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28 April 2023

Chief Minister, Treasury and Economic Development Directorate  
ACT Government

**ACT Budget 2023-24 - AEU ACT Submission**

Dear Chief Minister,

Thank you for the invitation to make a submission to the consultation for the 2023-24 ACT Budget.

Education in Australia is facing challenges not seen for decades because of systemic underfunding of public schools and the national teacher shortage. While the ACT has done better than most other jurisdictions to mitigate challenges, we cannot be complacent about them.

The AEU has made a wide range of submissions to the ACT Government over the past two years that consolidate a vision of an equitable and high quality public education system for the ACT. We have high expectations that are backed up by actionable, practical, evidence-based proposals.

There are more than 50,000 students whose lives are shaped by ACT public education. Our members work every day to help these students have a safe, healthy and prosperous future. The ACT Government must stand alongside its education workforce and make sure every school is safe and inclusive, every CIT student is supported to thrive, and every education worker feels safe and valued.

We look forward to the release of an ACT Budget that puts equitable and excellent education at the centre of its priorities.

Regards,

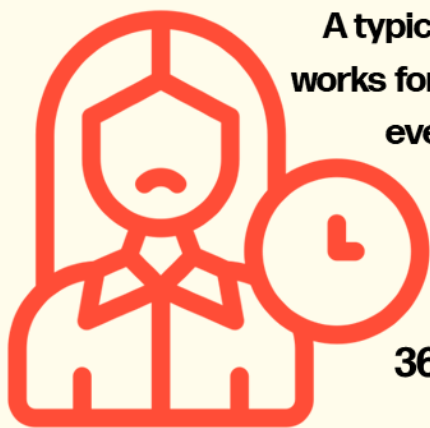
A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Angela Burroughs'.

Angela Burroughs  
Branch President

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Patrick Judge'.

Patrick Judge  
Branch Secretary





**A typical primary school teacher  
works for 45 hours and 39 minutes  
every week during term time**

**but is only paid for  
36 hours and 45 minutes**



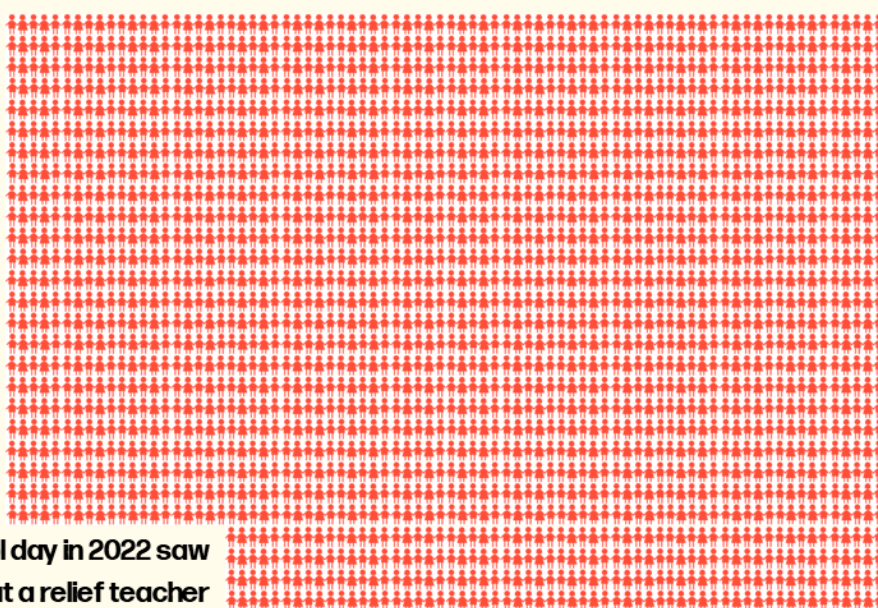
**In 2021-22, an educator  
submitted a report  
concerning occupational  
violence every 9 minutes  
and 51 seconds**

