



Association of Teachers and Lecturers (ATL Cymru's) Response Investing in Skills: Sector Priorities Funding, Fees Policy and Financial Support for Learners

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.

Question 1: Do you support the proposal to remove barriers to engagement and increase the responsiveness of the skills system by introducing greater flexibility for apprenticeship framework delivery?

ATL's policies are based upon a vision of an inclusive curriculum, on the trust and expertise of our teachers, and on local need and participation in education and training. The proposal to render more flexible the elements of the apprenticeship framework would certainly seem to offer greater availability and access for the local community. And, indeed, could offer provision for those travelling from further afield because of the smaller size of the provision.

However, there are also concerns. The breaking up of the framework into deliverable bits could well endanger the apprenticeship brand. It could also have the unintended outcome that learners may well compile various bits of the framework but never complete. So, there is no assurance that this initiative will in fact lead to greater completion and, indeed, could, by fragmenting the framework, decrease the rates further.

While the concerns of employers are highly relevant to the content and relevance of parts of the technical certificate and workplace competencies, the view that 'bite sized' provision is best educationally has yet to be seen. Indeed, the best models of vocational education and training are those that provide a holistic

framework that extends the learner and covers areas of learning that benefit a professional or technician in their field.

ATL would argue that bite sized learning is a reductive view of 'skills' and is one of the primary reasons vocational education and training in the UK has found it so hard to develop a world class skills workforce. Nevertheless, such restricted units of skills could well be imported as specialist provision within an apprenticeship framework and therefore suit niche employers and specialist developments in the field. There could well be a compact agreement by which an apprentice has a guaranteed entry to the elements in a framework from one or more providers. This could work with strong collaborative relations, be congruent with the proposal, and meet the view of ATL that too much marketisation of the framework could lead to issues of supply and of consumer inability to access all of the elements when it suits them.

Question 2: Do you support our proposals to reserve a proportion of the funding distributed through Further Education colleges for the purpose of supporting qualifications linked to sector priorities and for the delivery of National Priorities?

The aim to have a strategically managed provision for Skills in Wales is clearly an important and significant development. The attempt to ensure the right skills are developed by colleges and that the result is in a workforce with the right skills is well intentioned. While colleges have previously responded to fund streaming of one sort or another, the idea that employers will direct the qualification priorities via the Sector Priorities Fund, is understandable, but potentially flawed. The view of employers is naturally enough sector based and always has one eye on what could be developed through the sector and its associated skills. However, each learner, and society, would benefit more from a richer provision that is more easily transferable into other occupational sectors. Therefore, a balance between the current and needed skills for a sector and the wider employability skills for the learner and society should be struck. This is not to discount the choice of specializing in a sector if that is what the learner wants.

ATL's view is that a high quality vocational offer should be driven to improve the lives of individuals, communities and society. The community thrives through economic activity and employer investment in people and resources. However, employers also benefit from the transferability of individuals' skills and the experience gained over a working life. Lifelong skills are about development, and should not be thought of as a static model of 'a skill set'. Therefore, there needs to be further consideration as to the level of employer input into the KSQ. ATL would suggest educational and trade union input to be essential to that dialogue.

Question 5: Do you support the proposed package of reforms to the EMA designed to target resources where they will have greatest impact and support progression into higher level learning?

Firstly, the premise that young people will attend education with or without EMA is contentious. The Nuffield response to the 2005 white paper argued, fairly conclusively, that no measure had succeeded in ensuring wider participation. Therefore young people are as likely to remain out of education with EMA and seek part time or no employment. It also means that the failure of EMA to increase participation (in those terms) could be about participation and engagement in other forms – that young people had a right, were communicated with, that cultural aspirations were raised slightly.

The significant issue here is the notion that a target has one mechanism or one mechanism has one result. This is a linear model that does not match the open system of a society and is more suited to a laboratory or statistician's notebook.

The phasing of increased payments from level 1, 2, 3 and 4 would make more aspirational sense and would give a sense of commitment by society for the young person's development. This could be achieved by changing the levels of payment to more needed groups.

Finally, the idea of lateral progression is being lost with ending of 'returners' payments. There should be some allowance made for engagement, with some provision of course, for lateral movement in the educational and training system.

We cannot say that IAG is a perfect system, nor that individuals make the first choice the best choice, therefore some room for lateral as well as vertical progression should be built into the levers of funding.

Question 6: Which option do you believe to be the best for the future of 14-19 education in Wales?

ATL Cymru's preference is for option a.

Question 7: Which of the options above do you believe will ensure resources are best targeted at those learners who need financial support the most?

The one issue here is whether the employer and state driven model is the only one in town. It could be argued that learners have an entitlement to determine parts of their learning. This could provide specialist or wider choice in apprenticeships or the curriculum more broadly. Possibly, extending learning into the next level which would be an aspirational driver.