Academy news

ATL the education union

Regular news on academies from ATL

Spring 2010

What's inside?

- Summer training sessions for reps
- Consultation on accreditation
- Pay and conditions update
- Political positions
- Doing the sums on all-age academies

A rep's view of life in a new academy

ATL academy rep Helen Catterall started working at Thorncliffe School – now Furness Academy – because she wanted a new challenge.

Before she arrived in Barrow-in-Furness, Cumbria, in 2006, Helen worked at a community school in London and a Church of England school in Preston. Thorncliffe, then in special measures, represented something new.

Since 2006, the school has come out of special measures and merged with two others to form Furness Academy. "It's been excellent to see the school evolve, behaviour get better and the studiousness of students improve," Helen says. "The process has helped the school, the kids that have come here and their families."

Helen decided to become an ATL rep simply because there wasn't one at the school when she arrived. Since 2006, she has helped ATL membership grow to 69 out of around 300 staff at the school, mostly through recommendations from members she has helped.

Being able to help others feel happier and safer at work is "comforting", says Helen. "If I can step in, bridge any gaps and resolve conflicts then I certainly will."

The role also appeals to her because answering members' questions means she can answer her own questions too. "You learn about employment law and health and safety – I'm forever finding out new things," she says.

Thorncliffe merged with Alfred Barrow and Parkview schools to become Furness academy in September 2009. The change was complicated by the introduction of a new staffing structure and the fact that the new academy was split over two sites.

During the changeover, Helen provided support for staff members by sitting in on their interviews with human resources.

"Often I find that just being in a room with people just gives them that little bit of extra confidence, even if I sit there and I don't say anything," she says. "They feel that they've got a bit of added protection and they gain that extra confidence.

Now the changeover is complete, Helen has seen her workload

ATL rep Helen Catterall

increase as staff members seek advice about the new arrangements and the teething troubles experienced by every new school.

"I'll often spend three hours on the phone just chatting about various things to various people," she says. "I got home last night and did an hour on the email – it takes a lot of time and work, but it's worthwhile so I keep on with it."

As well as directly supporting ATL members, Helen works closely with other reps. Because she looks after both support and teaching staff, this includes Unison reps as well as those from the NUT and NASUWT.

Relations with management are good; the two vice-principals were previously headteacher and deputy headteacher at Thorncliffe, and their relaxed 'open door' policy has meant that Helen has never had to involve ATL national staff in a dispute.

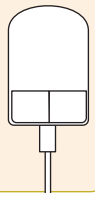
"I've always managed to resolve any issues at ground level," she says. "It's better all round if you can do that."

But she has had support from ATL in other areas when she needed it. Local branch secretary Norma Bates

continued on page 2

Past issues of *Academy news*

You can view and download this and past issues of Academy news online at **www.atl.org.uk/publications-and-resources/newsletters/academy-news.asp**.



A rep's view of life in a new academy (cont.)

is "absolutely fantastic", Helen says, and she is confident there's always somebody on the end of a phone who can help with any problems.

Helen has also been on three ATL 'Being a rep' training days, the last specifically geared towards academies. This was excellent, she says, because it allowed them to share experiences and focus on academy issues.

"ATL has been very supportive," she adds. "It does keep me going and makes my life a lot easier – and my life has been extremely busy over the last couple of years!"

If you would like to get more involved and become an ATL rep or contact at your school, see the 'get involved' section of the ATL website **www.atl.org.uk** or email **getinvolved@atl.org.uk**.

Summer training sessions for reps

Following on from last year's successful training course for reps in academies, ATL is running another course in the summer term that deals with the specific challenges and opportunities they face.

ATL rep Mick Ratcliffe, who attended the course last year, said: "It was a worthwhile training session and a very supportive vehicle for liaising with colleagues facing similar challenges."

Dr Nadhim Shamoon reported that the course had led to direct success negotiating at his school. "The two-day event last year empowered me with skills to work with the other unions to negotiate the model agreement for academies in England, which was accepted by the principle and the governors," he said.

The training takes place over two days on 1 and 2 July in London. It is free to ATL workplace reps in academies. Expenses will be met by ATL.

The course covers:

- recognition agreements - what they are and why they are so important in academies
- representing members' views in your academy
- disciplinary and grievance procedures and policies at work
- solving problems at work
- building ATL membership in your academy
- developing an ATL team.

The course is an opportunity to network with reps working in similar establishments and to share examples of good practice.

