



AEU ACT Branch Budget Submission 2025-26

To: Andrew Barr, Chief Minister

CC:

Yvette Berry, Minister for Education and Early Childhood

Michael Pettersson, Minister for Skills, Training and Industrial Relations

Chris Steel, Treasurer

Rachel Stephen-Smith, Minister for the Public Service

Dear Chief Minister Barr,

The Australian Education Union represents over 4,000 ACT educators who form the backbone of our public education system. Our submission to the 2025-26 Budget articulates a vision for strategic investment that would transform policy promises into tangible outcomes for students and staff alike, across schools and CIT.

This Budget arrives at a pivotal moment for education in the ACT. Recent initiatives - Strong Foundations, the Inclusive Education Strategy, the final phase of the Future of Education Strategy, and commitments made under the Better and Fairer Schools Agreement - have established ambitious goals. However, our members, who know the system best, report a persistent gap between policy aspiration and operational reality.

This year, we've engaged in comprehensive surveys of our membership that have identified obstacles to our system functioning at its best. We have thousands of responses from educators that present compelling evidence of systemic constraints that currently limit educational effectiveness. These constraints are not merely logistical inconveniences; they represent structural impediments to achieving the educational outcomes our community expects and deserves.

Our recommendations are calibrated to address documented implementation gaps. We identify key leverage points where targeted investment would amplify system-wide improvement. Each recommendation is evidence-informed, operationally feasible, and directly aligned with the ACT Government's stated policy objectives.

The choice before the Government is clear: invest adequately in public education now to achieve the ambitious goals already set or continue the pattern of under-resourcing. On behalf of all AEU members, we urge you to choose transformation over incrementalism and evidence over expedience.

Regards,

Angela Burroughs

Branch President

AEU ACT Branch

Patrick Judge

Branch Secretary

AEU ACT Branch

Recommendations

Make equity and excellence a reality in ACT public schools

1. Guarantee that every school will be funded to be able to recruit and retain every education and support professional it needs – including enough teachers, school leaders, school assistants, school psychologists, inclusion education specialists, youth workers, and allied health professionals.
2. Fully resource schools to implement every adjustment identified by educators as being necessary for a student’s participation in learning.
3. Fund expansion to flexible education, so that every student referred for additional support gets what they need, when they need it.
4. Fund system reforms in areas like class sizes to make sure every child can thrive.
5. Finalise and implement comprehensive minimum property quality standards for all ACT public school sites.
6. Establish transparent prioritisation criteria for infrastructure investments with regular public reporting on progress.
7. Commission a comprehensive and independent review of the SRA model to examine whether current funding levels enable schools to meet the complex needs of all students. The review should:
 - Assess the adequacy of loadings for students with disability, from disadvantaged backgrounds, and with English as an additional language,
 - Examine options for funding every student to thrive
 - Consider how funding models can support rather than undermine school collaboration and system-wide equity, and
 - Review the level of funding for public schools assumed adequate by the SRS.

Recommendations

Build a better CIT

1. Increase the number of specialist educators to support students with language, literacy, numeracy and digital skills challenges.
2. Ensure CIT's students can focus on their studies, with secure housing, cost of living support, and accessible mental health care.
3. Remove barriers to essential recruitment and move towards pay parity with public school teachers to attract industry experts.
4. Provide clear pathways for professional development and industry currency with adequate paid time.
5. Implement adequate administrative and technical support to allow educators to focus on teaching and student support.
6. Implement systematic maintenance schedules for specialised equipment and learning environments to minimise the need for costly reactive repair.
7. Support strategic infrastructure investment that enables program expansion in priority skill areas and emerging industry needs.
8. Honour the commitment that CIT will receive at least 75% of total ACT Government VET funding.
9. Ensure CIT remains the delivery partner for all current and future Fee Free TAFE places.
10. Provide adequate base funding that recognises CIT's community service obligations beyond training delivery.

Part 1: Make equity and excellence a reality in ACT public schools

System coherence is essential for learning outcomes

The ACT Government's commitment to Strong Foundations represents a watershed moment for our public school system. It shows that the evidence, the experts, the workforce, and the community agree: we must have a system that is cohesive and consistent.

