

ATL Cymru education manifesto

The Westminster election

The Welsh Assembly Government now has devolved responsibility for most education policy and practice in Wales. Next year ATL Cymru will be surveying members to ascertain their views about the educational priorities that a future government in Cardiff Bay should adopt. However, as not all educational matters are devolved the Westminster election remains important and the following are the key priorities for ATL Cymru.

- Keep national pay scales and conditions of employment for teaching staff
Minimum salary levels across England and Wales create equity, encourage geographical mobility of staff, and improve average earnings in economically lagging regions. National pay and conditions also free schools to focus on teaching rather than policies and practices around reward. And they prevent the kind of race to the bottom in quality which is often linked to a free market in goods and services.

Members in Wales are unanimous in their support for the maintenance of the STPCD and STRB across Wales and England. They are completely opposed to any devolution of pay and conditions to the National Assembly. Such moves would inevitably lead to teachers being paid less in Wales and cause acute shortage of staff, particularly in the border regions.

Pay and Conditions

- Introduce national pay scales for support staff

Over the last decade schools have chosen to use their increased funding to transform the way they work by employing a range of support staff. At the same time, local authorities went through a staff single status exercise which often did not recognise the proliferation of roles in schools. The new School Support Staff Negotiating Body urgently needs to agree and ensure implementation of national pay scales to achieve greater equity for support staff.

ATL Cymru urges the extension of the current English SSSNB to include support staff members in Wales. Progress on establishing a similar body in Wales has been painfully slow. Members are concerned that a separate body will result in lower pay in Wales. We also believe that such a structure, mirroring arrangements for teachers, would be the best means of safeguarding support staff members' pay and conditions.

- Safeguarding public sector pensions

The average pension being paid out by the Teachers' Pension Scheme is currently around £9,000 a year. The average pension paid by the Local Government Pension Scheme, including to school support staff, is around £4,000 a year. Given that support staff are on a low wage, and school and college teaching staff are lower paid than many comparable degree-based professionals, these pensions are a fair reward for years of service. What's more, the pension entitlements of school and college staff are reasonable and affordable into the future as reforms to the teachers' scheme in 2007 mean any future rise in the required contribution rate will have to be met by members. ATL would condemn any move to erode pensions simply to create a veneer of equality between the public and private sectors.

- No further rises in the state retirement age

- Staff to remain anonymous while an allegation is being investigated

False allegations cause huge damage to staff careers and lose good people to education. When a member of staff has been suspended while investigations are ongoing they should have the right to anonymity. This underscores the principle that suspension is a neutral act until the investigation is concluded.

The introduction of such legislation in Westminster should contain clauses that require concurrent Guidance from the Welsh Assembly Government.

Improve equity in education, nationally and internationally

- **Maintain or improve funding levels per learner in schools and colleges**
Although the funding of schools and colleges is a devolved matter ATL Cymru is adamant that the funding gap that exists between England and Wales needs to close. Welsh MPs have a crucial role in lobbying the Welsh Assembly Government about this but also ensuring that the Barnett formula is reformed so that Wales receives a fairer share of the UK's wealth to tackle long standing deprivation
- **Policies to end child poverty in the UK by 2020**
Low educational achievement is strongly connected with poverty and disadvantage. International research shows that around 86% of a student's attainment is due to their family background. With 4 million children – one in three – currently living in poverty in the UK, one of the highest rates in the developed world, the government's 2010 target to halve child poverty is likely to fall woefully short. Bolder action is needed to end child poverty by 2020, so eradicating inequality and providing all children with the opportunity to succeed. In Wales over 180,000 children still live in poverty. The Welsh Assembly Government's focus on child poverty is to be commended but needs to be more integrated with the work of departments of the Westminster Government. Welsh MPs should be active and effective advocates in securing a fairer share of funding for Wales so that historic patterns of deprivation and poverty can be tackled.
- **Play its part in achieving the education related Millennium Development and Education for All goals**