

ASSOCIATION OF TEACHERS AND LECTURERS

7 NORTHUMBERLAND STREET, LONDON WC2N 5RD TEL: 020-7930-6441 FAX: 020-7930-1359
e-mail: info@atl.org.uk web site: http://www.atl.org.uk VAT REG NO 539 0866 17
GENERAL SECRETARY Dr MARY BOUSTED B.A.(Hons) PhD



Removing the statutory duty to deliver work-related learning at Key Stage 4 – a Department for Education consultation

Submission from the Association of Teachers and Lecturers

Date: 4 January 2012

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 judgment, 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 believes it is a mistake to remove the statutory requirement to provide every young person at Key Stage 4 with work-related learning. We do not think this best serves the interests of young people, nor will it play a part in providing an excellent education accessible to all. We urge the government to reconsider.

We think it is disingenuous that much of the consultation paper seems to say how important work-related learning is – it is simply not true to say, as the paper does, that the government is offering much support, when this policy clearly has the opposite effect.

Whilst less bureaucracy for teachers can be a good thing, this is not the same as saying that all statutory duties should be removed. Those who work in schools accept their responsibility to young people, and actively want to help them to do the best they can. The government knows as well as ATL that the reality in schools is that the numerous pressures from government (league tables, benchmarks, Ofsted inspections, for example) dictate what is done, often irrespective of whether it serves individual children's needs. These are rational decisions which school leaders and teachers take reluctantly.

We are extremely concerned that if schools don't have to provide work-related learning at key stage 4, before long it probably won't happen in the majority of cases. The demands of accountability measures and the pressures of financial resources and time will simply be too great.

The right approach from government needs to be one which is looking to strengthen the offer to pupils to make work-related learning of the highest quality.

A central tenet of high quality work-related learning would be its accessibility to all, whatever a child's talents, interests, and background, as well as breaking down the barriers that those with disabilities and special educational needs face.

It would include work experience that is useful and the development of transferable skills as an important entitlement of the national curriculum. And work-related learning should be available to all and considered desirable for all. The policy proposal appears to serve the government's interest in promoting a two-tier hierarchy in education, separating those who study academic GCSEs as part of the English Baccalaureate from those whose talents lie in other subjects, courses, and qualifications. Even the most 'academic' pupils should be engaging in work-related learning as well. This is most useful to their development – socially and educationally – but should also be fairly intuitive in the context of the twenty-first century labour market. We fear that government is removing this duty in order to enhance the push through an academic track which isn't suitable for many young people, and isn't appropriate for the majority. It risks radically reducing career and learning opportunities for pupils.

ATL believes that it is essential for work-related learning to be a part of secondary education. It can contribute to dismantling the gulfs in advantage that many young people experience, and can hopefully be a counter to the necessity of family (or independent school) networks which allow a privileged few to 'get on' in life with ease.

Coupled with government's irresponsible approach to information, advice and guidance, this change could be a disaster for many young people. The current economic circumstances, the extreme levels of youth unemployment, plus policies such as those which drastically increase the financial burden of higher education, all make for a pretty tricky context to grow up in. Government should not be adding to this by cutting off more support for young people's development and in turn trimming down their prospects. This is a heady cocktail government is offering which appears irresponsible, unfair and destructive. For today's teenagers the costs and risks associated with making the wrong decisions are bigger than ever.

We believe that the Wolf Report was short-sighted to say that because young people no longer enter permanent, full-time employment at the age of 16, they do not need work experience at key stage 4. Transferable workplace skills, behaviours and attitudes can and should be built up over time and can aid decision-making (even at a basic level such as a preference for working outside or in an 'office job') – not just on careers but subjects and courses post-16.

Work-related learning, especially work experience, can reinvigorate pupils' interest in education and give them a sense of purpose. It would seem risky to delay such potential reengagement with learning.

ATL will continue to argue that any lessening of the 'statutory burden' or reduction in 'bureaucracy' which undermines or threatens a broad, balanced and equitable education for all young people is fundamentally the wrong thing to do.

This consultation paper offers no justification for the policy beyond a passing reference to "Wolf said it" and we are dismayed that yet again the government unpicks support for young people in education before establishing substantial alternative arrangements. We believe at the most difficult time to be young and planning future education and employment, the government is playing roulette with a generation's future. ATL urges a rethink of the plans to remove the statutory requirement to provide every young person at Key Stage 4 with work-related learning, before it is too late.