The literacy and numeracy expert panel noted that our schools have operated under a policy directive of decentralised funding and devolved decision-making throughout their history.¹ While this has encouraged a vibrant culture of leadership and innovation, it has also created inconsistent and inefficient resource management. The expert panel observed that the Education Directorate's support to schools is much thinner than our interstate counterparts.

Gaps created by inadequate system support are filled by the workforce – our members. Our survey reveals that 92% of school-based educators report that schools are not adequately resourced to implement strategic initiatives like Strong Foundations.² The financial burden of this under-resourcing falls directly on individual educators. AEU research shows that 88% of teachers currently pay for teaching resources out of their own pocket, spending an average of \$744 per year.³ When extrapolated across the teaching workforce, this represents approximately \$2.6 million annually that public servants are personally contributing to the delivery of government education policy.

Education Director-General Jo Wood has emphasised the need for our system to be “more strategic, more connected, and more intentional.”⁴ The AEU agrees: we must move beyond our current fragmentation toward the systematic, centrally supported approach that Strong Foundations envisions. The ACT Government's commitment to consistent, evidence-informed teaching practices across all schools can only be achieved through adequate central resourcing and support.

Ensure education for students with additional needs is fully resourced

The ACT's Inclusive Education Strategy represents a fundamental commitment to ensuring every child with disability can access, participate in, and succeed in their learning alongside their peers. This strategy aligns with the Future of Education's principle that inclusion is central to educational excellence, recognising that truly inclusive schools benefit all students, not just those with disability.

This is admirable, but without additional funding we are setting schools up to fail. We have changed the goalposts for schools but have not adjusted their funding commensurately. Additionally, our members observe that the complexity of student needs has increased significantly without corresponding increases in support. This complexity manifests in multiple ways: students requiring individualised adjustments, those experiencing trauma or mental

¹ ACT Government, “Literacy and Numeracy Education Expert Panel: Achieving Equity and Excellence through Evidence-Informed Consistency” (Canberra, April 2024).

² Australian Education Union ACT Branch, “Our Voices Together: What AEU Members Say about Working in ACT Public Schools,” 2025.

³ Australian Education Union ACT Branch, “Reaching for More: System Support in ACT Public Schools - Submission to ACT Government Inquiry into Literacy and Numeracy,” 2024, 6.

⁴ Jo Wood, “A Message from the Director-General, Jo Wood,” June 6, 2025.

health challenges, and increasing numbers of students with diagnosed disabilities requiring specialised support.

AEU members want the very best for all students. Our survey shows a strong desire for additional support in the classroom for greater student complexity.⁵ Our members want every school to have every person it needs to deliver support to every student. This means recruiting school psychologists, school assistants, inclusion education specialists, youth workers and allied health professionals. Currently, some schools can squeeze these into their constrained budgets, and some cannot. Others struggle to recruit in a labour market where health and education specialists are in strong demand. Our system needs long-term stability which can only come from the ACT Government committing to an adequate baseline staffing complement for every school.

We also need to make sure that when a student needs an adjustment, it can be delivered. The current system of resource allocation forces school principals to make impossible decisions that weigh need against need, to deliver as much as possible in a tight envelope of staffing allocation and other funding. This is inefficient on many levels, it is a considerable stressor to school principals, and it means the Education Directorate avoids accountability of decision-making around resourcing. A better system would see the Education Directorate guaranteeing that every school will be funded to implement every adjustment identified as being necessary for a student's participation in learning.

For students whose needs cannot be met by a school, there are currently limited options available. Flexible education provides the gold standard for students who can't engage safely or productively with their local school. Currently, the ACT provides 30 places for such students: 15 attend the Muliyan program, and 15 are supported through an outreach service. When a school makes a referral to flexible education, the student sits on a waiting list. There are far more students referred than places available - over the past three intake periods only an average of 30% of students who are referred to the Muliyan program are able to be placed in it.⁶ While the student waits for a place, their local school must make do, often with resourcing that is far away from meeting the needs of the student. We asked AEU members if this is sufficient, and an overwhelming 98% said it is not.⁷

Teacher and school leader workload is representative of an overstretched system

When teachers and school leaders describe their workload as unmanageable, they are saying that they literally cannot meet all of the demands on their time. Teachers, school leaders and other staff are stretched beyond their limits.

