



Association of Teachers and Lecturers (ATL Cymru's) and ACM/AMiE Response to the Enterprise and Learning Committees inquiry into the transformation agenda

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.

The Association for College Management is the TUC affiliated trade union and professional association that champions, represents and supports managers in the post-16 education and training sector throughout the United Kingdom. Our membership embraces academic and business managers at all levels up to and including college principals. In Wales the Association is governed by the ACM Wales Committee, an autonomous committee of the ACM National Executive Council. There are over four hundred further education college managers in membership of ACM in Wales.

In 2008, realising the common shared values and commitments of Associations, ACM and ATL joined together to form AMiE - the Association of Managers in Education. AMiE represents managers across the spectrum of colleges and secondary and primary schools. As an organisation that crosses the traditional divide between schools and colleges it is thus uniquely placed to voice concerns and provide innovative solutions to the challenges of post-16 education.

Structural Changes

1. Progress towards the Learning Partnerships across different local authorities in Wales- What are your experiences? How are partnerships functioning?

Members in colleges report that in several areas this is very good. Success is due to the sound leadership provided within the partnership, with a clear shared vision. However, it should be noted that much progress had been made in some areas before transformation. In those areas there is a sense of moving towards optimising arrangements pre and post-16. For example the quality and nature of the provision are now more on the agenda than simple cooperation. Issues of protocol are being discussed where this is a sense of a move towards 'harder' relationships with operational issues being defined in a more rigorous manner: who is responsible for what, what the processes of quality management will be, the operation of peer observations.

There are concerns from some colleges that, although they span LEAs, there is insufficient communication between adjoining LEAs. This can be particularly problematic in cases of merger. Transformation, in the context of Local Authorities, can involve issues of closure with a consequent lack of desire of some institutions to engage in partnership. In some rural areas there are concerns regarding practicality in terms of transport and logistics. In some cases there is concern that there is a lack of liaison between different groups that operate in the same geographical area. For example, there may be a regional group, a 14 – 19 network (with subgroups) and a learning partnership (with subgroups) and there is no overall coordinating body. There are still areas where institutional vested interests are the main strategic driver.

One school member reported that partnership in Wrexham is working in theory but tensions are developing between competitive providers with particular focus on the likely outcomes from the "Transformation Agenda" for school sixth forms etc. The partnership is meeting its obligations from the Welsh Assembly Government but is not entirely meeting the needs of the learner or the home schools.

Post-16 consortium operation has been in effect on Deeside for over 20 years, so collaboration is not new. Economic pressures are prejudicial to the comprehensive ideal – providing for all young people in the catchment area – as some subjects (commonly languages and music, for example) never generate viable numbers even across groups of schools. The 14-19 group in Flintshire, involving all 12 high schools and Deeside College, works well. We are concerned that the foundation status of some of Conwy's secondary schools will be detrimental.

Other members are concerned that partnership works to a point, but seems a very inefficient and time consuming way to organise a relatively small number of courses for a small proportion of the cohort. Concern has been expressed about how much it costs to fund the partnership co-ordination team.

2. How much schools and colleges are being consulted- Are you consulted by LEA's? Can you provide examples? Do you feel that this is 'real' consultation?

At senior levels there has been useful consultation with DCELLS staff, however, at the practical levels there is a sense that there is little direction given on issues of detail. This is partly due to the belief that there should be local solutions to local needs. However it would be useful if good practice could now be shared in such issues as how timetabling is managed, protocols for governance arrangements, financial models (for example, how ought funding be shared, how should recharging be carried out), discussions with unions, travel arrangements and costing, training of staff, learning support and charges, in class support, data transfer, MIS flow, ensuring that learner information is shared and available in a timely manner.

The consultation undertaken by the Welsh Assembly Government in regards to the Learning and Skills measure is a good example of 'real' consultation. Officials met with small groups of stakeholders across Wales. The in-depth discussions that took place ensured that the measure, and its guidance, has been widely accepted. Other good examples of consultation are the network groups hosted by Colegau Cymru that are attended by relevant DCELLS officials – Finance and MIS have been cited as being particularly useful.

Schools can often feel that there is consultation but there is pressure to fall in line with the LEA and tertiary college wishes.

3. Whether there are any particular issues experienced in Welsh medium provision

Welsh medium provision can be problematic. A North Wales working group has done enterprising work to produce models of provision across the region. A degree of distance learning/video conferencing already occurs between Flintshire and Wrexham.