**\$80 million a year:**  
the amount that ACT public school  
teachers subsidise the Government's  
spending on education on unpaid  
overtime and classroom resources



**94%**

**of school principals  
say that the Education  
Directorate lacks the  
resources to meet the  
demands of the public  
school system**



**An average school day in 2022 saw  
2,157 students go without a relief teacher  
when their usual teacher was absent**

## Recommendations at-a-glance

1. **Identify system inequities, and commit to fixing them** by identifying schools that have staffing challenges, working with the AEU, school staff and school community to design meaningful and sustainable solutions to the problems at the school, evaluating measures, and implementing incentives for experienced teachers to work at hard-to-staff schools
2. **Mitigate impacts of teacher shortage crisis** by paying preservice teachers to be employed in ACT public schools and supporting teachers who are parents or carers to return to the teaching workforce
3. **Fund a pilot of small group tutoring** for students who need it most
4. **Commit resources to making every school safe**, by ensuring that occupational violence risk assessments can be quickly implemented with readily available funding
5. **End 'fees' for public schools**
6. **Review funding of small schools** to ensure an equitable education experience
7. **Meet a 1:500 psychologist to student ratio** through a suite of attraction and retention incentives to boost recruitment
8. **Cost and commit to fund the Education Inclusion Strategy**
9. **Restore expert specialist support in every school** by recruiting Disability Education Coordination Officers and Inclusion Support Officers
10. **Enhance and expand the learning, inclusion and social supports that CIT offers its students**
11. **Initiate centralised permanent recruitment of school assistants**
12. **Incentivise school assistants to complete a qualification in teaching**
13. **Conduct feasibility study on ACT Office of the Children's Guardian**
14. **Seek citation with the Workplace Gender Equality Agency as an Employer of Choice for Gender Equity**
15. **Initiate annual use of the People at Work** survey tool to ensure the best possible WHS standards for psychosocial safety

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## Introduction

This submission represents the professional expertise of 4,300 educators in the ACT. Our members are school and CIT teachers, school assistants, school leaders and principals. It is our members who care for the most vulnerable ACT citizens – our children – and work every day to improve their education outcomes and wellbeing. Schools are community hubs and anchors for families to access services. We are proud to do the hard work of making public education happen every day.

Education is facing complex problems that demand smart, sustainable, and urgent solutions. As the workforce who implements those solutions, we know what works; and conversely, we know how well-intentioned policy ends up having ineffective, inefficient or even perverse outcomes. We are the people who must face families when things go wrong. We live the reality of policy and budgetary decision-making every day.

It is with that sense of gravity that we present our recommendations for the next ACT budget. Our submission is structured around three of the principles articulated in the Government's own *Future of Education Strategy*. We present recommendations to improve the delivery of education in a way that builds **equity, inclusion and access**. We also articulate opportunities to achieve **excellence with efficiency**.

Schools are not just places of education, but community hubs that attend to many facets of wellbeing. The topics covered in this submission sit across many of the domains of the wellbeing framework that underpins the ACT Budget. Our proposals align with domains of access and connectivity, education and lifelong learning, governance and institutions, health, identity and belonging, living standards, safety, social connection, and time.

## Equity

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Equity means students are supported according to their personal needs. All students must achieve, regardless of economic, social and cultural factors. Equity requires a differentiated approach, recognising that students have different backgrounds and starting points in their learning. Some students may (at times and with some of their learning) require more assistance in order to achieve their best.

Future of Education Strategy

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### Identify system inequities, and commit to fixing them

For as long as we have schools that are harder to work at than others, or schools that parents would prefer to send their children to over others, we do not have an equitable public education system. At the AEU we believe it is entirely possible to have a public school system for the ACT in which every school is safe, welcoming, well staffed and well resourced.

The School Resource Allocation (SRA) is a needs-based system, in which additional loading allocations theoretically provide funding to students who need extra help. If the SRA were perfect, and if the ACT had a perfect implementation of it, we would not have schools that are perceived as 'better' or 'worse' than others. This is not the case. We still have work to do.



