



What's inside

David John OBE	2
Note from the Director	2
North Wales branch welcomes ATL's new junior vice president	2
That time of year again	3
Asbestos	3
Roz on the road	4

A message from ATL Cymru's new president, Gareth Lewis



Gareth Lewis, president of ATL Cymru.

This year marked the tenth anniversary of the advent of devolution. A lot has been achieved in this time. Early on, the high stake SATs were abolished and the lunacy of the league tables swept away. The most notable of the

curriculum changes, the foundation phase, has been mirrored with an increase in focus on skills versus content elsewhere. Although it is early days, the 14-19 agenda is broadly welcome as it aims at meeting the needs of the learner within the local context. The assembly has also been much quicker and keener than the mandarins of Whitehall to recognise the professionalism of teachers and their expertise. The present education minister has stated that she now wants the vision of the last 10 years to bed in. This too is a welcome change to the frenzy across the border.

But the big failure of the assembly government has been finance. And this is set to get worse, particularly when the next round of elections is completed. It seems as if our politicians still don't grasp that high quality education is fundamental for delivering the one-Wales agenda of equality of opportunity and sustainable education, which provides our young people with the skills they need for life. Schools in Wales must provide education on sustainable development and global citizenship; it's about time that we had sustainable education funding. We need to engage in long-term financial planning. The annual budget round does not allow schools to properly plan for changing demography and long-term projects, while lack of hypothecated budgets means that funding does not follow policy into practice in the classroom. The most blinding indictment of this underfunding is the state of buildings across Wales. Resources that should be spent in the classroom are spent on repairing the leaking roof and the rotten loose windows. We cannot hide from the difficult financial times ahead. Rather than impacting on our classrooms, there may be efficiency savings to be made by reducing the number of local authorities (LAs); presently, they are too small to provide support for curriculum needs, and are costly bureaucracies diverting funds from frontline services.

I am proud to be taking over the role of president of ATL Cymru at this time. I would like to thank David Healey for all the time and effort he has put into the post over the last two years.

ATL's membership is increasing in Wales. We are pleased to represent educationalists across the board, from early years to FE colleges, in the maintained and independent sectors, from students, teachers, support staff to headteachers and senior management. Given this broad of base, ATL's voice is increasingly recognised and respected by government and other key stakeholders. Those who have sought the union's help on personal matters can vouch that our casework support is second to none. We have a growing number of reps in schools and colleges and more people are coming to branch meetings. ATL is a modern, member-lead union. It's there for you but also needs you. I'd like to leave you with this question: what can I do in my workplace to make ATL even better known, respected and heard?

David John, OBE

Members and staff were saddened to hear of the death of David John, who had been National Casework Official in Wales for several years prior to his retirement in 2007. David was a gentleman in every sense of the word. His courtesy, charm and care shone out to all who encountered him. His entire life had been spent in the service of education and ATL Cymru was very fortunate to have had the benefit of his vast experience. He was immensely well read but wore his learning lightly. Staff will remember a colleague who was always supportive and prepared to listen and help them in their own work. Members, especially those who had recourse to his services as a caseworker, will remember him as someone who fought their corner with tenacity and tact, always concerned to achieve the best possible outcomes for them in their difficulties. It is a fitting tribute to the immense affection and respect that David commanded that his funeral service was packed to overflowing. He will be missed.

Note from the Director



Philip Dixon, Director, ATL Cymru.

A new academic year is now well underway. On top of the regular challenges and demands we are now starting to view the fallout from the recession. The impact of the financial crisis will be seen more clearly over the

next few months. Whatever party is in power in Westminster it is clear that deep cuts in public spending are on the way after the General Election next year.

The assembly government, for all its laudable policies, has a poor record on education spending. Although it is early days we suspect that there will be a significant slowdown in school building improvements, which appeared to be moving at a snail's pace in any case. Other targets for cuts will include CPD provision and training. In FE, the intended five percent 'efficiency savings,'

weasel words if ever there were any, might well impact on jobs.

All this means that it is more vital than ever to become active in the union. Politicians listen when professionals speak with the authority that comes from lived experience. We need to bombard them with examples of how cuts impact negatively on education. ATL's policy and engagement is based on your work and your expertise. Make sure your voice is heard.

North Wales branch welcomes ATL's new junior vice president

The North Wales branch was very pleased to welcome ATL's junior vice president, Alice Robinson, on 23 September in St. Asaph. Alice is the latest newly elected junior vice president in a long and unbroken line to visit the branch early in their tenure; invariably the first of what will become an extensive programme of visits to branches throughout the four-year presidential cycle. Over 20 members from various sectors across North Wales enjoyed meeting their future president and hopefully enabled her to get off to a good start in a congenial setting! She spoke of her career, currently assistant headteacher at the school where she was a pupil at age-11, and listened to the concerns of teacher and support staff members regarding the practical ramifications of 'rarely cover', the phrase now enshrined in law in the School Teachers' Pay and Conditions Document. Like Alice's predecessors, she now takes up office with some awareness of the distinctiveness of education in Wales, along with happy memories of her first branch meeting as junior vice president!