In Gwynedd the worst fears of policy makers are being realised in the college based provision. Although the college tries to ensure that nearly all the provision is available bilingually the proportion studying in Welsh, proportion taking assessments in Welsh etc is very small. There is a team

now working on a set of protocols for schools to tell the college which language the pupils must use.

4. Effect on teaching staff

School-based teachers of KS 4 and KS 5 only subjects are very concerned for their futures. This is affecting the morale of staff. If the principle of no compulsory redundancies were accepted this would be assuaged.

5. College mergers and the effect on further education staff

There is anxiety amongst many managers about their future livelihood. Managers have to give a considerable amount of time to issues regarding possible mergers and a great deal of work has been spent ensuring that there is a minimum negative impact on staff; website areas have been set up where staff can ask questions, consultation process organised, FAQ answered, staff updating sessions arranged.

Senior staff can spend most of their time on merger issues; especially Principals (up to 80% of their time can be spent on this) and HR managers. This means that initiatives can be delayed and problematic issues, such as the introduction of QCF, may not be given the attention that they merited. There has been good support for colleges going through the merger process with measured and consistent support. However, decisions that are required are reflected back to senior management in DCELLS which causes a delay. Colleges which are waiting for merger foresee much work post merger.

6. Whether duplication and gaps in provision are being reduced

The measure has ensured that there is a minimum entitlement offered to learners. There does appear to be less duplication and partners are working in a collaborative manner to manage this change. In some areas the good progress with schools on the 14-16 agenda has been underpinned by ring fenced funding and if this is no longer available then the provision may cease.

In some areas there are not mature procedures for monitoring what provision is offered, and, anecdotally, there is a sense that some schools may offer, inappropriately, vocational provision where such provision could be provided by the local college. Conversely schools can feel that colleges may offer inappropriate academic qualifications which could be provided at a school level.

Some have commented on the lack of courses available to learners in green technologies. There are modules becoming available in some

diplomas and these are being offered as part of larger courses but, sometimes, as free standing credits on a cost recovery basis. There are areas where demand is not being met due to capping; hair and beauty, plumbing and mechanics have been noted as examples. In some cases learners may need to travel to adjacent local authorities, but this may not be appropriate and realistic. Some colleges recognise that there is a potential gap at level 1 and are aware of this issue.

Some would argue that a degree of duplication in schools may meet the needs of the learner better than the less able, less likely to travel. There are still gaps in provision due to lack of resources particularly school based vocational subjects.

The current obligation to provide 30 courses may be driving up the instances of duplication. Members report that there is a tendency for schools to copy others in finding attractive courses. The 25+5 rule is causing schools to opt for BTECs and NVQ's because the points system favours these, as does the new replacement for RE2, especially when working on the level 2 threshold.

Changes in Choice

7. Progress with the 14-19 Learning Pathways

The pathway to apprenticeship program has helped significantly in this area. Employers are recruited before the start of the course and the entry requirements are rigorous. There is also a significant commitment from learners required – 30 hours per week. The incentive of an apprenticeship at the end of the course has led to high success rates on the program and this can motivate learners who aspire to the program.

Colleges argue that although they are making progress in working with partners to ensure that learners have appropriate choices at 14, this can be at the expense of the financial viability of the faculty. For example, in an Engineering faculty in a college 20% of the staff costs are due to 14 – 16 school students. These costs are assigned on a direct cost basis only, and as a result, the faculty needs to meet its contribution to overheads from the courses it delivers to its learners post 16. This is a clear financial disincentive to further progress. Costs associated with sickness are a risk assumed by the FE institution; if a member of staff is ill then the costs of cover falls entirely on the college. In some areas the costs are met by ring fenced partnership monies and there is real concern that the provision will cease when these monies cease.

School staff are being offered the opportunity to team teach in some areas and this can be used as a staff development for such staff.

This is a clear example of institutions putting the learner first, and not the institution. There are examples where colleges timetable the 14 – 16 requirements first, demonstrating a real commitment to this provision and its quality. There is some concern that the minimum number of ‘academic’ courses at Key stage 5 is too low. There are still examples where the FE college has no access to learners to ensure that they are provided with information about the college.

There is a high degree of consensus on the objectives of 14 – 19 transformation, but the severe cuts of last year (7.43%), evidently driven by the unexpected success of schools and colleges in attracting more students to a wider range of courses, exacerbated by further cuts this year, mean that the legal requirement to offer a given quantum (up to 30, varying by LEA) is adhered to in name only: institutions are only obliged to offer up to 30 courses, but do not have to run them if they are not viable. It would be useful for WAG to have data on the number of courses that are running and the geographical spread.

