to have that continue so that they can take it forward—all their roots—and to be able to get that end-of-road experience for the students.

MS BARRY: I have one question. Do you have an example of how you have seen this cultural immersion become of significance to a child—maybe you have a child who is introverted, for example. How is this reflected in the children and their involvement in the school?

Mr Thiruvathawooran: There is a nation-wide exam that we have got for New Zealand and Australia. In that that program, I have seen a student. It is writing, speaking and poems. In the ACT environment, we have people who come in and examine students, and then whoever wins that goes nationwide. It happens in Sydney and Melbourne; there are around, maybe, 800 or 900 students. Out of that, this particular student from the ACT came first nationwide. That really changed the way the student got involved in everything, and he went on to also studying year 11 and 12 in Tamil. It is just that spark that you need to progress through, and he is currently one of our teachers in the school as well. It works; we have seen it happen with the students we have got. Do you know any other examples, Api?

Ms Ragulan: I am thinking of my own example. Although I was born overseas, I came here very young and did not know much of my hometown. So I learnt Tamil back in Victoria, and it was a similar situation. I have been in Tamil schools, and that is the only cultural connection back that I had. Both my parents are Sri Lankan and Tamil, but having this community is a sense of belonging. It is an identity, and that identity only really starts to kick in in year 8 and year 9. And not to have an extended program past the year 10 level, where a student really wants to shine—that is where having that opportunity is great. I did it in year 10; I had the opportunity to study Tamil at VCE level—so, ATAR equivalent in year 10—but not every student has that opportunity. It would be good to have that.

Mr Thiruvathawooran: Now you are the secretary of Tamil school!

Ms Ragulan: Yes.

MS BARRY: That is really useful. Thank you.

THE CHAIR: Thank you. We are going to have to wrap up there. On behalf of the committee, I thank you for your attendance today, for your submission and for all the work you are doing.

We have had one or two questions taken on notice. If you could please provide your answers to the committee secretary within five business days of receiving the uncorrected proof *Hansard*, that would be fantastic.

Ms Ragulan: Thank you.

Mr Thiruvathawooran: Thank you.

Short suspension

ELLIOTT, MS VERONICA, Executive Officer, ACT Parents
McLEAN, MS JULIE, Policy Officer, ACT Parents

THE CHAIR: We welcome the witnesses from ACT Parents. Please note that, as witnesses, you are protected by parliamentary privilege and bound by its obligations. You must tell the truth. Giving false or misleading evidence will be treated as a serious matter and may be considered contempt of the Assembly.

Thank you very much for the submission that you have provided and for appearing today. We will jump straight to questions. The main gist of your submission, if I can summarise it, is about equity and access across the territory, and making sure that there are pathways all the way through the system. One of the solutions put forward regarding potentially losing a centralised language offering for year 11 and 12 students has been out-of-area enrolments. What is your assessment of the sufficiency of that option?

Ms Elliott: Out-of-area enrolment is a mechanism that students in college use all the time to access a subject, or subjects, that they are really passionate about. It is much broader than languages, but languages certainly are a part of that. There are a number of students who would visit different colleges to look at the subjects that they have available, and they may even make further inquiries about what lines those subjects tend to be on, so that they can work out exactly what they are going to study in years 11 and 12.

The out-of-area enrolment pathway remains a viable option for college students, but we recognise that it will not meet everybody's needs, because all of our public schools have to make decisions about what they offer and what that experience would be like. It is very difficult to justify the expense of running a class for a very small number of students when there is demand for other subjects, for example.

THE CHAIR: Have you had parents raise with you any concerns around making out-of-area enrolment applications and being unsuccessful, whether it is broadly or specifically for languages?

Ms Elliott: Based on a choice of subject, no. Based on other criteria, yes. That is a little bit out of scope, I think, for today's purposes.

THE CHAIR: We learnt that 25 per cent of out-of-area enrolments for languages were knocked back due to school capacity. I was wondering whether that is something that has been raised with any of the P&Cs.

Ms Elliott: No, it is not. We could see the instance where it might occur. We would question whether that is related to a particular college, because of capacity in that area. That might be like a one-off. I am not aware of it more broadly, but that does not mean that it is not people's experience.

THE CHAIR: On the pathway issue, and the equity, one of the recommendations that you have made in your submission is to provide up-to-date mapping of that pathway, which makes a lot of sense to me. Do you have a sense of what is happening currently, and in which areas? You have mentioned Tuggeranong and parts of Belconnen, where there might not be pathways. What is your sense of the continuity of language offerings

across the ACT? Also, what is your sense of the government's engagement with that issue?

Ms Elliott: The ACT Education Directorate did some work in 2022, which developed a mapping of language offerings at that point in time, and analysis of pathways. From our experience, and from what we see and know from what is happening in different schools, their pathway information can change quickly, based on the availability of teachers.

Language teachers are specialist teachers, so they are more unique and can be harder to find. They can also be expensive. When we have schools that are struggling for teachers, anyway, it can be difficult for a school to make a choice about where that investment is going.

We would like to see some up-to-date information about what language education is available across the ACT. We would like to know whether the Tuggeranong and Belconnen regions are still experiencing gaps in language education, and whether there is the continuity available to learn from year 3, all the way through to high school and college. Obviously, when you are learning a language, you would not usually just go into year 11 and 12 and pick up a language. It is something where the continuity is really important, and having access to a pathway is beneficial.

What we know anecdotally is that language education is selected by some students, but it is not always overly popular. That can sometimes have an impact—the demand and driver for the availability in schools.

MS BARRY: Following up on Mr Emerson's question around out-of-area enrolments and whether you are aware of parents being rejected, I think you said that there were other criteria.

Ms Elliott: There are a range of reasons why someone might make an out-of-area application to a school or college. We are not aware of any out-of-area applications being rejected based on subject, but there are other grounds that are different.

MS BARRY: What are the other grounds?

Ms Elliott: You might make an out-of-area application based on wellbeing grounds, for example, which is outside the scope.

MS BARRY: The committee heard evidence about a model that essentially could sit within the ACT Education Directorate framework, but it could also sit outside. The model is where there is a centralised system, and students can opt in and study that language after school hours, for example. One of the strong reasons that was given for that model working really well is that if a child, for example, is studying three languages and there is a clash in subjects, they have that pathway as well.

I want to get a sense of whether you think that the education department can run a language program while having this sitting there concurrently, and whether you think that is of benefit to parents. I know that you talk about inequity issues, but the evidence is that parents are happy to pay. I want to get a sense of whether that model could sit

concurrently with the current structure and whether the fact that parents are opting in resolves that inequity issue for you.

Ms Elliott: I think there are a couple of different elements to the question. One of the things that is front of mind for me is that public education in the ACT is largely free. There are some voluntary contributions that can be made, if parents and carers choose to do so. However, education is not withheld without those payments. If the Education Directorate was to offer a fee for service for an opt-in arrangement, that would create some conflict in that area. I think that would be difficult for the community to come to terms with. It would be a significant shift away from free public education.

The other element around it is whether the people who would want to be doing it would have the access. Clearly, in Canberra, there are lots of families who are willing and able to afford additional expenses that might come from an offering like that, where they had to pay for a service. However, that is not everybody, and that would create, I think, an issue of equity.

In terms of having a centralised model, it is difficult, based on the participation rates that we have seen through CIT, to support a centralised model, because the numbers are quite low. I do not know CIT's reasoning for discontinuing, specifically, but I understand that participation rates have been low, and that might impact their ability to continue to provide a service. Given sourcing language teachers can be quite difficult and might be more costly than for a classroom teacher, for example, we would need to consider, as a society, what the cost of that service would be, to have a wide range of offerings to cover students' particular language interests. I do not believe that it will be a cheap exercise to run.

THE CHAIR: The Canberra Academy of Languages tabled a document earlier. They ran this program for four or five years, and they costed it at \$206,000 a year to run six different languages. On the point about equity and continuity of pathways, the previous witnesses from the Tamil School said that they have 100 students doing Tamil until year 10 and, with the loss of this program, there is no college that offers Tamil in the ACT.

Do you think that a centralised program, putting aside the cost, helps to maintain continuity for a larger range of students? I do not know how many French teachers there are teaching in Tuggeranong, for instance, or how many Spanish teachers there are in Belconnen. From my read—and you are the witnesses, so I am asking you the question—it actually expands the equity of the system by retaining a pathway for more students—less so, though, if you have to pay for the service. If the government funded it, would that change your position?

Ms Elliott: When you are looking at the population size, and we have 50,000 students in the public system, we would see that there are many more students who do not have a continuity of any language at all than, say, the example that was given of 100. There are students who study languages in high school that discontinue that language for years 9 and 10. There are students who then would discontinue for college, naturally. It is a point of transition where students have to evaluate a number of different things. They might have a wide range of subject interests, and they do have to make some preferences around that.

That is not to say that a centralised model would not involve greater participation, but what we have seen with CIT Solutions is that the participation rate has not been potentially where it was expected to be. I am suggesting that the \$206,000 that was quoted is very cheap. I have not seen the figures. I have not run the Canberra Academy of Languages, but I do not think that would be the true cost of running a centralised service.

THE CHAIR: It has only been tabled this morning, so we will publish it, I assume. It is a decision for the committee, and I do not want to pre-empt that decision, so we can have a look at it and see where the costings come from. Ms Tough?

MS TOUGH: Thank you both for coming in this morning. Something that piqued my interest in your submission was that Tuggeranong and parts of Belconnen are disadvantaged when it comes to language education.

Ms Elliott: Yes, correct.

MS TOUGH: Living in Tuggeranong, I know a lot of kids that do out-of-area enrolments for a lot of reasons in high school and college. Do you have any data or evidence about students accessing out-of-area enrolments in Tuggeranong where language is their primary concern? I know there are a lot of reasons, which we touched on earlier, around why people do out-of-area. Are you getting feedback that language is a big thing in Tuggeranong?

Ms Elliott: When we talk to parents and carers about languages in schools, providing a language or a number of languages is seen as a mark of a quality education system. People value it, even though some students find learning another language really difficult. Yes, people do make choices to enrol out of area to find a language that their student wishes to study. We do not have the figures on that, but the minister or the Education Directorate should be able to provide you with those.

Ms McLean: Going back to the most recent mapping that we have access to, which is from 2022, that showed that, across the ACT at that point in time, there were 14 public schools that did not offer any language and, of those, seven were in Tuggeranong.

MS TOUGH: Was that across primary school, all the way through?

Ms McLean: Mainly primary, and one high school. Even then, the choice of languages in Tuggeranong was extremely limited compared to other parts of the ACT.

MS TOUGH: My follow-up question was going to be about high school education access, and that is limited in Tuggeranong as well.

Ms McLean: We do not have the current information.

MS TOUGH: Yes, I am going to ask to have updated mapping.

Ms McLean: Back then, there was one high school that did not offer any language, whereas in other parts of the ACT you will find high schools offering multiple

languages, so students have a choice.

MS TOUGH: At that time students had the choice of either the CAL or CIT, but that was a fee-for-service offering.

MS BARRY: Do you find that, in the more inner suburbs, there are more schools offering language and, in the outer suburbs, there are less?

Ms Elliott: There is a general trend that some of the inner or more densely populated areas or schools tend to provide a greater range of subject offerings, including languages; that is correct.

MS BARRY: It is population based, not wealth?

Ms Elliott: I think it arose from historical changes in the way public education operated, in the *Towards 2020* school report. In the ACT, in around 2006, from memory, school choice was broadly allowed because our public schools were at a much lower rate of capacity. That created an opportunity for public schools to attract more students. One of the ways that some schools took advantage of that was to add a greater range of subjects, including languages, and that has continued to this day. I think what we are seeing now is that the gap is quite significant.

MS BARRY: Because it has been trending up?

Ms Elliott: That is right. Also, we now have the priority enrolment area policy which is applied. Yes, there are out-of-area applications that can be made, but a lot of the schools that offer more also have very high-capacity numbers, so that limits how many students they can take in.

MS BARRY: In a way, we have forced the model to be centralised, without meaning for it to be like that. The policies have moved the model into a centralised kind of—

Ms Elliott: Yes. In some ways there is a natural correction that might need to be assisted through policy, certainly. We did a survey of parents and carers at the end of last year and the beginning of this year, and having more consistency and equity of opportunity was one of the things that was consistently raised. People in the community are looking for there to be less variation in what is offered across schools.

MISS NUTTALL: My question follows on quite nicely. With those areas where there was limited access to language education, were there, from your reading, particular hotspots within those areas, and did you observe that they correlated with socio-economic disadvantage? Was it a question of not attracting enough students, not having enough funding per head to bring on a language teacher, in addition to full-time classroom teachers?

Ms Elliott: We have speculated as to why that might be the case. We do not have the data that substantiates that, but it definitely appears to us that some of the schools that have previously gone without languages are in more challenging socio-economic areas. There does seem to be some correlation between socio-economic advantage and the schools that offer more choice in terms of languages. That is at the heart of our argument

around having a more equitable system.

MISS NUTTALL: Thank you; that is really helpful. Obviously, government has had a language education plan from 2024. If you are familiar with the plan, how well do you think it does in ensuring equity within language learning in our public school system? Do you think that it hits the mark?

Ms Elliott: It is a good question.

Ms McLean: Yes, it is a good question. From our perspective, we would like to see some more action on the action plan. Most of the implementation timeframes were to be completed by the end of 2025, and we have not been consulted with or have any information about how that has gone. That is why one of our recommendations is that we are asking to see some updated mapping, so that we can see what is happening in schools, to see whether it has improved from 2022. From what we are hearing on the ground, it may have in some schools; broadly, I think we would not be surprised if it was much the same as it is now. Having regard to the impact of the action plan, we really have not been able to see that.

Ms Elliott: Yes, in practice. One of the things that we are hearing most frequently at the moment is that schools are struggling to provide qualified teachers in front of students generally, and that is creating a very big challenge for them. Again, that is not talking about specific teachers. Obviously, language teachers are specialist teachers, and they cannot be substituted easily. When we are having this general challenge around trying to find qualified teachers to fill in for or relieve teachers generally, and when we have quite specialist teachers, like a language teacher, which means that not everyone can pick that class up, there is an issue around the availability of the teachers that we have that is also having an impact, and we acknowledge that.

MISS NUTTALL: With the measures in the plan, do you think they are the right measures, but they have not been actioned? Do you think there are more measures that the plan would benefit from, if it was due for an update, or supplementary measures that we might ask for?

