

Press release

ATL Annual Conference, April 2011



Press Office: 7 Northumberland Street, London, WC2N 5RD
Direct Line: 020 7782 1589 | Switchboard: 020 7930 6441
Annual conference direct line: 0151 239 6040 – 18 to 20 April 2011
Out-of-hours: 07918 617466 | Email: newsdesk@atl.org.uk
Website: www.atl.org.uk

11 April 2011 EMBARGOED to 00.01 hours on Friday 15 April 2011

80% of education staff work with students who live in poverty in the UK - ATL

Nearly 80% of education staff said they have students within their school or college living in poverty, according to a survey conducted by the Association of Teachers and Lecturers (ATL).

Four in ten said they think poverty has increased amongst pupils since the recession began three years ago.

A teaching assistant in a West Midlands secondary school, said: "Every day I become aware of a child suffering due to poverty. Today I have had to contact parents because a child has infected toes due to feet squashed into shoes way too small."

Craig Macartney, a secondary school teacher from Suffolk, said: "More children from middle to lower income families are not going on school trips and these families find it difficult to meet the basic cost of living. A family with two or three teenage children who have one earner who loses hours, or their job, will struggle to reach the minimum income to pay for basics. This will get worse as the impact of the cuts affects families. The number of young people with mental health problems has been on the increase in the last three years."

A teacher from Halifax, West Yorkshire, worked with a "boy with no underpants – when changing for PE, others laughed."

The survey also revealed that 86% of education staff believe that poverty is having a negative impact on the general well-being of their students, with 80% saying that students living in poverty come to school tired, 73% said they arrive hungry and 71% said they lack in confidence. Among sixth form and further education students, a lack of confidence was cited as the most significant impact of poverty, by 77% of staff in further education (FE) and 70% of staff in sixth forms.

Anne Pegum, an FE teacher in Hertfordshire, said: "We have students who miss classes because they cannot afford the bus fare or cost of other transport to get to college. We have students who miss out on meals because they do not have money to pay for them and in some cases then feel unwell and have to be helped by our first aiders."

Another teacher working with sixth form students in Nottingham, said she had a student who "had not eaten for three days as their mother had no money at all until pay day" and was aware of students who "work long hours to pay for their bus passes and food."

Eight in ten education staff (81%) said they believe poverty has a negative impact on the educational attainment of students within their school or college, the main effects being under-achievement (85%) and lack of pupil motivation or aspiration (77%). Staff believed other significant impacts of poverty on educational attainment were lack of a quiet place to study at home (74%), pupils not doing their homework (72%), pupils unable to concentrate (66%) and higher absence levels (66%).

Jane Hill, an FE lecturer in Worcester, said: "There is a change in attitude of lower sixth students towards higher education. Many feel it is beyond their economic reach now and are somewhat disaffected in terms of their attitude towards study and A levels."

Staff felt overwhelmingly that one-to-one support was important to help pupils from disadvantaged backgrounds to stay and succeed in education (64%), followed closely by better pupil to staff ratios in schools and colleges (51%), and extending eligibility to claim free school meals (51%). Of those teaching sixth form and FE students, the two most important measures identified by staff for helping disadvantaged students were improved, low-cost transport to and from school or college (72% of staff working in FE and 62% staff working in sixth form) and re-establishing the Education Maintenance Allowance (58% of staff working in FE and 58% of staff working in sixth form).

ATL general secretary, Dr Mary Bousted, said: "It is appalling that in 2011 so many children in the UK are severely disadvantaged by their circumstances and fail to achieve their potential.

"What message does this government think it is sending young people when it is cutting funding for Sure Start centres, cutting the EMA, raising tuition fees and making it harder for local authorities to provide health and social services.

"The government should forget empty rhetoric about social mobility and concentrate on tackling the causes of deprivation and barriers to attainment that lock so many young people into a cycle of poverty."

ENDS

Key survey results:

ATL surveyed 627 primary, secondary, sixth form and further education staff working in state and independent schools and colleges in England, Northern Ireland and Wales during March 2011.

For the purpose of this survey, ATL has adopted the definition of poverty used by the Campaign to End Child Poverty: a couple with two children aged 5-14 years living on £333 a week = £17,300 a year after housing costs; a single person with two children aged 5-14 years living on £247 a week = £12,800 a year after housing costs.

