The national peak body for the career development profession

Submission to the Standing Committee on Social Policy

Legislative Assembly for the Australian Capital Territory

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

September 2026

1. About CICA

The Career Industry Council of Australia (CICA) is the national peak body for the career development profession in Australia. CICA represents ten state, territory and national member associations and speaks on behalf of the profession on standards, qualifications and public policy.

CICA sets and maintains the Professional Standards for Australian Career Development Practitioners (Career Industry Council of Australia [CICA], 2026a) and the Guiding Principles for Career Development Services and Career Information Products (CICA, 2026b). CICA endorses the qualifications that lead to professional practice and manages the Australian Register of Professional Career Development Practitioners, the single national point of reference for verifying that a practitioner is qualified to practise.

CICA made a submission to the ACT Public School System Resourcing Review in December 2025 (CICA, 2025), recommending reforms substantially aligned with those sought by these petitions. This submission restates that position and extends it in response to the terms of reference, which comprise the text of the petitions. Sections 4 to 6 address the three requests, and section 8 addresses the figures cited in the petitions.

2. Summary of position

In practical terms, CICA asks the Committee to recommend a guaranteed career development entitlement for every ACT public school student in Years 7 to 10. That entitlement should combine qualified staffing, dedicated recurrent funding, workforce scholarships, a preschool to Year 12 (P to 12) career education framework, central system leadership and annual public reporting. Taken together, these measures would convert career guidance from a locally variable service into a transparent Territory-wide guarantee.

CICA supports all three of the petitioners' requests. The requests are proportionate, evidence-based and achievable at Territory scale, and they align with the position CICA has consistently put to Australian governments.

CICA also submits that the three requests will not deliver their intended benefit unless they are implemented as part of a system-wide architecture. That architecture should specify what career learning students receive at each stage, create a central function to lead and assure implementation, and collect data showing whether

provision and outcomes improve. Employing practitioners without this architecture would leave the current variability largely intact, but at a higher cost base.

The Territory's own destinations data supports the case. The ACT Post School Destinations and Pathways survey found that students who received career guidance at school were more likely to be employed or studying afterwards, with the largest differences among students who left school early (ACT Education Directorate, 2024). That survey has now been discontinued, which is addressed at section 8.

CICA makes seven recommendations.

No.	Recommendation
1	That the ACT Government require every ACT public school with Years 7 to 10 to be staffed by a professionally qualified Career Development Practitioner, resourced at a minimum of 1.0 full-time equivalent (FTE) per school and 1 FTE per 450 students where enrolments in those years exceed 450, with an additional loading for schools with higher concentrations of students who benefit most from individualised guidance.
2	That "professionally qualified" be defined by reference to the Professional Standards for Australian Career Development Practitioners, being a CICA-endorsed Graduate Certificate in Career Development or higher, or an equivalent career development specific qualification, with listing on the Australian Register of Professional Career Development Practitioners as the verification mechanism.
3	That the ACT Government fund a multi-year scholarship program enabling teaching and non-teaching school staff to obtain a CICA-endorsed Graduate Certificate in Career Development, including course fees and paid release time.
4	That the ACT Government provide new, dedicated and recurrent funding for this reform, quarantined from existing school budgets, indexed, and sufficient to classify and remunerate career roles at a level that attracts and retains qualified staff, so that career development is not delivered as an unfunded responsibility.
5	That the ACT Government develop a P to 12 Career Education Framework aligned to the Australian Blueprint for Career Development, the national framework of career management competencies, setting out expected career learning at each stage of schooling.
6	That the ACT Government establish a Career Development Unit within the Education Directorate to provide system leadership, workforce development, quality assurance and data analysis.
7	That the ACT Government reinstate the ACT Post School Destinations and Pathways survey, strengthened to record whether a student's school employed a qualified practitioner and to report results by school and priority cohort, and that the Committee seek from the Education Directorate a verified baseline audit of current career development provision, qualifications and staffing across ACT public schools, with both datasets published annually.

