

## ASSOCIATION OF TEACHERS AND LECTURERS

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### *Consultation on impartial careers education – statutory guidance*

#### *Response from the Association of Teachers and Lecturers (ATL)*

*Date: 30 July 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 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.

#### **ATL response**

ATL is in agreement that information, advice and guidance (IAG) for young people needs to be impartial and welcomes the attempt to formulate statutory guidance to this effect. Careers education that supports participation in learning and raises aspiration can be of benefit to individual young people and society as a whole, as well as a school and its workforce.

Our members are concerned that, amidst 14-19 reform, the number of NEETs (those not in education, employment or training) is rising whilst demand for unskilled labour is set to fall in the next ten years. Statutory guidance on impartial careers education, with the right emphases and the resources and professional development to back it up, can play a part in ensuring young people are equipped with the information, ideas,

resources and ambition to make the right choices, enjoy a stimulating education, contribute to society and progress into the world of work. That the Government intends to make access to high-quality careers education and IAG a plank of the pupil guarantee highlights the importance of getting this statutory guidance right.

ATL acknowledges the importance of the partnership between schools and parents/guardians and encourages thought around the roles of staff, parents/guardians and students. Decision-making about learning and work is an area in which these roles are significant. Though the introduction to the statutory guidance highlights the most effective schools as actively engaging with parents/carers, there is little reference to the relationship within the stated principles.

This response challenges the overall success of the principles of impartial careers education – notably the lack of emphasis on impartiality itself, a need to think more about aspiration, and the desire to provoke good decision-making. It highlights issues around equality that require further thought whilst seeking to promote partnership work and the consideration of context (educationally, politically and economically) in the provision of information, advice and guidance. And it offers additional detail that should be included in this core guidance as well as suggestions for what might aid the forthcoming supplementary guidance. The issues raised in ATL's response should be considered also in the sets of questions that young people need answers to.

### ***Contextualisation***

ATL believes that 'effective, impartial careers education underpinned by high quality personalised information' is important in any context, but particularly important given the current complexities of 14-19 education and the political and economic context in which this guidance is being produced.

We think it is important to recognise not only that careers education must be impartial with regard to schools' own provision but also that it should be impartial in reference to Government's education initiatives, policy or those qualifications or progression routes in which Government feels it has a significant investment. Guidance and supplementary resources must also convey up-to-date information from across Whitehall departments. Currently, many decisions about employment and study are couched in terms of recession and wider economic recovery. Whilst it remains unclear how long this will last for, the consequence is a regular flow of work/training/jobs initiatives from non-education departments. The work of the Cabinet Office on social mobility should also be drawn upon.

Due to considerable change in the 14-19 sector, students face a complex landscape with a myriad of options and decisions to make. The core guidance shows awareness of this. It is imperative that the supplementary guidance deals with local geographic circumstances that impact upon opportunities and offers ways for students to navigate their choices and to see how some paths will open, and some paths will – to some degree – close down other options. ATL believes vocational education is important and wants Diplomas to succeed. Information, advice and guidance available to students must be able to tackle openly the status issues between different learning routes, whilst not undermining any particular route or qualification – thus allowing individuals to make informed

decisions. If employers or educational institutions are failing to understand one type of qualification and favouring candidates with another, it is fair that students are made aware of this in such a way that they are not being guided down a particular route, but can avoid taking decisions that will have a negative effect on what they are trying to achieve. It is important that employers and universities, for example, are involved in the provision of advice.

Workforce issues: ATL believes in locally designed curricula which capitalises on the abilities and professionalism of our members in schools and colleges. We would strongly advocate careers education that – whilst remaining impartial – has a local flavour, taking advantage of (and seeking to develop new) opportunities with employers as well as signposting education provision. To be able to do this effectively, and to aid understanding of the whole 14-19 sector and the options and routes available, continuous professional development provision is essential. ATL's members have highlighted, in particular, the need for FE lecturers who will be teaching 14-16 year-old students to undergo relevant information, advice and guidance training. Other than placing responsibilities for training, support and professional development on the head teacher and senior leadership team, the guidance says little about how school staff will be aided in meeting expectations.

We would like to emphasise the importance of careers education provision being capable of adapting quickly to changes in the landscape. Statutory guidance should make this easier, not more difficult. ATL understands that the supplementary guidance sitting beneath the core intends to do this. We hope that the resources and professional development opportunities for staff engaging students in conversations about future learning and work are fresh, dynamic and updated as regularly as necessary.

### ***Principles of impartial careers education***

ATL broadly welcomes the principles of impartial careers education. However, we argue that there are further principles that should be included, others need further development or to be more explicit, and that some indicators or outcomes need to be considered across different principles.

