

ASSOCIATION OF TEACHERS AND LECTURERS

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CWDC Consultation on the Common Core of Skills and Knowledge Response from the Association of Teachers and Lecturers, October 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.

Introduction

ATL's members include professionals across the education workforce and we therefore welcome the opportunity to respond to this consultation. In recognition of the inclusion of the Common Core of Skills and Knowledge for the children and young people's workforce in the 2020 Children and Young People's Workforce Strategy, it is important that all members of the children's workforce have an opportunity to feed into any revisions of the Common Core. However, our response must also reflect the current lack of explicit knowledge of the Common Core across the education workforce. Many would recognise the skills and knowledge identified in the Common Core, as these are also reflected in teachers' professional standards and the National Occupational Standards (NOS) for support staff. However, far fewer have knowledge of the Common Core as a separate vision and document and this undermines its status as a source of shared, 'common', cross-sector and cross-professional standards.

Knowledge of the Common Core

The majority of members that we surveyed on this have not heard of the Common Core explicitly. Therefore, few also have any awareness of having used it. However, the six key areas of the Common Core, i) effective communication and engagement with children, young people and families, ii) child and young person development, iii) safeguarding and promoting the welfare of the child, iv) supporting transitions, v) multi-agency working, and vi) sharing information, are deeply embedded within existing professional standards for teachers and support staff and in working practices across the education sector. Therefore, although the lack of knowledge of the Common Core explicitly is a cause for disquiet, we can be reassured that the skills and knowledge identified within it are recognised through other documentation and practices within the education workforce. However, ATL is concerned that ignorance of the Common Core means that the shared expectations that it embodies across the children and young people's workforce are not in place, undermining communication and role clarity. We believe that some of this is due to the nature of the Common Core itself and we address this in the next section.

The Common Core

We appreciate the need for a vision of the skills and knowledge required by the children and young people's workforce but perhaps part of the reason that the document is little recognised across the workforce sectors is that it details shared workforce skills and knowledge without any attempt to signpost when particular sections of the workforce will take the lead responsibility. Each sector, education, health, social welfare, police, will have particular strengths and priorities and will each play lead roles in different circumstances relating to the welfare of children and young people. This Common Core, while detailing particular shared skills and knowledge expectations across the sectors, would become far more meaningful to the related professional structures if it identified where individual professional roles would take the lead; there needs to be some sense of role recognition including appropriate role boundaries. While the principle behind the current Common Core is laudable, it has resulted in a framework of skills and knowledge which is little used across many of the professional sectors to which it is meant to apply, including the education sector.

The Common Core Consultation

As we stated at the beginning of our response, the majority of members who replied to our survey on the Common Core, many of whom are on senior leadership teams, have not heard of it explicitly. Members who are aware of the Common Core have encountered through a variety of means; inset training, ATL, working with other services, media, leadership fora, email updates, TES, Every Child Matters website, the headteacher and academic study. Some have heard of it through non-professional avenues, through fostering for example.

Members who have heard of it have used it for induction processes, appraisal and the development of job roles. This demonstrates that where there is knowledge of the Common Core as a set of knowledge and skills, they can be used within the professional contexts for which they were designed. Perhaps, considering the lack of knowledge of the Common Core across the education workforce, it is not surprising that it is not used at the moment to any great extent in in-house training programmes or briefing events and this is an area where promotion of a refreshed Core could be focused.

ATL respondents particularly favour the option of a dedicated website with supporting materials as being most helpful to them in building the refreshed Common Core into their work. Such a medium could include interactive fora, question and answer sections and case studies, all helpful with the issue of appropriate interpretation and use of the Common Core in specific circumstances and professional contexts. Other members believe that having the Common Core as part of initial training would be helpful while others, on a similar training theme, suggest the basing of accredited qualifications on the refreshed Common Core, something that will be realised if it is embedded, as outlined in the 2020 Children and Young People's Workforce Strategy, as part of the Integrated Qualifications Framework. These would be very effective at reaching those either new to the education profession or to those taking accredited qualifications but it does leave a gap for others in the workforce which current EPD and CPD models would need to address.

Our members feel that a multi-pronged approach is required to ensure that the Common Core is used across the children's workforce. Many feel that a key activity is the promotion of the Common Core to managers, and to professionals and practitioners; certainly, the lack of current knowledge in many of the sectors, and across all levels, endorse the view that this promotion is highly needed. As with the question of building the Common Core into their own work, our members feel that making it useful across the children's workforce requires a structural response; the use of the Common Core in the development of job roles and descriptions, and its inclusion in initial training. This would embed it within relevant professional structures.

Reflecting our earlier expressed concern about the need for some kind of professional delineation within the Common Core, our members believe that a useful revision of the Common Core would be to have different levels of the core skills and knowledge related to different job and role responsibilities, making it far more usable at the level of job descriptions, induction, appraisal and professional support.

Conclusion

Despite the lack of explicit knowledge of the Common Core which our own member surveys revealed, ATL is not surprised that the Expert Group did not identify the education sector as being of concern in terms of the extent to which the Common Core is embedded in practice. After all, working with children and young people is the business of education and the knowledge and skills identified in the Common Core are not dissimilar to those already embedded in teachers' and support staff's professional standards. The Every Child Matters agenda is also a significant part of those professional standards. However, the Common Core was developed from an identified need to align professional standards across the children's workforce and its lack of efficacy is particularly troubling therefore, especially as we move increasingly towards multi-agency working. Any refreshing of the Common Core needs to ask fundamental questions about that across-sector working, which, we know from member feedback, is often lacking in terms of communication structures, role boundaries, and delineation of lead responsibilities. It is not enough to ensure its greater use; we need to examine perhaps why it is currently so little used as a particular document and vision.