3. Career guidance and successful transitions

3.1 What the evidence shows

The international evidence on school career guidance points consistently in one direction. The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) analysed ten national longitudinal datasets from eight countries and, drawing on two earlier OECD studies, found evidence supporting eleven of fourteen potential indicators of teenage career readiness linked to better adult employment outcomes, including lower unemployment, higher earnings and greater career satisfaction (Covacevich et al., 2021). The analyses

controlled for gender, socioeconomic background and academic performance, and most also controlled for migrant status or ethnicity. The relevant behaviours cluster around how young people explore, experience and think about their futures in work while they are still at school.

The OECD has separately shown that access to these activities is unequal, and that the students in greatest need of career guidance are often the least likely to access it (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development [OECD], 2024, p. 57). Career guidance is therefore not only an education service. It is one of the more direct instruments available to a government seeking to reduce inequality of opportunity in the transition from school.

3.2 The ACT's own evidence points the same way

ACT destinations data shows both that students who reported receiving career guidance had stronger post-school outcomes and that access to guidance was incomplete, particularly for early school leavers. That combination makes the ACT evidence directly relevant to this inquiry: the issue is not only whether career guidance is associated with better outcomes, but whether ACT students can rely on receiving it.

The ACT Post School Destinations and Pathways survey tracked the outcomes of Year 12 graduates and early school leavers in the year after leaving school, with a follow-up survey of the same students approximately two and a half years afterwards. The 2024 report, covering students who left school in 2023, found that those who received career guidance at school were more likely to be employed or studying than their peers (ACT Education Directorate, 2024). The Directorate highlighted this result in the report's executive summary.

The difference is largest for the students furthest from a successful transition. Among 2023 school leavers (students who left in Years 9 to 12 without completing an ACT Senior Secondary Certificate), outcomes in 2024 were as follows.

2023 school leavers, status in 2024	Received career guidance	Did not
Employed and/or studying	**85.2%**	66.0%
Employed	**74.2%**	58.2%
Studying	**56.6%**	34.1%

The pattern among Year 12 graduates runs in the same direction but is narrower: 93.9 per cent of graduates who received career guidance were employed or studying in 2024, compared with 91.5 per cent of those who did not. Graduates who received career guidance also reported higher overall life satisfaction, at 73 per cent compared with 67 per cent (ACT Education Directorate, 2024).

Two features of these findings warrant the Committee's attention.

First, the association is strongest where the stakes are highest. Early leavers have the weakest outcomes overall. In 2024, the unemployment rate among 2023 school leavers was 20 per cent, compared with 14 per cent among graduates, and 14 per cent were not in the labour force, education or training, compared with 3 per cent of graduates (ACT Education Directorate, 2024). Career guidance is associated with the largest difference in outcomes for the group least able to recover from a poor transition unaided.

Second, provision is incomplete and unevenly distributed. Of students who left ACT schools in 2023, 61.8 per cent of Year 12 graduates and 52.1 per cent of school leavers reported having received career guidance at school, and around 16 per cent of each group reported participating in career education (ACT Education Directorate, 2024). On the Directorate's own data, roughly two in five graduates and almost half of early

leavers passed through ACT schooling without career guidance, and early leavers were the least likely to have received it.

The reasons early leavers gave are equally instructive. Parents of Year 9 to 11 students who left school in 2023 most commonly reported that their child wanted to earn their own money (68 per cent), wanted to get a job (68 per cent), had a job to go to (62 per cent), was not doing well at school (53 per cent), or wanted to undertake study or training that was not available at school (46 per cent; ACT Education Directorate, 2024). Except for school performance, each of these is a career decision made during or immediately after the Years 7 to 10 phase. A qualified practitioner is trained to help students test those decisions against pathway requirements, labour market realities and longer-term consequences before disengagement becomes irreversible.

CICA notes the limits of this evidence. The survey is voluntary and self-reported, response rates were 51 per cent for graduates and 30 per cent for school leavers, and it does not show whether guidance was delivered by a qualified practitioner (ACT Education Directorate, 2024). The figures show association, not causation. The same direction of difference in employment does, however, appear for early leavers in each of the four annual cohorts from 2020 to 2023 (ACT Education Directorate, 2024). CICA presents the figures because they are the ACT's own data, because the Directorate reported the pattern as a finding, and because their direction is consistent with international longitudinal evidence that controls for socioeconomic background and academic performance (Covacevich et al., 2021).

