



## Association of Teachers and Lecturers (ATL Cymru's) Response

**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.

ATL Cymru wholeheartedly welcomes this review and supports the findings. We do not advocate radical structural change in the way in which education is administered but advocate the need for a fundamental and far reaching change in culture.

### **Key theme 1: Changing the Balance Of Cost**

ATL agrees with the hypotheses identified in this key theme. We agree that there is a need to:

**Simplify governance:** Simplifying grant/Funding structures and policy portfolios may well give opportunities for savings in the costs of producing data.

The Minister needs to understand that at the school and college level a lot of resources are deployed to meet data collection requirements that only exist because they are

- WAG requirements or
- ESTYN requirements

Some data requirements are more useful than others. A reduction in data requirements and/or a thoroughly integrated data collection strategy would be welcomed. Thought could usefully be given to seeking a harmonised system of data collection in the school and FE sector to ensure consistency, fairness and the ability to share and track student data.

Teams in WAG who ask for data may not appreciate the data quality issues involved in collecting data particularly on hard to define fields. They may also not appreciate the issues in collecting data across very large numbers of learners in very diverse situations. It may seem like a small request to ask for 1 piece of information about a learner or learning activity, but each data item has to be therefore collected many thousands of times each year to cover all learners.

There are many associated costs with collecting data

- Staff
- Forms
- Computers
- Software
- Fileserver and paper storage
- Data analysis

Many information needs could be met more cost effectively by sample surveys rather than by blanket data collection and may provide data that is still fit for purpose. The need for data should be thoroughly examined and include consideration of how this can be properly and relatively efficiently gathered. For example the data below can be difficult to obtain, expensive and sometimes the data gathered is not robust.

- Destinations (all organisations – schools, colleges, careers service and universities are chasing these).
- Basic skills at start and end of programmes.
- On programme basic skills support
- Welsh language skills at start of programme.
- Employment status at start of programme.
- Highest qualification at start of programme.

The funding mechanism for FE is very complex and also leads to very high demands on data and to a lot of activity focusing on monitoring rather than delivering teaching. This is work carried out not just by administrative staff but by senior college managers. Extremely detailed curriculum delivery plans must be made every year by course, hours, start dates and end dates with close regard to the funding mechanism to ensure adequate funding.

A more broad brush funding approach would relieve some of this work and allow resources to be focused on learners. In terms of audit, we need to move quickly to a system whereby every penny could be accounted for rather than every penny is accounted for. Random sampling and spot checks could be used to maintain probity and accountability.

**Simplify grant structures:** The need to simplify the current grant structure and above all ensure efficient administration to enable schools to know what resources they have in sufficient time to determine staffing complement would be

a huge step forward. Currently the way to apply for grants is extremely bureaucratic and takes up a huge amount of time for staff in schools. A recent consultation with members has illustrated that there is uncertainty on whether the Small Schools Grants is still available. The grant from Bwrdd yr Iaith for the immersion course, which enables pupils from English-medium primaries to access Welsh-medium secondary education was cut this year from £16,000 to £9,000, with the intention of stopping it altogether next year. Members also reported that the Better Schools Fund was cut this year by 33%.

As much as members across Wales would welcome the abandonment of grants altogether– they are wholly unpredictable as regards size, timing, duration, and indeed their very existence, which makes it hard to assess what levels of staffing schools can afford – were they simply to be discontinued the implications for budgets, and therefore of staffing, could be major.

However, if grants are to be mainstreamed into the capital and revenue streams for education the WAG will need to ensure that these are used as such by Local Authorities. We noted with concern but no surprise the tacit admittance by the WLGA that its members frequently cream off expenditure destined for education to support other services. A predictably anonymous source said: ‘The problem is that if school funding is ring-fenced, the level of cuts that local authorities would have to impose in other areas would be so great that no-one could accurately predict the consequences. It could result in the meltdown of other local services’<sup>1</sup>.

Therefore the Minister should give serious consideration to ring-fencing some if not all of the education budget passported to Local Authorities.

