



yr undeb dros addysg

**Association of Teachers and Lecturers (ATL Cymru)  
Response to *Delivering Skills that Work for Wales: Reducing the proportion of young people not in education, employment or training in Wales***

**The Association of Teachers and Lecturers** represents over 160,000 education professionals across the four constituent parts of the United Kingdom. It draws its membership from teachers and lecturers, leaders and support staff in maintained and independent schools, and Further Education Colleges. As well as campaigning vigorously to protect and enhance members' pay and conditions ATL also believes that the education profession has a key role in developing education strategy and policy. ATL Cymru represents over 6,500 education professionals in colleges and schools across the whole of Wales.

**General questions**

**1. Do you welcome the broad policy direction set out in this document?**

ATL Cymru agrees with the broad policy direction of the document and is pleased to see that the Welsh Assembly Government is attaching urgency to the need to increase the participation of young people in education, employment and training and welcomes proposals to tackle this.

ATL Cymru believes in the value of education as a life-enhancing experience which surpasses its undoubted economic benefits. We are keen that every section of society has free and ready access to education

**2. What should be the priority actions if we are to deliver in line with our ambitions for reducing the proportion of young people NEET?**

ATL Cymru believes there are three priority actions necessary to achieve the Government's stated aim.

Firstly, there needs to be a concerted effort to increase the prestige and credibility of vocational and other alternative qualifications to encourage their take up. At present the education system and society at large seem to place

more emphasis and attach more prestige to the traditional GCSEs, A Levels and HE educational route. ATL Cymru endorses the WAG's intention to broaden curriculum options for 14-19 year olds. A broad curriculum is needed to engage those pupils who currently find school meaningless or present content difficult to cope with. ATL Cymru would like to stress the need to move away from a subject based curriculum to a skills-based, mixed provision curriculum. The benefits of a skills based curriculum needs to be effectively marketed. Increasing the profile and knowledge of the benefits of a skills based curriculum will lead to parity of esteem between vocational and traditional academic qualifications.<sup>1</sup>

The perception that there is no other worthwhile alternative can often disengage young people who feel they will not achieve via the academic route. One participant in the Nuffield engaging youth enquiry identified a vicious circle - without GCSEs, he would not be able to achieve his aims and, as he did not want to go back to college, he was effectively stuck.<sup>2</sup> This is an urgent matter. Young people who are unlikely to achieve good GCSEs at schools must be offered a suitable second chance, which they perceive to be accessible and relevant to their own personal situation.

Secondly, while we welcome the WAG's decision not to adopt the making of education and training to 19 compulsory as in England, nevertheless we believe that the conclusions that lead the DCSF to such a policy must be given due weight. Independent research estimates that the economic benefits of raising the participation age to be around £2.4bn per year, grouped over the course of a lifetime.<sup>3</sup> The English proposals aim to ensure every young person is in some form of recognized education or training until they are 18. No young person will be forced to stay at school but measures will be in place to ensure they take advantage of a wide range of opportunities, such as apprenticeships and work based learning.<sup>4</sup> It is hoped that raising the compulsory age will raise the aspirations of young people and their families and will encourage their commitment as they can see the benefit of the system.<sup>5</sup> As noted, we support the WAG's decision not to go down the route of compulsion but ATL Cymru believes it is therefore imperative that apprenticeships, additional learning options, and the rest contain relevant and attractive content if they are going to help reduce the incidence of NEETs. If the English experience of compulsion proves to be more effective than the Welsh policy of encouragement then policy will need to be reviewed at some future date.

