

A New Term in Northern Ireland



**Speak up
for Education**



the education union

The future shape of education will play a significant part in the decision-making of voters in the General Election, across England, Scotland and Wales. Why should Northern Ireland be any different? ATL believes that it is time to cut through the party political divisions in education and start listening to those in the know – the education staff working in our schools and colleges.

On behalf of our members, ATL calls for the following:

Section 1 Northern Ireland educational policy

ESA: Support for a single employing body

ATL has supported the establishment of the Education & Skills Authority, as the single employer of teachers and education staff. Less funding, pro-rata, reaches schools in Northern Ireland than in England, Wales, Scotland or the Republic of Ireland. The high educational administration costs in Northern Ireland reflects an over-segmented, divided, education system that we can no longer afford. Educational administrative savings should be redirected to frontline education. ATL does not support government funding for sectoral bodies, and considers that these bodies should – like Trade Unions – exist as voluntary and unsubsidised bodies. Outstanding issues around representation and advocacy for Controlled schools can be resolved with political will.

Sustainable Education: Supporting sustainable schools

Northern Ireland has too many small, educationally unsustainable, schools. Small schools are not merely a reflection of our rural spread, but of historical sectoral and social balkanisation within education. ATL supports the sustainable schools policy, and welcomes inter-school collaboration, shared campuses, and rational Area Based Planning in order to implement the 24/27 "Pupil Entitlement". However, we believe that increased collaboration will, inevitably, raise contractual terms and conditions issues which should, properly, be referred to the Teachers Negotiating Committee. Rationalising school provision will require a proper School Closures policy and a robust universal redundancy trawl which adequately protects the terms, conditions and quality of the teaching workforce.

Post-Primary Transfer: Supporting an agreed system

ATL accepts that there is entrenched division, both in the society and in the political world, on the issue of post-primary transfer. Public debate has been polemical, focussed on institutions rather than children and appears unlikely to promote an educationally agreed system. ***Our call to politicians is for an agreed system. We need a "deal" on education.*** A system grounded in political consensus can plan for the long-term change now required. Without that consensus, uncertainty will heighten educational and institutional uncertainty.

ATL has, to date, backed the "educationalists' consensus" supported by the 4 main churches. ATL considers that academic selection at age 10/11 is too young to make career-defining decisions and we are not convinced of the efficacy of the many different systems of testing used and rejected since 1947. ATL broadly favours "decisions at 14" (ie at the end of Key Stage 3) as more appropriate. Within 14-19, ATL favours locally-based solutions, with a collaborative "mixed market" of schools including Grammar Schools, shared 6th form provision, and schools specialising in Applied and Vocational education.

At this stage, however, we would accept an **agreed** political deal or way forward.

"Most categories of teacher in 2010 continue to report working over 50 hours per week."

**Speaking up for trust:
"Government must rely on the experience of teaching staff in making decisions about education. I want what works, not what sounds good."**

ATL Survey, January 2010

Balanced Intakes: Supporting socially-balanced intakes

ATL supports measures aimed at achieving more socially balanced intakes in all schools. From an educational (rather than ideological) perspective, socially-balanced intakes are proven to enhance systemic educational performance. We are concerned, too, at the high levels of "bussing" and travel required to support the current arrangements. ATL notes with concern the educational underachievement particularly prevalent amongst the Protestant working class (males in particular). We believe this is related to the more starkly imbalanced intakes prevalent at schools attended predominantly by the Protestant community.

School Starting Age: More flexibility on school starting options

At 4 years 2 months, Northern Ireland has the youngest school starting age in Western Europe. Early exposure to academic skills do not necessarily bring sustained benefit and may even impact negatively on some children's motivation to learn. ATL supports more flexibility so that children can start school when they are ready. Parents, generally, would welcome more flexible starting options. The quid pro quo for raising the school-starting age is Scandinavian style investment in early year's provision.

SEN & Inclusion Policy: ATL supports retaining the statutory statement process alongside better early intervention.

Improving early intervention will come at a cost. ATL would be concerned to maintain the skills and contribution of Special Schools, the future of which the current Department of Education proposals appears to undermine. The current SEN & Inclusion policy proposals may form the basis of a new policy but are unacceptable in their current form.

Marketisation: Rejecting PFI, PPP and the marketisation in education

The financial crisis offers an opportunity to reject the ideological dogma of the Private Finance Initiative (sometimes known as Public Private Partnerships). This "off books", short-termist accounting wheeze is now widely rejected as an expensive procurement route, a bad deal for taxpayers, loading high levels of indebtedness onto the governments of tomorrow. The wholesale privatisation of staff which often accompanies PFI/PPP projects undermines a whole school team ethos and sense of organisational well being.

Equally, ATL urges that the Specialist School initiative drop all requirement to attract private sector donor sponsors as a pre-condition of applications.

Workforce Reform: Promoting workforce reform and addressing class sizes.

ATL supports the extension of 10% PPA time (Planning, Preparation & Assessment) to Northern Irish schools and believes that a "1st Guaranteed Year" for Newly Qualified Teachers could be applied to cover PPA time as well as to tackle educational disadvantage, high teacher/pupil ratios and high class sizes.

Skills Policy: It's not just skills supply, but skills utilisation!

ATL believes that Government in Northern Ireland needs to spend as much time on skill utilisation (as in the Scottish or the Irish vocational education systems) as on skill supply. It is clear that the "low skilled equilibrium" within the labour market cannot be solved by skills supply alone. Slavishly following the English 'Leitch' agenda is not good enough. Quality apprenticeship and skilled technical routes will be based on industrial policy, strategic sectoral intervention, and collaborative frameworks between government, employers and unions.