This crisis can be boiled down to a simple economic view: student needs exceed our education system's capacity to deliver. Our education workforce is spread too thin to try to cover the gaps.

Our members' vision for improvement is clear and evidence based. When asked about changes that would have significant educational impact, the most popular responses included more time for teachers to get to know their students, smaller class sizes, expanded access to

⁵ Australian Education Union ACT Branch, "Our Voices Together: What AEU Members Say about Working in ACT Public Schools," 13.

⁶ "Inquiry into Annual and Financial Reports 2023-24" (Canberra, February 17, 2025), 216.

⁷ Australian Education Union ACT Branch, "Our Voices Together: What AEU Members Say about Working in ACT Public Schools," 17.

alternative settings and referral services, and more time for teachers to access mentoring, coaching and collaboration.⁸ These priorities align strongly with international research findings, where high-performing education systems implement exactly these evidence-based approaches.⁹

Without additional baseline investment in public schools, we will not reduce teacher and school leader workload. We will continue to burn out dedicated educators and shortchange students. This should be intolerable to any Government that genuinely cares about people.

Recommendations:

- **Guarantee that every school will be funded to be able to recruit and retain every education and support professional it needs – including enough teachers, school leaders, school assistants, school psychologists, inclusion education specialists, youth workers, and allied health professionals.**
- **Fully resource schools to implement every adjustment identified by educators as being necessary for a student’s participation in learning.**
- **Fund expansion to flexible education, so that every student referred for additional support gets what they need, when they need it.**
- **Fund system reforms in areas like class sizes to make sure every child can thrive.**

Adopt a systematic approach to the management and upgrading of education infrastructure

The quality of school infrastructure fundamentally shapes both teaching conditions and learning outcomes. Our comprehensive survey of over 1,200 educators reveals stark inequities in infrastructure quality that undermine the ACT’s commitment to providing excellent education for every child, regardless of which school they attend.

The scale of the infrastructure challenge is significant. Our survey shows that 94% of educators agree that infrastructure quality directly impacts their work, while 91% agree that infrastructure affects student learning outcomes. However, only 51% consider their school’s infrastructure well-maintained, and just 29% report adequate heating and cooling systems.¹⁰ These disparities mean that some students are learning in uncomfortable, poorly maintained environments while others enjoy modern, well-equipped facilities.

The Standing Committee on Education and Community Inclusion’s inquiry into school infrastructure found similar concerns, with over 300 individual project applications received from 73 schools for funding in 2023-24, but only 51 projects receiving support.¹¹ The Committee took up the AEU’s recommendation that the ACT Government prioritise equity in public school

⁸ Australian Education Union ACT Branch, 15.

⁹ Bram Spruyt et al., “Teachers’ Perceived Societal Appreciation: PISA Outcomes Predict Whether Teachers Feel Valued in Society,” *International Journal of Educational Research* 109 (2021): 101833.

¹⁰ Australian Education Union ACT Branch, “Our Voices Together: What AEU Members Say about Working in ACT Public Schools,” 18.

¹¹ Legislative Assembly for the Australian Capital Territory, Standing Committee on Education and Community Inclusion, “Inquiry into the Future of School Infrastructure in the ACT,” March 2024, 41.

infrastructure by finalising minimum property quality standards, auditing all infrastructure against these standards, and setting out a schedule for improvement.

Our current situation contradicts fundamental principles of equity in public education. Without comprehensive minimum property quality standards and regular assessments against those standards, the Education Directorate cannot know where problems exist in its asset portfolio, how much it would cost to fix them, and where significant upgrades are needed.

Reactive repair rather than proactive maintenance is more costly to the ACT Government. Making principals apply competitively for the funds that would give their students what they need to learn is a waste of time and money. It is an insult to the school communities who miss out. Moreover, we continue to participate in the illusion that ACT public schools are fully autonomous, self-owned bodies, which must raise funds independently for their asset maintenance.

Public schools are public assets. Our ask is simply that the ACT Government invests in basic, cost-effective maintenance of its own buildings and equipment.