Ms Elliott: It would be really good to see some further investment in schools that remain without a language. We would probably have some questions around some of the measures that were listed in there and how effective those are for engagement. If we are talking about remote delivery of a language education program, what is the participation and engagement like at different levels of schooling? Are there schools where that has worked better than others? I think we would have a few questions around the outcomes of those implementations.

THE CHAIR: Coming back to the ATAR languages centralised program, some of the issues you raised are teacher availability issues, costs, and the equity argument—making sure that students, regardless of their postcode, can access opportunities. Focusing just on year 11 and 12, which is the subject of the petition that brought about the inquiry, we had evidence earlier around teacher availability—that it helps to address that challenge by having a centralised offering, because you do not need a Spanish teacher in multiple different colleges. You have them at one location where students can attend after hours. That saves money as well. Again, you are not employing six

different Spanish teachers at different colleges; instead, there would be one at a centralised location that everyone can access.

I understand the argument against charging students a fee, but without that argument, I am struggling to understand why ACT Parents is not more supportive of a centralised program for year 11 and 12 students, based on the different issues that we have discussed in the last half-an-hour.

Ms Elliott: Essentially, the financial situation at the moment is very tight. We have looked at the numbers from the participation in the CIT Solutions program, and we consider that it would be a better investment for the government to provide language teachers through schools that are currently without them, which would impact more students, than publicly funding a centralised program. That is not to say that a centralised program is not beneficial, because clearly there is a demand for this service, but it is a bit bespoke, and its offering would depend on the demand within the community, which can change from one year to the next. It is not that we are not supportive of that; it is about what would give the best and biggest impact for students overall.

THE CHAIR: You would rather see, let us say, this \$206,000 spent on a couple of teachers or—

Ms Elliott: I cannot see \$206,000 being anywhere near enough to provide that program. I have a lot of questions around how the Canberra Academy of Languages managed to do that. Was it a volunteer organisation with no overheads?

THE CHAIR: No, they had six class teachers. This is the costing; it is based on six class teachers, a director of languages, having admin and reception costs, an IT officer and multiple different resources—IT services, curriculum resources and so on. I note, of course, that this is after school hours, so you are not employing someone full-time; you are employing someone for whatever it is—two hours a week. I think that is where the—

MS BARRY: The FTEs.

THE CHAIR: Yes, you get FTEs of 0.2 FTE, and that is where the cost saving comes in, compared to someone being employed by a school to teach languages with one full-time gig.

MS BARRY: That is per year as well, I would say.

Ms Elliott: Yes. I would expect the cost to be more, if that was going to be provided by the Education Directorate. There would be costs associated with system set-up and how it would work around opting-in applications et cetera. When you look at a service that is run in the community, it generally runs very differently from something that is then provided through a directorate or a department.

THE CHAIR: Thank you. We will wrap it up there. I do not think we have had any questions taken on notice. On behalf of the committee, I thank you for your attendance today. The committee will now suspend the proceedings for lunch.

Hearing suspended from 11.43 am to 12.26 pm

HENNESSY, DR BIANCA, Research and Policy Officer, Australian Education Union, ACT Branch

JUDGE, MR PATRICK, Branch Secretary, Australian Education Union, ACT Branch

LETHBRIDGE, MR ORION, Member, Australian Education Union, ACT Branch

THE CHAIR: Welcome back to the public hearings for the inquiry into E-PET-077-25: Access to 11-12 ATAR language courses in 2026. We welcome representatives from the Australian Education Union, ACT Branch. Please note that as witnesses, you are protected by parliamentary privilege and bound by its obligations. You must tell the truth. Giving false or misleading evidence will be treated as a serious matter and may be considered contempt of the Assembly.

We will go straight into questions. Thank you for appearing and thank you for your submission. I would be curious to get all your views on this, including from you, Mr Lethbridge, as a teacher. One of the suggestions that has been put forward to resolve the loss of a centralised language delivery program outside of school hours was to have teachers travel between schools to deliver those courses at different schools. What would your thoughts be on that proposed model?

Mr Judge: To start from first principles, the question we would like to start that discussion with is: what is the ACT government's intent in relation to delivering language education across the entire public school system? If the intent is that it is delivered equitably and every child in every school, whether they are all the way in South Tuggeranong or whether they are in a centrally located school, gets access to the same opportunity—and we say that should be the case—then there is a very clear case to be made for at least some movement. It is currently the case that some teachers teach across multiple sites. It is very much the case that that is the sort of thing you may have to consider, especially for some of the smaller schools if they are to have language education provision. I think it would require a different approach in terms of the central management of staffing, if you were to take that approach. But we would certainly say that it is worth considering what the mechanics are of delivering language education programs across the territory.

The first step is for the government to be clear about what they intend to deliver—we do not believe it currently is clear what the government intend to deliver—and, once it is clear what the government intend to deliver, how are they going to deliver that? Does it match what they are currently delivering? What are the gaps? What is their current capacity to deliver? All of these questions need to be answered before we can get into the specifics of any particular program.

THE CHAIR: Well, we will ask them later on.

Mr Judge: Please do.

THE CHAIR: We certainly will, and you can tune in and find out what we learn. I am curious about, from a teacher's perspective, the different benefits if we focus specifically on the year 11 and 12 model, where we have a centralised program where multiple different teachers and students all come together at the same time of week for a couple of hours for a lesson, as opposed to other proposed models which might involve students moving between different colleges or teachers moving between

different colleges. Is there one model that is preferred for teachers?

Mr Lethbridge: I suppose my perspective is somewhat limited. I have been in the ACT as a teacher for seven years, and I have only taught in one school in that time because I am a specialist teacher. The language that I teach is Korean language. There are very few Korean language programs in the ACT. From my perspective, I think part of the issue with the system is that it is “hyperlocal” That is a word that I borrowed from somebody else—I forget whom—which I thought was quite good in terms of describing what happens in the ACT system, where you have schools with programs, a teacher is employed at a school to deliver that program, and then their timetable, if they are a specialist, is topped up with other things. I am a Korean teacher. That is my training. I could be teaching Korean across multiple schools, but colleges operate each on their own independent timetables. Some have trimesters instead of semesters. I suppose my observation would be that there are all these hyperlocal factors that really produce challenges at the system level.

THE CHAIR: On the availability and recruitment of teachers, one of our earlier witnesses indicated that having a centralised program can be of benefit in relation to that issue. In the scenario that you are describing, where you are actually a Korean teacher but you have to do some other things, or do some other work, to be able to have a full-time job, is that something that the union generally sees as a benefit of having a centralised program, as kind of a way of gathering together teachers from different languages and all the students who want to learn those languages, and give them employment outside of the normal school hours?

Mr Judge: It is certainly a benefit of proper workforce planning—something that we know from, particularly, the events of last year around school budgeting processes being absent almost entirely in the ACT Education Directorate. If we intend to deliver a languages education program, you would think the obvious question to ask would be: what staff do we need? Then you would plan to recruit those staff. You would need to know how many staff you need in each different language specialisation and you would need to know how you were delivering the programs.

One thing that we certainly hear a lot from the Education Directorate in response to these sorts of questions when we raise them is that these questions about the delivery of programs are left up to every school—that the government announces a broad policy intent and then it expects 100 different implementations of that policy intent across ACT public schools. That is just an accountability avoidance mechanism for the ACT Education Directorate. They are responsible for delivering on the government’s commitments, whatever those commitments are. It is not good enough to pass the buck to school principals, who have no oversight of this at a system level. They only have oversight of their school. It is why we are in the situation that Orion describes, where we have this sort of hyperlocalisation of the way in which things are delivered. That is no way to run a public education system.

MS BARRY: Thank you very much for your submission. It is good to get submissions that really talk about the issues, because that means we can interrogate the information and hopefully help build up the system. You essentially answered my first question with your opening, but my biggest concern is that there is a lack of a centralised planning system that talks about the policy intent and how those policy intents would be

implemented. When you have had conversations with the Education Directorate about matters and issues, what is the excuse that is given? What do they say? Is it a lack of funding? What is the excuse?

Mr Judge: They typically defer to localised decision-making in schools. The last meeting that I can recall having with directorate officials about the delivery of language education, we were raising, as we always do, really important issues about consultation with the workforce, about the impacts that are currently being felt by Orion and his colleagues in their schools and about the way the government goes about planning and delivery of languages education. Their response in the meeting was to tell us that they understood the issues, and there seemed to be some genuine engagement with them.

The final response sometime later than that was to just defer to “schools make local decisions about the delivery of programs”. That is not an acceptable answer, and we should not be accepting from the Education Directorate this sort of deferral of responsibility. It is really important that we see some central planning.

MS BARRY: Just on that issue of central planning, I know that, in your submission, you talked about all of the recommendations you had made around the Language Education Action Plan and that they were not reflected in the plan. Can you talk me through some of the recommendations you had? Also, following on from another question that my colleague asked, how we can activate the action plan essentially—not plan to plan?

Dr Hennessey: Absolutely. Planning to plan is something that we are quite fed up with, to be honest. Our submission, as you know, sets out a fairly long history of engagement over this issue. The call for this plan came from this Assembly in 2018. By 2024, we had the Language Education Action Plan—five years and eight months later. We had engaged prior to that, in around 2022-23. There was some good work done by the Education Directorate—which I think some other witnesses have talked about. There was a paper published that mapped out all of the different languages that are offered and the pathways by language and by network. So it did that beginning work of looking at where the inequities are, where there is a lot of choice and which student cohorts we are serving more than others. That was fantastic—but that was in 2022. It probably now needs to be redone.

We responded to that discussion paper saying, “Fantastic; thank you so much for doing this work. This is really quality work. Our members would love to talk to you about options for various alternative delivery models. We are concerned that our members are facing incredible workloads, not just trying to keep their language programs viable in the classroom but also having to market their programs to future students in order to keep them viable in the future.” That was received, and then we did not receive any further questions or engagement on that.

We then received the Language Education Action Plan. As a policy officer, I am surprised by it—to put it pleasantly. It contains no targets. As Patrick says, it does not tell us what we are aiming for, it does not define what the problems are and it does not identify the drivers of those problems. So there is no way that you can establish how change should happen. It proposes, as you say, to develop plans and to explore options by the end of 2025—noting that this was called for by the Assembly in 2018. It has no

mechanism for the EDU to better support language teachers or even just to understand it better and no mechanism to better support principals who are having to make these decisions. It simply says, “We restate our commitment to languages. Everyone should be able to learn it.”

MS BARRY: How?

Dr Hennessey: Yes; good luck. This has been something that we have been working on for years and our members have a long history of advocacy in trying to get improvements. It is a failure of policy thinking, of courageous leadership and of governance to devolve everything to a school where the school cannot reach across schools to provide that equity that we promise.

MS BARRY: Thank you; that is really useful. I want to touch on something you mentioned. There have been alternative delivery models mentioned. Did you mention that you have an alternative delivery model?

Dr Hennessey: We do not have anything figured out. I understand that a lot of this morning’s proceedings have been about exploring different models, and that is fantastic. But a lot of that work needs to be done by the Education Directorate in consultation with its workforce, and it has not done that. That discussion paper in 2022, from my memory, mentioned the fact that there are these alternative models in various other states, and we also mentioned, “Looks interesting; maybe you should talk to your workforce about it.” To our knowledge, that has not happened. Instead we receive this submission from the ACT government saying, “It is too hard and we do not want to create a community expectation of improved service.” That is outrageous to me.

MS BERRY: Thank you.

MS TOUGH: I want to pick up on the hyperlocal evidence and schools being quite independent from each other in decision-making. ACT Parents were here this morning and provided evidence that Tuggeranong and some parts of Belconnen are missing out on language education compared to the rest of Canberra. Do you have any evidence or understanding of why schools in the outer areas are not providing or prioritising language course offerings compared to the more inner schools, where it is not just one language but at some schools there are multiple languages students can pick from? Do you know any decision drivers for that?

Mr Judge: I think the key driver for us to name is that the ACT Education Directorate has not actually determined the requirement for schools in terms of what they should deliver or what they must deliver. So what is it that we expect every school to have? If we do not expect it of every school, why should some schools get a better offering than other schools get? This is something that we should be really clear about. I do not know whether it is the case that it is Tuggeranong and Belconnen. That could well be correct, but it would not matter which part of Canberra it was that was missing out or which school that was missing out; we should not have some schools that are more equal than others. I am not going to speculate about the reasons why. There could be factors like school size that come into it. But, again, that is easily solved through proper workforce planning. That is really the heart of it.

MS TOUGH: So when there is direction from the directorate that says you need to offer these courses or so many schools in this region should be offering these courses, it might lead to a more equitable distribution?

Mr Lethbridge: May I briefly add to that?

MS TOUGH: Yes, please.

Mr Lethbridge: Clearly in an anecdotal capacity, from what I have seen, because languages take a long time to develop fluency in, you end up with specialists who are then stretched quite a lot by delivering, for example, composite classes with no additional preparation time factored into their teaching load. So they are effectively teaching multiple courses in one line, but there is no written provision for additional planning time. Courses are highly personalised to the teachers who produce them and run and administer them. I think that leads to probably—again, anecdotally—a lot of frustration from those people who are running those programs, and then they may make the decision that, “I cannot continue running this,” and they move on, and then the program—

MS TOUGH: Ceases, yes. Picking up on that, so you could have a teacher who is teaching but the students in their class could be at a beginner level, intermediate level and potentially even quite high fluency level, all in the same class, being taught by the same teacher at the same time and the teacher has to teach to all skills at once and not let the students at one level get bored but not leave the others behind.

Mr Lethbridge: Yes. Through the Board of Senior Secondary Studies we teach beginning, continuing and advanced programs—again, worlds apart. If you think about English language development, you have the equivalent of kindergarten students with the equivalent of university students in one classroom in terms of their skills and knowledge.

MS TOUGH: Are there schools that are running on different lines—and if you do not have that data, that is fine—where there is enough of a demand that schools are running, say, the beginning course and the intermediate course on different lines to accommodate that, or is there just not enough demand?

Mr Lethbridge: I would have to come back to that point on hyperlocal and the fact that all decisions are made at the school level about how many lines can be allocated to a teacher. I have been fortunate at times to be well supported by my school, but I have not always been able to have as much time as I would need to deliver my courses.

MS TOUGH: So, because it is hyperlocal, there is really no way to know across the board how schools are then teaching.

Mr Lethbridge: I do not think that this is a unique experience to me, which is why I am here—to represent colleagues across the system.