3.3 Transitions are processes, not single events

A successful transition is the product of work done well before a student leaves school. It depends on self-knowledge, on testing intentions through workplace exposure and employer contact, on subject choices that keep the intended pathway open, and on career management skills the student will need at every later transition. These are the kinds of activities the OECD found to be associated with better adult outcomes. Without them, students still make transitions, but with less information, narrower options and a higher risk of false starts. The cost appears later as course changes, attrition from tertiary study and apprenticeships, and periods outside education, employment and training. It is borne by young people and by the Territory.

3.4 The transitions ACT students are asked to manage

ACT public school students face several consequential transitions in quick succession. Subject selection in Years 9 and 10 begins to determine which senior secondary, tertiary and training pathways remain open. The move from high school to college at the end of Year 10 is a change of institution as well as a change of stage. Beyond college lie vocational education and training (VET), apprenticeships and traineeships, higher education and direct employment, each with its own entry requirements and application processes.

These systems are technical and change regularly. A student or parent relying on information that is a few years out of date can close off a pathway without realising it, and the consequences are not easily reversed. Keeping up to date with these systems is part of a qualified practitioner's professional obligation. It is unreasonable to expect this of staff who have other full-time responsibilities.

A qualified practitioner also maintains relationships with employers, training providers, tertiary institutions and support services, enabling a student to be referred to a named contact rather than left to make the first approach alone. For students who are least confident in unfamiliar institutional settings, that difference is often decisive.

3.5 Transition support is where inequality is compounded or reduced

Students require different levels of support to transition successfully. Those whose families understand the intended pathway can leverage that knowledge and their networks. In contrast, students who are the first in

their family to pursue higher education, unfamiliar with the Australian education and training system, have a disability, or face the risk of early school leaving lack such sources of expertise. For them, the school is often the only reliable source of expert guidance. When schools do not employ qualified practitioners, this guidance is unavailable. This disparity contributes to existing disadvantage extending into adult life, a cycle the petitioners urge the Assembly to break.

3.6 Why Years 7 to 10

The early secondary years, specifically Years 7 to 10, are crucial because students begin to develop and narrow their career aspirations during this period. This is when subject choices can create or limit future pathways and when the risk of losing engagement is highest. In the ACT, this stage is particularly important since these years occur in high schools separate from the colleges that oversee Years 11 and 12. The pivotal moment when an ACT student chooses their future direction, often the most influential decision, is also when they switch institutions. Since guidance during the college years comes after this decision, it may not effectively influence their earlier choices.

4. The first request: professionally qualified practitioners at a minimum ratio

4.1 CICA supports the request

CICA supports the petitioners' request that all ACT public schools with Years 7 to 10 employ professionally qualified career practitioners and be resourced at a minimum of 1 FTE per 450 students. This is the position CICA put to the ACT Public School System Resourcing Review in December 2025 (CICA, 2025).

4.2 What "professionally qualified" should mean

The petitions refer to career advisers. This submission uses the profession's term, Career Development Practitioner, for the same school-based role. If the Assembly adopts a workforce requirement, the policy instrument should define a qualified practitioner rather than leaving it to individual schools. CICA recommends the definition already used nationally.

- The entry-level qualification for a Professional Career Development Practitioner is a CICA-endorsed Graduate Certificate in Career Development or higher, or an equivalent career development specific qualification (CICA, 2026a).
- Listing on the Australian Register of Professional Career Development Practitioners provides an independent, publicly searchable verification that an individual holds that qualification and maintains professional membership. It gives the Directorate a compliance mechanism that does not require it to assess qualifications itself.
- Practitioners are bound by the Code of Ethics within the Professional Standards, which matters when practitioners work individually with young people on decisions with long-term consequences.

A teaching qualification is not a substitute. Teachers and school wellbeing staff carry substantial workloads and perform essential roles, but they are not trained in labour market analysis, career development theory, transitions planning, or the operation of the VET and higher education systems. When untrained staff take on career responsibilities, provision depends on individual capability and availability rather than student need.