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<sup>1</sup> Martin Johnson, "Subject to Change: New Thinking on the Curriculum", ATL, 2007

<sup>2</sup> Nuffield Review, Engaging Youth Enquiry, Briefing Paper 2: The Life Circumstances of Young People, <http://www.nuffield14-19review.org.uk/files/documents182-1.pdf>

<sup>3</sup> Department for Children, Schools and Families press release, "Raising the Participation Age ' has potential economic benefits of £2.4bn per year group', 29<sup>th</sup> November 2007  
[http://www.dcsf.gov.uk/pns/DisplayPN.cgi?pn\\_id=2007\\_0225](http://www.dcsf.gov.uk/pns/DisplayPN.cgi?pn_id=2007_0225)

<sup>4</sup> Department for Children, Schools and Families press release,  
[http://www.dcsf.gov.uk/pns/DisplayPN.cgi?pn\\_id=2007\\_0225](http://www.dcsf.gov.uk/pns/DisplayPN.cgi?pn_id=2007_0225)

<sup>5</sup> Department for Children, Schools and Families press release,  
[http://www.dcsf.gov.uk/pns/DisplayPN.cgi?pn\\_id=2007\\_0225](http://www.dcsf.gov.uk/pns/DisplayPN.cgi?pn_id=2007_0225)

Thirdly, ATL Cymru believes that developing a better understanding of young people who are the ‘targets’ of NEET policy should be a priority action.<sup>6</sup> Research needs to be qualitative as well as quantitative if it is to be effective. This is essential if any policy interventions are to be successful. The WAG needs to undertake collaborative work with other governments in the UK to identify why young people become disengaged and NEET in the first instance to enable preventative measures to be developed.

### **3. Is there anything missing from our analysis of young people NEET (see Chapter 1) which should help to direct our future policies?**

As stated in chapter 1 of *Delivering Skills that Work for Wales*, there is a lack of data sets to put together a comprehensive picture of those who make up the NEET group.<sup>7</sup> The current data does not allow us to provide any great detail on who these young people are which means that it will be difficult to target policy interventions effectively to reduce the number of NEETS in Wales. There needs to be a common definition of the term NEET and what it constitutes to enable robust data to be collected. The forthcoming London School of Economics research<sup>8</sup> highlights disparity between interpretations of the term NEETS. The definition of NEET used by the UK government takes into account anyone who has done any sort of education or training during the last month. The government figure for NEETS is 7%. In comparison, the LSE research asked young people what their main activity was and produced a figure for NEETS of 18%. The divergence in figures reflects the differing interpretations of the term NEET. This great disparity in interpretation needs to be resolved in the first instance before any interventions can be targeted effectively to reduce the proportion of NEETS.

The analysis of NEETS in the consultation concentrates on the 16-18 year old age group and fails to address the needs of those NEET aged 19-24 year. A recent statistical publication by the WAG has revealed that 18% of 19-24 year olds are classified as NEET, compared to 10% of 16-18 year olds.<sup>9</sup> This highlights the need to widen the focus of policy and intervention beyond the age of 18 to ensure that all those who are NEET or potentially NEET are targeted and have the support necessary to re-engage them in education, training or employment.

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<sup>6</sup> Nuffield Review, Engaging Youth Enquiry, Briefing Paper 2: The Life Circumstances of Young People, <http://www.nuffield14-19review.org.uk/files/documents182-1.pdf>

<sup>7</sup> Welsh Assembly Government, ‘Delivering Skills that Work for Wales: Reducing the proportion of young people not in education, employment or training in Wales’, <http://new.wales.gov.uk/consultation/dells/2008/neet/neetconse.pdf?lang=en> (p.6)

<sup>8</sup> See The Press Association, ‘Survey highlights the number of NEETS, 19<sup>th</sup> July 2008, [http://ukpress.google.com/article/ALeqM5jS\\_fJEgiNwZ8ATQoD8Adz3MhiNBQ](http://ukpress.google.com/article/ALeqM5jS_fJEgiNwZ8ATQoD8Adz3MhiNBQ)

<sup>9</sup> ‘Participation of young people in education and the labour market’, National Statistics for Wales release, 29<sup>th</sup> July 2008, <http://new.wales.gov.uk/statsdocs/post16ed/sdr108-2008.pdf?lang=en>

ATL Cymru believes that the term 'NEET' is *fundamentally* problematic as it classifies a heterogeneous group with one label and is also a negative category. For example, because it is a negative description it includes young people who are long term sick, on a gap year, or trying to get a band started. How far those in the category are actually 'disengaged' and 'disaffected' is not measurable as the group is so heterogeneous and therefore policies have not been effectively targeted because of prevailing assumptions as to what constitutes the NEET group.