MS TOUGH: Wonderful. Picking up on some more evidence this morning from ACT Parents, they were talking about investing in schools to expand language options. It would not necessarily mean that every school has every language available, but there

would just be better oversight of where languages were to reduce the need for out-of-area enrolments or out-of-area enrolments that are really, really out of area. So you would not have Tuggeranong kids going to the complete other side of Canberra, rather than expanding or having a centralised language school model. I am just wondering your thoughts on which one you would see as more equitable from both student and teacher perspectives.

Mr Judge: You can certainly see that it would be difficult to deliver all languages in all places.

MS TOUGH: Yes; that is obviously not a viable option.

Mr Judge: That is not viable. The problem we have more so is actually delivering on the commitments we already have around language education. Before we get into the question of how many offerings or something like that, it is really a question of, “What are we delivering, what can we deliver and what should we deliver?” It is not ideal to be having a conversation that sort of contemplates these things, because any well-structured, well-thought-out program of delivery of the policy objectives of a government—if there are policy objectives in relation to teaching languages across the ACT—should answer these questions. We should not be having to answer these questions. These are things that the ACT Education Directorate is responsible for having answers to. If the answer is, “We devolve that decision-making to local schools,” even if that was reasonable—and we say that it is not—it is not working very well. There is a real need for some accountability to be taken at the Education Directorate level and to make the decisions about what languages they are going to offer and how they are going to offer them—to be clear on that.

MS TOUGH: This is kind of pushing the edges of the terms of the inquiry, but are there other subjects or courses that are having similar issues? Language is obviously quite a specialised subject and something that I think a lot of people in the community value having access to. So it is kind of different to a lot of other courses. But are there other areas where there is limited access or students are struggling or we do not have the teaching workforce, as a comparison?

Mr Judge: I do not think we have the teaching workforce across the territory as a whole, frankly. We are aware of cases where schools have rosters for who is going to take the 60 students whose teacher was ill that day, because there is no access to relief staff and there is insufficient staffing in the first place. That is just for the basic education provision. They may be generalist primary school teachers that are missing for the day and someone is picking up 60 or 90 students. That is a pretty significant failing.

You could take your pick of subject areas where there are challenges. But, having said that, there is, I think, a particularly clear challenge in terms of the delivery of language education. It is one that would appear to have a number of proponents who have potential solutions to it that are worth exploring and something that we could look to resolve. We are aware that there may be a latent workforce of language teachers who might hop back into language teaching if it were made less unattractive. But the challenges that Orion has spoken to put a lot of pressure on the individuals in those roles. This should be obvious, and I should not have to say it, but it is not the job of

teachers to market the courses that they teach. They should not have to do that. It is also not the job of classroom teachers to be accountable for the number of enrolments in the classes that they teach. The fact that they are made to feel that they have to do those things and be accountable for those things is really symptomatic of a lack of sensible approaches and honest approaches and accountability to delivering on language education in the ACT. We might attract more people back and we might solve the workforce issue, if we were a bit clearer about what we are trying to achieve.

MS TOUGH: You mentioned a lot of teachers leaving, feeling unsupported. Do you know—from data or anecdotal—if there are language teachers out there that are qualified but are not in school teaching anymore?

Mr Lethbridge: Anecdotally, I know of several cases where that is the case or where teachers have come into the ACT with the skills, with the specialisation, but have not felt satisfied by the opportunity to exercise those skills in that specialisation and have then left. I can think of several instances of that, off the top of my head. More generally, I am aware of several of my mentees who were trained and did teach a placement with me who are not employed teaching in their specialisation.

MS TOUGH: Thank you.

MS BARRY: This is probably beyond the scope, but where do they go? What jobs did they go on to—because language is so specialised?

Mr Lethbridge: Back to teaching in other jurisdictions.

MS BARRY: So they leave the ACT completely.

Mr Lethbridge: Correct.

MS BARRY: Okay.

Dr Hennessey: Can I just add to that?

MS TOUGH: Yes.

Dr Hennessey: You mentioned data and obviously we do not have data, but I also might suggest that the Education Directorate also does not have that data, because they do not write down, “This college teacher can teach these subjects.” They do not have centralised systems that tell them that we have X amount of Spanish teachers and Y amount of demand. What we are saying when we say that devolving these decisions to the school level does not work, they do not even have the information to be able to make those policy decisions. In 2022, they started and then that stopped.

MS TOUGH: Do you know why that stopped? You said in 2022 they started but then—

Dr Hennessey: I do not know.

MS TOUGH: Okay.

MISS NUTTALL: In your submission you describe the engagement of the Education Directorate as non-constructive—specifically, the directorate’s focus on workload issues for language teachers in the ACT, while being simultaneously unwilling to explore improved supports to language teachers that would help recruit and retain them. Could you please advise us what measures should be taken to support existing language teachers and to recruit new specialists, noting that I think you have also outlined the inadequacy of current offerings of scholarships for teaching students in high-demand specialisations like languages?

Dr Hennessey: I think we can probably do a three-parter here, because we all might bring something different. I have learnt a lot from talking to Orion about this. In particular, the workload that I was really concerned about when I spoke to him was that he was needing to justify the financial viability of teaching a small class. So perhaps we can take some of that stress away. Teachers also really want their employer, the school system, to tell them what it is that we are aiming for. That policy direction is not just so that we can make good decisions; it is so that people can understand what it is that we are all working towards.

Mr Judge: There are a lot of things we can do to support our teachers and ensure that they have the things that they need. One of those things is to be clear about what the minimum staffing level for schools should be and what the expected offering is. We do not have that in the ACT at the moment. The jurisdiction that surrounds us does have a minimum staffing agreement—New South Wales does have one—and it goes into what your expectations might be about teachers in different specialisations. Although that adjusts for school size, at least it is still clear that we expect these sorts of people with these sorts of specialisations to be in these schools. Doing that and being clear about the offering in schools, takes the pressure off to be an advocate for your subject area. It takes the pressure off to be marketing your course. It takes the pressure off in a whole range of different areas.

The other thing that we can do to support our language teachers, though, is to engage with and listen to them. It is incredibly frustrating for our members to be involved in making submissions on the work that they do and to have those submissions, frankly, ignored by their employer. The people who do the work of delivering language education have a lot to offer about how it can be delivered and how it can be delivered sustainably. We would really encourage the ACT Education Directorate and the ACT government to constructively engage with the people who are doing the work. We do not have all the answers to all of the questions, but it is a really important point that the workforce needs to be engaged with and listened to.

Mr Lethbridge: I would be the first to acknowledge that there are not simple solutions to complex issues, and what we are talking about is a very complex issue. There is definitely a degree to which I have been willing to extend myself to make sure that I am delivering to a standard that I am personally satisfied with for my students, and I do not think I am alone in that. I am one teacher, one teacher voice, and I cannot represent all teachers, but I am probably reflecting the thoughts of at least some of my colleagues.

I do feel quite strongly because, as I said, I have been well supported to the best of my school’s ability, to the best of my principal’s ability. They have worked very hard to

support me and to keep me in that school and doing that work, and I am very appreciative of that. But, again, I am one instance, and I know how to advocate for myself and my students. I think of the new educators coming in who may not have the confidence to do so, and I worry a lot about what workloads they end up with. I do not think there is a simple solution, but I do think it needs to be a system-level solution.

When that initial work was done in 2022 with the mapping of what languages are available and where, I was really excited to see that work start to occur, because to my mind then it looked like there could be a hub system, which could be something, maybe not perfect, more equitable than, for example, one centre, even if it was north side or south side. I do not know what the solutions would look like. I have had my wife, for example, tell me to stop trying to take responsibility for thinking of these things, because ultimately I am an employee, a teacher, in the directorate.

MISS NUTTALL: When you talk about self-advocacy and teachers being put in the position where they have to advocate, is that because there is a threat that consistently low enrolments might mean that a class does not come back?

Mr Judge: It is not just that there is a possibility that that might happen and it is not just pressure, I should say, on our language teacher members; it is also pressure on the school principals. They are not provided with a budget allocation that accounts for the need to offer this language or that language. They are funded based on the number of enrolments at the school, as if that is a determinant of some of these factors. So, where numbers do drop and classes are smaller, it places school administrators in a really terrible position where they are trying to work out which part of their budget to rob to pay for the languages education or the other way around. That is a product of the sort of longstanding issue—one we have spoken about a number of times today—of the Education Directorate devolving accountability to schools and expecting them to solve these sorts of issues. But it is impossible for a school principal to magic more money into existence to pay for the running of courses that the Education Directorate will certainly be expecting that they run.

MISS NUTTALL: I appreciate the irony of asking you guys this, but how does that reconcile with the principle of universal free public education?

Mr Judge: Well, not very well. Fundamentally, in a public education system—and I am aware that there are some private schools in the ACT that struggle to offer languages education as well—it is not acceptable for us to be saying to some parts of the territory, “You do not get an offering,” and saying to other parts of the territory, “You can have it three times over.” It is not equitable and it is not reasonable. The basis on which schools are funded nationally and at the ACT level is supposed to be equitable. It is supposed to be based on needs of students. But it is problematic if that funding model is not actually delivering equity in practice, if it is not delivering us with an equitable offering across the schools. People who live in inner Canberra should not be more equal than people who live in the outer suburbs. I can understand why people who live in the outer suburbs would feel that they are not getting fair treatment from the government if they see that inner Canberra schools are able to offer languages and they cannot.

MISS NUTTALL: Have you observed that the offering of language courses correlates

with socio-educational advantage—appreciating that there are not perfect measures within the ACT? In practice, do you see that correlation?

Mr Judge: We do not have the data to know exactly what offering is where. But, from the general principle of how schools are funded, when we are talking about those competing needs, with the principal having to work out, “Which part of my staffing budget do I rob to pay for this small class over here?” they are not just considering languages; they are considering all of the elective offerings that they might have. They are considering how they provide inclusive education. They are considering all of these things. It is, in fact, an ever-expanding list of things that need to be considered and budget decisions that need to be made. If a school has a greater level of need and, therefore, more of these factors that need to be adjusted for, without separate provision for the offering of something like a language, it is going to be much harder for that school to actually find the budget to hire the staff to offer the language.

MISS NUTTALL: Thank you.

THE CHAIR: Mr Lethbridge, how many year 11 or 12 students do you have that you are teaching Korean to?

Mr Lethbridge: This year I have approximately 30.

THE CHAIR: Thirty across the two ages?

Mr Lethbridge: Yes.

THE CHAIR: If you get so frustrated after this hearing that you decided to quit and they do not have a Korean teacher anymore, what happens to those students?

Mr Lethbridge: Wonderful question. I do not know.

THE CHAIR: Would there be benefit in having a centralised program which might offer Korean and other languages for such an occurrence, so that those students could, at least theoretically, then access that program and continue their education while we are searching for another Korean teacher? I understand this may have happened in the past with some languages.

Mr Lethbridge: Yes. My understanding is that what the Canberra Academy of Languages was designed to do was exactly that; to supplement the offerings of public schools. My understanding is that it was never designed in its original form to replace offerings. I suppose the challenge there is that it was a private endeavour by a few passionate individuals. So, as a supplementary entity, perhaps, but why private? Why did it get to the point where it needed to be a private provision?

THE CHAIR: I think that is just how it started, but we are asking the question of whether the government should run such a program. That gap is not something that has really been canvassed. When people leave their jobs, where do their students go if they want to continue their education in that language? You are not going to have 30 students to add to their enrolment and suddenly learn Korean somewhere else maybe.

PROOF

Mr Lethbridge: There is an additional level of complexity there in terms of what the Board of Senior Secondary Studies accepts as a certified external provider and so on.

THE CHAIR: Thank you so much. On behalf of the committee, I thank you for your attendance today. We really appreciate it.

Hearing suspended from 1.04 to 1.29 pm

DRUMMOND, MS NATALIE LISETTE

THE CHAIR: We welcome a local parent to the hearing. Could you please tell us about the capacity in which you are appearing, and why you have provided the submission?

Ms Drummond: I am representing myself as a parent.

THE CHAIR: Please note that, as a witness, you are protected by parliamentary privilege and bound by its obligations. As such, you must tell the truth. Giving false or misleading evidence will be treated as a serious matter and may be considered contempt of the Assembly. We have 25 minutes, so we will go straight to questions.

We really appreciate your taking the time to come in. I want to ask how you learnt about CIT Solutions, the program that was offered by CIT. Was there any marketing for parents, that you were aware of, that CIT did regarding the external centralised language program?

Ms Drummond: No. My daughter was looking to go on to college, and I knew it was one of her strong subjects, so I thought, “Where can you go?” She really wanted to go to Lake G, and they do not offer it there. She wanted to go to Lake G for volleyball, so I said, “Fine.” I started to do some internet searching, and I came across CIT Solutions on a Wednesday night at Ainslie. I offered that to her, but she said, “Can’t do it,” because she does volleyball training on Wednesday nights.

She goes to college all day, has a little bit of time at home, from 5 pm to 7 pm; then she would have to be at volleyball training from 7.30 pm, finishing at 9 pm. She said, “I’d be too tired.” We just had to let it go. I did not pursue it anymore, because of her answer to that.

THE CHAIR: She had a college choice, and she thought, “This is the one I want to be in. I’d love to study French, but I also really care about volleyball.”

Ms Drummond: Yes.

THE CHAIR: The stars did not align to make it work.

Ms Drummond: Yes.

THE CHAIR: You received no direct marketing about that; you had to do your own research to find out about that?

Ms Drummond: I did my own research, yes. I started to look at different colleges and at what was available in Canberra for college students to do it.

THE CHAIR: One of the options that has been put forward by the government is to have college students move—not move entirely to another college, but to do just the language line at another college. Your daughter would be enrolled at Lake Ginninderra. Using Narrabundah College as our example, they might go over to Narrabundah during the French language class and then come back. Do you think that would be feasible?

Ms Drummond: It possibly could, but how would the student get there? With my children, I have said, “Get on the bus.” Will they get on the bus? No. You have young people that will get on buses; others will not. Also, having regard to the distance from Lake G to Narrabundah, I imagine there would be several buses involved, and it is about trying to fit that into a timetable. It relies on me as a parent, or her father, to say, “I can take a little bit of time off,” or “I’m available at lunchtime; I can get you down to that class and back.” Logistically, I think that is tricky.

THE CHAIR: You have proposed in your submission a different model which would avert that by having teachers go from college to college on different lines. That is essentially the model that you are suggesting?