**Prioritise the policy portfolio:** The call to prioritise the policy portfolio is long overdue. With diminishing resources, the Assembly Government must decide what is really important and be prepared to kill some sacred political cows if necessary. If the number of WAG initiatives were drastically reduced then schools would be able to effectively concentrate on the delivery of initiatives.

From consultation with members, concerns and issues have been raised about the following priority areas:

- One Wales laptop scheme - This is a good idea in theory but is poorly funded which has majorly diluted its impact.
- EMA - This is divisive because it is means tested. The cost of administering the scheme is significant.

## **Key theme 2: Standardise and Share Provision**

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.walesonline.co.uk/news/wales-news/2010/08/20/fear-that-education-spending-vow-will-destroy-other-council-services-91466-27100063/>

**Standardise and share support with regional consortia:** We agree that the 22 LAs in Wales need to work together to share provision and reduce overhead costs. We also agree with the Minister's recent comments on a BBC interview (14<sup>th</sup> August 2010) that a debate needs to begin on the role of LAs in education in Wales. ATL has long called for the reduction in the number of Local Authorities. While we accept that full scale reorganisation is unacceptable at present we believe the current number of administrative bodies for education in Wales operating autonomously is unacceptable. We believe that more collaborative working and shared services are necessary. Clusterings would be ideal and ensure that more money goes to the front line rather than back office functions. This builds on the Beecham agenda for joined up government and would result in better quality services, greater efficiency, and financial savings. We believe that strategic planning on the part of Local Authorities could ensure that job losses result from natural wastage and that each of the 22 takes on functions for others in its cluster.

**Integrate local authority services, local authority and further education non-education support functions by geography:** We agree that common delivery of services is necessary for cost effective provision.

Clustering backroom services will not just free up money for the front line, it could also improve their quality and efficiency- more HR professionals with extensive knowledge of the education sector would be particularly welcome.

Members have identified many services they believe could be best delivered locally by a LA; behavioural support/ inclusion/ AEN/ educational psychologists; link officer support for school and school transport (detailed local knowledge important).

Members believed that services best delivered on a consortium basis would be curriculum support, payroll, legal services, governor training ( this already works well in NE Wales), admissions, delivery of the Transformation Agenda and curriculum development at large, SEF, leadership development and training, ICT support, purchasing. These lists are not exhaustive.

**Schools collaborate to deliver better support:** This is already occurring in many areas as a result of the Transformation Agenda and the current approach to schools federation as the report has highlighted.

### **Trust across the system - Inspection**

Audit requirements are onerous as we have previously noted. Inspections appear to terrify all educational organisations and cause an immense amount of work and resources. While we recognise the importance of quality, a more supportive regime without such a potential cost for perceived lack of quality could allow resources to be focused on the learner rather than preparation for inspection.

ATL fully endorses and understand the hypotheses for shifting costs and protecting services and believe them to be relevant and positive. A shift in cost is possible and should be pushed to ensure that more money is given to the front line delivery of services where they can make the most impact. This would be extremely welcome from teachers, heads, support staff and practitioners who all want to see more money coming directly into schools. The need for trust is imperative, with the WAG willing and able to adhere to the wishes of the profession.

The issue of surplus places should also be a key priority for WAG. The whole process needs to be speeded up and supported by the Welsh Assembly Government. We agree with the Minister that it is 'bonkers' for schools to be kept open with no pupils but we are firmly of the opinion that some responsibility for this lunacy lies with the WAG's refusal to lay down clear guidelines about minima. We believe these are developable based on sound pedagogical reasons as well as financial ones. Leadership is required from politicians at the national level to expose the fallacies associated with very small schools but also their drain on the system as a whole.

### **Teacher training**

ATL Cymru is concerned about the current level of supply and demand for training teachers in Wales. We have noted recent Liberal Democrat claims that between 2004/05 and 2007/08 Wales trained an excess of almost 3,000 teachers at a cost of more than £22million pounds. We urge the WAG to scrutinise this data further to see if significant savings can be made in this area. We are also concerned about the human tragedy that lies behind these statistics and are aware of many young, newly qualified teachers who are unable to find employment in Wales.

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