If you are an ATL rep or contact in an academy, or would like to become the ATL rep or contact in your academy, register your interest by contacting ATL's learning and development team at **training@atl.org.uk** or calling 020 7782 1582.

ATL's 2010 Conference

Pay, governance and whistle-blowing in academies are among the topics due to be debated at ATL's Annual Conference in Manchester, which takes place from 29-31 March.

A key motion for members in academies calls on ATL to campaign against the "gifting of schools to unreliable sponsors" and asks the government to ensure that academies both follow national pay and conditions regulations and recognise the right of employees to be represented by recognised trade unions.

The motion, tabled by ATL's Devon branch, says the government should not approve new academies unless they can give good value for money and significantly improve standards.

Other Conference highlights include keynote speeches from education secretary Ed Balls, shadow education secretary Michael Gove, and Liberal Democrat education spokesperson David Laws.

ATL 2010 Conference takes place at Manchester Central Convention Complex.

You can follow ATL's Annual Conference online at **www.atl.org.uk/conference2010**.

Network now

During last year's training for ATL Reps in academies, reps agreed to join an academies network that meets online to share advice and issues and could also be useful in contributing to *Academy news*.

The network is for ATL members, reps and contacts to share issues, experiences and solutions online. To join the academies network or to send any feedback and suggestions for this newsletter, email **academiesnetwork@atl.org.uk**.

Pay and conditions update

At the national level, ATL has recognition agreements with sponsors Absolute Return for Kids (ARK), Edutrust Academies Charitable Trust (EACT), Harris Federation, OASIS Community Learning and the United Learning Trust (ULT).

HARRIS FEDERATION

ATL has agreed disciplinary, grievance and redundancy procedures with the Harris Federation.

We are currently seeking to review the existing recognition agreement, as well as considering the following new policies:

- health and safety policy
- safer care code of conduct policy
- pay policy
- staff attendance policy
- performance management policy.

EACT

Negotiations are underway with EACT, and the first objective is to agree a health and safety manual.

OASIS

We are continuing to negotiate on the national agreements outlined in the last issue of *Academy news* with OASIS, for which we provide the secretariat for the trade union side.

ULT

We are continuing our review and update of some of the employment policies and procedures with have agreed with ULT.

ARK

While we have agreed disciplinary, capability, grievance and dignity at work policies with ARK and are considering more, we have not been able as yet to reach agreement on a new ARK contract of employment.

One of the main areas of disagreement remains teachers' working time. ARK has so far refused to accept our case for retaining a limit of 1,265 hours over the academic year.

If you would like further information on any of the above policies and procedures, please contact Usman Gbajabiamila in ATL's London office by email at ugbajabiamila@atl.org.uk

Political positions

With a general election taking place in the near future, *Academy news* examines the three main political parties' position on academies.

Labour

The Labour Party says it will expand the academies programme if it wins the next general election. However, its view is that schools under local authority control will remain the norm with academies playing an important, but smaller role in the education of children. Their current plan is to have between 300 and 400 academies open or in the pipeline by 2011.

In order to encourage sponsors to come forward, the policy of charging potential sponsors a £2 million fee to run academies would be scrapped. This would be replaced with a more robust screening process for potential sponsors – with some sort of kite mark. Part of this accreditation would mean future sponsors would either have to have an educational background or be partnered with an educational organisation. It would also give ministers increased powers to remove failing sponsors. Existing sponsors would only need to win the kite mark if they choose to open new academies.

Labour would also remove or curtail certain freedoms and the independence enjoyed by academies. For example, academies would be required to follow the national curriculum in core subjects.

The Conservatives

The Conservative Party says it would encourage the expansion of academies as an alternative to local authority controlled schools but would not introduce its own kite mark as it believes it would add to bureaucracy.

The party's school reform programme would establish new academies in the most deprived areas of the country by redirecting the school capital budget to fund at least 200,000 new academy places in the poorest communities.

It also wants to give each school a chance to achieve academy status with 'outstanding schools' being pre-approved, to extend the programme to include primary schools, to give academies greater freedoms and to ensure any school in special measures for more than a year is immediately taken over by a successful academy provider.