Ms Drummond: That is what I was suggesting. You need face-to-face in language; you definitely do. But I do not think, in today’s world, that you need it all the time. You can use a lot of online resources. If the IT is up to it, maybe teachers could be in a spot where they might be doing some rotation, and maybe they take on all the classes in Canberra for two hours online. I do not know, because I do not know how many language teachers for different languages we have in Canberra.

THE CHAIR: I will ask the government whether they know. We will see what we learn. We are not quite sure, either. On that hub model, would one option be to have, in each region, a location where students could go and learn, and where it is closer, or do you think it is important for teachers to be able to go to students where they are?

Ms Drummond: I think it is important for teachers to go to the student, because they are not all driving. A lot of them are relying on public transport. Also, I think it is really important for the student that it is during normal college hours; then it will not impact on other activities or work that you might have—a part-time job, a casual job.

THE CHAIR: Had your daughter done French all the way through primary school and high school, or had she just picked it up in high school?

Ms Drummond: Not quite. She went to Aranda. They have a French teacher there. She learnt French, and she ended up being one of their high French students. She was very good at it, from primary school. I would like to say that she did it all the way through high school, but she had to pull out of high school because of bullying.

THE CHAIR: I am sorry.

Ms Drummond: She did it in year 7. She got a certificate at the end of the year, for year 7. She was getting 100 per cent—really good marks. I do not know about all of it. She is just really good with the language. We pulled her out in year 8, and it all fell over. I did put her into Alliance Francaise; I paid myself to put her through that for a bit. She did one-on-one lessons, but she then decided that she did not want to do it anymore.

She then went to distance education, and they offered French there. I found this really funny: distance education offered three languages, and French was one, and they said the class was full. I thought, “Hang on, this is distance education. The class is full?” I know there is a limit, but she was not a beginner. I could not get them to change it.

After a year, she did not like that; she then went back to the local in-area, which was Melba Copland High School, and they put them at the college in year 10. They did not have a French program, but they said she could go to the language room, and she would just do Duolingo. She would do French, Spanish or Portuguese. She decided she would pick up Portuguese. I do not think she can do a lot of it, but she was just playing around with Duolingo. That is why, when she wanted to go to Lake G for college, I started to look around and think, “How could she fit French into this?” That is when I stumbled onto CIT Solutions.

MS BARRY: I need to practice my French with your daughter; my French is really terrible now, because I have not used the language.

Ms Drummond: You must use it or lose it.

MS BARRY: That is absolutely correct. I want to clarify something. When your daughter dropped out of year 8, was she homeschooled or did she continue in—

Ms Drummond: She actually got school refusal. We did a lot of battling for many years.

MS BARRY: Did you have any conversations with the Education Directorate about language, when it was not offered anymore? Was there a conversation with the Education Directorate or the principal at Lake G about whether or not French was something that she could—

Ms Drummond: I think she moved on from that. I would have loved to try and get her more focused on it. I think if they did French there, she definitely would have grabbed it. She said, “No, I’ll do other subjects.” Because she did not come all the way through Canberra high doing the French, she was a little bit distanced from it. She just said, “No, I’ll do other subjects.”

MS BARRY: She probably could have continued with the language, if there was structure around continuity, and certainty around whether there was a pathway for her, all the way—

Ms Drummond: Do you mean when she got into the college?

MS BARRY: The college, yes.

Ms Drummond: I am not really sure. All I know is that they offer those three languages and, if it is not offered there and you are going there, you cannot do it. That is my understanding of it. I did not investigate too much. She was saying, “Forget it.” It was in the hard basket.

MS BARRY: On your floating model, there has been evidence that language is something that you learn collectively, and the strength of language is when people who are highly proficient can elevate the skills of other people in the class. On that floating model, where the teachers float, the evidence from the last attendees was that you need to learn language in groups. If you had two people in a college, for example, learning a

language, and the teacher only had to teach two people, and then you had another two people, perhaps there would be that collective group learning.

One suggestion that was floated around and not thoroughly discussed was having buses that pick up students and take them to where they need to be, because it is really important that the languages are centralised and the students are learning together. What do you think about that model, not as a substitute for the floating of teachers but probably as a way of making language work in schools?

Ms Drummond: If you had an external hub and one central place, and you provided transport for the students, that changes things. There is then no problem for any student at any college to get there. I never quite understand with my own child whether she prefers group learning or individual learning. You are right; when you do languages, you need to be able to practice speaking with other people.

MS BARRY: But each student is different. Some people just want to do their own thing. If she is using Duolingo, she is obviously self-sufficient, to be able to do that.

Ms Drummond: Yes.

MS TOUGH: Thank you for coming in, Ms Drummond. We really appreciate your evidence and your perspective. You mentioned after-school commitments being a reason that students could not access CIT Solutions. In your daughter's example, there were classes after school, but it was on the same day that she had a sporting commitment, and that makes it a big day. A lot of students, by the time they are in year 11 and 12, have part-time jobs, maybe they have sporting commitments; there could be music—a range of extracurricular, plus paid work, activities.

Ms Drummond: Yes.

MS TOUGH: You were saying that French was only offered on that one day. If there was a central language model but it was after school, if languages were offered on multiple days, do you think that might alleviate some of the pressure, or is it better to have something in school hours?

Ms Drummond: For me personally, I think it should be during school hours. It does give you more options, having it on different days and at different times. They are young. They are becoming adults. They have a lot of schoolwork to do, assessments, assignments, sports and work, as you say. I think it should be within those school hours—as close to it as possible. If you have had a full day at college and you have to go out again—

MS TOUGH: Yes, and do two hours of another class.

Ms Drummond: you might say, “I just need to go home.” It would come down to the individual, I guess. Some students would be really prepared to do that. I just do not think that is my daughter.

MS TOUGH: In some situations where students are learning outside school hours, they would then have free periods or free lines during the school day, where that is a

recognised course. But it is still a lot to put on a young person to do a full day of school, or close to a full day of school, then a full afternoon of language, plus other activities.

Ms Drummond: Yes.

MS TOUGH: As a school subject for your ATAR, it is about keeping it in school hours as much as possible.

Ms Drummond: Yes. I think it makes it easier for families and students, and having regard to the logistics as well. You drop them off in the morning, or they make their own way in the morning; they come home in the afternoon.

MS TOUGH: When your daughter was studying at Alliance Francaise, was that outside school hours?

Ms Drummond: She was not at school; she had the school refusal, so I sent her there during the day, during school hours.

MS TOUGH: They have courses—

Ms Drummond: She had two-hour private lessons during the day. They found me a teacher.

MS TOUGH: I am assuming that you were personally out of pocket?

Ms Drummond: Personally out of pocket and driving her—picking her up and dropping her off.

MS TOUGH: Where is that physically based in Canberra?

Ms Drummond: That is in O'Connor.

MS TOUGH: A lot of driving, with getting her to and from.

Ms Drummond: Yes, and picking her up late sometimes. As I reminded her, “You’re in a safe place; you’ll just have to wait until I get there.”

MS TOUGH: By the time you are in year 9 or year 10, you are old enough to wait somewhere.

Ms Drummond: Yes.

MS TOUGH: Thank you. I appreciate your coming in and sharing your daughter’s experience, and sharing your experience, and your ideas for a way forward.

Ms Drummond: We need language in Canberra. It is very multicultural. I would really like them to put a bit more—

MS TOUGH: Emphasis.

Ms Drummond: emphasis, maybe. I know language is not for everyone. A lot of people are just happy with their own language. For those students who want to explore other languages, I think they need to be given an easy opportunity.

MISS NUTTALL: One of the themes that we have heard throughout the day is that the information that the government gathers about how many languages are being taught across the ACT, how many language teachers there are in the ACT, is more limited than a lot of people might expect, and that undermines an ability to plan and say, “We’re going to need languages here, here and here, and we’re going to need a good spread.” Do you think there is information that the government should be gathering about language education across the ACT that might enable them to better plan for their requirements for languages, funding that they might allocate for language teachers, and things like that?

Ms Drummond: I think they do need to find some way to gather information—who wants to study it, the number, and do statistics on it. I think they need to gather some information about it. With the college system, with the number of languages that each college seems to do or does not do, and the variety, I often think it should be possible to have all the languages offered. There are so many languages that you have to put a limit somewhere. Maybe you need six of the most popular that you have at every college, so it is not a matter of saying, “You have to go to a different college for that one.” You often cannot get in, anyway, when you are out of area. That is another issue.

MISS NUTTALL: Absolutely. Did you apply for an out-of-area enrolment?

Ms Drummond: We are out of area for Lake G.

MISS NUTTALL: That is for volleyball.

Ms Drummond: When I saw that Dickson did French, and she got knocked back for Lake G, I said, “Okay, let’s try Dickson.” She got knocked back from there. We tried harder for Lake G.

MISS NUTTALL: As a parent going through that process of trying to get in, out of area, for a specific offering, whether that was language or something like volleyball, what was your experience like, in terms of applying, and in terms of the communication that you got back about why you were knocked back the first time?

Ms Drummond: I have to think back a year. You just get something standard back. It gets tiring, having to keep applying and applying. It is about finding out what you have to write for them to finally decide why you should get into a particular school. I do not even know how she got into Lake G. All of a sudden, we got a yes. I thought, “Okay, great. Let’s roll with it.” I do not actually know what extra step it was. I do not know whether it was the principal.

THE CHAIR: On behalf of the committee, thank you very much for your attendance today, for providing a submission and for being willing to appear before the committee. It has been very helpful and insightful, and we appreciate it.

Ms Drummond: Thank you for the opportunity to come and say something.

PROOF

THE CHAIR: Thanks for being such a strong advocate for your daughter. It is very impressive and inspiring. You should be acknowledged for that as well.

Ms Drummond: You have to be; thank you.

THE CHAIR: Of course.

Ms Drummond: You certainly have to be, in today's world, I think. Thank you so much.

THE CHAIR: The committee will now suspend the proceedings.

Hearing suspended from 1.49 to 2.52 pm

Haidon, Mr Shaun, Principal, Senior Secondary Certificate (Year 12) Program,
Canberra Institute of Technology

Jackson, Mrs Roslyn Louise, Non-executive Director, Canberra Institute of
Technology Governing Board

Von Guttner, Ms Georgia, Chief Industry and Innovation Officer, Canberra
Institute of Technology

THE CHAIR: Welcome back to the public hearings for the inquiry into E-PET-077-25, access to 11 to 12 ATAR languages in 2026. We welcome representatives from CIT and the CIT Board. Please note that, as witnesses, you are protected by parliamentary privilege and are bound by its obligations. You must tell the truth. Giving false or misleading evidence will be treated as a serious matter and may be considered contempt of the Assembly.

Thanks for appearing today. We will go straight into questions. I wanted to ask about the decision to start offering the Canberra Modern Languages Program, the centralised language offering that we have been inquiring into. What shaped that decision? What advocacy brought it about? Briefly, what is the history there?

Mrs Jackson: Unfortunately, CIT Solutions Proprietary Limited made that decision—so their governing board. I am the sole remaining director of CIT Solutions, but I was only appointed to that board on 21 May 2025—so that decision predates. I can only assume that a lot of the substance to the decision for them would have been having a reputation for language delivery and education and, having lost a contract with the Federal Police, they were looking for other avenues to deliver language courses in.

THE CHAIR: What kind of work was undertaken to market the courses to students or families during the time? It was offered over a two year period, 2024 and 2025. Do I have that timeline right?

Mrs Jackson: Yes, 2024 and 2025 were the two years that CIT Solutions delivered it. I am unaware of what sort of marketing strategy they had. I am looking at Shaun to see if he can add anything.

Mr Haidon: That would be a CIT Solutions company decision about their marketing strategy and their approach.

THE CHAIR: Is that something that could be taken on notice and you can have a look at what you might be able to provide?

Mrs Jackson: Absolutely, though that could be a challenge, because of the liquidation process and all the other directors have moved on.

THE CHAIR: Sure. Let us know how you are going, and we understand if you cannot access things. We have learnt that, prior to this program being offered by CIT Solutions, there was an early access option—so years 9 and 10 students may have been able to access the program at an ATAR level—but that was not delivered through CIT Solutions. Is that your understanding as well?

Mrs Jackson: Certainly, our understanding is that CIT Solutions only delivered to year

11 and year 12.

Mr Haidon: Are you referring to H courses in the H course program through universities or—

THE CHAIR: I do not know. What I am referring to is students who are not in year 11 or 12 taking an ATAR level course. Is that an H course?

Mr Haidon: No, not necessarily. If we could have more information about how that that potential cohort was being offered by CIT Solutions, we could—

THE CHAIR: No; sorry. It was offered when this was run through the Canberra Academy of Languages prior to the CIT Solutions kind of era.

Mr Haidon: We would be unaware of the Canberra Academy of Languages and how they were approaching their offering, their marketing and so forth.

THE CHAIR: Sure. But during this period of the Canberra Modern Languages, it was always years 11 and 12 students only.

Mr Haidon: Yes.

THE CHAIR: There are still some students who are finishing off their studies this year—right?

Mrs Jackson: Yes. We are honouring those students who were enrolled in year 11 who are now in year 12 for 2026, and delivering the courses to those students. But we did not take on any new students in 2026. There was a lot leading up to that. There was a lot of consultation with the families of those students from year 11 in 2025 to provide them with assurances and what would be the approach for teaching them out in 2026?

THE CHAIR: Has everyone from the year 11 cohort stayed on?

Mrs Jackson: No. There were 15 students and only 10 of those students—

Mr Haidon: We have nine students currently for this semester. Next semester there will be 10 students across six languages.

THE CHAIR: How is it delivered currently? Is it three and a half hours in one evening?

Mr Haidon: That is correct. On a Thursday, there are three and a half hours of face-to-face delivery. Given such a small cohort, we wanted to take steps to ensure that that cohort was close together. We have five educators currently that are supporting those five languages. It will be six when French comes in next semester. They are in an evening at CIT Bruce, supported in a safe, close-knit, supportive way.

THE CHAIR: So there are nine students now attending. How many were there last year across years 11 and 12?

Mr Haidon: In semester 2, there were 15 year 11 students and 28 year 12 students.

THE CHAIR: And the year before? Do you have that data?

Mr Haidon: For semester 1 2025 there was 22 year 11 students and 28 year 12 students.

THE CHAIR: So a little bit of a dip last year?

Mr Haidon: Yes.

THE CHAIR: Do you have any understanding of why there was a decrease?