Infrastructure inequities also create additional workload for school leaders. Principals report spending significant time managing maintenance issues, procurement processes, and capital works, drawing them away from their core educational leadership responsibilities.¹²

Current infrastructure management also places an excessive burden on school communities. Public schools regularly hold fundraisers for essential purchases, repairs and upgrades. This fundraising burden creates further inequities, as schools in more affluent communities can raise additional funds while schools serving disadvantaged communities cannot access this additional resource stream. We wholeheartedly support demands made by stakeholders such as the ACT Children and Young People Commissioner to properly fund our schools to reduce the need for fundraising for what are essential public services.¹³

Recommendations:

- **Finalise and implement comprehensive minimum property quality standards for all ACT public school sites.**
- **Establish transparent prioritisation criteria for infrastructure investments with regular public reporting on progress.**

¹² Legislative Assembly for the Australian Capital Territory, Standing Committee on Education and Community Inclusion, 8.

¹³ ACT Children and Young People Commissioner, “ACT 2025-26 Budget Submission” (ACT Human Rights Commission, May 2025).

Our system is under-resourced by design

The Student Resource Allocation (SRA) model represents the ACT's commitment to needs-based funding for public schools. The SRA model aims for transparency, clarity, and to direct resources to where they are needed.¹⁴ While these principles are sound, our members' experience suggests significant gaps between principle and practice.

In our 2025 survey, 94% of school principals reported that the Education Directorate lacks the resources to fully implement system-wide initiatives. This indicates that the overall funding envelope may be inadequate regardless of how it is distributed. We recommend that the Education Directorate commission an independent review to assess the SRA's capacity to deliver on its promises.

This situation also urges a critical appraisal regarding what we consider to be appropriate base funding for our schools. The amount of government funding received by schools is decided by the Schooling Resource Standard (SRS), devised by the Gonski inquiry panel in 2011. The SRS designates a base per-student amount, with loadings added to address disadvantage.

The basic principles of this model are sound, but there is one glaring issue. The SRS was designed in 2011 based on analysis of what funding would be required for only 80% of students in a school to reach minimum national achievement standards.¹⁵

This means that even 'full' SRS funding is designed with the intention that one in five students will not reach minimum achievement standards. If community and government expectations are different, then we need funding models that reflect this.

The Gonski panel noted that "other benchmarks can be chosen and that the architecture advocated by the panel can easily accommodate the use of other benchmarks".¹⁶ It would be possible, for example, to adjust the SRS to fund schools enough for 90% or more students to reach minimum standards. Successive governments of all levels have not done so.

Recommendation:

- **Commission a comprehensive and independent review of the SRA model to examine whether current funding levels enable schools to meet the complex needs of all students. The review should:**
 - **Assess the adequacy of loadings for students with disability, from disadvantaged backgrounds, and with English as an additional language,**
 - **Examine options for funding every student to thrive**
 - **Consider how funding models can support rather than undermine school collaboration and system-wide equity, and**
 - **Review the level of funding for public schools assumed adequate by the SRS.**

¹⁴ Education Directorate, ACT Government, "Student Resource Allocation in ACT Public Schools," n.d.

¹⁵ David M. Gonski et al., "Review of Funding for Schooling: Final Report" (Canberra: Australian Government, Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations, 2011), 157–58.

¹⁶ Gonski et al., 158.

Part 2: Build a better CIT

CIT students and staff deserve the ACT Government's support

The Canberra Institute of Technology stands at a critical juncture in its 97-year history. As the ACT's public provider of vocational education and training, CIT is deeply embedded in the community and plays a cornerstone role in the local skills and training system. CIT's alumni build Canberra's homes, run Canberra's small businesses, care for the oldest, youngest and most vulnerable Canberrans, and so much more - demonstrating CIT's profound impact on the ACT economy and society.

CIT's new Strategic Plan for 2025-2035 was developed through consultation with staff, students, partners, stakeholders and the ACT community. This collaborative process revealed that CIT's impact is multifaceted, creating ripple effects across the entire ACT community and beyond. The strategic plan lays out a roadmap to be able to expand course offerings, facilitate inclusive and innovative teaching, and ensure that systems, processes and spaces enable strategic delivery.¹⁷ This is a strong and bright future if it is achieved.

