

ASSOCIATION OF TEACHERS AND LECTURERS

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***Consultation on the DCSF's '2020 Children and
Young People's Workforce Strategy'***
Response from the Association of Teachers and Lecturers
10 March 2009

ATL, as a leading education union, recognises 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 and support staff – are empowered to get active locally and nationally. We are affiliated to the TUC, and work with government and employers by lobbying and through social partnership.

ATL Policy

ATL's education policy is underpinned by the professionalism of teachers. Teachers should be recognised for their knowledge, expertise and judgement, at the level of the individual pupil and in articulating the role of education in promoting social justice. Development of the education system should take place at a local level: the curriculum should be developed in partnership with local stakeholders and assessment should be carried out through local professional networks. Schools should work collaboratively to provide excellent teaching and learning with a broad and balanced curriculum, and to support pupils' well-being, across a local area. This means that mechanisms must be developed that ensure a proper balance of accountability to national government and the local community, and which supports collaboration rather than competition.

ATL response

ATL members in schools and colleges increasingly work in partnership with other agencies, as part of an overall children and young people's workforce, to meet the needs of their pupils. We welcome this document's addressing of the issues and needs inherent in joint-working from vision to issues of professional development, common procedures and leadership. This is a comprehensive vision of the workforce and it is useful that it is issued in tandem with the *21st century schools* consultation. However, as with the latter consultation, there are aspects of the current system and its impact for which this workforce strategy does not account and which undermine its intentions, particularly around the accountability framework. This consultation is also somewhat limited

by the need for more detail in some of its proposals and we hope that there will be further consultation on key elements, once that detail is available.

Workforce vision

ATL welcomes, supports and is committed to the Strategy's four-point vision that all within the children and young people's workforce are:

- Ambitious for every child and young person;
- Excellent in their practice;
- Committed to partnership and integrated working; and,
- Respected and valued as professionals.

We particularly appreciate the *Every Child Matters*-inspired ambition for each child and young person to "develop as healthy and safe, independent, learners, thinkers and members of society". However, as we state in our response to the *21st century schools* consultation, the current assessment and accountability systems encourage risk-averse, test-focused teaching in schools alongside shallow and often unsustainable learning and the disengagement of many children and young people from an increasingly narrowed and arid curriculum. In this context, it will be very challenging and counter to the current prevailing culture for the schools and colleges-based workforce to fulfil this aim.

The emphasis on excellence in practice is one which ATL endorses, particularly in its focus on evidence driving professional practice in order to make a difference to children and young people, on reflection and commitment to continuing development and improvement. However, as in the first aim, there is a failure to recognise systemic barriers to the realisation of this vision. For example, there is a wealth of evidence regarding the negative impact of the current regime of national curriculum testing and of the positive impact of strategies such as Assessment for Learning (AfL). However, teachers do not have the freedom to change their assessment practice sufficiently as they must work within a system which sees frequent high-stakes testing for children and young people and the placing of schools on league tables based on narrow academic results.

Review and reflection may be pointless in an environment where the teacher is or feels powerless to innovate, where decisions and changes are always imposed from above.

ATL members are strongly committed to partnership and our response to this strategy is informed by a strong desire for better integrated working systems to fulfil the *Every Child Matters* agenda. ATL's policies on teacher professionalism, curriculum, assessment and accountability reform and sustainable education are driven by the vision of education staff having the "professional empowerment to make a difference", and that their professional judgement, commitment and contribution are respected and valued.

Recognising the challenges, current and future

ATL members have, through responses to consultations on SEN, Children's Trusts and others, made their concerns about the current challenges in achieving successful multi-agency partnerships very clear. We are

pleased that this workforce strategy document recognises all of these challenges, informed by the Expert Group. Member feedback has consistently reported a patchiness in service provision around the country, with some areas reporting partnership working of a good standard whilst others report weak partnerships, breakdowns in communication and high turnover of staff, making the building of important cross-professional relationships more challenging. Therefore, our members concur with the weaknesses identified in the strategy: that there are vacancies in many areas and professions; inconsistent quality of initial training; low status of some professional groups; lack of clarity of purpose; lack of clarity around the allocation of responsibilities at local level; and, the difficulty of negotiating through the different professions' approaches to professional regulation, qualifications and skills.