Mr Haidon: We received the students in semester 2, and they would have already commenced with CIT Solutions. So it would have been something that CIT Solutions would have overseen and engaged with families about. Quite often, families and the students would make decisions that this particular language does not fit with their overall course package decisions and that they would prefer to take different courses on offer. It may have something to do with travel arrangements. It could be a whole range of factors about own family and personal commitments those students are making, such as work, sporting commitments and so forth—other extracurricular activities.

MS BARRY: I have some questions around your teacher teaching capacity. Did you find it difficult to recruit teachers into those language courses?

Mr Haidon: We used the same teachers that were with the CIT Solutions arrangement. Six educators are drawn from ACT schools—so they are existing language educators. We have them on a casual agreement that we transitioned them into and they are supported. They have this commitment on a Thursday evening and then their standard commitments that they are making with their schools where their primary employment is with. It can be challenging to source educators of languages—that is for sure.

MS BARRY: But you had had the continuity of the educators that came through the—

Mr Haidon: Yes.

MS BARRY: So that was not a problem, essentially, in the decision to cease this.

Mr Haidon: Correct. Semester 2 in 2025 is when CIT took it over from CIT Solutions in the transition.

MS BARRY: Can you explain why that is not something that you are looking to progress in the future?

Mrs Jackson: A decision was made to liquidate CIT Solutions on the concerns that it could become insolvent if it continued trading at losses, which is the trend that it had been following. In that process, there was a review of what should be transferred to CIT as the sole owner of CIT Solutions and decisions were made based on financial arrangements that were in place. Obviously, CIT itself has to be very conscious of its own act and the FM Act and, of course, we also have a direction from Minister Steel that was received in 2022 outlining a requirement to ensure efficient and effective

delivery of our education products. The teaching of the year 11 and 12 program was running at a loss. There is a small fee that the students or their families contribute each semester but it goes nowhere near covering the cost of delivering the program and there was no funding from the Education Directorate.

MS BARRY: Following on from that, did you have conversations with the Education Directorate about whether or not this was something that they were willing to fund, noting that there was a high level of students who were enrolled?

Mrs Jackson: Absolutely. Following on from decisions on what would be taken over by CIT there was consultation with the Education Directorate about the program.

MS BARRY: What were the outcomes of the consultation? What was the conversation?

Mrs Jackson: My understanding is—not the specific wording—that, basically, there was no funding for the program.

MS BARRY: Were there any conversations about transitioning, noting that some of those children were ACT public education students? Was there any conversation about transitioning them into a public education pathway in the public education system?

Mrs Jackson: I would have to say that that would be an Education Directorate decision to do that.

MS BARRY: But there was no conversation from them in terms of what to do with these students that we know that—

Mr Haidon: Throughout the time, we have always said to the students and the families that, if you want to make alternative arrangements, we can work with you, your family and the school to see that you are not disadvantaged by having your package changed, your selection of majors, minors and so forth that contribute towards your senior secondary certificate. That has always been something that we have been committed to throughout, in working with the Board of Senior Secondary Studies, to see that happen in a streamlined, smooth way for the students and families.

MS BARRY: Are there any students who have taken up that offer?

Mr Haidon: Students have decided to not continue through and either finish off at a minor level, for a variety of reasons. For that student, it may be that languages education is not the course that they want to pursue and they will use their time in other studies. That is common.

MS BARRY: Okay. Thank you.

MS TOUGH: Thank you for coming in. Just building on what Ms Barry said around CIT Solutions, was CIT Solutions charging students for the courses? The Canberra Academy of Languages was a fee-for-service model. Was CIT Solutions fee for service?

Mr Haidon: Yes, and the charge was to either the student or the school, paying semester by semester.

MS TOUGH: Was it a mix of students and schools paying, depending on the schools?

Mr Haidon: Yes; that is my understanding.

Mrs Jackson: But, for the record, I would add that that did not cover the cost of delivery of the program.

MS TOUGH: I note CIT Solutions is now winding up. Do you know if the rate that was being charged was the same rate as the Canberra Academy of Languages had been charging previously or if there had been a change in the fee structure?

Mrs Jackson: We will take that on notice.

THE CHAIR: What is the fee is being charged now?

Mrs Jackson: There is a fee, but, again, it is not total recovery by any means—a long way short.

Mr Haidon: The semester 1 fee is \$1,250 and semester 2 is \$1,000. There are marginally fewer weeks in semester 2.

MS TOUGH: So you will take on notice what the fees were under CIT Solutions, so we can compare that to what Canberra Academy of Languages was charging. We received some evidence this morning from the previous Canberra Academy of Languages on how much they think it would cost to run. Just over \$200,000 was their estimate of how much it would cost to run a centralised language school. So it would be interesting, knowing what you are charging now, to see what CIT Solutions were charging and how that is actually below cost. So it would be good to do those comparisons.

You mentioned the teachers were the CIT Solutions teachers and are now engaged by CIT casually. We got some evidence from the AEU that, by being CIT Solutions, they were not on the enterprise agreement; they were just award covered. Are the teachers now on the enterprise agreement conditions?

Mr Haidon: Yes. They are under the CIT educators agreement rate and employed as casual educators in that.

MS TOUGH: Wonderful. We have had a lot of different suggestions today on how languages could be offered for year 11 and 12 students from the centralised model that currently exists and did exist, through to language teachers floating around the ACT to different schools, and then there is also what is currently happening where students float to an extent—they travel from their home school to another school—and suggestions everywhere in between of that. From your experience with the students currently enrolled, is there a model that would work best?

Mr Haidon: I would start by saying that, whatever the framework that is put forward

by our partners in the Education Directorate and sector colleagues of independent and Catholic education, CIT would happily engage and support to see it work, particularly with a funding commitment behind it. Languages education typically has the greatest outcome when it is a high level of immersion in the language subject. That can be difficult to achieve with any model that is being proposed. The centralisation does assist to scale and to have more efficiencies. Also, there is the potential that particular schools are offered as hubs for certain languages—so not one centralised, but different schools working off their strength. But, again, I think there needs to be some strong feasibility in all of those options before making a pick of what is the best.

MS TOUGH: Thank you.

Ms von Guttner: I would make a further observation. I know it has been a guiding principle for delivery at CIT, and that is because the numbers in teach-out are small—so there are minimum safe class sizes. That is for the students and for support of the educators as well. We were down to a staff ratio of one to one, as you heard, on those numbers. In an immersive face-to-face environment, you cannot all be in the same room in a vocal, verbal context. Those logistics and education excellence outcomes are really challenged at the numbers. They really need strong numbers. I think in a distributed hub model, which could have central background operations quality perspective, the numbers are very small.

Mr Haidon: Every language of the six, bar Tamil, is taught in an ACT college or an ACT school. It is only Tamil. From the educators that we have drawn from, the majority are from Gungahlin College, and then we have educators drawn from other sectors—Brindabella Christian College and St Mary McKillop College. So it is a cross-sectoral effort to see language education delivered for this currently small group of nine students—soon to be 10, next semester.

MS TOUGH: Have you had any conversations with TAFE NSW around how they assist with teachers? I think the HSC in New South Wales are the equivalent for 11 and 12. Some subjects, including some languages, are taught through TAFE NSW as one way of engaging the students. Have there been any conversations with TAFE NSW on how they offer languages, for some ideas?

Mrs Jackson: I would have thought not, given that it is a responsibility of the Education Directorate, not CIT, to deliver those courses.

MS TOUGH: Thank you.

MISS NUTTALL: I appreciate that you have spoken to this in the broad sense, but I am interested in what cost-benefit analysis CIT Solutions undertook before they decided to discontinue offering language courses.

Mrs Jackson: We will have to take that on notice, because we do not know what sort of cost-benefit analysis is there. All I can say is the outcome is that it runs at a loss—a significant loss.

MISS NUTTALL: Are you able to provide the figures on what that loss is and how much the language course was costing the CIT every year?

Mrs Jackson: I cannot for CIT Solutions, but we do have numbers for 2026 delivery with CIT. That is a net deficit of \$102,000. I have rounded that.

THE CHAIR: And that is with revenue of \$12,500, or a little under?

Mr Haidon: The estimated revenue over semester 1 and semester 2 is approximately \$21,250. Our forecast estimate expenditure for the two semesters is \$124,075—so a net loss of \$102,825. That is on our estimates.

Mrs Jackson: Just for clarification on that, given the number that you said, Chair, the students pay a fee both semesters. That is why it was up to the \$21,000 figure.

THE CHAIR: I was going to jump in and give it, but you had the revenue figure. So that is all good.

MS BARRY: What is the biggest expenditure for you?

Mr Haidon: Staffing—the educational delivery. We pay staff for their direct instruction of students and also their planning and then assessment time follow-up. So that contributes.

MISS NUTTALL: Is that a cost that scales with enrolments? With a lot of these courses, I am envisaging, it might not be too much more that you would pay stuff depending on whether the class had one student versus 15.

Mr Haidon: If there were more students, the net loss would be smaller. But it then determines on what class size you would like to set and also then if you are considering overheads. In these figures, my understanding is that it is the direct casual education, and we are not considering the elements of CIT overhead administrative costs. This is a transitory arrangement.

THE CHAIR: The building and all that sort of stuff.

Mrs Jackson: Correct; academic governance overheads.

Mr Haidon: We wanted to support these students carry through with the commitment we made back in semester 2, 2025, to carry them through.

MISS NUTTALL: Thank you. I am interested in the way student enrolments have changed that element of cost recovery over time. When Canberra Academy of Languages had the course, at its height in 2023, there were 74 students across the six languages. Would I be able to get the figures of how many students you had across semesters 1 and 2 in 2024? Do you have an explanation for why students have dropped off so significantly? Have you had any feedback on that?

Mrs Jackson: We would have to take that on notice.

MISS NUTTALL: That would be great, if that is okay—if you are happy to take on notice the enrolment figures in CIT for 2024. I think you have provided us with 2025

and reasons for that.

Mrs Jackson: We do have numbers for 2024.

MISS NUTTALL: Okay.

Mr Haidon: No; not for 2024.

Mrs Jackson: I beg your pardon; I thought you read those out.

Mr Haidon: CIT took the program on in its transition in semester 2. So we have semester 1 and semester 2 of 2025. When it was under CIT Solutions, that is their decision, their considerations, their reasoning and rationale as to why things may have gone up, down or sideways.

MISS NUTTALL: Do you have those numbers for when CIT Solutions had that? Do you have the enrolment numbers?

Mrs Jackson: We will have to go looking for that, yes, so we will have to take that on notice.

MISS NUTTALL: Thank you.

THE CHAIR: The ACT government submission indicates that, in May 2025, there were 49 enrolments.

MISS NUTTALL: Yes, but I am interested in the numbers for 2024—that middle stuff. It looks like the face-to-face contact hours have changed since Canberra Academy of Languages was running. I think it used to be two hours of face-to-face contact. Under CIT it looks like that was 3.5. In terms of scheduling, especially for college students, did you receive any feedback that that increased time demand might mean it did not work with young people's schedules at the end of the college day?

Mr Haidon: When any provider delivers certification courses under the BSSS, it has to meet the Board of Senior Secondary Studies quality requirements of attendance, engagement and so forth. For us, with such a small cohort, we took it that the way to ensure the safety of group and continuity of learning was to have increased face-to-face hours. I understand the model of two hours face to face and then two hours of self-paced online learning used to be the model. For us, we could not see that being a way to demonstrate high-quality language education in a safe, transitory way for this cohort.

MISS NUTTALL: That is really helpful to know; thank you. Was the ATAR languages course the only BSSS certified course offered by the CIT at the time? Are there other BSSS certified subjects that you offer that are not languages?

Mr Haidon: Yes, but it is not to under-17-year-olds. We offer a suite of accredited and tertiary courses—English, mathematics, the sciences, pathways and global studies and history. That is to an adult cohort where they have aged out, you could say, of the senior secondary system, and they are coming to us to either finish off their package for tertiary preparation, or they are coming back, maybe as 25- 30- and 40-year-olds, to CIT to

access those higher-order general capabilities. We have about 115 of those students currently in our course.

MISS NUTTALL: What makes those courses sustainable on an ongoing basis? Is it about people's capacity to contribute from an education perspective? Is it enrolment numbers—so it is not like you are charging them more than languages, but it builds up because there are more people to absorb that cost?

Mrs Jackson: Miss Nuttall, flowing on from your earlier comment, it is the sheer fact of numbers. You only need one teacher for a group of five. It is going to be far more cost-effective than a one-on-one arrangement. I am not saying the other education is delivered one to five—but, just as an example, it would not be a one-on-one delivery.

MISS NUTTALL: Thank you. That was really helpful. Speaking of young people and the way they use this, did you have any consultation mechanisms in place to take on board feedback from young people? I am thinking of the cohort that might have transitioned over halfway through and been able to say, "This amount of contact hours works better with my schedule and this does not." Did you have a mechanism for getting feedback from the students in your course?

Mr Haidon: I am not aware of the particular consultation that was taking place at that semester 2, 2025 period. But, more broadly, CIT regularly takes input from its current students or prospective students, giving feedback through mechanisms available through CIT Ask Us or, once they are in, providing feedback through unit evaluation surveys, the learner engagement survey and CIT's student association. All that is put into our ongoing course continuous improvement.

MISS NUTTALL: Would you have the data from any like CIT Ask Us feedback?

Mr Haidon: So for this one, there were not specific questions around, for example, "You are a student in this course with CIT Solutions. Could you give us some thought and feedback on options a, b, and c?"

MISS NUTTALL: And there was not an evaluation survey from that class either?

Mr Haidon: If there were ongoing evaluations and feedback at CIT Solutions, we could take that on notice to see how that informed. But it was not something that was factored into what was transitory. We have nine students and 10 students and we have a commitment to take them through.

MISS NUTTALL: Thank you.

Mrs Jackson: I would just add that we started consultation with the Education Directorate in at least June 2025. So, if you are thinking of feedback to then encourage new students to take it up in 2026, for example, it would have been the Education Directorate that would have been following up with the schools and talking about whether they were considering to deliver in 2026 or not. We had already made the decision and we had informed the directorate that we were not continuing in 2026, back in June of 2025. So they had the time to be discussing with the schools what would be implemented for 2026. When we knew that they were not going to take over, of course,

we wanted to honour those students to make sure that they could complete their year 12.