4.3 A refinement to the ratio

CICA supports a resourcing benchmark of 1 FTE per 450 students. The same ratio was recommended by the Victorian parliamentary inquiry into career advice activities in Victorian schools in 2018, which described it as the ratio recommended by the career development profession (Economic, Education, Jobs and Skills

Committee, 2018). In September 2026, a second Victorian parliamentary committee reaffirmed it, recommending that every government school have at least one qualified full-time equivalent career practitioner per 450 students (Legislative Assembly Economy and Infrastructure Committee, 2026, p. 33). CICA was among the organisations that recommended this ratio to that inquiry (Legislative Assembly Economy and Infrastructure Committee, 2026, p. 32).

CICA draws the Committee's attention to a practical consequence. At the August 2025 census, nine of the 22 mainstream ACT public schools with Years 7 to 10 (excluding specialist schools, the secondary Introductory English Centre and Year 10 early access programs at colleges) enrolled fewer than 450 students in those years. Two of them are new schools still adding year levels (ACT Education Directorate, 2025). Applied literally, a per-student ratio would allocate those schools a fractional appointment. Fractional career roles are difficult to fill, sustain and integrate into a school. In practice, they tend to be absorbed into other duties, which reproduces the inconsistency the petitions identify.

CICA therefore recommends that the benchmark be expressed as a ratio with a floor: a minimum of 1.0 FTE in every school with Years 7 to 10, and 1 FTE per 450 students where enrolments in those years exceed 450. This goes further than the Victorian recommendation, which does not specifically address schools with fewer than 450 students, and reflects the smaller enrolments of many ACT high schools. CICA further recommends that the Directorate consider an additional allocation (a loading) for schools with higher concentrations of students who benefit most from individualised guidance, including First Nations students, students with disability, students from refugee and migrant backgrounds, and students at risk of early leaving.

5. The second request: scholarships to build the workforce

CICA supports the request for targeted scholarships and regards this as the element of the package most likely to determine the success of the reform.

The constraint on implementing a qualification requirement is the workforce supply. The pool of practitioners in Australia with an endorsed Graduate Certificate in Career Development is finite, and jurisdictions that introduce qualification requirements without a parallel training pathway either dilute the requirement or recruit from each other. The most reliable source of new practitioners for ACT schools is the staff already working in them.

Victoria's experience illustrates both the value and the limits of this approach. Since 2019, its Upskilling Career Practitioners program has supported more than 460 government secondary school staff in completing a Graduate Certificate in Career Development. The Victorian Government told the Economy and Infrastructure Committee that this had enabled at least one fully qualified career practitioner in each government school. The Committee welcomed this progress but concluded that "upskilling alone cannot ensure students receive consistent, high-quality support". It also noted that the Victorian Government had supported the 2018 recommendation for a 1:450 ratio, either in full or in principle, but had not established one (Legislative Assembly Economy and Infrastructure Committee, 2026, p. 32). Scholarships are therefore necessary, but they need to be paired with the staffing requirement and dedicated funding set out in Recommendations 1 and 4.

CICA recommends the following design features.

- Full coverage of course fees at a CICA-endorsed provider, rather than partial subsidy. In CICA's experience, cost is a primary barrier for school staff considering the qualification.
- Funded release time. In CICA's experience, staff undertaking postgraduate study while carrying a full teaching load are at the greatest risk of not completing.

- Eligibility for both teaching and non-teaching staff, as the petitioners propose. Career development is not restricted to registered teachers, and school-based staff in student services and pathways roles are often well placed to take up the role. Entry to a Graduate Certificate usually requires an undergraduate degree, but several providers also admit applicants on the basis of relevant work experience or other qualifications, so non-teaching staff without a degree may still be eligible. Scholarship guidelines should make these entry pathways clear.
- Funding limited to professional-level qualifications. Scholarships should support study towards a CICA-endorsed Graduate Certificate in Career Development or higher. The Certificate IV in Career Development is not a professional-level qualification, and CICA does not recommend it as part of upskilling the school career workforce.
- A planned intake of scholarship holders each year against a multi-year target, rather than a grant round that must be renewed annually, so that the Directorate can plan against a known rate of workforce growth and providers can plan delivery.
- A defined transition period during which schools work toward the qualification requirement, with scholarship recipients counted as progressing toward compliance.