We hope that the new National Partnership for the Children and Young People's Workforce will be able to take on these challenges and we welcome its focus on using evidence to support most effective implementation of the government's workforce vision. It is vital that the school workforce is represented on this Partnership. It is interesting that this new body is being formed alongside the proposed review of the role of key workforce organisations such as the National College for School Leadership (NCSL), Training and Development Agency (TDA), Children's Workforce Development Council (CWDC) and the National Academy for Parenting Practitioners (NAPP) and we hope that the emphasis will be on role clarity, the avoidance of duplication and a simplification of the infrastructure supporting multi-agency integrated working. We welcome the DCSF proposed establishment of a knowledge bank for the children and young people's (CYP) workforce and its informing by practitioners across the services as well as evidence from the new Centre for Excellence and Outcomes in Children and Young People's Services.

However, ATL must stress again that the continued emphasis on outcomes is not unproblematic, particularly bearing in mind the negative impact of narrow target-based academic outcomes on the broader *Every Child Matters*-based outcomes which inform this integrated vision. Schools particularly suffer from this contradiction as they are held accountable under both strands with no governmental policy recognition of the contradictions inherent within these policy agendas.

Procedures

It is vital that drive, vision and support for integrated working of children and young people's services is strong at local level and we welcome the strengthening of Children's Trusts as statutory bodies acting as pivotal agents to translate this strategy into local implementation programmes for deployment and development of the local workforce, through the publishing of the local Children and Young People's Plan. We continue to be concerned about the relationship between Children's Trusts and schools and colleges. As key agents of local workforce reform, the commissioning of local services and of training, we are concerned that the Trusts will have sufficient resources to deliver this programme and that their partnerships with CWDC, NCSL and TDA avoid overlapping of responsibilities and undue complexity whilst mutually benefitting from shared local and national perspectives. We are also concerned to learn

the impact of the Trusts' work and of these partnerships on the school and college workforces and the implications for accountability.

The strategy's aim to cut down on overlap, excessive bureaucracy and to clarify roles is very welcome. Our members particularly appreciate the proposal that the CWDC review tools of integrated working such as guidance around information sharing, the lead professional role and the Common Assessment Framework and we hope that the voice of practitioners from across the services will feed into the review.

The Strategy also proposes better data collection across the children and young people's workforce in order to gauge capacity. Whilst we welcome a more coherent approach to workforce support and capacity which we know from member evidence about high levels of vacancies across the services to be urgently required, we urge that the data is meaningful and also that its collection does not prove to be an onerous task on practitioners whose primary focus should be the education and well-being of children and young people and who already bear significant workloads.

Difficulty in communicating across services has been raised as an issue by members in relation to multi-agency working. We therefore welcome the proposed development of an integrated communications strategy. ATL will provide feedback locally and nationally, once the system is in place, on whether it helps education staff to more easily access relevant information, evidence and guidance and to talk with the 'right' professionals in other sectors, when necessary.

Professional development

The Strategy proposes a central role for Children's Trusts in commissioning relevant training across the local workforce. Whilst we support the principle, we await its implementation with some concern, partly around sufficiency of resources and also around the continuing element of central imposition this has on teacher continuing professional development (CPD). ATL believes that teaching has to be a learning and innovating profession, and that the government's role should be to recognise and optimise the spread of good practice arising from classrooms. Local communities of teachers must be equipped to reflect on their practice, and to try out new ways of improving learning. Managerialism in general is a barrier to reflection, and a managerialist organisation of CPD will prevent it. While the government and the school should each have a say in the individual teacher's further learning, particularly if they are funding it, the individual teacher should have a major say. Yet the role of the Children's Trust adds yet another layer of managerialism and it may be that teachers will have increasingly little say or influence around the CPD to which they have access.

