



**Towards an independent
general teaching council
- a consultation on the
future status of the gtcs**

**ATL's response to the
Scottish Government's
consultation document**

26 June 2009

ATL – the education union

The Association of Teachers and Lecturers (ATL), as a leading education union, recognise the link between education policy and our members' conditions of employment. Our evidence-based policy making enables us to campaign and negotiate from a position of strength. We champion good practice and achieve better working lives for our members. We help our members, as their careers develop, through first-rate research, advice, information and legal support. Our 160,000 members – teachers, lecturers, headteachers, support staff and students – are empowered to get active locally and nationally.

ATL is affiliated to the Trades Union Congress (TUC), Irish Congress of Trade Unions (ICTU), European Trade Union Committee for Education (ETUCE) and Education International (EI). The union is a member of the Social Partnership – working with the UK Government, employers and other unions on education issues. ATL is not affiliated to any political party and seeks to work constructively with all the main political parties.

Consultation Questions

Chapter 2: Functions of an independent General Teaching Council for Scotland

Section 2.2 – Responsibility for the Teaching Standards

Q1: Would it be appropriate for the GTCS to be given a more explicit responsibility in relation to the standards?

ATL believes in the concept of 'teacher professionalism' and is supportive of the suggestion to give the GTCS a more defined role in relation to the standards. Questions do arise as to who would have the final say if there was disagreement on the future direction of the standards or introduction of new standards. We would welcome further detail on how this would be resolved.

Section 2.3 – Entry Requirements to and Approval of Courses of Initial Teacher Education

Q2: Should the GTCS assume responsibility for setting entry requirements to Courses of Initial Teacher Education?

It is a logical extension of granting independence to the GTCS for it to assume responsibility for setting entry requirements to courses of Initial Teacher Education.

Q3: Should the GTCS assume responsibility for the approval of initial teacher education courses?

Yes. It is again a logical extension of granting independence to the GTCS for it to assume responsibility for the approval of initial teacher education courses. If the status quo were to be retained after granting of independence then the question of powers of intervention from the Scottish Government would have to be examined.

Section 2.4 – Continuing Professional Development Entry

Q4: Do you think the GTCS should expand its role to into CPD? If so, what do you think this role should consist of?

ATL strongly believes in the concept of teacher professionalism and in our submission to the consultation on setting up the General Teaching Council for England we supported the concept of the new body having responsibility for teachers' CPD. We believe, however, there should be depth and diversity of CPD provision and would not envisage the GTCS becoming a provider of nor the sole arbiter of teachers' CPD.

It could be argued that the logical conclusion to teacher professionalism is a professional re-accreditation scheme. We believe however that neither the timing nor the environment is right for such a scheme to be introduced. Teachers are already engaged in dealing with the successful introduction of Curriculum for Excellence and the proposed new national qualifications. If the new Council wished to examine this matter further then we would expect that all stakeholders were active partners in a consultation process before further action is taken.

Chapter 3: Governance of an independent General Teaching Council for Scotland

Section 3.2 – Size of Council

Q5: What do you think is the most appropriate size for an independent Council?

Good governance would suggest that an independent Council should be smaller in size than currently, however ATL recognises the pressures presently on Council members to fulfil their duties. Whilst a suitable reduction in Council membership may be a longer-term ambition for a future Council to consult upon we have no desire for the new Council to be hamstrung when it takes up its role.

The Scottish Funding Council, with a Council composition of 16, makes good use of an appointments system to fill places on its Committees. The new Council may wish to augment its membership with an appointments system to the Committee positions. If such a position were to be adopted then it is important that the principle of a majority of elected teachers on each Committee is retained, with an appropriate balance between teachers and Headteachers.

Section 3.3 – Composition of Council

Q6: How best can we ensure that the public interest is well represented on an independent Council? In answering this questions stakeholders may wish to consider factors such as the composition, appointments process and definition of lay member which could all play a role in ensuring the public interest is well represented.

A number of reserved places could be made within the composition of the new Council to ensure public interest is well represented. In addition a definition of a lay-person akin to that used by the General Medical Council and Nursing and Midwifery Council would ensure an appropriate balance on the new Council.

Q7: In terms of models the independent Council could adopt, do you prefer Model 1 or Model 2, a variant of either model, the status quo, or something completely different?

The democratic election of teachers onto their respective GTC's across the UK is an important principle for ATL. We would not wish to see the adoption of any model which reduced the amount and/or ratio of elected teachers onto a new independent Council. In that respect our preference would be for Model 1.

Q8: In considering the composition of the current Council, do you think that there are groups missing from whose input the Council would benefit?

The consultation document has highlighted the groups such as the Scottish Qualifications Authority who are not currently members of the Council. A balance needs to be struck between the purpose and size of the new Council (strategic v operational) and its ability to be all-inclusive when considering its composition. The new Council may wish to investigate whether the dynamic with such groups would be better served through a *Memorandum of Understanding*.

Section 3.4 – Other relevant issues

Q9: Do you have any comments relating to the issues raised in this section?

ATL supports the proposals contained within paragraphs 65-68 namely:

- the GTCS continues to be accountable to the Scottish Parliament
- the GTCS submits its Annual Report, Strategic Plan and Diversity Action Plan to the Scottish Parliament, as well as attend Committees of the Scottish Parliament as required
- the GTCS should have control over its finances when it becomes independent
- the GTCS should have flexibility to set detailed criteria for the removal of individuals from Council.

Q10: Do you believe the length of time individuals should be allowed to serve on Council should be capped?

Yes, in order to allow the opportunity for new people and fresh thinking to be introduced to the Council. We believe an appropriate term limit would be two terms on Council. A process of rolling elections should occur within the first cycle of the new Council to avoid the potential, however unlikely, that all or the majority of Council would be required to step down after the first two terms of an independent Council. This may mean some members only serving for an initial two years however this may appeal to current long-serving Council members who would be keen to aid the successful transition to an independent GTCS but may not wish to serve a further four year full-term.

Space for additional comments

Space for any additional comments that respondents would like to make about the future of the GTCS

ATL is aware that the GTCS has been talking to SCIS over the expectation of registration within the independent sector. Our general views on a professional re-accreditation scheme are given in Question 4. With specific regard to the independent sector feedback from members attempting to register with the Council has been of a bureaucratic and restrictive scheme which does not take into account teachers' experience in their chosen subject. We would wish there to be a wider consultation if the GTCS were to progress with proposals for the registration of teachers in the independent sector.

**This submission was prepared on behalf of
ATL Scotland
CBC House
24 Canning Street
Edinburgh, EH3 8EG**