We have evidence of inequity when we look closely at the pattern of workforce engagement by school. The 2022 *Teacher Shortage Taskforce Final Report*<sup>1</sup> identified a problem which it named as the 'casual gap'. This is the gap between teacher leave taken and casual relief teachers engaged. A casual gap of 0 means that every teacher taking leave was replaced by a casual relief teacher. In the 12 months to August 2022, the average daily casual gap across the system was 162.

The most important part of this story is that the casual gap number varies greatly between schools. The immediate impact of this is worth mentioning, as we know that schools which face acute understaffing will inevitably find it difficult to continue a quality teaching program, and we know from incidents investigated by WorkSafe ACT in 2022 that understaffing directly contributes to the prevalence of student violence against students and staff.

The root of the problem is that some schools are more difficult to staff because working there is challenging. They have a lower (or non-existent) buffer of 'inbuilt relief';<sup>2</sup> higher rates of teacher absences, lower numbers of casuals willing to work, and a high proportion of teachers in their first three years of service.<sup>3</sup> What this indicates is that for a school with a high casual gap, staff are unable or unwilling to work there, and will take opportunities to leave when possible, through transfer to another school or through not accepting casual work. For those that stay, the rate of absences indicates exhaustion, and typically some prevalence of psychological injury due to workload and/or violence.

The Teacher Shortage Taskforce included the following recommendations in relation to this problem:

*Recommendation 11: The Education Directorate will implement targeted and differentiated strategies and initiatives to meet and support staffing requirements for identified schools with teacher shortage challenges. This will include considering incentives to encourage experienced teachers to be placed in these schools and strengthening teacher mobility process to enable the system to deploy teaching resources where they are needed the most.*

*Recommendation 8: The Education Directorate will encourage the use of inbuilt relief teachers in all schools to support schools in managing teacher absences. This will enable more secure form of employment through permanent appointment or long-term temporary engagement and less reliance on casual employment. The system approach will be developed in conjunction with the AEU.*

In order to implement this recommendation, **we recommend that the ACT Budget commit specific funding to a short project (up to 1 year) to:**

- Identify the schools that have staffing challenges

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<sup>1</sup> [Teacher Shortage Taskforce Report](#), ACT Government and AEU, pp. 9-11.

<sup>2</sup> Inbuilt relief is a staffing model where schools have additional staff who are permanent teachers who work only at one school, but they are not assigned a class/es like other teachers. They are assigned to cover teacher absences on a daily basis so that the school does not need to rely on the very limited casual relief teacher workforce.

<sup>3</sup> As part of the Teacher Shortage Taskforce, the Education Directorate shared with the AEU data which compared the numbers of 'New Educators' (teachers in their first three years of service) with experienced teachers. There was considerable difference across the ACT school system. When the number of New Educators at a school is high, it often indicates that teachers seek to transfer out of a school as soon as they can, and that other experienced teachers do not preference the school when it is their time to transfer.



- Work with the AEU, school staff and school community to design meaningful and sustainable solutions to the problems at the school (a multidisciplinary, wraparound approach<sup>4</sup> might include the provision of social services, secure housing, psychological or other allied health support, expert support in-school to help increase school capacity to support disability inclusion, infrastructure upgrades – and would thus need a whole-of-government approach, because many of these issues fall more directly under the purview of the Health and Community Services Directorates)
- Evaluate efficacy of measures implemented by examining data such as the casual gap over time, compensable injuries, and dangerous occurrences logged through the Riskman system
- Conduct cross-jurisdictional research and feasibility study of incentives to encourage experienced teachers to work in these schools, noting that similar schemes exist in other jurisdictions<sup>5</sup>

### Mitigate impacts of teacher shortage crisis

The shortage of teachers is a problem nation-wide which will only be fixed by reducing teacher workload and making remuneration equal to that of similar professions. When this is achieved, the teacher shortage will be relieved over a period of years, as more people take up teaching degrees at university.