The Nuffield Review gives as 'an analysis of the groups that are over-represented in the NEET classification', the following:

- Young people 'looked after'
- Teenage parents
- Young carers
- Young people with chronic illnesses or disabilities and victims of accidents
- Suicidal young people
- Young people suffering from mental illness
- Young people engaging in risk behaviors involving smoking, drinking alcohol and serious drug misuse
- Young people involved in crime<sup>10</sup>

At the same time the same analysis found that a lot of young people that were considered NEET were economically active. While we should be targeting appropriate help to all these groups who represent a significant number of young people we must avoid creating some sort of 'moral panic' about them.

Of 16 and 17 year olds that are economically active, the Nuffield the review gives the following important reminder of the types of employment that create future problems:

*"The majority of these young people will be relatively poorly qualified, and so this trend is indicative of an increase in the supply of low-skilled jobs that these young people can fill over the time period. The number of such jobs has increased and so it is reasonable to assume that it is economically efficient for employers to fill them with 16 and 17 year-olds who can be paid a lower minimum wage. In a sense, then, there appears to be a mutually reinforcing contract between young people and employers which continues to encourage a significant minority of 16 and 17 year-olds to leave the education and training system."<sup>11</sup>*

The actions of unscrupulous employers seeking cheap labour could possibly be responsible for the increase of NEETs at 17 as they see employment, even low paid employment as beneficial and preferable to continuing in education due to

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<sup>10</sup> Written Evidence from the Nuffield Review to the Inquiry into Post-16 Skills Training, available at: <http://www.nuffield14-19review.org.uk/files/news46-1.pdf>

<sup>11</sup> Written Evidence from the Nuffield Review to the Inquiry into Post-16 Skills Training

their disengagement and feeling that there is a lack of opportunities in the current, academically led education system.

### **Specific questions**

#### **4. What are your views on the systems we outline in Chapter 2? In particular**

##### **a. Should one organisation have lead responsibility at operational level for young people who are NEET? If so, what should this mean in practice?**

For co-ordination purposes it would be useful to have one organization in charge at operational level for young people who are NEET. In practical terms, the organization with lead responsibility needs to work in a multi agency fashion to develop targeted interventions. We suspect this will be difficult as the heterogeneity of NEETs will involve organizations with radically different outlooks, values and cultures. Included under this definition are teenage pregnant mothers, young offenders and others who are partially involved in the youth labour market.

##### **b. What more can we do to embed KIT processes within local authorities?**

ATL Cymru believes that it might be worthwhile investigating the possibility of Local Authority clustering to enable the KIT process to be embedded more effectively.

##### **c. Would there be value in enhancing the information provided to schools on the destinations of former pupils?**

There would be value in enhancing information provided to schools so they are made aware of the impact of targeted NEET policies that worked well and those that didn't. Schools need to be given direction on how best to use the information provided as there is only so much schools can actually do. A multi-agency approach is needed to tackle the issue of NEETs. We would not want to see schools burdened with extra responsibilities in this area without significant and adequate funding.

##### **d. What more can we do to support information sharing between organisations?**

It may be worthwhile to develop a toolkit and guidance for best practice to share information. We certainly believe that comparative studies of the experience of the rest of the UK would be beneficial

#### **5. What are your views on the provision for learners that we outline in Chapter 3? In particular,**

**a. What more can we do to support 14-19 Networks in developing learning provision for NEET and at-risk young people?**

ATL Cymru members have expressed concern about proposals to place a duty on LEAs, schools and further education institutions to co-operate in the delivery of local options menus. Many members fear the time devoted to the core curriculum will be significantly reduced with schools expected to deliver it in a shorter space of time to accommodate more common options to be made available in local areas. This could potentially distort schools ability to deliver the curriculum to those who are not NEET, possibly causing tensions. While we are fully committed to the reengagement of the disaffected and disengaged we are equally emphatic that this cannot be at the expense of the majority.