That time of year again: student recruitment!

As everyone else looks to the approaching winter, ATL organisers across the UK were busy planning, booking and ordering in preparation of the arrival of new student teachers and lecturers in universities and colleges across the country. Organisers ensure that ATL has a presence at local universities and colleges during enrolment days and freshers' week, encouraging new student teachers to take advantage of ATL's offer of free student membership.

ATL in Wales is no exception. ATL organiser, Helen Cole, alongside ATL Cymru research and information officer, Zöe Brewis, and recruiters in the field, Roz Benney and Rebekah Maclaughland, with help from local members and branch officers, ensured that all new



Student recruitment at Swansea Metropolitan University.

student teachers in universities and colleges in Wales were given the opportunity to join ATL.

Asbestos: the silent killer in the classroom?

Although teaching is not usually thought of as a dangerous profession, a silent potential killer stalks the classrooms of Wales. Asbestos can be deadly.

Too little information about asbestos is available. We don't know how many schools still contain asbestos, so most teachers have little idea of whether they or their pupils are being exposed to it. Over 400 ATL members in the UK know that they have been exposed to asbestos in their school or college but there are many more who are unsure.

The Health and Safety Executive suggests that between 1980 and 2000 at least 182 people working in education died in the UK from Mesothelioma, the cancer caused by exposure to asbestos. But this is the tip of the iceberg. Many teachers and pupils will be unaware, and because asbestos-related illnesses take between 15-60 years to develop it is difficult to know how many will become ill or die as a result of exposure.

Exposure to asbestos can result in Mesothelioma, which is usually fatal, or lung cancer or Asbestosis which can be highly debilitating or even fatal. ATL and the other education unions are lobbying parliament heavily. In Wales ATL has previously tabled a statement of opinion calling on the Welsh assembly government to:

- clarify where the duty to manage asbestos lies;
- provide proper training to all headteachers and school managers regarding their current responsibilities in this area;
- increase the awareness of education staff across Wales at the danger posed by exposure to asbestos;
- conduct a comprehensive audit of asbestos in all schools in Wales.

ATL Cymru has had significant coverage in the press on this issue and will continue to lobby the Welsh assembly government. The assembly can't drag its feet on this issue. The health of our young people and those working in education is far too precious to allow the issue to be swept under the carpet any longer. If you have been affected by asbestos in your school or know of a colleague who has then please contact ATL Cymru by email at cymru@atl.org.uk.



Cardiff NQ summer seminar.

NQ summer seminar

Once again this year, ATL Cymru ran a summer seminar in August for newly qualified (NQ) teachers in preparation for starting their first teaching posts in September. The seminar was very well received with sessions on induction, managing behaviour and caring for your voice. One NQ commented: "ATL's courses are excellent. This has been really useful with lots of information that you just don't get anywhere else."

Roz on the road

The summer term ended for the North Wales branch with a very enjoyable occasion. A successful buffet dinner was held for school and college representatives and contacts in St. Asaph on 2 July, in the wake of visits by North Wales branch's recruiter in the field, Roz Benney, to members in far-flung corners of the branch. Virtually every school and college in North Wales now has a named contact/representative, which makes for ease of communication and cohesion across a geographically dispersed branch. Roz plans to visit more schools in 2010. In the summer, assisted by members of the North Wales branch committee, Roz organised and manned ATL's stand at the national Eisteddfod in Bala.

Meanwhile, Roz and her team of branch recruitment secretaries have been out and about, recruiting up to 800 student members at Aberystwyth, Bangor and Glyndwr (Wrexham) universities, and attending NQT events in all six North Wales LAs. Although NQT numbers are lower this year across the country, over 100 have already been canvassed and the October NQT conference at Glyndwr university will provide a further opportunity to make new entrants to the profession aware of the benefits of joining the education union!

FE college mergers update

Progress toward the first merger of FE colleges under the Welsh assembly government's transformation agenda is underway with Swansea and Gorseinon colleges due to merge on August 1 2010, subject to the assembly government's approval. A due diligence exercise has been completed and extensive consultation is now underway. An independently chaired joint consultation/negotiation committee has been set up consisting of management and union representatives from both colleges. ATL is represented on this committee by Philip Dixon, Director

of ATL in Wales, David Hunt, Swansea College, and David Lane Gorseinon College. All the main unions (ATL, UCU, AMiE and Unison) are working closely together to ensure that the merger process achieves the optimum outcome for all their members. In particular, the unions are calling for there to be no compulsory redundancies as a result of the merger, and for upward harmonisation of terms and conditions of employment once the transfer under TUPE regulations is complete. It is therefore expected that the complete process will take approximately two full years.

Dates for your diary

Branch meetings

North Wales,
Tuesday 10 November 2009

South and Mid Glamorgan branches,
Tuesday 9 February 2010
5.15pm, Village Hotel, Coryton, Cardiff M4 J32

Gwent,
Tuesday 1 December 2009
Glen yr Afon Hotel, Usk

Committee in Wales meeting
Friday 27 November 2009



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