We cannot wait years to protect our students from the worst impacts of the current crisis. As such, we make the following recommendations to get as many qualified teachers into the classroom as possible, right now. These are recommendations made by the Teacher Shortage Taskforce report and accepted by the Education Minister. They were developed by the AEU and the Education Directorate in collaboration. **We recommend that the 2023-24 Budget include funding to:**

- **Pay preservice teachers to be employed in ACT public schools, and**
- **Support teachers who are parents or carers to return to the teaching workforce,** such as through facilitating access to early learning centres and out of school hours care programs

### Fund a pilot of small group tutoring

The Grattan Institute released a report earlier this year making the case for small group tutoring to help students who are falling behind their peers.<sup>6</sup> The report proposes that one round of tutoring of about 3 sessions a week for an hour each for 12 weeks delivers the equivalent progress of about four months of normal classroom learning. This means that it may be a cost effective way to deploy intensive learning support to students who need it most. Programs like these are already operational in Victoria, NSW, South Australia, and nationwide through a program run by the Smith Family. This means that the ACT Government could design a pilot based on the learnings already gained by these other programs.

<sup>4</sup> This was a recommendation of the [Inquiry into the ACT Auditor General's report No. 6 of 2021 – Teaching Quality in ACT Public Schools](#), completed by the Standing Committee on Education and Community Inclusion in August 2022.

<sup>5</sup> For example, [Victoria offers incentives of between \\$9,000 and \\$50,000](#) to take up positions in hard-to-staff schools. This is paid when the teacher accepts the placement, and they are required to work in the school for two years. Annual retention payments of \$9,000 are then offered after the second, third and fourth year at the school.

<sup>6</sup> [“Tackling under-achievement: Why Australia should embed high-quality small-group tuition”](#), Grattan Institute.

Grattan's report gives costing estimates that may help test the viability of such a program. It suggests that 20% of students in primary and high schools should access small group tutoring in literacy and numeracy from a teacher, for 12 weeks. They cost this at \$900 per student, plus an extra 35% for program supports for implementation and evaluation. For the ACT, which has around 40,000 students in primary and high schools, this amounts to approximately \$9.7 million.

**We recommend that the 2023-24 Budget include funding for a pilot project to deliver small group tuition to students who need it most, with a view to expand the program if it proves successful.**

### **Commit resources to make every school safe**

The Education Directorate's annual report for 2021-22 stated that there were 5,628 incidences of occupational violence logged in the ACT Government incident reporting system for the year. Given the ACT was in lockdown for 11 weeks during this time, we can put actual in-person teaching days at 154 days, deducting all public holidays and school holidays. This means that in the 2021-22 year, there were 36.55 incidences of occupational violence reported every teaching day. **Another way to put this is that every 9 minutes and 51 seconds, an educator experiences occupational violence in an ACT public school.**

This figure should be cause for alarm and trigger the immediate funding of meaningful solutions. The Occupational Violence Management Policy and Plan, developed by the AEU and Education Directorate in collaboration as part of the [2018 Enforceable Undertaking](#), sets out a process for ensuring that the Education Directorate meets its obligations under the *Work Health and Safety Act 2011* (ACT) in a systematic, methodical manner, using the full range of tools available to eliminate and mitigate risk of harm and injury. This work was on the back of an [independent review](#) in 2017 which made a suite of recommendations.

In short; we already know the solutions, but our members consistently report that they cannot implement them due to a lack of resources.

While there are ACTPS employees being violently assaulted and suffering long-term psychological and physical injury as a result, this situation is plainly inexcusable. It can, however, be fixed. **We recommend that the ACT Budget include provision for a fund at a global level in the Education Directorate that schools can access to fund control measures identified as necessary by the Occupational Violence Risk Assessment that is conducted after a violent incident.**

At the moment, control measures typically need to be resourced at the level of the school-level budget. This presents difficulties particularly when a student engages in violence but does not have diagnoses required for disability loadings, or when there is a conflict between what has been funded by a disability assessment and what is deemed necessary for safety purposes.