6. The third request: additional and dedicated funding

CICA supports the request for additional funding and submits that five features are essential.

Funding must be new, recurrent, indexed and identifiable. If schools are required to employ qualified practitioners from existing allocations, the cost will be met by reducing another service. If funding is time-limited, schools will create short-term appointments that undermine continuity and relationships. If it is not indexed, its real value will decline each year as salary costs rise. If expenditure is not reported as a discrete line item, the Assembly will be unable to monitor whether the investment is adequate or effective.

The fifth feature is adequacy. Funding must be set at a level that enables career roles to be classified and remunerated so that qualified staff can be recruited and retained. CICA's evidence to the Economy and Infrastructure Committee's inquiry was that many school career practitioner roles are categorised as administrative or ancillary, leading to inadequate remuneration, limited influence within school leadership, and reduced retention of skilled professionals (Legislative Assembly Economy and Infrastructure Committee, 2026, p. 31). The President of the Victorian Association of State Secondary Principals told the Committee that schools often fill these roles with education support staff because they cost less than teachers, and questioned whether schools can pay enough to retain them (Legislative Assembly Economy and Infrastructure Committee, 2026, p. 31). Without attention to classification, new funding risks being spent on roles that are hard to fill and quickly vacated.

7. Beyond the petitions: making the reform durable

The three petition requests address the minimum requirements for staffing, workforce supply and funding. They are necessary but not sufficient. Two further elements would determine whether the new workforce delivers a consistent entitlement across schools rather than a locally variable service.

7.1 A P to 12 Career Education Framework

The ACT has useful components in place, including Vocational Learning Programs for Years 9 to 12 and work experience arrangements (ACT Government, 2026a). What is not publicly specified is the career learning every ACT student should receive at each year level, and the standard against which a school's program can be judged.

CICA recommends a P–12 Career Education Framework aligned with the Australian Blueprint for Career Development (National Careers Institute, 2022), the national reference for career management competencies already used by education systems across Australia. A framework would transform career education from a set of activities that some schools deliver well into an entitlement that every student receives. The Victorian Economy and Infrastructure Committee reached the same conclusion, recommending that developmentally appropriate career education be embedded in the Victorian Curriculum F–10, underpinned by the Blueprint, and that career education be introduced in government primary schools (Legislative Assembly Economy and Infrastructure Committee, 2026, pp. 36, 50).

CICA has developed the Career Development Service Benchmarking Resource, a structured self-review tool that enables a school to assess the maturity of its career development program against defined elements and outcomes. CICA would make this available to the ACT Education Directorate to support implementation and school-level quality assurance.

7.2 An ACT Career Development Unit

A qualified practitioner in every school still results in variable provision if each practitioner works in isolation. A small central unit within the Education Directorate would:

- provide professional supervision and continuing professional development;
- maintain and monitor the qualification requirement;
- coordinate employer and tertiary partnerships so that individual practitioners are not each negotiating separately; and
- collect and analyse transition and destinations data.

The ACT's scale is an advantage here. A system of this size can be led coherently by a small unit in a way that larger jurisdictions cannot as easily and can plausibly become the first Australian jurisdiction to guarantee a career development entitlement across the compulsory secondary years.

8. Data: what is known, what is unverified, and what is no longer being collected

8.1 The figures cited in the petitions

The case for reform rests on two types of data: a verified baseline showing what career development provision currently exists in ACT public schools and an outcomes measure indicating whether student transitions improve after reform. At present, one is unverified, and the other has been discontinued.

The petitions cite two figures: that three in five students in Years 7 to 10 at ACT public schools do not have access to a qualified career adviser at their school, and that 13 of 22 such schools do not employ a qualified professional career practitioner in a career adviser role.

CICA has not independently verified these figures and does not hold school-level staffing data for the ACT. CICA recommends that the Committee obtain a verified baseline from the Education Directorate, including the number of schools with a designated career development role, the FTE for each role, the qualifications of staff in those roles, and whether those staff are listed on the Australian Register of Professional Career Development Practitioners.