MISS NUTTALL: It is really helpful to know, from the transitional arrangements. I suppose my focus was on whether any student feedback could have informed the changes to retain students and therefore keep the service viable. So that was the context in which I was asking. But it is helpful to know that the onus would be on the Education Directorate, when you started to talk about that sort of transitional—

Mrs Jackson: The decrease in the numbers could purely be that they would have known that there was change. So families—parents protecting children—possibly might have discouraged new students to take it up, knowing that there was uncertainty in the market until they knew what the Education Directorate was doing.

Mr Haidon: To that point, the Board of Senior Secondary Studies would have all certification of beginning, intermediate or advanced language courses and which school or in which year and so forth. That would give a better insight than what Ros was saying, which is just a little snippet of what we did as a centralised service in transition, which is really distorting the numbers you are looking at, which is about demand for languages education in the ACT.

MISS NUTTALL: Thank you.

THE CHAIR: That would be a good question for the BSSS. The directorate told CIT Solutions that it was being wound up in June of last year to give time to establish new arrangements. But, at some point, CIT realised that you were going to have to carry forward the program for this year. When was that?

Ms Jackson: We would have to take that on notice.

THE CHAIR: Okay.

Mr Haidon: It was communicated in June to the ACT Education Directorate about this decision and its implications. It was from June 2025, that CIT, our colleagues, previously made contact with the ACT Education Directorate about—

THE CHAIR: In your previous answer, you indicated you wanted to give them time to consider what was next. My assumption is that, at some point in that time window, they decided the directorate is not going to do this and that is when CIT said, “We will honour the cohort for 2026.”

Mr Haidon: We already said that we would honour the cohort—

THE CHAIR: You said that from day one?

Mr Haidon: If you were a year 11 student, you would have two years or so to get to major, assuming you pass everything. Year 12s would be finishing off just by the end of the year. That was said from the outset.

THE CHAIR: That was communicated to the directorate from the outset.

Mr Haidon: Yes.

THE CHAIR: Okay. You do not need to take it on notice then.

Mrs Jackson: Thank you.

THE CHAIR: Thank you for your attendance today. Any questions that you have taken on notice, please provide your answers to the committee secretary within five business days of receiving the uncorrected proof *Hansard*.

Mrs Jackson: Can we seek some clarity, Chair? I am foreseeing some problems in getting a number of the CIT Solutions documents together.

Mr Haidon: The organisation does not exist, per se.

Mrs Jackson: Everything is in the hands of the liquidator. You have given us five days to get that information to you.

THE CHAIR: If you are unable to access it, please get as much to the committee and we will go from there.

Secretary: I will be sending an email through to confirm the questions that we have captured. Then you will get an uncorrected copy of the transcript with those questions. So it will not be five days from today; it will be five days from when I send that email through.

Mrs Jackson: Thank you.

THE CHAIR: If you have any issues accessing information, you can explain why and so on and we can go from there.

Mrs Jackson: Excellent.

THE CHAIR: Okay. Thanks for coming in.

Short suspension

BERRY, MS YVETTE, Deputy Chief Minister, Minister for Education and Early Childhood, Minister for Homes, Homelessness and New Suburbs and Minister for Sport and Recreation

BORTON, MR JASON, Executive Branch Manager, Education Programs and Services

SPENCE, MS ANGELA, Deputy Director-General, Education Directorate

WOOD, MS JO, Director-General, Education Directorate

THE CHAIR: We welcome Ms Yvette Berry MLA, Minister for Education and Early Childhood, and officials.

Please note that, as witnesses, you are protected by parliamentary privilege and bound by its obligations. You must tell the truth. Giving false or misleading evidence will be treated as a serious matter and may be considered contempt of the Assembly.

We will go directly into questions. I have a question about modelling for the cost of delivering a centralised languages program for year 11 and 12 students. Is this a cost that the Education Directorate modelled after finding out that CIT Solutions was being wound up in June of last year?

Ms Wood: The directorate has looked at some costs of delivery. There are a whole lot of different considerations depending on what model you might land on, so I would not say we have a definitive cost, but we could share some of that work that went into that on notice, if that would assist the committee.

THE CHAIR: Thank you. Yes, that would be really helpful. I am curious about the extent to which cost was a determining factor in deciding not to take over the delivery of the program, and at what point that decision was made.

Ms Wood: Ms Spence can add to this. There is obviously a range of factors in looking at the concept of a centralised delivery of languages. It is about student demand. It is about teacher and workforce availability. It is about costs. And there are always trade-offs in investing in a new thing—looking at where you would take the resources from. So all of those factors are part of the consideration, and all of those factors impact on whether something would be a sustainable thing to deliver centrally.

THE CHAIR: I acknowledge you have taken on notice the question of cost. We have heard a couple of costs today; you may have been listening in. The Canberra Academy of Languages provided a costing of \$206,000 a year to deliver the program with six teachers for six languages. CIT indicated that this year they are delivering it for \$124,000; that is just the staffing cost. Were your costings in that region? It seems like a pretty small figure.

Ms Wood: Our costings would be significantly more than that. Obviously, we have got to take into account our own staff entitlements, if we were to be running a service staffed by our own staff. And to cover that span of languages, I would think, would be significantly more.

THE CHAIR: Okay. Can you shed some light on the assumptions that the directorate was applying? In the CAL costing—the Canberra Academy of Languages costing that

has been tabled—they assumed six teachers at 0.2 FTE. I think they got the salary figures from the Education Directorate’s latest enterprise agreement. Is that kind of the—

Ms Berry: I think we have taken that on notice.

Ms Wood: In what we come back with, we can include those assumptions about how we have reached the costings.

THE CHAIR: The assumptions and how they figure—okay. Other barriers to standing up a program that you have mentioned were that the ACT government has never had a centralised language program and that it has been delivered externally, which is what we heard today as well, through the Academy of Languages and then CIT Solutions. A concern was raised in the government submission that this could create an expectation that each individual school needs to somehow embed individualised options—sorry, it creates community expectation the government is unable to meet. But multiple other jurisdictions have a publicly run, government, centralised language program, so it is not really unprecedented, and it does not seem to have created an expectation there. So I am struggling to understand those justifications for not taking over the delivery of the program.

Ms Berry: Well, it would in the ACT, set a precedent. I accept the comment that you have made about other states and territories, but we have not in the ACT. We also have not run a program that funds education for both non-government and government schools in the ACT, and that is what this program does. It funds language for non-government schools as well.

THE CHAIR: Of course, the directorate could choose to exclude non-government students if it took over the management of the program, if that was a concern. It has been operating—not run by the directorate—since 2017, and that does not seem to have established a kind of precedent that people expect this to happen across multiple different subjects. I think we are talking about quite specific language education. Wouldn’t that be enough to allay that concern that an unreasonable community expectation could be created?

Ms Berry: I am not sure what you are asking us to do—give assumptions or feelings about things. If you could ask us a question about the evidence we can provide or for assistance, we can do that.

THE CHAIR: Okay.

Ms Berry: But it is difficult when you are asking us to give you some feelings about things.

THE CHAIR: I do not know that I am doing that, but I am happy to ask a different question if that is helpful. Based on the costings we received earlier, a break-even of 55 students would have been enough to break-even at CIT. In May of last year, the program had 49 students—so pretty close to that kind of break-even point.

Before that, though, there were 74 enrolments in 2023, when the program was run prior

to moving to CIT Solutions. And we have learnt that, at moving it to CIT Solutions, the early access option was removed, so year 9 or 10 students could no longer access the program, and that the attendance was increased, where the requirement was previously two hours in person, it went up to 3½ hours. Have you looked at the impact on those changes on enrolment levels and on the financial viability of the program?

Mr Borton: What we really need to be clear about here is that this is provided by an external provider. That external provider is accredited by the BSSS, and the BSSS have requirements for external providers in regard to meeting requirements to deliver an external program. So whichever provider it has been—whether it has been the first iteration, whether it is CIT Solutions and/or CIT—those are external providers that are providing it. They have to meet the requirements that BSSS set. So whatever changes happened in regard to those requirements were set by the BSSS. That is not anything that we control as the directorate.

It is not as simple as saying the directorate would just take over a program. We are not an external provider. We provide schooling for ACT public school students. We provide languages education within our schools.

This program was provided by an external provider for cross-sectoral students to participate in. Then that external provider decided no longer to provide that program. The notion of the directorate taking over a program is not accurate in regard to what that is, because those programs, by an external provider, are accredited and licensed to do that for the BSSS. We are not that organisation. We provide the education in schools by teachers in subject areas. I think that that is a really important distinction in the questions that are being asked here about us taking over a program.

THE CHAIR: Sure, I understand the distinction. The government is not obliged to take over the delivery of the program.

The CIT board member, before you, did say that it is the directorate's responsibility to provide language education, of course, for public college students—

Mr Borton: Certainly.

THE CHAIR: and this is one of the options we are exploring. It is the reason we are here. The petition has come forward proposing that this happen, so we are trying to understand why it has not.

Just before I pass onto Ms Barry, I want to ask about the other solutions that have been put forward—one of them is out-of-area enrolments.

Mr Borton: Yes.

THE CHAIR: The other is—well, perhaps we will just focus on that. Other members might have questions on the others.

This was put forward, and it was also mentioned in a response to a motion that Ms Barry brought forward last year, as one of the options for students wishing to pursue a language not available at their local college—to enrol out of area. A question on notice

came back recently showing that for this year, of the 115 applications for out-of-area enrolments for languages, 31 were declined due to school capacity reasons. Doesn't that show that this option is not viable for a significant portion of students it is offered to?

Ms Wood: I think, obviously, we work on managing school capacity across the system, and that is equally true about colleges, as at other stages of schooling. We take into account a whole range of factors in those decisions about our out-of-area enrolments. And there are circumstances, like those that were identified, where there is not capacity for additional students. But I think we need to recognise that our colleges actually deliver a range of languages—some of them deliver multiple languages. So there are very active efforts to ensure we are providing quality language provision to senior secondary students, and in those circumstances, we could not meet every student's preference for the language and college enrolment.

THE CHAIR: Of the 31 students this year, do you have any sense of what they did instead? Did they drop the language? Did they have look at changing school systems?

Ms Wood: I do not think we have that information.

Mr Borton: No.

THE CHAIR: Ms Barry?

MS BARRY: I have a few questions around the language education plans—just taking a step back to understand. This is one of the comments that was made by the Australian Education Union around the purpose. What is the government seeking to achieve in terms of language generally within ACT schools? Is it to offer languages to everybody who wants to study language or is it just to have languages there? What is the policy intent, and how have you captured that policy intent in your planning for languages across schools?

Ms Wood: I think that at the most macro level—and then I will hand to Ms Spence—our intent is to deliver in alignment with the national curriculum. The national curriculum specifies that there is a range of languages for which there is the national curriculum. Within the ACT, our policy establishes eight core languages under the national curriculum, and our intent is to deliver those languages for our community. But then, as you identified, we have the action plan and a range of work under that that Ms Spence can speak to.

Ms Spence: Thank you. Building on the requirements of the Australian Curriculum, which goes from kindergarten to year 10, and the requirement for teaching languages, in our policy in ACT public schools K to year 8, it is a requirement. I think that that requirement is based on learning an additional language supporting aspects of the curriculum around intercultural understanding and respect. It supports, I think, the bigger picture of education around being global citizens and effective communicators—supporting a broad diversity within the community. That is, from a national perspective, why languages are in the curriculum. They are a valued part of the curriculum, and our policy in the ACT public school system backs that in, where teaching a language is compulsory from year 3 to year 8.

For year 9 and 10 it moves into an elective space, where students can choose, and our requirement for our schools is to have an option for students to choose a language should they wish to continue the pathway. Of course, as you move into senior secondary, for those that want to continue to higher levels of understanding, again, our senior secondary system is very much student-choice based, and it is a demand-driven program.

The Language Education Action Plan was established as we approached teacher shortages. Our ability to attract qualified educators to teach the eight priority languages for the ACT became quite challenging, and therefore we needed to address that through a dedicated workforce plan and look at different models to support education delivery and to enhance current language offerings—for example, through community schools, which is not our offering, I am going to say that; but it is something that, from an ACT citizens' perspective, is really valued. It was developed to ensure that we had actions to help us address an increasing number of schools that, at that particular point in time, were unable to deliver language education in their school settings, especially in the primary school space.

Since the implementation of that plan, and the different actions, we have been able to work with some schools to introduce new languages. Some of those languages are outside of the eight ACT priority languages. For example, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander language education is taught in some of our schools. It is a part of the Australian curriculum, but it is not an ACT priority language.

We have eight priority languages to support pathways, but because of our staffing shortages, it is becoming more and more difficult to maintain that. Therefore, we have looked at other languages to be taught in the schools and to develop new partnerships to help support teachers who, for whatever reason, may be teaching Indonesian and do not actually have any Indonesian language, when the school is trying to maintain their Indonesian language program, resources and partnerships with other schools to help deliver their language program.

So that is where the Language Education Action Plan started, and over the years, following the Punjabi-Hindi survey, we have looked at different work, which would be a new language for the ACT and what that could help us achieve in terms of addressing our actions as part of the LEAP.

MS BARRY: Thank you. I have a few more questions, if that is all right. The first question I have, just following from your responses is: do you have data on what languages are taught where? How many teachers are there? Have you done any survey in terms of what is influencing teachers? The evidence we have heard is that teachers are leaving the ACT because they are asked to teach four different things, not just language, because they want to maintain a full FTE. Have you done any survey on why there is a migration of teachers in languages outside of the ACT or into other roles? My question is: how well do you understand the landscape?

Ms Wood: We are very clear about—and we can provide this either now or on notice—which languages are taught in which schools, and we can show that by region as well. To the question about teachers and the workforce, it is a workforce pressure nationally,

not just in the ACT, and where we have, particularly in primary school, where we may have a smaller primary school, it is always going to be a challenge if we are seeking a teacher just to teach particular subjects. So that kind of idea that teachers may teach multiple subjects, in our scale, is an operational reality we need to deal with.

Ms Spence: And primary schools in particular—

Mr Borton: Yes, that is correct.

Ms Wood: I am not aware of specific data that says we are losing language teachers at a higher rate than other jurisdictions necessarily, but if there is any analysis of that that has come from other submissions, we are happy to have a look.

MS BARRY: Is that because most decisions about language are left to the individual schools? The education department, with a bird's-eye view about the education system, and language in particular, would have some kind of indication of whether this is trending up or trending down and where you are gaining teachers and losing teachers. There would be some indication of that.