This funding envelope needs to be guided by two principles: that it is immediately accessible, and that it is flexible where necessary. If an Occupational Violence Risk Assessment identifies a control measure, this means that the situation has already been assessed by a multidisciplinary team of experts from the Directorate's Occupational Violence and Complex Case Management Team. Such an assessment should be regarded as sufficient to warrant the immediate release of funds to implement the controls named. Where a measure cannot be implemented due to staffing shortages, it is crucial that it can be flexibly implemented until such a situation is resolved.



In addition to making our schools safe, this recommendation furthers the goal of equity in our school system. It helps resources be put quickly into schools that desperately need it. In time, such measures will do much to make every school a place where all students and staff are safe.

### End school fees/voluntary contributions

Most public schools in the ACT make requests for voluntary financial contributions to school operating expenses and infrastructure upgrades. These are typically at least \$100 per student every year, with additional voluntary fees requested per subject for high schools.

There should be no need for families to pay fees for public education. It creates an added financial pressure on families who may not be able to contribute. It also means that schools with wealthier families have more reliable contribution revenue, further compounding financial inequity between schools.

**We recommend adoption of [the New Zealand system for voluntary donations](#), whereby schools whose community has a lower socioeconomic status can opt-in to a scheme where they receive a set amount per student per year if they agree not to ask families for voluntary contributions.** This provides a more reliable source of funding than voluntary contributions and ensures that families already suffering the most through the current cost of living crisis are not pressured to pay to improve public services. In 2022, 95% of eligible schools in New Zealand opted to participate in the scheme.

This scheme could be piloted in 2023-24 for a small group of schools and expansion considered in following years should it be successful.

### Review funding of small schools

Public schools in the ACT range widely in size – the smallest has just 58 students, the largest over 1800. While there is a loading included in the Schooling Resource Standard for small schools that recognises they cannot achieve the same efficiencies of scale as a large school,<sup>7</sup> our members tell us this is not sufficient. Staffing and operations are stressors for these schools: while they have much smaller budgets, they must still staff key positions and attend to the full suite of learning and student wellbeing functions that communities expect of any ACT public school. Members tell us that this sometimes means, for example, that they are forced into having a staffing profile that skews toward beginning teachers, because there is not enough room in their staffing budget to achieve a more balanced profile. This affects student learning as well as staff experience, as those beginning teachers have fewer experienced educators to help them develop their professional practice.

It may be that a relatively small top-up to funding for small schools is all that is needed to help them achieve balanced staffing profiles and efficiencies with regard to other operational functions. **To define what this may be, we recommend the ACT Budget include resourcing for a review into the funding of small schools which should include consultation with the principals and educators at those schools.**

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<sup>7</sup> The school size loading is applied for primary schools with up to 300 students and secondary schools with up to 700 students. See information on the loading at the [Department of Education website](#).

## Access

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Access means that each student has the supports they require because educators know them and can respond to their individual experience. Supports for learning and wellbeing are available and provided to students. Collaboration between schools, students, families, the community sector and other government services is necessary for students to gain access to the right supports at the right time.

Future of Education Strategy

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### Recruit a psychologist for every school

At the beginning of the 2023 school year, the AEU received reports from members that 18 schools in the ACT public education system are without a school psychologist. School psychologists are the cornerstone of school-based mental health support, but there are not enough of them.

Even when a school does have a psychologist, their time is spread thin. Demand for urgent services is high, meaning those psychologists must work hard just to keep up with need for crisis support and conducting essential psychological evaluations and assessments. There is very limited capacity to assist schools to implement prevention, early intervention and support programs.

