

ASSOCIATION OF TEACHERS AND LECTURERS

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Education Select Committee inquiry into 16-19 participation in education and training

Submission from the Association of Teachers and Lecturers

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1. Executive summary

1.1. Education for all is at the heart of ATL's policy principles. We are dismayed at the regularity with which government's education policy is not directed by what is best for learners and does not impact positively all 16-19 year olds.

1.2. There are some key features of 16-19 education which are essential: high quality educational provision; an understanding of learners' needs balanced with economic or employers' needs; access to reliable and useful information, advice and guidance; and a broad offer accessible to every young person.

1.3. ATL's members report many benefits of EMA and we are disappointed that the government has so swiftly abolished the allowance.

1.4. ATL supports the raising of the participation age but believes the continuation of this policy must be backed by full consideration of the needs of all learners, and that supporting learners is never diminished by accountability systems.

1.5. It would be a mistake to consider the impact of the raising of the participation age in isolation from other policies and the disadvantaged backgrounds many young people have. New resources are needed to support the policy's implementation.

2. About the Association of Teachers and Lecturers

ATL, the education union

2.1. 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.

2.2. 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. AMiE is the leadership section of ATL representing leaders and managers in schools and colleges. We are affiliated to the TUC, and work with government and employers through partnership and by lobbying.

ATL policy

2.3. 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 should 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.

3. Essential to 16-19 education

3.1. Education for all is at the heart of ATL's policy principles. This government's education policy should be directed by what is best for learners, for whom the education system primarily exists, and should impact positively on all 16-19 year olds.

3.2. There are some key features of 16-19 education which are essential: high quality educational provision; an understanding of learners' needs balanced with economic or employers' needs; a broad offer accessible to every young person; and access to reliable and useful information, advice and guidance (IAG).

3.3. It is in this context that the raising of the participation age and the abolition of the education maintenance allowance (EMA) should be judged.

What is high quality 16-19 education?

3.4. High quality post-16 education should build upon earlier education and must develop the knowledge, skills, attitudes and dispositions to enable young people to be responsible citizens and independent thinkers. Students should be prepared for employment, competent to make choices and learn throughout their lives. 19-year-olds should be ready to progress to employment or continue in education, with useful social and learning skills and qualifications that are valuable and understood by both employers and education institutions. 16-19 education should be sufficiently engaging to retain young people at risk of leaving education, employment and training.

Supporting learners' needs

3.5. ATL has communicated concern to the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills that the government skills strategy focuses too intently on Britain's economy and not enough on Britain's learners and their varied needs and desires. We argue that the correct approach to skills development resets the scales that balance economic outcomes and educational benefits, and takes a holistic approach to education rather than concentrating on those that have already left, or are approaching the end of formal education. With the blurring of the end of formal education forthcoming as a result of the raising of the participation age (importantly not 'school leaving age'), it becomes increasingly important that policy impacting upon education is coherent, and that young people's needs are neither forgotten nor

diminished.

3.6. We are gravely concerned that government policy on 16-19, particularly the abolition of EMA, its latest Skills Strategy, and using destination data for school accountability, uses young people as a tool for other political or economic ends, rather than treating them as individuals or seeing their needs and rights as learners. This must be addressed immediately.

Broad, flexible and equitable

3.7. Education must be equitable and post-16 education must offer flexibility and meaningful choice of subjects, qualifications and ways of learning to suit diverse cohorts of young people each year. The false dichotomy of vocational and academic study diminishes both. Young people should be engaged in both, and should have access to both, irrespective of whether they are undertaking heavily academic A-Levels or a primarily vocational Apprenticeship. A two-tier system labels young people as successes or failures, and ATL is vehemently against streaming young people into separate institutions prior to 16 in any way that disrupts their ability to undertake a broad education post-16. Functional skills and personal, learning and thinking skills, which cut across both academic and vocational learning, are also vital.

Reliable and useful information, advice and guidance

3.8. Outstanding IAG is vital; the impact is felt before, during, and (often long-) after 16-19 education. ATL believes that careers education should raise aspiration, support participation in learning, help overcome inequality and assist in making goals achievable. Staff must be able to offer the most appropriate advice to meet the needs of the student rather than the needs of the institution and IAG should be impartial in reference to education policy, initiatives, and government's implicit or explicit preferences. The sentiment of the Nuffield Review that young people must be taught to develop the 'competence to make decisions about the future in the light of changing economic and social conditions'¹ is crucial and highlights the importance of decision-making skills alongside knowledge of the 16-19 landscape.