However, we welcome the alignment of across-the-sectors' standards with the Common Core of Knowledge and Skills as an important link in the integration of services and establishment of shared understandings, knowledge and values. From the education sector's point of view, the links with teachers' professional standards and the GTCE Code needs to be made more explicit.

Multi-agency working has created particular demands at leadership levels and we welcome the Strategy's proposals for shared leadership programmes and a stronger role for NCSL in development and delivery of

programmes across the children and young people's workforce leadership. While supporting the principles, we are concerned to have more detail of the proposed programmes. We note the document's statement of encouragement for "mobility between sectors" and would like to explore the levels of mobility envisaged, ie for what periods of time, at which professional levels, how will this be managed and so on. The proposed "talent management programmes" also needs fleshing out before we can provide proper feedback. We want to be clear that whilst there is a role in schools for non-QTS members of the school leadership team, we strongly believe that the headteacher role should only be filled by professionals with QTS. The issue of mobility must also be taken in the context of the role of the school; we caution against a blurring of boundaries between the school as a place of education and its entity as an 'extended school' in terms of the professionals working there; opportunities for mobility and information sharing must support rather than undermine the concept of the right professionals doing the right jobs.

We are pleased to see that this shared professional development is to be supported at national partnership level and we welcome the role of the TDA working in partnership with the CWDC on integrated recruitment and the exploration of joint induction programmes. Teachers already face an extensive programme of induction when newly qualified and we therefore caution against an overloading of the existing programme and that any shared induction requirements must take into account existing statutory induction arrangements for NQTs.

We await with interest to see the detail of the Integrated Qualifications Framework (IQF) and how it will fit the professional roles together and thus facilitate mobility and shared professional learning across the sectors.

We welcome the focus on the Early Years workforce, and for the provision of a range of professional development programmes such as Communications, Language and Literacy Development and Every Child a Talker. However, while we welcome the emphasis on graduate leading settings, we must re-emphasise the importance of professionals with QTS working directly with children in early years settings. Evidence shows that graduates, particularly with QTS, working with children and not just leading the settings, offer the best support for children's learning. We believe that exploration is needed of the training of teachers for the early years foundation stage (ie from birth to five, rather than 3-5). We also believe that further exploration of the relative roles of Early Years Professional and qualified teacher would be helpful.

ATL is, of course, particularly concerned with the elements of the Strategy relating to teachers and support staff. We welcome the document's recognition of the challenges in recruiting and retaining staff yet we are concerned that the strategy does not propose a deeper analysis of the causes of these problems, particularly as the factors often lie beyond the control of schools. This leads to quick-fix solutions such as 'golden handcuffs' and 'Fast track into teaching', rather than long term solutions. We have already highlighted issues around the lack of teacher autonomy and we know that many teachers leave out of frustration with the lack of power they have to make a real difference in the lives of their pupils, constrained in teaching and assessment by national systems. They have

to deal with the impact of a system which does not engage learners with an over-emphasis on testing and which makes many feel like failures, seriously impeding the opportunity for teachers to build relationships built on learning. The impact of such disengagement is alienation and challenging behaviours in the classroom, which in turn leads many teachers to leave the profession. The relevant agencies also need to look at recruitment issues relating to support staff particularly as their roles are becoming increasingly central to education in schools. As part of this, we call for an emphasis, in the development of a recruitment strategy in education, on the roles carried out by education support staff, to raise their profile and to develop their status within the education workforce, making these roles more attractive to those who wish to work in education.

