

ASSOCIATION OF TEACHERS AND LECTURERS

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DfE consultation on Financial Support for 16 to 19 year olds in Education or Training

Submission from the Association of Teachers and Lecturers

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ATL, the education union, is an independent, registered trade union and professional association, representing approximately 160,000 teachers, head teachers, lecturers and support staff in maintained and independent nurseries, schools, sixth form, tertiary and further education colleges in the United Kingdom. AMiE is the trade union and professional association for leaders and managers in colleges and schools, and is a distinct section of ATL. We recognise the link between education policy and members' conditions of service.

ATL exists to help members, as their careers develop, through first rate research, advice, information and legal advice. Our evidence-based policy making enables us to campaign and negotiate 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). ATL is not affiliated to any political party and seeks to work constructively with all the main political parties.

ATL policy

ATL believes that teachers as professionals must be recognised for their knowledge, expertise and judgement, at the level of the individual pupil and in articulating the role of education in increasing social justice. Within light national parameters, development of the education system should take place at a local level: the curriculum should be developed in partnership with local stakeholders; assessment should be carried out through local professional networks. Schools and colleges are increasingly encouraged to work collaboratively to offer excellent teaching and learning, and to support pupils' well-being, across a local area. Accountability mechanisms should be developed so that there is a proper balance of accountability to national government and the local community, which supports collaboration rather than competition.

Question 1

Do you think we have identified the right groups of young people to be eligible for the £1,200 bursary?

The groups referred to are appropriately identified. In addition, young asylum seekers should be included.

It would be helpful to see consistency in the way in which the age range to which the bursary applies is described. The heading in the consultation document and in the information provided for learners by the Department and YPLA refers to 16 to 19. This creates the impression to young people that the entitlement continues for learners aged 19. The detail in the

consultation document refers specifically to care leavers and young people aged 16, 17 and 18. This suggests that it would be clear if the scheme was described as a 16 to 18 Bursary.

However, we are concerned at the cut off age of 19 for young learners. It would be appropriate to make arrangements so that learners in the identified categories who are entitled to a guaranteed bursary between the ages of 16 and 19 should continue to be eligible for the same bursary until they have completed a programme of study. Many young people from disadvantaged backgrounds will be starting a foundation level or level two programme at the age of 16 and may, therefore, take longer to reach a level three qualification. Young people in the identified groups should be entitled to this support until they reach that qualification level. In some cases this would mean providing support until the ages of 20 or 21.

Allocations in most schools, colleges and training providers are likely to be made at the start of the year. This has the potential to put learners who start a programme later in the year at a disadvantage if all funds have been allocated. However, as the £1,200 Bursary for these groups of learners is presented in the consultation document as an entitlement which the Department expects to be paid, it may put the school, college or training provider at a disadvantage if it has allocated all funds and is subsequently required to make further payments. If this element of the Bursary is in reality an entitlement, the costs should be met in full by the YPLA.

We would like to see clarification of the way that the guaranteed bursary will be treated in relation to the assessment of income support payments. It would be helpful to see a clear written statement to the effect that the payment will not be taken into account in the assessment of income support and that it will, therefore, be an additional source of income for income support recipients.

Question 2

Do you think these are the right underpinning principles for the way the Fund should operate?

It is disappointing that the consultation is taking place without the 'short, focussed guidance' referred to in paragraph 3.5 being available. In effect we are being asked to comment on the proposed Bursary when the detail of the scheme is not available.

The first of the three principles outlined, that support should be targeted to those young people facing the greatest financial barriers to participation will be difficult to implement in practice. With significant local autonomy at school, college or training provider level, it is difficult to avoid the risk that there will be major variations between organisations in relation to the financial thresholds that are used to determine eligibility and entitlement levels at which the Bursary will be paid. It is almost inevitable that this will lead to a kind of post-code lottery that will see many learners disadvantaged and may deter some young people from remaining in education.

Do you agree that schools and colleges should have discretion in these areas? See question 3 in the response form.

It is appropriate for schools colleges and training providers to have discretion in these areas but there should be nationally agreed limits on that discretion to ensure that there is an element of fairness in the application of the scheme.

Are our proposals for transitional support the right ones for young people currently in receipt of EMA?

No

Having conceded that it is appropriate to continue to support learners currently in support of EMA it would be more appropriate to devise a transitional protection scheme that treated all current EMA recipients in the same way and with the same level of support as that currently enjoyed.

There is also a lack of clarity about how the Bursary will be funded in subsequent years. Schools, colleges and training providers need to have a clear understanding of the amount of money that will transfer from the transitional protection funds into the main Bursary scheme once transitional protection has been phased out.

Do you agree that the fund should be allocated in 2011/12 on the basis of the proportion of young people currently in receipt of the maximum weekly EMA payment?

Yes – in part. Use of current data on EMAs is a reasonable basis for making allocations in the first year of the new scheme. However, these data cannot reflect need in relation to the guaranteed bursary for looked after children and others in the greatest need. This element of the Bursary should be funded centrally or run as a national scheme

Additional comments

It would be helpful to have the guidance that is proposed as soon as possible after the close of the consultation. It might be appropriate to publish that in draft and to invite comments.

Schools, colleges and training providers will have a significant amount of work to do to ensure that the Bursary is running smoothly in time for starting in September at a time when budgets are constrained. The YPLA should provide an additional payment to cover these set-up costs.

It would be helpful if the Department could work with BIS and the SFA to ensure that any changes to discretionary learner support funds and the Adult Learning Grant are aligned with the Bursary scheme so that effective planning can be undertaken in time for a smooth transition.