3.9. Before rushing into change, and particularly when unpicking a positive policy such as funding for the EMA, having flexible, reliable and unbiased IAG is even more essential. By dismantling local provision without a new careers service in place, government has failed to ensure this, further damaging the life chances of this generation of teenagers.

4. Education Maintenance Allowance

4.1. ATL believes that the EMA has made a difference to ensure ALL young people can consider education post-16 a viable option. Though not perfect, it has the potential to make both a short-term and long-term impact upon people's lives and we are disappointed that the government has so swiftly abolished the allowance.

¹ Nuffield Review of 14-19 Education and Training, *Summary, Implications and Recommendations*, 2009, p3

4.2. Our members report many benefits of EMA, including but not limited to: improved attendance, achievement and student motivation; a positive impact on progression for students from level 1 to level 2 programmes; making behaviour management easier; allowing level 3 students the opportunity to study and prepare for university without having the additional pressures of part-time jobs. One member, working in a large regional sixth form college, reports that “students have also been able to save a small proportion of their EMA to put towards giving them equal access to college trips and events which their parents are unable to fund.”

4.3. Comments ATL members have received from learners when discussing government policy on EMA include:

- “I will struggle to pay for transport, books, internet and paper to attend college.”
- “EMA helps people reach their potential, without it I'll end up in Tesco.”
- “No EMA = more unemployment, Tesco doesn't have jobs for all of us!”

4.4. In general, it is known that means-tested support does not reach everyone in need. EMA's abolition combined with the enormous rise in university fees send a clear message to young people about the government's direction of travel, its priorities, and the future of education funding. Whilst we recognise the policies are slightly more nuanced than that may sound, unfortunately the negative headlines are perceived in such a way by young people. We are concerned, therefore, that there will be a disproportionate effect on applications for means-tested support from the Discretionary Learner Support Fund (DLSF) and that too many 14, 15, and 16 year olds have already been fatally discouraged from post-16 education.

4.5. A UCU/AoC poll of students² in receipt of EMA showed 70% would drop out of college if the allowance was withdrawn. An ATL member, lecturing in Health and Social Care, reports that already three students from her two-year course have been ‘lost’ this year to employment who “see it as more beneficial to gain any employment in the short term rather than risk unemployment in a years time...never mind university.”

4.6. The DLSF is fundamentally unfair. Politicians regularly complain about a so-called postcode lottery in public services; with flexible ‘rules’ on who is eligible and how much entitlement can be, young people in different areas of the country (or even in the same area but wanting to take up different education courses that require attending different institutions) face differential support. The DLSF will not provide assistance with 16-18 year-olds’ travel costs, opening up a gap for many where LAs also do not provide the support. Travel is significant for young people in education, particularly given the nature of federated institutions and collaborative delivery of 14-19 qualifications. Travel, including cost, is a massive issue for those in rural areas.³ Further unfairness can be seen by the discrepancy of financial support for food varying already between learners in school sixth forms, who can receive free school meals, and those in colleges, who do not.

4.7. Furthermore, whilst the Department for Education aims to reduce

² www.ucu.org.uk/index.cfm?articleid=5208

³ *Poverty and social exclusion in rural areas*, ATL position statement (2008)

bureaucracy in educational establishments, BIS has unnecessarily added to it by insisting upon colleges administering this fund. It is hard to see how this will operate without – at the very least - additional funding for colleges to cover the considerable staffing and administration costs of managing and assessing DLSF.

4.8. As one ATL member working in a sixth form, puts it: “EMA has basically broken down the barriers preventing participation of all learners equally in post-16 education and the Discretionary Learner Support Fund will face real challenges in maintaining this level of equal opportunity for young people to achieve to their full ability.”

5. Raising the participation age: recognising every young person’s needs

5.1. ATL is pleased that this government is continuing its predecessor’s policy to raise the age to which young people will continue in education.

5.2. Raising the participation age will also have consequences for those working or learning outside of the 16-19 sector and those considered ‘NEET’, and data collected in relation to the legislative change will be put to varying uses. Policy must recognise the differing needs of every young person, and not a select few.

5.3. ATL’s members are proud to be entrusted with educating young people and are passionate about impacting positively on their futures. Supporting learners is paramount in their professional lives. It is important then that the Secretary of State’s intention to use destinations data to hold schools to account and to support parental choice of secondary schools does not distract from helping young people themselves. Teachers of younger children should be able to focus on developing them and giving appropriate, and individual, IAG without worrying about sending them down routes that government demands through high-stakes accountability measures – not least because of the variables outside of schools’ control that influence individual (e.g. health) and collective (e.g. economic outlook) outcomes.