The pattern the figures describe in which provision depends on local staffing decisions rather than a system requirement aligns with CICA's observations across Australian jurisdictions and with the Directorate's own destination data. Whatever the precise ACT numbers prove to be, nothing in the current arrangements guarantees a student access to a qualified practitioner. That is the question before the Committee.

8.2 The discontinuation of the destinations survey

The ACT Post School Destinations and Pathways survey has been discontinued. The ACT Government Transparency Portal page for the survey, managed by the Education Directorate and last updated on 28 April 2026, records that the survey was discontinued in 2026 (ACT Government, 2026b). Reports for 2019 to 2024 remain available on that page, with earlier reports available on request. No reason for the decision is provided. CICA suggests the Committee ask the Directorate:

- why the survey was ended;
- what, if anything, replaces it; and
- whether the decision was taken on cost, response rate or other grounds.

CICA regards this as a significant loss and asks the Committee to address it in its report. The survey was the Territory's only systematic measure of whether young people leaving ACT schools were making successful transitions. It was the only ACT source linking receipt of career guidance to post-school outcomes, and one of the few that reported separately on early school leavers, the cohort about whom least is otherwise known. Its follow-up survey also showed what happened to students two and a half years after leaving school, which annual point-in-time data cannot capture.

The consequences are practical. Without the survey, the ACT cannot identify which schools or cohorts are transitioning poorly, test whether changes to provision make any difference, or benchmark itself against comparable jurisdictions that continue to publish destinations data, including Victoria and Queensland (Queensland Department of Education, 2025; Victorian Department of Education, 2025). Most directly for this inquiry: if the Assembly acts on these petitions, there will be no instrument to demonstrate whether the investment worked. A government that ceases to measure outcomes has also lost the means to demonstrate accountability for them.

CICA recommends that the survey be reinstated and that consideration be given to strengthening it in two respects. First, the career guidance question recorded whether a student recalled receiving it, not what was provided or by whom. The survey's definition of career guidance was broad, covering one-on-one or group discussions with career advisers, industry experts and representatives of universities and the Canberra Institute of Technology (ACT Education Directorate, 2024, p. 32). Recording whether a school had a qualified practitioner would turn an association into evidence a government can act on. Victoria already collects comparable information: its On Track survey records whether school leavers had a one-on-one conversation with their school's career adviser, and the Victorian Committee reported that only 66.6 per cent of 2024 non-completers had done so (Legislative Assembly Economy and Infrastructure Committee, 2026, p. 28). Second, reporting results separately by school and for the cohorts identified in section 4.3 of this submission would allow the equity gap to be monitored rather than assumed.

9. National and international context

Australia lacks a national policy framework for lifelong career guidance. There is no national entitlement, no cross-portfolio governance mechanism, no agreed quality standard linked to public funding, and no national evidence framework (CICA, 2026c). Consequently, school career education is delivered inconsistently across states and territories, with significant variation in both the content students receive and the qualifications of those delivering it.

This leaves Australia out of step with comparable systems. The European Union's 2026 reference framework for lifelong guidance, developed by Cedefop (the European Centre for the Development of Vocational Training) with support from the European Commission, sets out 18 evidence-based guidelines covering access, quality assurance, governance, workforce professionalism and funding, and includes specific guidance

for school students (Cedefop, 2026). In England, the Education (Careers Guidance in Schools) Act 2022 extended the statutory careers guidance duty to all state-funded secondary schools, including academies, across the full secondary age range.

The absence of a national framework does not prevent the ACT from acting. It strengthens the case for action. In the absence of Commonwealth requirements, a student's entitlement depends entirely on the decisions of their state or territory government and, at present in the ACT, on the decisions of their individual school.

10. Conclusion

The petitioners seek a modest and practical entitlement: that access to a qualified career practitioner does not depend on which public high school a student attends. CICA asks the Committee to recommend that the ACT Government establish that entitlement for Years 7 to 10 by implementing the three requests alongside a P to 12 Career Education Framework, a central Career Development Unit and annual public reporting, so the reform delivers consistent provision rather than a better-qualified version of the current variability.

CICA would welcome the opportunity to appear before the Committee at a public hearing and is available to assist the ACT Education Directorate with implementation, including access to the Professional Standards, the Australian Register, and the Career Development Service Benchmarking Resource.

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