Our school psychologist members have long campaigned for a target ratio of one psychologist for every 500 students, which is the standard of best practice recommended by the Australian Psychological Association.<sup>8</sup> In addition to ensuring that the next generation of Canberrans are learning healthy social and emotional skills that lead to more respectful relationships, we know that school age support is one of the most effective ways to improve mental health when compared to all other methods of support and treatment.<sup>9</sup>

The ACT Government needs to take urgent action to recruit and retain school psychologists. This will necessitate introducing attraction and retention incentives (ARIs) to make work with the Education Directorate as attractive as work in private psychological practice.<sup>10</sup>

**We recommend that the 2023-24 Budget commit funding for enough school psychologists to meet a 1:500 psychologist to student ratio through a suite of attraction and retention incentives to boost recruitment.**

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<sup>8</sup> ['Position statement: Psychologists in schools'](#), Australian Psychological Society, April 2022

<sup>9</sup> ['Productivity Commission Inquiry Report: Mental Health'](#), Australian Government, June 2020

<sup>10</sup> The [Australian Psychological Society's National Schedule of Recommended Fees for 2022-2023](#) has a standard 46 to 60-minute consultation fee of \$280.

## Inclusion

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Diversity is embraced, all students are accommodated and a universal sense of belonging is fostered. In a thriving and inclusive education community, all students and their families feel welcomed and valued for who they are and what they can contribute. A strong sense of belonging is understood as a prerequisite to achievement.

Future of Education Strategy

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### Cost and commit to fund inclusion strategy

The Education Directorate is committed to making progress on inclusion of all students in all schools, which means making all schools accessible for students with disability. For the Inclusion Strategy (due to be released in 2023) to be fully implemented, there must be significant and strategic additional investment in ACT public schools over the next decade.

The Inclusive Education Strategy currently being developed by the Strategic Policy branch of the Education Directorate will consider the domains of infrastructure, expanding and developing the teaching and support workforce, and increasing provision of other resources.

We estimate that the overall cost of a meaningful inclusion reform package is likely to be in the tens of millions. To look to the case of one of our neighbours, for example: Victoria announced in 2020 a \$1.6 billion investment to transform their public education system to be more inclusive, including costs to upgrade infrastructure, enhance school planning and teaching, and employ more specialist staff.<sup>11</sup> Adjusted for population (the ACT has around 7% of the student population of Victoria), the same investment would cost approximately \$113 million here.<sup>12</sup>

This expenditure is essential to uphold the basic rights of people with disabilities, and ensure that every child in the ACT has the best possible start in life.

**We recommend that the 2023-24 Budget includes funding to cost the implementation of the Inclusive Education Strategy, and funding to implement the first phase of the Inclusive Education Strategy. Once a costing exercise has been completed, the ACT Government should commit to fund the entire strategy over the next ten years.**

### Restore expert specialist support in every school

Over the past two years, the model of providing expert support in disability education to schools has been decimated by the teacher shortage. In the past, a group of teachers with additional qualifications and/or experience in special education worked out of Network Student Engagement Teams (NSET) to support schools flexibly, in collaboration with multidisciplinary social and health professionals.

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<sup>11</sup> Premier of Victoria Media Release, '[Inclusive Education: Making sure our kids can be their best](#)', November 2020.

<sup>12</sup> However, note that this was for a 100 school pilot program, so may actually be fairly representative of our needs in the ACT. More research comparing the needs of the ACT to the programs of other jurisdictions is needed.

NSET no longer functions as designed, because the teachers in NSET have been redeployed to schools to mitigate acute staffing shortages. The current clinical practice team is limited in its ability to offer support and advice grounded in educational expertise and experience. The strength of NSET was twofold: it supported schools using a multidisciplinary and expert team, but it also was able to communicate patterns of need (in infrastructure, staff capacity, other resourcing, and so on) back to the Education Directorate to better inform system planning. Both functions are severely diminished now.