5.4. We expect NEET figures to change but note that the recent year-on-year rise is driven by those aged 18⁺.⁴ Bearing in mind the evidence from young people that abolishing EMA is likely to send them into employment (and into a series of part-time jobs), it is important that significant thought is given to those on the cloudy borderline between being in a job with training, and being in a job without training. All young people must be treated as individuals with the right to learn and achieve, not as statistics or labels which may have long-term effects on their lives. The government’s intention to remove its obligation to enforce the raising of the participation age leads us to question the commitment to ensure all 16-19 year olds are still learning and developing. We know that enforcement will be difficult, and we would not support the criminalising of young people, but are concerned that this indicates government doesn’t even have the desire for an individualised focus on young people.

5.5. We urge the select committee to ask how government will ensure training in employment is of a high enough quality to be able to deem

⁴ DfE Quarter 4 2010 statistics, released February 2011

employees as learners still participating in education, and in particular to consider evidence on enriched or 'expansive' apprenticeships⁵.

5.6. We believe it is important with the raising of the participation age that young people are able to easily re-enter school or college-based education even if they decided to take employment at 16. In 2010, we wrote:

"Young people must not be forced into an unchangeable pathway at, or before, they are age-14."⁶

The same applies at age 16 too. FE and HE should not be ruled out by one decision at a young age. Aside from government's funding decisions across education sectors making this look difficult, we are concerned too that not enough clear thought has been given to how easily learners, or potential learners, can change course.

5.7. It is of great concern to ATL that vocational education and qualifications will suffer diminished status as government pursues an agenda of labels, division and hierarchy in relation to academic study and the institutions in which each could take place.

6. Raising the participation age: impact and equality

6.1. Though we support raising the participation age, we believe it is a mistake to attempt to review the policy in isolation. Significant change will happen concurrently with the advent of 16-19 academies. Changes in teaching training and to the professional support provided by the Institute for Learning should also be considered, as well as funding issues.

6.2. Any impact on academic achievement may prove irrelevant because of wider government policy (i.e. HE funding). Whilst keeping young people in formal education longer a decade ago probably would have helped boost students in universities, it is hard to see that now because of the cost/benefit analysis government is sadly pushing students into; non-educational factors such as tuition fees and the job markets for graduates and non-graduates are increasingly important in decision-making.

6.3. Young people leaving education at 16 with limited qualifications are disproportionately from disadvantaged backgrounds.⁷ Poverty is the single most important aspect of early childhood which has the greatest influence on children's life chances, particularly with regard to education, and the effects of growing up in poverty are often amplified by additional disadvantage, for example, due to ethnic background or disability. For such young people, it is important not just to keep them in education but to ensure pre- and post-16 education is relevant to them. This should include offering tailored support to mitigate some of the effects of poverty (not just early intervention but consistent intervention according to need) and government committing to bring together communities, disadvantaged families, schools, colleges, and

⁵ Lorna Unwin and Alison Fuller, *Towards expansive apprenticeships* and Susan James, *Learning Environments: evidence from World Skills*, Skope paper (2010)

⁶ *14-19 curriculum and its assessment*, ATL position statement (2010)

⁷ *Poverty and social exclusion in rural areas*, ATL position statement (2008)

trade unions to devise practical strategies for tackling socio-economic disadvantage in relation to education.

6.4. Aside from the resources associated with ensuring employers are providing suitable and sufficient high quality training to benefit the additional young people staying in education, it will be necessary to increase the number of teachers, lecturers and other staff. They will require the resources to develop their students and encourage them to stay in education. Public expenditure must not simply subsidise employers, but must make a significant impact, beyond short-term statistic chasing, in reducing the number of young people classified as NEET.

7. Conclusion

7.1. We believe that government must do more to ensure high quality education for 16-19 year olds.

7.2. When the government's skills strategy is not clear on how it is going to deliver learner-focussed educational outcomes, and when the very concept of 14-19 education is up in the air, we question whether anyone can be fully prepared for the raising of the participation age at this moment in time.

7.3. However, ATL welcomes this select committee inquiry, and advocates that the recommendations include:

- EMA should not be withdrawn without proper consideration of the impact of the DLSF on the most vulnerable.
- The raising of the participation age must now be supported by full consideration of the needs of all learners, especially the most disadvantaged, and a commitment that supporting learners is never diminished by accountability systems.
- New resources, including investment in initial and continuing professional development for staff, will be needed to ensure education for all 16-19 year olds is high quality and that a new system of IAG is effective and useful for young people.

7.4. You can judge a country's government on the education it provides for all. We hope that raising the participation age changes lives, as it has the potential to do, and does not just become politically expedient.