It is essential schools and colleges are adequately resourced to enable them to deliver a wide variety of suitable options to children. Schools are often restricted by the subject options they can offer young people because of budgetary considerations.

**b. How can we best direct Cymorth Theme E in future?**

ATL Cymru does not wish to comment on this.

**c. Do the proposals go far enough in outlining changes to our national training programmes? If not, what more do we need to do to improve the quality of those programmes for vulnerable young people?**

ATL Cymru is encouraged by the Welsh Assembly Government's commitment to increasing significantly the number of modern apprenticeships in Wales but wants to see the Assembly put measures in place to ensure that young people who would benefit participate in these programmes. There is a need to better promote apprenticeship programmes. A recent report by Ofsted concluded that in England the inadequate promotion of apprenticeships has resulted in a lack of understanding of the full potential of the programme and a general fall in participation.<sup>12</sup> The report highlights that learners who spend a lot of time on work placement, without a prospect of securing employment, often lost motivation and became disillusioned with the course, in some cases causing them to drop out. The low level of financial support available to learners on programme-led apprenticeships also acted as a deterrent. These are important issues that need to be addressed in Wales.

**6. What are your views on the support for learners that we outline in Chapter 4? In particular:**

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<sup>12</sup> Egov monitor, 'Programme-led apprenticeships need greater promotion and understanding following a sharp fall in participation, says Ofsted', <http://www.egovmonitor.com/node/20083/print>

**a. What more can we do to develop the Support for Learners element of Learning Pathways 14-19 for the benefit of NEET and potentially NEET young people?**

ATL Cymru welcomes the WAG's intention to re-engage people who have already left education or training by the development of a model for learning coach support, specifically for NEET and potentially NEET young people. This type of targeted measure will pay dividends by re-engaging young people, increasing aspirations and instilling a sense of opportunity.

To successfully re-engage NEET and potential NEET young people there is a need to transform the curriculum. As stated earlier, ATL Cymru supports a broad, mixed curriculum which will re-engage young people who feel school is boring or meaningless to them.

**b. Is the idea of financial parity across different types of learning for 16-19 year olds a good one?**

ATL Cymru welcomes the proposal to review the financial support mechanisms with the view to assessing the viability of financial parity across all types of non-advanced education and unwaged training participation.

**c. What more can we do to ensure that learners are not swayed in their choices by unintentional financial incentives or disincentives?**

Some members of ATL Cymru have expressed concern regarding the distribution of the EMA in Wales. Members report that some young people simply stay on at school to claim their EMA. Their behavior can be disruptive and to the detriment of other pupils. The EMA can alienate those who are not entitled to it and ATL Cymru welcomes the proposal to review the EMA in Wales to find out how it affects both those who are entitled to it and those not entitled to it.

Research from the Nuffield review highlights problems with accessing the EMA because of the levels of bureaucracy involved.<sup>13</sup> Difficulties are faced by those whose parents are above the threshold and so do not have full support. Also, some families and young people are reluctant to set up a bank account to avoid the paper trail because of fears of possible changes to their benefits or because of semi legal/ illegal activities.<sup>14</sup>

ATL Cymru urges the WAG to put pressure on the Westminster Government to ensure that all apprenticeships are brought in line with the national minimum wage (NMW). Currently the TUC estimates that only 30% of apprentices are

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<sup>13</sup> Nuffield Review, Engaging Youth Enquiry, Briefing Paper 2: The Life Circumstances of Young People, <http://www.nuffield14-19review.org.uk/files/documents182-1.pdf>