**We recommend that the 2023-24 Budget commits special funding to restore the expert specialist support in disability education to every school.** This should include:

- Recruitment of Disability Education Coordination Officers (DECOs; at least one for every school)<sup>13</sup> to assist principals and teachers to better support students with disability, and to coordinate services offered by allied health professionals. DECOs should be engaged at the School Leader C level, meaning they can dedicate most of their time to providing specialist support, rather than also managing a teaching load. The Directorate should set goals for recruitment, design a suite of attraction and retention incentives if necessary, and report against recruitment goals in its annual report.
- Restoration of the capacity of the Network Student Engagement Teams (NSET) through the recruitment of Inclusion Support Officers (one for every three schools, approximately 30 total) which were lost due to acute teacher shortage issues, so that all schools can call on expert multidisciplinary allied health and social work support for all students. The Education Directorate should identify staffing gaps that prevent the proper functioning of the NSET model, design a suite of attraction and retention incentives to fill staff across the system to allow for NSET to be fully staffed, establish recruitment goals and report against these goals in its annual report.

These recommendations are echoed by that made by the ACT Council of Parents and Citizens Associations, who have said:

The ACT Government should fund a position in all schools (pro rata depending on size of school) to oversee disability supports, facilitate the implementation of ILPs, monitor and review the implementation of reasonable adjustments, provide support to teachers and act as a contact point for parents.<sup>14</sup>

### Help CIT students thrive

The ACT Government has made investments into addressing skills shortages by entering into [a \\$16.5 million Skills Agreement](#) with the Australian Government to deliver 2,500 fee free TAFE

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<sup>13</sup> Responsibilities of the DECO would include: supporting teachers in their inclusive education practice, helping them identify their strengths and areas for skill development, supporting the development of Individual Learning Plans in collaboration with other teachers and parents, and then supporting teachers to translate these plans into pedagogical differentiation in lesson planning, supporting school leaders in their development and implementation of whole-school approaches to inclusion, supporting annual Student Centred Appraisal of Need processes that enable special funding loadings to deliver supports, supporting the implementation of Positive Behaviour Support Plans, supporting collaboration between teachers and school assistants to ensure students, and acting as a liaison or contact person with parents, NSET officers, NDIS providers, and so on.

<sup>14</sup> [ACT Council of Parents & Citizens Associations submission to the ACT Budget 2023-24](#), p. 4.

places at CIT in 2023. This is in addition to existing free or low fee TAFE places funded by the JobTrainer program.

People accessing free or low fee training are likely to be people who live with disadvantage, both socioeconomically and as learners. This was acknowledged through the 2022 Jobs and Skills Summit and associated discussions. This means that people accessing training sometimes need extra support to meet the demands of their course across the foundation skills of language, literacy, numeracy and digital skills (LLND). It also means that they sometimes are studying while in insecure housing, or while needing help to access transport, childcare, food, and to meet other costs of living and study. These forms of support are delivered by counsellors, social workers and disability support services at CIT, as well as by the CIT Students Association, CITSA. CIT's own student services require direct investment – CIT knows its students, and its students should not need to look externally for help.

While CIT provides this wide range of support to its students, its baseline funding to do so was not increased when either the JobTrainer or Fee Free TAFE programs were announced. This has led to a situation where students have their tuition costs waived, but the costs to CIT to support their learning have increased. Without additional funding, CIT teachers are left to carry the burden of providing ad hoc support on top of their already stressful workloads.

**We recommend that a package to enhance and expand the LLND, inclusion and social supports that CIT offers its students be introduced for the duration of the Fee Free TAFE and JobTrainer programs. This will help those CIT students to thrive, which in turn helps Canberra meet critical skills shortages.**

## Excellence with efficiency

The AEU has members forming a majority of workers in every ACT public school and CIT campus. We know how to make the ACT education system run better, through strategic and sustainable actions. In this section, we detail proposals to leverage the talent already in the ACTPS, to streamline government regulation, and to better measure and certify success.

## Develop and plan for school assistant workforce

The Education Directorate increased its school assistant workforce by 47.6% from 2016 to 2022.<sup>15</sup> School assistants perform varied roles in schools, and are relied on to support teachers and school operations, as well as providing specialised learning support to students.