However, our March 2025 survey of AEU CIT members reveals significant gaps between this vision and their daily experience of CIT's operations. When asked whether CIT has achieved its stated vision of creating "an environment where our people thrive, are motivated, and embrace leading roles in achieving our ambitions," 91% of respondents said it has not.¹⁸ This finding suggests fundamental challenges in translating strategic intent into workplace experience.

Supporting student success means supporting CIT's educators

CIT's mission involves supporting students with diverse needs and complex circumstances. Candidates running for ACT Government recognised this when they made an election commitment to the AEU that CIT students will be supported to thrive through increased resourcing to develop language, literacy, numeracy and digital skills.¹⁹

Our members have clear views on how this increased resourcing should be deployed. When asked about the best approaches to supporting student success, 85% of respondents support increasing the number of specialist educators to work with students with learning challenges, both individually and in small groups.²⁰

These priorities reflect CIT's role in serving students who often face multiple barriers to educational success. CIT states that its commitment to inclusion means providing equal access to education and training and enabling anyone to pursue their learning and career goals.²¹ This includes supporting students who arrive without adequate foundation skills, those experiencing mental health challenges, students with disabilities, those from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds, and students who face difficulties meeting the cost of living.

¹⁷ Canberra Institute of Technology, "Skilling for the Future, Equipping You for Life: The next 10 Years 2025-2035," 2025, 16.

¹⁸ Australian Education Union ACT Branch, "Building a Better CIT: What AEU Members Say about Working at the Canberra Institute of Technology," 2025, 13.

¹⁹ The [AEU ACT Branch Election Pledge](#) was signed in 2024 by Andrew Barr, Yvette Berry, and Chris Steel.

²⁰ Australian Education Union ACT Branch, "Building a Better CIT: What AEU Members Say about Working at the Canberra Institute of Technology," 11.

²¹ Canberra Institute of Technology, "Skilling for the Future, Equipping You for Life: The next 10 Years 2025-2035," 9.

Like teachers in schools, CIT educators are the people who encounter the hardship faced by students when other government services have failed them. In the absence of a strong social and economic safety net, CIT educators help students find safe and secure housing, financial support and mental health care. They are not paid to do this. Furthermore, acting as de facto social workers pulls educators away from their work as industry experts and education specialists.

Recommendations:

- **Increase the number of specialist educators to support students with language, literacy, numeracy and digital skills challenges.**
- **Ensure CIT's students can focus on their studies, with secure housing, cost of living support, and accessible mental health care.**

CIT is its people - we must recruit and retain them better

CIT's success as an education provider depends fundamentally on attracting and retaining staff who combine industry expertise with teaching capability. However, current workforce challenges threaten this foundation, with implications for both educational quality and institutional sustainability.

The national shortage of vocational educators is particularly acute in key industry areas, and CIT teacher salaries have not kept pace with industry rates, creating significant recruitment challenges. Our survey confirms this impact, with 57% of respondents reporting that their area has not been able to fill essential teaching roles due to difficulty attracting applicants or workforce shortages.²² Additional recruitment challenges identified by our members include delays in undertaking secure work conversions, staff not being paid correctly or on time, job insecurity for temporary staff, and changing budget and staffing targets that create ongoing uncertainty.

Working conditions impact educator effectiveness and student outcomes. Our survey reveals that CIT educators spend too much time on low-value administrative and compliance tasks rather than on educational priorities. Members call for adequate administrative, technical, IT, and student support for departments, as well as physical, technical and human resources to promote safety.

Recommendations:

- **Remove barriers to essential recruitment and move towards pay parity with public school teachers to attract industry experts.**
- **Provide clear pathways for professional development and industry currency with adequate paid time.**
- **Implement adequate administrative and technical support to allow educators to focus on teaching and student support.**

²² Australian Education Union ACT Branch, "Building a Better CIT: What AEU Members Say about Working at the Canberra Institute of Technology," 11.

Adopt a systematic approach to the management and upgrading of CIT infrastructure and learning facilities

The quality of CIT's facilities and learning environments directly impacts both student outcomes and educator effectiveness. CIT requires specialised equipment, workshops, and laboratory spaces that reflect contemporary industry standards and enable hands-on learning experiences.