Mr Borton: We certainly do. It is a very fluid thing which changes almost weekly or monthly, or half-yearly or at the end of each term. Teachers move and change. But we are mapping all of that and that is going to be publicly available quite soon. You can imagine that it is a spider web of where schools are and what language they have, and we are trying to create as much pathway as we can in the eight priority languages up from primary school through to high school and into college, in regions, so that young people and their families can see the pathway through. It is a really tangled web. We are developing that right now.

We have done it previously, but it changes every single year because it really is dependent on a couple of things: whether there are enough students in those areas that want to do those languages and if there is a teacher to deliver that language, particularly in the secondary. If there are no Japanese teachers for a primary school, for example, that is really challenging. Then they have to go back to their community and think: "Is there another language we could do and does that language upset the pathway for our local high school?" So, yes, schools make those decisions based on working with their communities, but that is appropriate, because the community needs to have a say about what language they choose there, and they also work with their board and whether there is an available teacher to do that.

But in high school and college, it is different, because for those schools from year 9 up, as Angela said, they are electives, like every other subject. So they are demand-driven based on numbers and then teacher availability. So there are a couple of different scenarios there; it is not a simple calculation.

MS BARRY: So why is it then that the directorate's policy position is that teachers must justify the financial viability of their language classes? That is the evidence we heard from the Australian Education Union.

Ms Wood: We fund schools at a global level. There is a range of inputs into the budget for a school, and there is a small amount of core funding that is just for having a

principal and deputy principal, those kind of core roles. But, broadly, our schools are funded on an enrolment basis, with additional loadings for particular characteristics of their student profile. Then there will be additional funding for the profile of students with disability and some specific line items. So, broadly, we are funding schools on an enrolment basis. It is a complex job for principals to plan their subject delivery and plan their staffing across the whole curriculum, and that includes languages. That is why, as Mr Borton said, it is something that has to be juggled year to year but also term to term as teachers may move on and new teachers may come in. So we do not fund specifically any subject individually; we are funding on the profile of students in that school.

MS BARRY: What supports do you give to the schools when, perhaps, for whatever reason, there is a fluctuation in the enrolment numbers as it relates to language? How do you support that school, knowing that that fluctuation would then lead to other financial decisions being made by the school? How do you support the school to ensure that they are not disadvantaged? The question here is about equity. If one school is, for whatever reason, losing students from a certain language, if you are funding based on enrolment numbers, their funding would reduce, which means that they have to make up the cost somewhere else—because you are not funding based on language. How do you support the schools to ensure that they remain able to offer those languages if the enrolment numbers change?

Ms Spence: We have a section within the Education Support Office that can provide service support for schools when they have those hard decisions. Ultimately, the principal needs to make the decision around the subjects, because it is not just about the languages program; they have, especially in the senior secondary space, so many course offerings. As the students submit their course preferences as they come into year 11, they actually have to analyse every subject area before they make decisions. It is basically demand driven. If there is a situation where a college, in successive years, is not getting enough enrolments for a particular language area and they have a language teacher, they can reach into the ESO for support around how to manage that situation, especially when you have a skilled staff member that might be available to teach French—this is not accurate—in their school, yet they actually do not have students that want to learn French. This is where we look at, “Where are other schools?” We have mobility in our HR processes, and at the end of each year we look at how we can transfer our staff between schools. There is an option that, if there is a higher demand in another area, teachers can go into the transfer round so that they can teach the subject that they are interested in in a school that needs that particular skill set. It is an ongoing, year-by-year analysis around the demand of students across all subject areas, not just language—for example, biology. If they have 15 kids that want to do a biology subject and they have two kids that want to do French and they cannot manage their timetable, they may need to make different decisions in order to support all of the delivery under the one bucket of money.

MISS NUTTALL: When you get students submitting their preferences for course offerings, is that not just for existing courses that the school offers and which ones they would opt into? If I submit to a high school that offers Japanese, I am not necessarily going to a school that only offers French and be like, “Hey, I want to do Japanese here.” Do you collect information on preferences outside of what is currently offered?

Mr Borton: No. That would change depending on your staff profile. That might not

be the same every year for every school. There are lots of different factors there.

MS BARRY: It sounds like the chicken and the egg.

Mr Borton: Yes. It is not as simple as that. It is not static; it actually changes.

Ms Berry: That is because it is an elective.

Mr Borton: That is right, yes.

Ms Berry: It is because every subject except for English is an elective. If you are a parent and you have children in year 11 or 12 who are in high school, at the end of each year, you get a list of courses that the school offers and then students pick what they want to do as their first choice, second choice and third choice. You would remember.

MISS NUTTALL: Yes; it is pretty recent.

Ms Berry: I remember, from my kids as well. If there are not enough kids that want to do metalwork but there are plenty that want to do woodwork, then that is where the class ends up.

MISS NUTTALL: I hear what you are saying. My point is that students are not necessarily going to think to add to that existing list and say, “If the school does not offer this, I would like to go to this school because it is in area but I would like to do this course.” So it is really hard to gauge demand for the shifts in languages and things like that. More broadly, when you say everything but English is ultimately an elective, how does that reconcile with the requirement that every student from year 3 to year 8 has access to a language?

Mr Borton: You are correct: from year 3 to year 8 there is the language provision there for the Australian curriculum. But, from year 9 and year 10, it becomes elective. In year 9 through to year 12, every subject is elective except English. So not the entirety of high school, but from 9, 10, 11 and 12 it certainly is the case.

MISS NUTTALL: What then necessitates a high school having a language offering? We heard evidence that, at least back in 2022, when the government first mapped language offerings, there was in fact a high school that did not teach language. I think there were a few primary schools as well. So how does that work? Why do we see that?

Mr Borton: We have just had a really good look at this. It is quite interesting, because those numbers have gone down significantly over the last five years. We are sort of over 20 schools and most of those are primary schools, and that included two high schools that did not offer a language program. We do have one high school that currently does not have a program, and we are working with them. That is about staff availability. We have data for 2025, and there are a number of those primary schools which have now been able to get a teacher and are offering a program. So things are looking brighter in that space, which is really positive. When I say “we”, the directorate and me personally are going out and meeting with principals and saying, “What is the issue? Why haven’t you got a program?” and 100 per cent of the time—not just some of the time—it is about being able to get a staff member.

I was the principal at Richardson Primary, and we had Spanish. It was one day a week. To get someone to come in and do one day a week to meet our requirements, because that is all you have actually got the funding to do, is really hard. We tried to share with other schools et cetera. It is tricky. It is not as simple as, “Well, you need to get one.” We looked at what our other options were, and it is very challenging. It is a big decision to change the language as well. It is really about having available staff. For example, you might have one French teacher in your school and you do French, and then they decide to go and have a family or to go on long service leave. What if it is really hard to backfill? That program is at risk.

We have offered scholarships and we have incentivised to try and get people to take up language teaching. We continue to do that because we think it is important, but it is hard. In primary school, for example, we do not have other subjects like that. We do not have just English teachers or just science teachers necessarily in the same way as we do with language teachers. So it is a little bit different and more challenging.

Ms Berry: And it is not a community language program; they need to be qualified.

Mr Borton: That is right, yes.

Ms Spence: Can I just offer a clarifying point, in that the out-of-area enrolment policy supports senior secondary and for language choice in high school, but not primary school. Our enrolment policy does not allow for an out-of-area enrolment based on a language choice. So there are differences in our out-of-area policy requirements for language selection.

Ms Berry: With the exception of Telopea.

Ms Spence: Telopea, yes; sorry. That is because it is a special arrangement—bilingual in a primary.

Ms Wood: And Yarralumla.

Mr Borton: I would add that there are a couple of examples where students do all of their studies at a particular college and then choose to do a language at a different college. We have a couple of examples of that. Obviously, that is challenging. We have to align timetables, scheduling and travel et cetera, but there are examples. It is possible under our current enrolment policies to have a dual enrolment, so to speak. So they do all their studies at their local and then go off to a different college that offers their subject of choice in regards to language. So that can happen. It is quite rare, but it does happen.

THE CHAIR: How many of those cases are there?

Mr Borton: There are two cases currently. That data has come from the BSSS. We verified that, because I thought that was important to let you know.

THE CHAIR: Thank you.

Mr Borton: It is open to all students, but some students have been offered that and it just does not work out for them.

THE CHAIR: It is tricky logistically—right?

Mr Borton: It is really logistically challenging, but it is possible if they really, really want to.

THE CHAIR: Ms Wood, I think you were either going to take on notice the list—or Ms Spence might have the list—of the languages offered at different schools. I do not want you to read out the list but, if you have it, would you mind tabling it for us to have at the end?

Mr Borton: We definitely have that.

MS BARRY: Did I also ask the question around how many teachers teach which language in what school? Was that a question I asked?

Ms Spence: You asked that, yes. We would not have that data on us right now. I am trying to think whether pulling the timetables for every school and looking at what classes they teach is—

Mr Borton: Are you interested in which languages are taught or have more programs? Is that what you are interested in?

THE CHAIR: I think there are two questions. One is: which schools are offering which languages currently?

Mr Borton: We are mapping that. As we said, that is going to be publicly available soon—but, just remember, it is not static. That will continue. It is a dynamic document at a point in time.

THE CHAIR: Sure—what is on offer right now.

Ms Spence: We will need to take the other question on notice. I am not sure whether that data would be available in terms of that breakdown, but we will take that on notice and see what we can find out.

THE CHAIR: That would be: how many language teachers are there across the public system and where are they located?—if you are able to provide that. They are separate questions. You might be able to answer one and not the other.

Ms Berry: You already have language course by college, as part of our submission, I believe.

Mr Borton: We also need to understand that teachers in the ACT who are TQI registered can teach any subject area. We may have teachers who have studied a particular language and indicated that in their HR profile but they do not teach that particular language because they do not have to.

THE CHAIR: That came up earlier, which I think that is partly why we are asking it. Miss Nuttall asked about latent demand for languages, where a student might not have any way of indicating they wanted to study French at a school that does not have it, but also latent availability of teachers, where the directorate might not be aware of the fact that there is a French teacher teaching maths and science but not French.

Mr Borton: Even if we were aware of it, obviously, that is an individual professional choice that a person can make. One of the reasons they may or may not decide to do that is that they prefer to teach something else or because of the challenges of having to work across two or three schools or moving from class to class in primary school, where other teachers have got their class for all the day. It is a really tough gig being a release teacher, which is what we call those guys. Language is usually delivered in that form. They have year 2, year 3, year 4, year 5 of year 6—all different classes—and it is challenging. So there may be teachers who know how to speak Indonesian, for example, but choose not to teach that.

MS BARRY: The data that we are asking for—and, again, this would go to your planning—is: how many teachers are in a specific school that can then offer the languages that you have put forward to offer? We are not asking for the informal arrangements; we are asking: how many teachers do you have teaching Spanish in Narrabundah College and how many teachers do you have teaching French in Melba Copland? That is the data we are asking for.

THE CHAIR: And how many could teach French if they wanted to?

Mr Borton: That is a different question.

THE CHAIR: That is a different question, yes.

MS BARRY: It might be a bit difficult to get.

Mr Borton: That is what I am saying. I am not sure we could answer that second one, to be honest, because people do not necessarily have to indicate that.

THE CHAIR: But if they have—

Mr Borton: It would not be an exact science; it would be a bit of a guessing game.

MISS NUTTALL: From a workforce planning perspective, why wouldn't you collect data on how many qualified specialist teachers there are in the system? It seems to me that, if you are trying to match demand with the availability of teachers, you would want to have that information to hand.

MS BARRY: True.

Ms Berry: I think this is the work that the ACT Education Directorate is doing now with the review into resourcing within our schools. Our school system has operated since before self-government as a single and autonomous school system—if you could call it that. We have been trying over a number of years to bring our schools together under one system across a range of different strategies, starting with the Future of

Education Strategy, which still applies in many ways around improving equity outcomes within our schools. Coming from that, there is the Strong Foundations work that we are doing and the Early Childhood Strategy also leading into school, and now with the school resourcing review. Once that is released, it will give us a chance to really work with our schools and for the directorate to understand better what is happening within individual schools, which we know more now because we have been doing a lot of work around budgets and resourcing than the directorate has ever done before.

That is a significant reform change for our schools to be undertaking and for the Education Directorate to be undertaking, because it is reform that is required within the directorate to make sure that this change within our system happens in the best possible way. So it will happen over time—it is significant—and all the bits of information that we do not hold in the Education Directorate currently will become known to us, I think, over time as we do this work. We probably know more about our schools in the last five years than we have since our schools became part of the ACT system from New South Wales previously, because they operated as single schools.

It is a big job that we are asking our schools to go through. Part of that is around understanding, as you rightly say, “Who are the specialist teachers; who are the people that work in our schools and what do they do; and how do we support our schools better by operating as a system, with supports from the Education Directorate, in a more systemic way and systematic way?” I think you will see that that work will prioritise different areas—and it is right now, with Strong Foundations in literacy and numeracy going forward being one of the priorities. Languages might be one of those in the future, but I would not say it is a priority right now.

THE CHAIR: Just wanted to jump back quickly. On the web of pathways that you spoke to, Mr Borton, Ms Barry’s question earlier on was about, “What is the policy and what is the aim for the Education Directorate in language education?” Just to clarify: is the purpose of the mapping of this web of pathways so that you can say, “We want to see that a student can study a specific language all the way through their local area—they can go to Majura Primary, then Lyneham High and then Dickson College, and the whole way along there is at least one language offered? Is that the aim?”

Mr Borton: Essentially, as far as practicable, we want to create the pathway from primary to high school into college. That is the goal. Whether that actually happens or not depends on so many factors. So, as much as practicable, yes, that is what we are trying to achieve.

THE CHAIR: That is the policy guide?

Mr Borton: Yes, essentially. This exercise is about mapping to see what is currently in place, and we have done this over the years. But, at the moment, we want to know what it is right now and so we are doing that task. That is what we are trying to achieve, but I just want to be really clear that that is not necessarily the case everywhere, as much as we would love it to be.

MS TOUGH: One of the questions I was going to ask was about mapping, because we heard some evidence this morning that, according to ACT Parents, Tuggeranong and

some parts of Belconnen are less serviced for languages than other parts of Canberra. The government submission mentions that all colleges have languages, except Erindale. Is there a reason that Erindale does not have languages at the moment?

Mr Borton: That is not our understanding. I think it is every college. There were schools that we checked on; none of them were colleges. They have an external provider. We are following up on that one.

Ms Spence: They do offer an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander language program—

Mr Borton: That is right.

Ms Spence: but it is not one of our eight priority languages.