<sup>14</sup> Nuffield Review, Engaging Youth Enquiry, Briefing Paper 2: The Life Circumstances of Young People, <http://www.nuffield14-19review.org.uk/files/documents182-1.pdf>

currently protected by the NMW.<sup>15</sup> The TUC highlights that since England introduced a £80 minimum weekly rate for apprenticeships in 2005, the completion rates for apprenticeships have improved.<sup>16</sup> Apprenticeship completion rates have more than doubled over the last five years, from 28% in 2002/03 to 63% in 2006/07.<sup>17</sup> The rate of improvement in completion has been greatest in low-paid sectors such as child care (181 improvement in completion), health and social care (150 per cent) and hairdressing (125 per cent).<sup>18</sup> This is helping to boost equality as those in the lowest paid apprenticeships are more likely to be women. Rates still need to be improved, particularly in low-paid sectors, where around four in ten apprentices do not complete their training.<sup>19</sup> Apprenticeships need to be properly funded and made an attractive prospect if they are to become a viable option.

Many NEETs are exposed to poverty and deprivation in their lives. This disengages young people from the system and has a negative impact on their future aspirations as they often feel trapped in their current predicament and feel doomed to stay there. When addressing the issue of poverty there is a strong bias for concentrating on urban poverty, as urban poverty is highly visible and well documented, social exclusion in rural areas is rarely captured in official statistical data because of the dispersal of poor rural households and their often close proximity to affluence.<sup>20</sup> Concerns have recently been expressed by the WAG Rural Development Sub-committee that policies and programmes of the Welsh Assembly Government do not reach people in rural areas.<sup>21</sup>

The lack of well-resourced, regular and extensive provision of public transport and safe routes to school/college currently prevents many pupils from disadvantaged backgrounds from taking part in after-school and extra-curricular activities, which have been shown to be an important means of raising self-esteem and increasing participation in education.<sup>22</sup> ATL Cymru is therefore calling on the WAG to allow young people free access to public transport until the age of 19.

## **7. We have provided draft guidance for local data collection at Annex C of this strategy. We would like to know whether:**

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<sup>15</sup> TUC press release, "TUC call for all apprentices to be protected by minimum wages", 7<sup>th</sup> August 2008, <http://www.tuc.org.uk/skills/tuc-15169-f0.cfm>

<sup>16</sup> <http://www.tuc.org.uk/skills/tuc-15169-f0.cfm>

<sup>17</sup> <http://www.tuc.org.uk/skills/tuc-15169-f0.cfm>

<sup>18</sup> <http://www.tuc.org.uk/skills/tuc-15169-f0.cfm>

<sup>19</sup> <http://www.tuc.org.uk/skills/tuc-15169-f0.cfm>

<sup>20</sup> ATL Position Statement, Poverty and Social Exclusion in Rural Areas, 2008

<sup>21</sup> [http://www.assemblywales.org/bus-home/bus-committees/bus-committees-third1/bus-committees-third-rd-home/bus-committees-third-rd-agendas/rdc\\_3\\_-14-08\\_p3\\_rdc\\_report\\_on\\_poverty\\_and\\_deprivation\\_in\\_rural\\_wales.pdf?langoption=3&ttl=RDC%2](http://www.assemblywales.org/bus-home/bus-committees/bus-committees-third1/bus-committees-third-rd-home/bus-committees-third-rd-agendas/rdc_3_-14-08_p3_rdc_report_on_poverty_and_deprivation_in_rural_wales.pdf?langoption=3&ttl=RDC%2)

<sup>22</sup> ATL Position Statement, Poverty and Social Exclusion in Rural Areas, 2008

**a. the two main categories of NEET are helpful to CYPP organisations for their data collection?**

ATL Cymru welcomes the two main categories and believes they could be helpful for CYPP organizations in collecting data. We are concerned that the categories may not be rigid enough to enable the consistency in data collection that is necessary to enable interventions to be targeted effectively.

**b. there be any difficulties in implementing data collection on this basis within organisations?**

Schools may find it difficult to implement data collection. As stated earlier, it would be beneficial for schools to collect data on NEETs but ATL Cymru would like to stress that no schools should be burdened with extra responsibilities without significant and adequate funding provided.

**c. we could do more to encourage local organisations to collect data in a consistent way.**

ATL Cymru does not wish to comment on this.

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