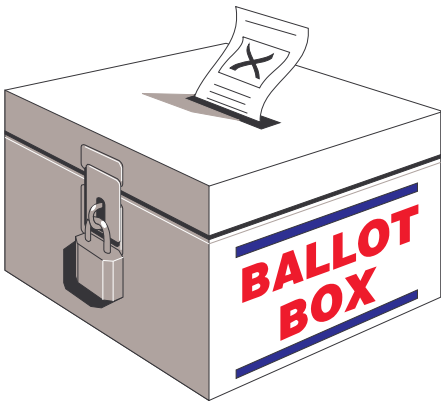
The Liberal Democrats

The Liberal Democrats say they want to scrap the idea of academies and replace them with what they call 'sponsor managed schools'.

By doing this, they believe all schools and local authorities will have the powers and freedoms currently afforded to academies, giving the academies model a twist and building on what they consider its best parts, while correcting its defects.

Their vision is for sponsor-managed schools commissioned by local authorities. They would aim to allow educational charities and private providers to be involved in delivering state education, but without the flaws of the academies system and the 'unlevel playing field' on issues such as funding.

Read ATL's education manifesto at www.atl.org.uk/election.



Consultation on sponsor accreditation

ATL recently responded to a government consultation on accreditation of academy sponsors. Under the proposals, potential sponsors would need to demonstrate the vision and capacity to run one or more schools and evidence of a strong, successful track record. Changes following the consultation mean that non-educational sponsors do not need to form a partnership with an educational institution.

The aim of the Department for Children, Schools and Families (DCSF) is to have a list of potential sponsors that local authorities and schools consult when trying to find a sponsor.

Current academy sponsors would not need to seek accreditation unless they wished to sponsor new academies, but the DCSF anticipates many sponsors will wish to seek accreditation retrospectively.

DCSF accreditation would be awarded if sponsors can demonstrate:

- sound governance
- effective leadership and management
- a strong vision for managing and improving schools
- a track record for improving outcomes for children and young people
- the capacity to achieve trans-formational change in the schools they are supporting.

ATL has been concerned about the nature of some academy sponsors and supports the principle of an accreditation scheme. However, it insists this must be a robust process that parents and staff can have confidence in.

ATL argues that accreditation should only be awarded to sponsors who:

- are committed to dialogue with staff through union recognition
- are committed to the education of all children in the community
- have the educational expertise and a proven track record to raise standards and sustain performance
- have a clear policy for educating those with special educational needs
- involve both staff and parents as members of the governing body
- are good employers by offering a reasonable work-life balance and pay and conditions at least in line with the maintained sector.

Full details of the accreditation process and criteria can be found at **www.dcsf.gov.uk/accredited**.

Doing the sums on all-age academies

Billed as "one of the most revolutionary changes in education in recent years", Nottingham Academy opened its doors to up to 3,600 pupils aged 3-19 in September. As the largest school in Europe, it is to have 20 classes per year in the secondary phase of education. Pupils have been given a map to navigate the three campuses that together take an hour to walk across. But will this super-sized academy deliver what it promises?

All-age 3-19 academies are the latest in a series of developments designed to bring about the 'modernisation' of the education sector and to raise standards, particularly in areas of disadvantage. So far, there are around 20 academies in England offering "all-through" education.

Supporters argue that all-through schools ease the transition between primary and secondary education and prevent a drop in pupil attainment between key stages 2 and 3. Apart from an expectation of raised teaching and learning standards overall, the government's Innovation Unit promotes all-age schools as an innovative way to: share resources and expertise across phases; increase opportunities for the personalisation of learning; provide more flexibility in curriculum design, delivery and school management; offer greater opportunities for professional development; improve pastoral care and special educational needs (SEN) provision; and maintain greater continuity in the provision of extended services and multi-agency working. All-through schools are also said to be better placed to meet the five outcomes of the Every Child Matters agenda throughout a child's education.

However, there is still a dearth of independent evidence of the benefits of all-age schooling. Concerns have been raised that all-through academies are largely the result of necessity or expediency rather than innovation, particularly where individual schools have found themselves in difficult circumstances. Sceptics also point to the lack of changes, for example, in Ofsted inspection frameworks, national information systems, accountability and assessment regimes, the nature and contents of the curriculum and initial teacher training (ITT) to reflect and support the vision of all-age schooling.

Do you work in or near a 3-19 academy? Tell us what you think. ATL is interested in hearing your views on achievement, cross-phase working, professional development, workload, governance, health and safety, attendance, personalisation, equality, behaviour, etc.

Send your comments to Daniela Wachsening, ATL's education policy adviser, at **dwachsening@atl.org.uk**.

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Spring 2010. ATL Product code BUL14.
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