Do you believe any of your pupils/students are living in poverty?	Yes 78.8%	No 11.3%	Don't know 10.0%	Overall number of respondents to this question 622
Have you noticed an increase in poverty amongst your pupils/students...	Yes	No	Don't know	Overall number of respondents to this question 603
since the recession began	41.1%	28.1%	30.7%	
in the last 5 years	41.5%	23.6%	34.8%	
in the last 10 years	22.0%	25.7%	52.3%	
What do you think has contributed to this rise in poverty amongst your pupils/students?			%	Overall number of respondents to this question 329
Benefit reforms			28.6%	

Tax reforms	12.2%			
Job losses/lack of employment	90.9%			
The recession	58.4%			
Gender pay gap	8.5%			
Lack of affordable child care	32.8%			
Increased costs of food and utilities	76.6%			
Lack of social housing	37.4%			
Change in eligibility to claim free school meals	20.4%			
Lack of affordable credit	12.2%			
Rising costs for school uniforms	15.5%			
Lack of affordable transport/transport costs	30.7%			
Do you believe poverty impacts negatively on the general well-being of any of the pupils/students you teach?	Yes	No	Don't know	Overall number of respondents to this question 622
	86.2%	6.1%	7.7%	
If you believe poverty does impact negatively on the general well-being of any of your pupils/students, in what ways are they affected?		%		Overall number of Respondents to this question 546
Coming to school hungry		73.1%		
Coming to school tired		80.2%		
Coming to school without the proper uniform or with worn out clothes		67.0%		
Higher stress levels		49.5%		
Lack of confidence		71.2%		
Unable to access leisure activities outside of school - art galleries, music events, cinema, theatre and sports		65.2%		
Physical isolation		19.2%		
Lack of friends/problems making or Keeping friends		38.6%		
Being bullied		29.5%		
Frequently changing accommodation		40.5%		
Poor physical health		58.1%		
Poor mental health		52.0%		
Teenage pregnancy/parenthood		16.1%		
Taking drugs		22.9%		
Alcohol misuse		23.3%		
Domestic violence		29.7%		
Eating disorders		20.0%		
Do you believe poverty impacts negatively on the educational attainment of any	Yes	No	Don't know	Overall number of respondents to this question 617

of the pupils/students you teach?				
	80.6%	8.6%	10.9%	
If you believe poverty does impact negatively on the educational attainment or opportunities of your pupils/students, in what ways are they affected?			%	Overall number of respondents to this question 513
Under-achievement			85.0%	
Lack of access to opportunities for further education			45.8%	
Unable to go on school trips			40.9%	
Unable to take part in after school activities			37.2%	
Lack of a quiet place to study at home			73.7%	
Pupils not doing their homework			71.7%	
Frequently moving schools			20.7%	
Lack of pupil motivation or aspiration			77.2%	
Unable to concentrate			66.3%	
Unable to buy school equipment and/or books			37.0%	
No computer/internet access at home			60.6%	
Higher absence levels			66.3%	
What, if anything, do you think should be done to support pupils/students from disadvantaged backgrounds to stay in and/or to succeed in education?			%	Overall number of Respondents to this question 603
Extend eligibility to claim free school meals			50.9%	
Ring-fenced early intervention grant for early years providers			34.2%	
Re-establish the Education Maintenance Allowance (EMA)			47.3%	
Increase pupil premium funding			34.8%	
Annual school uniform grant			43.4%	
Improved and low-cost transport to/from school/college			45.9%	
Better pupil:staff ratios in schools/colleges			51.2%	
Improved Initial Teacher Training (ITT)/ Continuing Professional Development (CPD) to meet the needs of disadvantaged pupils			31.8%	
Extended services provision			32.8%	
Better Special Educational Needs (SEN) provision			41.8%	
Integrated academic/vocational routes			31.3%	
Better progression routes to further and higher education			28.5%	
1-2-1 support (ie. mentors, volunteers, counsellors)			64.3%	
More computer/internet access			28.0%	

Note to editors:

1. The Association of Teachers and Lecturers' Annual Conference is taking place at Liverpool's BT Convention Centre, from Monday 18 to Wednesday 20 April 2011.
2. The Association of Teachers and Lecturers (ATL) is an independent, registered trade union and professional association, representing approximately 160,000 teachers, headteachers, lecturers and support staff in maintained and independent nurseries, schools, sixth form, tertiary and further education colleges in the United Kingdom.
3. ATL exists to help members, as their careers develop, through first rate research, advice, information and legal advice.
4. ATL is affiliated to the Trades Union Congress (TUC), Irish Congress of Trade Unions (ICTU), European Trade Union Committee for Education (ETUCE) and Education International (EI). ATL is not affiliated to any political party and seeks to work constructively with all the main political parties.