North Gwynedd and Anglesey schools are working together to devise a local curriculum that will cover the whole area post 16- six Gwynedd schools, five Anglesey schools and the two colleges. This work is being driven by two factors - the WAG sponsored research project by a consultancy called 'FE associates' . This work is seemingly ignoring all previous work done and agreements reached by the Geographic Pathfinder that was all democratically approved and widely consulted upon.

The main problems faced by the post-16 agenda are geography. Students are expected to travel long distances, schools are of very different sizes, there is a huge variance between the school day times and lesson times, and significant linguistic differences.

8. Whether there are more vocational choices for Year 9 and Year 11 pupils

On the whole, yes, with schools and colleges now meeting the measure. However there is still much to be done in changing the prejudice in some parents and learners minds regarding vocational education. In one school only 17/280 in year 9 opted for a vocational program. This can lead to difficulties in offering financially viable courses in the partner FE institution, although grouping students from several schools can assist in ensuring viability. It will be important to monitor whether choice made translates into courses actually being run.

We are concerned that some academic courses could be axed to make room for more vocational courses as indicated by the Minister

recently. We agree 'radical solutions' will have to be considered to achieve parity of esteem between academic and vocational options but it would be a retrograde step to cut the number of academic courses on offer.

9. Whether local curricula are being established/timetabled and the effect on teaching and lecturing staff

As institutions work together to optimise the manner in which options are made available to staff, there will be an increasing need to retrain staff. There is a perception that, at the moment, the first option would be redundancy rather than retraining. Lecturers in FE colleges have had to deal with younger learners than they were used to. Appropriate staff are often used for this year group, and training is given in behaviour management. It is imperative that the lack of transferability of PGCE (FE) is dealt with. There needs to be parity between the qualifications for entry into teaching in FE and in schools.

Members from schools report concerns that transport arrangements prevent harmonisation of school days and sessions. One member reported that in their school the start and finish times are determined by the bus companies who provide transport for three schools consecutively.

One member from Gwynedd reported that there are plans (post 16) to get the curriculum deputies from the eleven schools in the area together to develop a form of common timetable. If this is successful it will have to be a block timetabling system which will cause all other parts of the school to be block timetabled. This will upset language teachers in particular - who claim it will affect standards in their subjects. The timetable is already very constrained and will be more so leading to problems for part time staff in particular who will not have designated days off. In one school in particular they already cannot respond to requests received by new mothers for reduced timetables. This situation will be exacerbated by block timetabling.

In the cases of schools with block timetabling they will face significant difficulties if the school gets a DDA adjustment requirement. The reformation of the timetabling system is done to reduce costs. Some schools will lose subject areas and some staff will have to either become peripatetic or be replaced by staff who can cover more than one subject. One school reports that they have already actively recruited staff that can offer several subjects when they have a vacancy.

10. Whether there is increased use of digital teaching, and the impact this is having

This is very dependent on capital spend and feedback is that this is variable. Some colleges have noted an increase but note that this is more a function of technology rather than partnership. There is evidence of an increase in the use of elearning, as this is how learners now access information. Much work has been done by colleges to ensure that learners are assisted in gaining access to appropriate and useful materials through the use of VLM such as moodle.

Members in schools report that equipment is inadequate compared to that of post 16 providers. At school level, old machinery and equipment is a real problem. There is concern that there is a big difference in the school resources on offer in Wales compared to England.

11. Whether there is increased personal support for pupils, such as learning coaches

There is slow progress, due to funding restrictions. Some members have suggested that it is difficult for learners to obtain genuinely impartial advice. One member from a school reported that in their institution they have recently proclaimed that every member of staff is a learning coach. This is a far cry from the initial ideal for a team of specialist coaches in each school. All that schools can realistically do now is to ensure they have something that answers the need in their pastoral programme using existing staff and resources.

Colleges provide a wide range of support for learners, and the learning coaches have, anecdotally, made a difference. Learners have access to a wide suite of support services; personal tutors, learning coaches, student support officers attached to at risk students in faculties, links with appropriate support from external agencies, learning support, basic skills support, enrichment programs, learn direct etc. This support is continually developing.

12. Whether pupils with Additional Learning Needs are coping

Members report that in FE colleges there is often very good learner support and staff are used to gaining access to this. They may, after assessment, believe that a 14-16 learner requires support but the funding for this may not be available from the school and hence the support may not be available. If it is made available it is at the college's expense.

Members believe that the group that has benefitted most from the increased vocational provision is the group just above the ALN who are not academic and not statemented. This is a relatively small group and the question begs to be asked whether their needs could not have been met without the changes the transformation agenda has brought about.