



Association of Teachers and Lecturers (ATL Cymru's) Response to the GTCW Consultation on a Revised Code of Professional Conduct and Practice for Registered Teachers in Wales

The Association of Teachers and Lecturers represents over 160,000 education professionals across the four constituent parts of the United Kingdom. It draws its membership from teachers and lecturers, leaders and support staff in maintained and independent schools, and Further Education Colleges. As well as campaigning vigorously to protect and enhance members' pay and conditions ATL also believes that the education profession has a key role in developing education strategy and policy. ATL Cymru represents over 6,500 education professionals in colleges and schools across the whole of Wales.

1. Is the purpose, scope and status of the revised Code clear?

The Association of Teachers and Lecturers welcomes the publication of the GTCW code of conduct as a way to kick start an important debate in what can and cannot be expected of teachers. As codes are in place in the other three parts of the UK it is right that a code should be devised for teachers in Wales, reflecting the reality of devolution. However, ATL believes that the code proposed by the GTCW is flawed and needs a great deal more work before it will be acceptable to the profession and helpful to teachers.

The tone of the code is very prescriptive. Instead of celebrating the conduct and professionalism of the vast majority of teachers the working of the code implies that teachers need to be told to be honest, caring and decent. There is a vagueness and subjectivity about these standards of behaviour to which teachers are to be held accountable.

There needs to be far more debate on the code if it is to command the support and respect of teachers in Wales. It is to be lamented that the GTCW did not consult teachers' professional organisations in the formulation of the code.

2. Are the key principles adequate in defining teacher professionalism and in maintaining the public's trust in the teaching profession?

ATL members agree with the key principles in defining teachers professionalism but as stated have issues with the demeaning tone and prescriptive nature of the document.

3. What revisions, if any, might be made to section 4 "Professional Conduct"?

Amongst others, members have issues with the bullet point:

"behave in keeping with your unique position of trust and status as a role model".

If the GTCW is to enforce this then they need more definition and specificity around what they are asking teachers to do in order to demonstrate awareness of their role. They also need to be clear on what areas are teachers to "lead by example" and which characteristics are they meant to inspire in young people.

Members are also concerned that the code as currently drafted will impinge on their personal and family life. Care must be taken to recognise that teachers have certain rights under the Human Rights Act to 'respect for their private and family life'.

The language in this section is ambiguous and members felt it was deliberately grey.

4. What revisions, if any, might be made to section 5 "Criminal Offences"?

Again, the bullet point:

"be mindful of your position as role model to pupils" needs further clarification.

5. What revisions, if any, might be made to section 6 "Professional Practice"?

ATL agrees that to ensure professionalism teachers need to keep their professional knowledge and skills up to date throughout their teaching career. If this is to be included as a condition in the code of conduct then CPD for teachers needs to be adequately funded. It is difficult at present for teachers to fulfil this requirement with the current CPD funding regime. The onus needs to be put on the GTCW to secure funds for teachers to fulfil this commitment. It is simply not acceptable for teachers to be expected to develop their professional practice but

not be funded to do so. The GTCW would be well advised to rework this section of the code to take account of the complexities of CPD funding. An obligation can only be placed if other agencies are prepared to provide adequate CPD resources.

6. Do you have any other comments?

There is a deep tension in this document between the sanctions that should be applied to the tiny minority of teachers who bring the profession into disrepute and the promotion of educational excellence by the vast majority. We believe that the current draft represents an inappropriate attempt to address two distinct issues in a single document:

- on the one hand, a welcome but essentially aspirational statement of excellence in teaching and professional practice and
- on the other, a statement of the minimum expected standards of competence, practice and conduct against which employers or the GTCW itself may take action (such as internal disciplinary procedures or de-regulation) where teachers fail to meet them.

We believe that these two issues should be addressed in separate documents.

It is not clear in the code what support teachers can expect in following some of the codes demands. For example, teachers are expected to keep their knowledge up to date- but the code does not tell them how they can do this in situations where money for that updating is scarce or non-existent.

The code is also quiet about situations in which the professional judgement of a teacher clashed with that of a head or senior manager. There are high expectations but little support.

ATL Cymru would reiterate the need for further debate on this code and would recommend a working group involving all the teaching unions is set up to scrutinise the code fully. This is imperative if the code is to be meaningful and command the support and respect of teachers in Wales.