School assistants are usually engaged directly by a school to fill specific student and school needs. They are the workers in education most likely to experience insecure work and underemployment. They are also some of the lowest paid workers in the ACTPS.

Many school assistants have a wealth of knowledge and expertise that would translate to excellence as a teacher. However, gaining a teaching qualification involves four years of study at an undergraduate level, including compulsory unpaid placements in schools.

The AEU knows that its school assistant members are skilled educators whose knowledge and expertise are not fully leveraged by the Education Directorate. **We recommend that this be rectified by two programs of work:**

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<sup>15</sup> [Teacher Shortage Taskforce Report](#), ACT Government and AEU, p. 7.

- **Initiate centralised permanent recruitment of school assistants**, including an opt-in transfer system similar to teachers so that school assistants can find employment at another school should they want it, and including support to schools to ensure that school assistants have Professional Development Plans and access to training and professional development.
- **Incentivise school assistants to complete a qualification in teaching**, including a scholarship scheme that includes guaranteed employment in ACT public schools upon graduation, paid study time and paid placement time in an ACT public school. See attachment for full proposal.

### Conduct feasibility study on ACT Office of the Children's Guardian

Teachers and schools currently need to navigate a confusing landscape of regulators who ensure student safety. This is an inefficient use of government resources, time-consuming for teachers, and means that educational expertise is spread thin in each regulator office. We recommend that the 2023-24 ACT Budget fund a feasibility study into the establishment of an ACT Office of the Children's Guardian, [similar to that operating in NSW](#). This Office would provide:

- A one-stop-shop for Working with Vulnerable People card applications and renewals (currently Access Canberra)
- Reportable Conduct Scheme processes (currently ACT Ombudsman)
- Regulation of early childhood services under the National Quality Framework (currently the Children's Education and Care Assurance Regulatory Authority, or CECA)

### Engage with meaningful metrics to ensure staff safety and wellbeing

We recommend the whole ACT Government engage with the following independent processes for ensuring ACTPS workplaces are safe and inclusive. These are:

- Seek citation with the Workplace Gender Equality Agency as an [Employer of Choice for Gender Equity](#), which has criteria covering: leadership, strategy and accountability, developing a gender-balanced workforce, gender pay equity, support for caring, mainstreaming flexible work, preventing sexual harassment, gender-based harassment and discrimination, and bullying, and driving change beyond the workplace
- Annual use of the [People at Work survey tool](#) developed by work safety regulators to ensure the best possible WHS standards for psychosocial safety

Using these tools would give independence, structure and better evaluation potential for work safety and inclusion. They offer no-cost expert and independent assessment of how the ACT Government should better direct resources to fix endemic problems.



## Attachment A: Proposal for scheme to help school assistants gain teaching qualifications

This program could include:

- Collaboration with the University of Canberra to offer targeted competitive scholarships to school assistants employed in ACT public schools who are looking to gain a teaching qualification
- Offer of permanent employment upon completion of qualification
- Paid study time, paid placement in an ACT public school

Costings estimate:

- Overall program cost of approximately \$2.34 million, based on the following assumptions:
  - o A school assistant level 3 is currently paid \$58,404. They work 125 hours over 4 weeks, and there are 40 weeks in the school year, totalling 1,250 hours per year. Hourly rate is therefore \$46.72.
  - o A program of 20 school assistants, each receiving 5 hours of paid study time through the term, would total a cost of \$186,880 p.a. (20 LSAs x \$46.72 x 5 hours x 40 weeks).
  - o An additional incentive of \$20,000 each per year to support their studies, totals \$400,000 p.a.
  - o Paid placement time should be covered by other recommendations included in this submission.
  - o Total cost of program would be \$586,880 p.a.

This is merely just over a quarter of what Victoria has dedicated to a similar scheme, after accounting for the difference in population. [Victoria offers a program with a total cost of \\$33.5 million.](#)