Mr Borton: In colleges, there is a little bit of flexibility around that, because they are looking for BSSS endorsement for their programs. Also, it is not the Australian curriculum that they are delivering. They do have a language-based program.

MS TOUGH: It is not one of the eight.

Mr Borton: It is not one of the eight.

MS TOUGH: That makes more sense.

Mr Borton: That might be why they have said that, yes.

MS TOUGH: Is that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander language course that they are delivering BSSS accredited or certified?

Ms Spence: I do not know, off the top of my head. I can take that on notice and get that for you.

MS TOUGH: Yes, take that on notice. If it is, it is really interesting that that is being taught.

Mr Borton: My understanding is that it is not an accredited course, but it is being included as part of their Senior Secondary Certificate. But they are not the same thing. We can clarify that and give you the 100 per cent answer.

MS TOUGH: If you could clarify its status; thanks. We had some evidence this morning regarding the time when the Canberra Academy of Languages offered courses as an external provider—that some students were able to access it through early access. They were taking ATAR-level courses while in years 9 and 10. We understand that, when it moved to CIT Solutions, CIT Solutions did not take on younger students; you had to be in years 11 and 12.

The Canberra Academy of Languages was offering these ATAR courses for year 9 and 10 students, and it counted towards their ATAR, once they were old enough. For some, the colleges then recognised that they had already done courses towards the ATAR, and they were able to take a lower course load. Do other subjects across the ACT have early

access? Is that something that exists for anything else?

Mr Borton: It is a good question. My understanding, having been around when it did transfer from CAL to CIT Solutions, is that the BSSS made adjustments to their policy around requirements for external providers and what was and was not going to be accepted. I think that was one of the things that they changed. They were focusing only on years 11 and 12. It is my understanding that there are no other subject areas that get credit in years 9 and 10 for ATAR consideration. That would be a question that the BSSS would need to be 100 per cent clear on, but I am reasonably confident that that is the case.

Ms Spence: There are some possible exceptions with some of our SMART programs, which have year 10 students starting in our college system earlier, where they may be doing study. It is an acceleration program, basically, for select students in which they may engage with BSSS-accredited subject areas.

MS TOUGH: Earlier on?

Ms Spence: Yes.

Mr Borton: They would still be doing BSSS courses, even though they would be a year previous to it. Certainly, that is quite rare.

MS TOUGH: That is only for select students?

Mr Borton: Yes.

Ms Spence: Select students in those particular programs.

MS TOUGH: It is not like you could have early access to a lot of courses for anyone.

Mr Borton: Yes.

MS TOUGH: Thank you; that is interesting. We also received evidence from the Tamil School that they have TQI-registered language teachers who are teaching in the Tamil School as a community language school, but they say that their barrier to becoming an external provider is that there is no centralised, directorate-led system to recognise this. While they say that they have the teachers, they feel like there is an infrastructure gap, in order to help them become an accredited school. Have you come across that? Is there a pathway for them to have those teachers accredited to deliver a course?

Ms Wood: We have the regulatory function that regulates non-government schools. There are standards that need to be met and a range of processes to register a school. As Mr Borton said, there is also an accreditation process for an external provider for senior secondary subjects.

Mr Borton: They could do that. There are a couple of issues with Tamil. One is that it is not an Australian curriculum pathway, but we are talking about senior secondary courses, so that is a matter for the BSSS. I am not passing the buck there; I am just saying that they are the regulator for approved external providers. This is in the same

way that CAL was a provider, and CIT Solutions. CIT is slightly different because they are already an education provider, but it is still external to us. I think that question is one for the BSSS, in regard to that matter. There is nothing that would stop them putting forward an application to be an external provider, other than that it is a lot of work, and it could be a challenging barrier for a very small group of people. I feel for their situation.

MS TOUGH: It is not an Education Directorate thing; it is a thing for the BSSS?

Mr Borton: No, it is not a function for us. They are the regulator for year 11 and 12 studies. In that case, that would certainly be for BSSS to consider.

MS TOUGH: That is really useful, because it seems that they have a very engaged cohort, very engaged students, and they are just looking for that pathway. Have you received any feedback from students and families who may have thought they would go on and do an ATAR language course and now, with the change with CIT Solutions and CIT, they are choosing not to take a language pathway, and they will choose a different study pathway? Has the Education Directorate had feedback from families around that?

Mr Borton: A couple of individuals have made contact with me. We offered them different pathways; some took them on and some did not. There have been very few, but others may have made decisions and not told us. Certainly, when the CIT alerted us to the fact that they were not going to continue as an external provider, our number one concern was the continuation for those current student cohorts. To their credit, they did work through continuing those, even though that was challenging, in regard to a small cohort et cetera. At that point in time, we worked with each of those families to make sure they understood what their options were. Some chose to take a different pathway. As far as feedback goes, yes, there were a couple of quite unhappy parents, which was reasonable, under these circumstances, but very few.

MS TOUGH: Has the Education Directorate engaged with colleagues in other jurisdictions around how different language models are offered? New South Wales has the School of Languages; there is distance education. I think some TAFEs in New South Wales offer courses for senior secondary students. Is there engagement around how other jurisdictions work?

Mr Borton: We have certainly looked at it. We have done a scan across all jurisdictions with regard to this. The ACT is a little bit different. The majority of those distance ed ones are quite essential; essentially, they are distance ed offerings because they have rural and remote communities, whereas we are a completely urban city. You can get from one end to the other in about an hour, at the outside. I know that is not easy for some, but, at the end of the day those arrangements for other jurisdictions are mainly about accessibility for rural and remote students.

Yes, we have looked at those. There is quite a significant investment, too, in regard to that, for what we would be doing here. The economies of scale would be in question, I think, in regard to scale, because of our size and geographical advantage, as opposed to, say, WA, where you have to travel 2,000 kilometres to get to the school.

Ms Spence: Our current distance education provider is delivered through New South Wales Education, for the ACT. That means, in the senior secondary language space, because it needs BSSS accreditation, their language courses in years 11 and 12 are accredited by the New South Wales board of—

MS TOUGH: Board of studies?

Ms Spence: I want to say NESAs, by their standards unit. To meet the requirements of our Senior Secondary Certificate, we need a completely different accreditation for that subject area. Whilst our schools sometimes choose to pick up a single subject through distance education in New South Wales for high school, for example, it is because it is Australian curriculum based. However, in senior secondary, that becomes more challenging because of BSSS accreditation requirements.

Mr Borton: They actually do a Higher School Certificate subject, which is New South Wales based, and they have to cross-reference that back to the BSSS accreditation. It is quite tricky, and very few take up that option, mainly because they want to do a BSSS-approved course, to get credit for their own ATAR. It is much more simplistic. But it is an option, and that is based in Queanbeyan.

MISS NUTTALL: Under action 1 of the Language Education Action Plan, did you develop a workforce plan for public school language teachers that is integrated with the directorate's existing workforce strategy?

Mr Borton: It was not separate to the workforce strategy. It was definitely embedded in there. I described those actions earlier; they are around offering scholarships, working closely with the UC as our main provider, to make sure we get every single student that can teach languages to come through in our public education system, and reaching out to all of our other partners in universities across New South Wales, in particular, to try and target language teachers.

Yes, there are clear actions within the broader one, but it was not a separate one just for language teachers. Do not forget that we also have shortages in other subject areas—in particular, maths and vocational education and training. There are a number of identified areas of subject expertise that we would want to be targeting. Languages is definitely one of those, and that is why we offer the scholarships and do those other things. It was intended for that, yes.

MISS NUTTALL: With the scholarships, we have had other submitters point out that those are insufficient, and we are seeing it in what we believe to be the lack of specialist language teachers, although it is tricky when we do not quite track that. Can you point to any concrete actions within the language education plan with KPIs for workforce retention and things like that?

Mr Borton: The Language Education Action Plan is not developed in that way. It involves a number of actions which we thought we could take to improve this situation. The workforce plan is an HR plan, which looks across more broadly than just language teachers. That has those more defined targets, goals and numbers associated with it. This is a generalised plan to say, "What are we going to do to assist, with what we currently have, in making language education the best we can possibly be?" That is

without committing significant additional funds, other than people power, which is what we have done.

MISS NUTTALL: I am interested in what measures and principles you have implemented, noting that when other submitters have tracked this, they cannot really point to actions that have been taken as a result of the plan.

Mr Borton: We certainly have a list of the implementation actions that we have had. We are happy to provide that. It clearly outlines exactly what we have done and when we have done it. We are happy to provide that to the committee, if you like.

MISS NUTTALL: That would be great—possibly on notice, in the interests of time, if that is okay with you?

Mr Borton: Yes, we will do that.

MS BARRY: One of the submissions, from the Australian Education Union, indicated that most of the recommendations that they made are not reflected in the plan. Can you take on notice providing how you incorporated the consultation that you had with them and the pairings into the plan?

Mr Borton: Yes, we can do that.

MISS NUTTALL: More broadly as well—this is a bit of a broad question to tie it up, in the interests of time; I am happy to lodge the other stuff on notice—when we talk about universal free public education and the requirement to make languages available to all students, in practice, if we do not have enough language teachers and offerings, or students are not able to move between schools, they do not get access to the language that they wish to study. How does not having a centralised language provision support the principle of a free public education?

Ms Wood: As we have already talked about, we are working hard on how we support schools with language provision. It will always be the case that we cannot meet absolutely everyone's preference for language in school. We are a small system and we have a number of small schools. That adds an extra scale problem.

We have talked broadly about schooling. In a primary school setting, it would be pretty challenging to have a centralised system, because you really want teachers to be embedded in the school and principals to be able to lead a whole education team. There is a whole range of strengths that come from having languages education embedded in a school, versus a model that comes in and out. It does not become part of the school in the same way.

We recognise that we are not presently able to offer every student that opportunity to study a language. As Mr Borton said, we have seen some improvements. There are some improvements this year on last year's data, so that is what we will continue to work on.

Ms Berry: There is that challenging match-making as well. When we have a smaller number of languages to offer, it is easier to manage.

Mr Borton: Yes.

Ms Berry: And there are more opportunities for pathways. Almost every other day, we are asked to offer in our schools another of the 270 languages—more—that exist in the world. That becomes more complicated, the more languages that you offer. I think it was a good decision at the time to have the eight and, outside that, be able to offer different additional ones, if you have capacity or ability through a specialised teacher. With the smaller number, or a concise number, of languages, there is more chance that we can offer a pathway. It does not always happen. Sometimes, just by the nature of language teachers and that specialty, it becomes more difficult.

MISS NUTTALL: We spoke earlier about the challenges, with it being left up to individual schools to make the decision as to whether or not to have a language and what FTE you would dedicate to that, because there is no loading for language learning. Have you, at any point, advocated to the federal government to introduce a loading for language learning, given that it is a requirement of the Australian curriculum? It is a requirement within ACT schools to have it. Is there any extra earmarked funding?

Ms Berry: Not that specific question. We have not, no.

Mr Borton: Certainly, in the year 11 and 12 space, we have to remember that it is elective, like every other subject.

MISS NUTTALL: Yes, absolutely.

Mr Borton: I am not suggesting that it is not really important and really valuable, because it absolutely is. People are very passionate about language, and we celebrate that. The pathways opportunities for kids in our colleges are so advanced and fantastic that they get a really broad range of opportunities. But it means that they may be choosing cybersafety over Japanese, or engineering over a language. Those are the sorts of decisions that kids can make now. It is far better now, with regard to the opportunities they have with different pathways, than ever.

One of the consequences of that is maybe a reduced number of students choosing languages. I am not saying that it is a good or a bad thing. I am just saying that is currently what is happening. Students vote with their feet on that. We are proud that they have those opportunities, but this is one of the things that can be a fallout from that.

MISS NUTTALL: Sometimes it is tricky because students can only vote with their feet, to a certain extent, if the offering is not there. I am thinking about the 73 or 74 students who were enrolled in the Canberra Academy of Languages back in 2023, and it would be difficult to see where those students would go if there were not the supplementary offerings for them to study languages.

Ms Berry: I think some of those were non-government students as well.

Mr Borton: Yes, a significant portion were. Those schools looked at other options for them. I am not suggesting that that is not the number. That is part of that question, yes.

THE CHAIR: Fifty-three were from government schools.

Mr Borton: Yes, about 50.

MISS NUTTALL: That is a fair number of language offerings across the—

Mr Borton: Yes, it is.

THE CHAIR: Ms Tough asked about Tamil earlier. We have had a lot of submissions from the Tamil community. We heard from the Canberra Tamil School, who said there are 100 students currently studying with them up to year 10. With the loss of the centralised languages program, there is nowhere for them to go in year 11 and 12. They said they were not consulted on what would happen with senior secondary language education in 2026, and moving forward. Has any consultation occurred with the Tamil community prior to making the decision not to run a centralised program within the Education Directorate?

Ms Berry: There would be a number of communities that we did not consult with, because it was not our program. We were not consulting to operate a program. Perhaps the CIT would have done that.

Mr Borton: Yes. CIT did work with them. They were an external provider. We were not considering—

THE CHAIR: They specified that they worked only with the families that were already engaged in the program.

Mr Borton: That is correct, yes.

Ms Berry: Yes.

THE CHAIR: Which is what they considered to be their remit. They considered all the families outside that remit to be the remit of the Education Directorate.

Mr Borton: BSSS.

Ms Berry: Yes.

Ms Wood: When we are talking about students who are not yet at the senior secondary level who are studying that language in a different setting, we probably would not have visibility of which public education students are maybe also studying Tamil in that way.

Mr Borton: Yes. None of our schools offer that, because it is not an Australian curriculum subject, which is challenging. It means there is no curriculum for it in the high schools or primary schools. It was a BSSS course, because they designed that.

THE CHAIR: We have run a little bit over time.

Ms Wood: Chair, I have a document to table.

THE CHAIR: Are you able to table a document?

Ms Wood: Yes.

THE CHAIR: Thank you very much.

Ms Wood: This is the list of languages by school, and also languages by region.

THE CHAIR: Thanks very much. On behalf of the committee, I thank you for your attendance today. For questions taken on notice, please provide your answers to the committee secretary within five business days of receiving the uncorrected proof *Hansard*.

More broadly, on behalf of the committee, I would like to thank all our witnesses who have assisted us through their experience and knowledge. We also thank broadcasting and Hansard for their support, and the amazing secretariat as well. If a member wishes to ask questions on notice, please upload them to the parliamentary portal as soon as possible, and no later than five business days from today. The hearing is now adjourned.

The committee adjourned at 4.39 pm