Additions to the principles: Given the rationale for the guidance, ATL is surprised that impartiality is not more strongly reflected in the principles. It should be considered a principle in its own right, but at the very least the principles as they exist must better reflect an element of responsiveness to requests – be it from a young person with particular needs or a student with a niche interest they want to explore. A key outcome of effective careers education should be sound and well thought through decision-making. This is reflected within principle 1 but should be more emphatic and highlighted as an end in itself not simply a means to empowerment.

The significant role of parents is raised in the guidance, but the principles do not convey the need to encourage young people to engage, where appropriate, in discussion with their parents, other family members, their peers, and other networks. In particular, the guidance should consider the importance of formal and informal networks and how young people can begin to develop these. Anecdotal evidence shows that networks can provide both information and opportunity from a young age. It is

important too for there to be a principle of honesty. This could be coupled with impartiality. Young people need to know what employers and further or higher educational institutions want. They must be provided with access to information connecting the educational, training and/or career choices in front of them with realism about what universities or particular employers understand, value, and desire in successful candidates. This should be done in a way that does not undermine any particular pathway.

The principles of what careers education must do would benefit from added ambition. A principle to 'aspire to break the boundaries of traditional careers advice' might seek to constantly develop relevant and up to date information (on, for example, internships, networks, access to financial resources) and be active in reducing inequality.

Existing principles: ATL believes that some of the stated principles require further consideration. Some of the outcomes suggested are reflected elsewhere but we think it is important that they should be indicators of success in these principles too.

#### *5 – Is integrated into all parts of the school's curriculum*

ATL is in favour of integration with the curriculum. However, we advocate strongly that this should not be to the detriment of learning nor the social benefits of education that may suffer if too great an emphasis is put on the jobs market / the economic importance of educational achievement. DCSF's *Your child, your schools, our future* highlights educational success as providing a better future for each child, allowing the economy to thrive, and supporting wider social goals. It is important that these three outcomes are balanced and that the statutory guidance and principles for careers education reflect such a balance.

#### *6 – Raises aspirations*

The significance of this principle should mean it is placed nearer the top of the list of eight. There are other outcomes which would help indicate top levels of success in achieving this principle. More than understanding benefits of particular paths or being challenged in terms of ambitions, careers education should be attempting to raise aspirations by developing a drive to succeed and to overcome barriers. It is crucial too that young people know how to get where they want to. It is wrong to separate this necessity from aspiration. Aspirations not only become realistic, but can also be raised, when young people realise what they have to do and how to go about reaching certain goals.

#### *7 - Challenges stereotypes*

The level of detail stated in principle 4 (sources of help) leads ATL to strongly insist upon greater detail to ensure full understanding of the expectations of principle 7. What sort of stereotypes and what kind of barriers to opportunities are schools expected to address? If this is not spelled out, there is a strong possibility that careers education will not only significantly vary between different schools but also that some schools will offer a more comprehensive careers education than others. ATL believes that this statutory guidance does not go far enough in dealing with issues of equality.

#### *8 – Helps young people to progress*

The final indicator focuses on young people remaining in their chosen pathway. ATL believes this is misplaced. There are numerous reasons for students seeking to change their original choices and the focus instead should be ensuring students remain in the right pathway for their desired outcome. Other indicators of this principle which ATL recommends are added would address careers education being sufficiently forward-looking for a given individual, and would convey young people's understanding of the consequences of the choices they may be about to make.

### ***Equalities issues to consider***

ATL argues that the principles of impartial careers education should be supplemented with regular equality impact assessments. This would be particularly beneficial in determining whether the school has adopted a whole-school approach to, for example, tackling gendered subject and career choices. Schools currently have a duty to promote gender equality (alongside race and disability equality), and we would like to see careers education made an explicit concern in school action plans to promote gender, race and disability equality.

The proposed statutory guidance is pretty much generic and there needs to be recognition that a one size fits all approach is not appropriate. Qualification of the meaning of 'impartial' is important. For example, the existing obstacles that disabled pupils face in making their own life choices should be recognised. 'Impartial' would not mean abandoning realism about age and so cannot lead to blindness towards race, gender, disability, sexuality or religion. Young people may require a specific rather than a strictly 'impartial' careers education.

Gender equality: ATL firmly believes it is imperative that impartial careers education seeks to challenge existing barriers and perceptions around male and female subjects and occupational sectors. The Equalities and Human Rights Commission's June 2009 report, *Staying On*, argues that:

"Gender appears to be a more important differential than social class in accounting for differences in career aspirations. Boys are more likely than girls to expect to work in engineering, ICT, skilled trades, construction, architecture or as a mechanic. Girls are more likely to expect to work in teaching, hairdressing, beauty therapy, childcare, nursing and midwifery."

The extent of occupational segregation reflects and reinforces traditional attitudes about the status and role of men and women in society and the jobs that are 'suitable' for each gender. These gendered stereotypes are variously reproduced in dominant notions of what constitutes 'masculinity' and 'femininity'. ATL recognises that teachers and lecturers have an important role in addressing and challenging such prejudices and stereotypes. Gender stereotyping, which effectively restricts both sexes, in practice disproportionately disadvantages women and girls whose 'traditional' career choices tend to lead them into a life of low pay with often poor working conditions. It is important, therefore, that the statutory guidance explicitly challenges such expectations.