Section 2 Reform and accountability

Teacher Professionalism: Trust teachers' professional judgement to determine curriculum details, pupil assessment and teaching

The question 'Is the national curriculum too large?' is often discussed in terms of the proportion of teaching time it should occupy. ATL has a different take. The national curriculum should be a framework of all the skills and knowledge areas to which all pupils are entitled. The detail should be filled in by teachers locally and regionally, subject to consultation with parents and community. This requires local assessment of pupil achievement, of a kind which supports future learning. Teachers are the professionals with expert knowledge of curriculum, assessment, and teaching methods and must be allowed to make professional judgements.

The Inspectorate: Protecting the Education & Training Inspectorate's role

Schools are accountable to parents, governors, education authorities, the Inspectorate and the Minister, with pupil-performance data a key but often misleading indicator. We need accountability but the Inspectorate should play a more strategic role. This would also break down the current culture of compliance, encouraging local innovation. The "Every School a Good School" policy risks driving the Inspectorate from being one of the most thoughtful and reflective parts of the educational landscape to becoming an advance guard for a "name and shame" culture.

Unnecessary Bureaucracy: Reduce workload by cutting bureaucracy

Schools are infected with the culture 'if it isn't written down, it doesn't happen'. From detailed lesson plans to the full-time work of the 'data manager', school staff are spending untold hours minding their backs. This work is neither welcomed nor productive. As professionals, teachers need some control over their workload to reduce their stress and exhaustion.

Speaking up for education for all: "Education is not only a universal human right but a driver of economic development and global security"

1GOAL - Send My Friend to School, 2010

Section 3 Recruit and retain a quality workforce

Parity pay scales: Keep national pay scales and conditions of employment for teaching staff

With the (potential) arrival of the Education & Skills Authority and with public purse stretched, the prospect of regional pay is an ever-present threat. Enforcing minima across the UK creates equity, encourages geographical mobility of staff, and improves average earnings in economically lagging regions. UK-wide pay and conditions free schools from time-consuming attention to reward policy and practice. They also prevent the kind of "race to the bottom" in quality which is often linked to a free market in goods and services.

Anonymity during allegations & investigation: Staff to remain anonymous while an allegation is being investigated

Whilst investigations are being conducted in situations where an individual has been suspended, anonymity underscores the principle that suspension is a neutral act. In order to maintain the principle of natural justice, school staff should have the right to anonymity whilst an allegation is being investigated.

Pensions: Safeguarding public sector pensions

The TUC briefing 'Exploding Public Sector Pensions Myths' <http://www.tuc.org.uk/extras/publicsectorpensions.pdf> explains why the pension entitlements of school and college staff are reasonable and affordable into the future, especially since the recently agreed changes to the teachers' scheme. School and college staff are lower paid than many comparable professionals, and their reasonable, but not generous, pension arrangements compensate for this.

Retirement Age: No further rises in the state retirement age

ATL supports the removal of the compulsory retirement age which would prevent employers from removing staff without fair process and allows those willing to determine when they wish to retire. The state retirement age should not be increased without a comprehensive review of the qualifying periods for entitlement to it and a better standard of living for pensioners increased in line with salaries rather than inflation. Increasing overall retirement age will not avoid pensioner poverty. It will only succeed in creating a class of people too old to work and too young for a state pension.

ATL Retired Members: supporting the pensioners' manifesto

ATL supports its retired members through advocacy of the Pensioners Manifesto endorsed by Age Concern, Help the Aged NI, the ICTU and the National Pensioners' Convention, see www.pensionersmanifesto.org

Speaking up for fairness: "As I reach retirement, after 38 years of unstinting service, I feel very strongly that the government should keep faith with me, as I kept faith with it"

ATL Survey, January 2010

Section 4 Improve equity in education, UK wide and internationally

School / Learner Funding: Maintain or improve funding levels per learner in schools and colleges

Schools and colleges have been the recipients of unprecedented real terms increases in funding over the past decade, but have also faced increased demands. Whatever the squeeze on public spending, government must never consider the maintenance of quality education and training as optional, and must seek ways to provide for increased demand in the further and higher sectors.

Fair Funding: Fair funding as between sectors, phases, and locations, including fair provision for pupils with SEN

Learners have varying levels of need, so equal funding is not fair funding. It is difficult to marry a transparent national system to proper local discretion whilst ensuring that individual institutions are treated fairly, but we need continued efforts in that direction. Given the importance of the early years the presumption that primary schools need less than secondaries needs revisiting. Most research evidence supports the view that funding pupils more, and earlier, brings best rewards and value.

The skills sector tends to serve the less advantaged and should be valued, rewarded and funded equitably. There is an argument in favour of rebalancing provision towards the needs of the economy, notably at Level 3, instead of at higher education level where we currently vastly over-provide based on relatively low demand for graduate/ high skills in the economy.

Child Poverty: Policies to end child poverty in the UK by 2020

Low educational achievement is strongly connected with poverty and disadvantage. With 4 million children – one in three – currently living in poverty in the UK, one of the highest rates in the developed world, the UK Government's 2010 target to halve child poverty is likely to fall woefully short. The government must take bolder action in order to end child poverty by 2020, so eradicating inequality and providing all children with the opportunity to succeed.

Millennium Development Goals: Play its part in achieving the education related Millennium Development and *Education for All* goals

“Research tells us that factors outside schools, such as family background and economic circumstances, account for about 85 percent of the differences in pupil attainment.”

Mark Langhammer,
ATL's Northern Ireland Director

ATL is the union for education professionals in Northern Ireland and across the UK.

Active in all sectors, we use our Members' experiences to influence education policy, and we work with government and employers to secure fair pay and working conditions. From early years to FE, teachers to support staff, lecturers to leaders, we support and represent our Members throughout their careers.



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