

ASSOCIATION OF TEACHERS AND LECTURERS

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Call for evidence for the independent review of early education and childcare qualifications

Response from ATL, the education union

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ATL, the education union, is an independent, registered trade union and professional association, representing approximately 160,000 teachers, head teachers, lecturers and support staff in maintained and independent nurseries, schools, sixth form, tertiary and further education colleges in the United Kingdom. AMiE is the trade union and professional association for leaders and managers in colleges and schools, and is a distinct section of ATL. We recognise the link between education policy and members' conditions of service.

ATL exists to help members, as their careers develop, through first rate research, advice, information and legal advice. Our evidence-based policy making enables us to campaign and negotiate locally and nationally.

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.

ATL policy

ATL's education policy is underpinned by the professionalism of teachers. Teachers should be recognised for their knowledge, expertise and judgement, at the level of the individual pupil and in articulating the role of education in promoting social justice. Development of the education system should take place at a local level: the curriculum should be developed in partnership with local stakeholders and assessment should be carried out through local professional networks. Schools should work collaboratively to provide excellent teaching and learning with a broad and balanced curriculum, and to support pupils' well-being, across a local area. This means that mechanisms must be developed that ensure a proper balance of accountability to national government and the local community, and which supports collaboration rather than competition.

ATL response

This response is based on our early education policy, developed by members in 2011. We believe that early education should continue to at least age 7, and that from the age of 3, the education element should be teacher-led.

It is unfortunate that this consultation does not look at teacher training, as we believe early education qualifications should be looked at in their entirety rather than piecemeal, and we are convinced of the need to look again at the content of teacher training for the early years. Teaching 2-

year olds (and younger) is very different from teaching 5-year olds, and equally complex. Training should acknowledge and support this.

ATL's priorities

Our members state that young children need adults to offer consistency, positive encouragement and a feeling of safety and security

Families need the adults to be approachable and confidently competent, and to be able to develop relationships of trust.

Early education demands a high level of knowledge, including:

- ♦ comprehensive knowledge across subjects and an understanding of different ways to teach those subjects in ways that children can learn
- ♦ thorough pedagogic knowledge (teaching through play, structuring interactions between children to support and challenge learning)
- ♦ knowledge of children's prior understanding, attitudes to learning and family background.

Teaching in the early years is also highly skilled: it is as much about dialogue and relationships as it is about instructional techniques. Teaching through play requires a deep understanding of subject disciplines and ways of learning, as well as skills of planning, observing and assessing. It involves use of teaching techniques that engage children's focussed attention, and flexibility to develop deep learning in areas suggested by children themselves.

Because caring for young children is viewed as 'natural' women's work, the early years workforce is often seen, disparagingly, as either an army of mothers, or the province of young 'girls' without qualifications. Until society, employers and government, begin to see parenting as a vital and shared enterprise, the work of looking after children will continue to have low status. However, early education and childcare is about much more than 'looking after young children'. Young children are powerful and active learners, already deeply committed to the project of exploring and understanding the world. Early years settings should be places where children and families come together with professionals to build vibrant communities of learning. Early education should develop children and young people to become critical readers, writers, thinkers and communicators; who understand the ways that their lives are shaped by history/society, and the potential for their own agency within it; who enjoy learning and are motivated to continue.

The status of the profession is linked with both the public understanding of the complexity of the work, and importantly with pay.

Members want coherent and consistent initial and continuing professional education, and a pay package that encourages rather than hinders gaining qualifications. They want coherent career pathways including into roles in schools, and support (including financial) to undertake relevant training. There are many important roles within early years, each of which should have career progression, as well as the opportunity for movement between roles. While we welcome a commitment to a minimum level 3 qualification for those working with our youngest children, we believe the long-term aspiration should be for a graduate workforce in young children's education.

While different roles will demand different skills and knowledge, there should be a common core of passion for and knowledge about early years

and the needs of young children common to all. Early years professionals should work together to reflect on and share practice and information about children; sharing professional support such as early years SEN and outreach workers between settings. A common core, and common language, could enable greater sharing of professional practice, as well as equipping people to move between sectors within the children's workforce.

Clear-sighted and effective leadership is crucial. We agree wholeheartedly that settings should be led by graduates, and we recommend this review carries out a thorough evaluation of the NPQICL to ensure it remains a strong leadership qualification, and that it links with the NPQH.

Conclusion

We welcome this review, although we believe its remit does not allow it to be particularly innovative in its development of qualifications and training for early years practitioners. We hope that it will look closely at international experience of the development of pedagogues and early years teachers, in order to develop a model of initial and continuing professional education which will support early educators to develop professional accountability for children's learning and well-being; and to develop collective strength to argue for the best provision for children.