Disability equality: By the age of 19, young disabled people are three times as likely to be NEET as their non-disabled peers. Over a third of those without any formal qualifications are disabled. Improving the provision of IAG can play a part in reducing the likelihood of young disabled people entering adulthood with social and employment disadvantages.

We agree that accessibility and the availability of information in appropriate formats (i.e. different fonts, Braille, easy read, electronic and audio formats) must be an integral part of all the elements of careers education. Recognition should also be given to the need to have any materials appropriately mediated by people used to the young disabled person's communication method.

However, the guidance needs to signpost equality legislation and existing public sector duties explicitly. ATL is concerned that assumptions about disabled pupils have led to judgements about their ability, which have in turn skewed their careers education. There is a need for continuous professional development particularly in relation to disability awareness and resources to support disabled pupils. ATL's 2008 survey on disability equality showed three-quarters of respondents had not received any training at their school or college on disability equality and 40% of respondents did not know whether their school or college had a disability equality scheme. Of those who did know about the existence of such a scheme, 63.4% did not know whether disabled people had been involved in its preparation.

The guidance should also make more specific reference to the promotion of work experience for disabled pupils and require schools to make links with Access to Work providers to promote awareness and availability of reasonable adjustments.

Geographic and economic disadvantage: In the ATL position statement, *Poverty and social exclusion in rural areas*, we argue that breaking the link between poverty and low educational attainment remains as much of a challenge for rural schools and colleges as it is for their urban counterparts.

14-19 curriculum and planning demands are adding to the difficulties of many rural schools in contributing towards breaking that link – schools in rural areas are experiencing considerable challenges in offering a range of curricular and extra-curricular experiences. ATL is extremely concerned that rural schools and colleges are not able to offer and maintain a full range of post-16 courses and is concerned by its impact upon students' career choices and life chances.

ATL's members are increasingly concerned about inclusion issues for young people in rural areas with regard to their full entitlement to 14-19 Diploma provision. Poor transport infrastructure, personal cost implications and a paucity of opportunity with limited choice can put these students at a disadvantage in comparison to their urban peers. ATL believes that impartial careers education must have at hand information on overcoming these barriers – be it signposting public transport timetables and discounts or directing students towards bursaries and grant-giving organisations. This information must not be the preserve of the privileged and adequate support and guidance should be available if

needed, for example in making a bursary application. Those responsible in schools for careers education should be guided to seek to address the lack of employer engagement that rural areas may face to a greater extent than urban counterparts. ATL calls for a rural impact assessment of Government's education initiatives – including the statutory guidance for impartial careers education, which may be part of the necessary remedy to these issues.

### ***Other areas of guidance requiring development***

ATL's members believe in the individual and social benefits that education can provide. The introductory information to the statutory guidance discusses the school Self Evaluation Form and the areas with respect to careers education that are evaluated. ATL agrees that this should include the development of 'knowledge and understanding of the world of work [and] skills and personal qualities which will serve them well in education, training, employment and their future lives'. However, we would like the guidance to be more explicit in linking this to social mobility policy and initiatives which allow aspirational young people to fulfill their talent and ambitions. Supplementary detail could be provided, for example, on The Panel on Fair Access to the Professions and consideration made to the issues, such as the existence of social codes in employment, that are raised in Jenni Russell's *Guardian* article, 'For children today, table manners still trump talent'.<sup>1</sup>

There is a need for greater reference in the statutory guidance to developing effective partnership working. This is hinted at under principle 6 (raises aspirations) but needs to be more explicit. Students should be aware of other sources of advice available locally, as indicated in principle 4 (sources of help) but importantly, there should be a coherent approach to providing young people with not just advice on, but opportunities to participate in or visit local employers, universities, FE colleges, work-based training providers and so on. The aspiration for careers education should be that this work is not ad hoc or solely in designated spells of work experience but based upon strong partnership working.

Supplementary guidance that includes case studies of social mobility and partnership working will aid the provision of impartial careers education.

### ***Conclusion***

ATL believes that careers education should raise aspiration, support participation in learning, help overcome inequality and assist in making goals achievable.

This statutory guidance can help those working in schools provide the most effective and useful careers education, and should make adaptability to change easier not more difficult. It is important though to recognise the complexity of the 14-19 landscape and the challenges faced by those new to teaching across this age range, and to provide continuous professional development and access to resources that support staff in schools and colleges.

ATL recommends that the principles of impartial careers education are revisited with particular reference to aspiration, inequality, decision-making, partnership working, and impartiality itself.

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.guardian.co.uk/commentisfree/2009/jul/28/social-mobility-equal-opportunity>