However, we welcome the Strategy's recognition of the need for professional reflection and collaboration to support teacher CPD and their identification of school clusters as an effective support for such activity. We need more detail about the support which government is to offer these clusters, particularly in areas where schools may face long distances and related transport issues in building close collaborative relationships, as in many rural areas. We also need to make sure to build on existing structures; there is already a range of partnerships with which schools engage, and CPD partnerships should build on those rather than become a separate entity. If teachers are to reflect on professional practice, the government will need to allow them the professional autonomy to innovate and to build on that review and on the other hand, to encourage schools to collaborate, they will need to urgently review the current choice and accountability system which emphasises competition rather than co-operation, epitomised by the league tables.

We welcome the aim to offer a Masters-level programme to teachers but challenge the intention to offer it to those new entrants to the profession, within their first five years. This neither recognises the already-high pressures facing new teachers in terms of their professional learning and the building of their confidence and skills in the classroom nor the need to emphasise continuing professional development and professional reflection at all stages of career.

ATL has long supported its support staff members and we welcome the establishment of the School Support Staff Negotiating Body to develop a pay and conditions framework and to build a more systematic approach to professional development for support staff. We await the detail of the IQF to see how the support staff development routes fit within the framework and we also urge with an approach to professional qualification and development across the education workforce, including teachers, which recognises the range of skills and experience within the overall workforce. For example, we welcome the emphasis on increased support and information around employment-based routes to teaching for mature and second-career entrants and we call for similar flexibility, as well as rigour, to routes for support staff whose current roles will shortly need them to have QTS, such as SENCOs. We urge TDA and local providers to recognise the wealth of expertise and experience amongst many in this role through the formers' guidance to providers and through the latter's flexibility of programme provision.

ATL shares the aim that the further education workforce by 2012 will be fully trained and engaged in training, which will require the capacity building of FE institutions which this document outlines. We welcome the recognition by the FE Workforce Strategy of the importance of the sector, and of the FE workforce as a catalyst of change. However, we believe that this professional recognition through the strategy must be met with pay levels and terms of employment for FE lecturers being brought up to those enjoyed and earned by school teachers. ATL campaigns for a training and qualifications structure that both produces a quality workforce and also justifies pay parity.

We welcome the development of Principal professional qualifications. However, our members believe that there should be parity of esteem between QTS and QLS. We advocate starting with an accepted standard for mainstream education with the building of specialist units for primary, secondary, further and higher professional qualifications. Setting up a twin-track of QLS and QTS perpetuates the divisive split between teachers in schools and lecturers in FE. This division downplays the status of FE lecturers and is an obstacle to the professionalisation of the workforce. ATL agrees with the aims underpinning the FE Workforce Strategy, but we need to see much more detail if we are to offer more than qualified support. We welcome the opportunity to respond to an ambitious and significant Strategy that could enable the FE sector to play the leading role in making the UK a world class skills economy. We look forward to working closely with LLUK, and other stakeholders, in order to improve the professional status of staff, the effectiveness of learning, the engagement of employers, and the raising of skill levels for learners in the Further Education sector.

Conclusion

The issue of professional accountability is missing from this consultation document. Yet the confused development of accountability is a key hindrance in the realisation of many of this strategy's child-centred aims and in the achievement of meaningful partnership working. We fully support the vision but we once again urge the government to take a wider view of the education system and to recognise the impact of its different agendas on each other. The emphasis on accountability at the level of the individual school, parental choice and school competition undercuts the collaboration on which government hopes to build teacher professional development; the emphasis on a narrow standards and targets-focused education system undercuts teacher professionalism, *Every Child Matters* outcomes and learning from professional reflective practice.

We agree with the Strategy's focus that children's well-being is best promoted within a local area, rather than by individual schools working in a competitive education system. We recognise that schools have a vital role to play, but we also know that they are in need of a wide range of support in order to focus on their core priorities of teaching and learning. We would like to see a better balance of accountability within the system to reflect the area-wide responsibility to promote pupil well-being and that bodies such as the Children's Trusts will play a strong role in ensuring that schools, and other services, get the support they need to ensure that every child and young person achieves the aims at the core of *Every Child Matters*.