Infrastructure renewal is central to delivering quality teaching and learning, and the investment in the new Woden campus is encouraging. However, our members report ongoing challenges with existing infrastructure and learning environments. An enormous 93% report that their campus's infrastructure and facilities are not well maintained. Our members identify the need for heating and cooling upgrades, better spaces to do their work, as well as better equipment, facilities and technologies for their students to learn.²³

Recommendations:

- **Implement systematic maintenance schedules for specialised equipment and learning environments to minimise the need for costly reactive repair.**
- **Support strategic infrastructure investment that enables program expansion in priority skill areas and emerging industry needs.**

Funding stability is essential for CIT's continued excellence

CIT's role as the public provider of choice in the ACT's vocational education and training sector requires sustainable funding models that recognise both its unique mission and its community service obligations.

It helps that the ACT Government has committed that CIT will receive at least 75% of total government VET funding. Similarly, the commitment that CIT will be the delivery partner of all current and future Fee Free TAFE places acknowledges its central role in making education and training accessible to all Canberrans. These commitments reflect the understanding that public TAFE institutions like CIT deliver high-quality and accessible vocational education and training in ways that purely market-driven providers cannot. Unlike private training providers, CIT must serve community needs even when they may not be highly profitable.

The national context for vocational education highlights both opportunities and challenges for public providers like CIT. As the Standing Committee on Employment, Education and Training articulated in their '*Shared vision, equal pathways*' report of the inquiry into the perceptions and status of vocational education and training, TAFE changes lives, and deserves the support of governments and communities.²⁴ Investing in CIT means investing in Canberra for Canberrans, both educationally and economically. As our labour market evolves, CIT is well positioned to respond to the Territory's needs, given its respected programs, industry connections, and community relationships.

²³ Australian Education Union ACT Branch, 12.

²⁴ Standing Committee on Employment, Education and Training, "Shared Vision, Equal Pathways: Inquiry into the Perceptions and Status of Vocational Education and Training" (Canberra: House of Representative, Parliament of Australia, February 2024).

However, realising this potential requires adequate and predictable funding that allows for strategic planning and investment. Any uncertainty about government support makes it difficult for CIT to make the long-term commitments necessary for infrastructure development, staff retention, and program innovation. The ACT Government should continue to reaffirm its strong commitment to CIT and ensure that its funding envelope adequately recognises its crucial role in serving all Canberrans.

Recommendations:

- **Honour the commitment that CIT will receive at least 75% of total ACT Government VET funding.**
- **Ensure CIT remains the delivery partner for all current and future Fee Free TAFE places.**
- **Provide adequate base funding that recognises CIT's community service obligations beyond training delivery.**

Conclusion

The 2025-26 Budget presents an unprecedented opportunity to transform educational aspiration into achievement across both school and vocational education sectors.

The evidence base is robust and compelling. Our surveys of educators across schools and CIT provide detailed insights into both the challenges facing our education systems and the solutions that will work. This evidence aligns with broader research findings and recommendations from other stakeholders, creating a clear consensus around priority areas for investment.

The workforce commitment is evident in the dedication of thousands of educators who continue to deliver high-quality education despite systemic constraints. However, this commitment cannot substitute for adequate systemic support. Currently, we have a situation where individual dedication is patching over systemic resourcing failure – to the detriment and cost of AEU members.

ACT public education needs adequate resource allocation to close the implementation gap that currently separates policy promise from classroom reality. Strategic investment in educator capacity will improve student outcomes while reducing workforce pressure. Infrastructure improvements will create better learning environments while demonstrating respect for our students and staff.

The cost of continued inaction compounds over time in predictable ways. Infrastructure deficits become more expensive to remedy as buildings age and systems fail. Workforce shortages become entrenched as experienced educators leave for employment with lessened risk of burnout. Resourcing gaps widen as some communities are able to fundraise to supplement inadequate public funding while other communities cannot.

The evidence from high-performing education systems internationally confirms that sustainable improvement requires systematic investment in the factors our members have identified: adequate staffing, quality infrastructure, decent working conditions, and comprehensive support for diverse student needs. These systems achieve excellence not through individual heroism but through systematic support for educational professionals.

We call on the ACT Government to implement a Budget that recognises education as fundamental infrastructure - essential to the Territory's continued prosperity and requiring sustained, strategic investment.

The evidence for change is clear and AEU members are committed. This Budget must deliver the transformation our students, educators, and community deserve.

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