



**Future of schools management in Scotland
ATL Scotland's written evidence to the
Education, Lifelong Learning and Culture Committee
2 July 2010**

ATL, the education union

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. We help our members, as their careers develop, through first-rate research, advice, information and legal support. Our 160,000 members – teachers, lecturers, headteachers, support staff and students – are empowered to get active 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). The union is a member of the Social Partnership – working with the UK Government, employers and other unions on education issues. ATL is not affiliated to any political party and seeks to work constructively with all the main political parties.

Introduction

ATL Scotland welcomes the opportunity to provide written evidence to the Education, Lifelong Learning and Culture Committee on the future of schools management in Scotland. One strength of being a UK-wide union is that we can draw upon our members' collective experiences in working in schools with diverse management structures in England, Wales and Northern Ireland. In doing so we will offer a constructive analysis on their potential impact on teaching and learning.

Principles

In a free society, parents have the right to choose an education by an institution independent of the state, subject to safeguards. But ATL recognises that the state has the duty to provide education for the very great majority of young people. In a democratic society, then, schools should be under democratic control and accountable through the government to the taxpayer.

In order to achieve value for the taxpayers' money, the provision of schooling must be subject to rational planning. If schools become marketised, there are necessarily costs associated with inefficient organisation.

ATL applies these two principles to all proposals for new ways of managing the school system. We oppose any mechanism which places vital community resources in the hands of unaccountable groups, however benign they may appear.

Within these high level principles, ATL also applies the following criteria to the delivery of education under any new model:

- *Admissions*

Schools cannot be allowed to select pupils and should follow locally and/or nationally agreed protocols

- *Governance*

There should be staff representation on the governing bodies of any new school structure.

- *Pay and conditions of service*

In all schools, pay and conditions at least as favourable as those detailed in the Scottish Negotiating Committee for Teachers Handbook.

- *Recognition*

The school workforce unions should be given automatic recognition rights under any new model. We would not wish to replicate members' experiences in England where some academies have denied staff their basic employment rights.

We note that the 'internal management and governance of schools, roles of different grades of teaching staff and faculty arrangements and so on are not within the scope of this work, other than perhaps tangentially'. We respect the Committee's desire not to examine those issues in detail at this moment in time but would argue that good governance and management are central to the success of any new model.

Different models of delivery

Academies

There are now 203 academies in England. This is a population large enough to draw conclusions about the policy. Like other schools, there are the good, the bad and the ugly amongst academies, and there is no reliable data that the introduction of Academies has raised educational standards as claimed by the Westminster Government. Academies being independent, neither national nor local government has any mechanism to deal with poor performance or to lever up the quality of learning and teaching, or to intervene on workforce issues such as unreasonable pay and conditions or workforce reform – a major policy issue for the Westminster government. All this despite being directly funded by the state, with many of the funding provisions secret: a case of he who pays the piper not calling the tune.

Maintained schools independent of local authority control (e.g. Trusts, Free schools)

Legislation was introduced at Westminster to allow for the creation of Trust Schools in England. The model would allow any interested organisation, with the exception of those engaged in brewing, gambling or pornography, to be able to set up a charitable trust to govern a maintained school. The response has been large, with further and higher education institutions and schools regarded (by Ofsted) as highly successful leading many trusts. Since they remain state schools and subject to all the state's provisions, the trust school model is attractive to many. However, ATL opposes it because ultimately the school is governed in the interests of the sponsor, not parents or the community. Partnership between schools and with FHE can be achieved without transfer of 'ownership'.

Much media coverage has been given to the concept of Free Schools, mostly driven by the Conservative Party's adoption of it in their election manifesto. We do not see the merit in a wholesale transfer of the policy to Scotland because of the different socio and educational backgrounds. Neither do we believe there is currently an appetite in Scotland amongst charities nor not-for-profit trusts to set up new schools. The mere repetition of the mantra that competition drives up standards does not automatically make it happen.

There must be a strong tendency for such a policy to be expensive since it creates surplus places. Like other models relying on independence, there is also an insufficient capacity for external monitoring or intervention to improve learning and teaching.

Community Based Management of Schools

East Lothian Council has gained significant amounts of media coverage as it continues to develop its proposals for the Community Based Management of Schools. ATL Scotland participated in the recent conference held at Queen Margaret University to discuss the 'challenges and the prospects' of this new delivery model. East Lothian Council has a successful track record of pupil attainment and innovation within its Department of Education and Children's Services and is seeking to improve the learning and teaching experience in its schools.

We welcome the principles of community empowerment contained within the document and East Lothian's desire to 'close the gap between the local community and the schools which serve that same community', on the condition that any structures allow for local democratic control. We would not favour Community Based Management Schools becoming Trusts independent of the Council at some distant point in the future. However, by the Council's own admittance 'we would suggest that such a destination only forms the last 5% of our total journey and may or may not be a place where our communities decide they want to go'.

Faith Schools

To a great extent there is a different debate surrounding faith Schools in England than the one that periodically raises its head in Scotland. Much of the debate in England is centered around faith schools' ability to diverge away from the National Curriculum and their autonomy over school admission policies. A larger debate exists upon the extent to which faith schools contribute to community cohesion, a duty placed on faith schools by the Westminster and forms part of the Ofsted inspection process.

ATL recognises that some faith schools offer excellent teaching and are well integrated into their local community. However, ATL believes that the fragmentation of education opportunities for pupils is not a good starting point for a society which is beginning to acknowledge the dangers of segregation, the importance of community cohesion and of shared understandings and values. ATL believes that we need schools that embrace the diversity of the individuals within our community, not a diversity of institutions dividing pupils and staff on religious grounds.

However, ATL does not advocate a faith-blind approach in schools, since this would not acknowledge the complexity of community or the individuality of pupils. It is vitally important that our public culture, in this case our schools, is faith-sensitive, and avoids the blockading of faith communities into embattled, inward-looking and defensive enclaves.

National Quango

In Northern Ireland there is a movement away from School Boards to an Education and Skills Authority (ESA) which would act as a single employer of all teaching and education support staff. This was widely welcomed by teachers' unions seeking uniform employment practices and an estimated savings in bureaucracy being focused on frontline services. It is yet to be finalised as negotiations between the political parties continue within the Assembly on a number of areas.

The advantages of a national quango such as the ESA in Northern Ireland are not necessarily achievable in Scotland. Teachers already have a uniformity of employment practices through the 2001 Teachers Agreement. In addition it is always questionable as to how much can be saved from an estimated reduction in bureaucracy. We would suggest that efforts may be better placed in seeking savings through improved procurement procedures.

The Cabinet Secretary for Education and Lifelong Learning is on record as being "happy to embrace diverse approaches" we would suggest that the creation of a national quango will not deliver the diversity that he is seeking. We remain to be convinced that a national quango could also deliver the raising in standards of learning and teaching that all stakeholders desire.

Regional Boards

The concept of regional boards was, as the Committee is aware, debated at the Scottish Labour Party's Spring conference. As we understand the proposal the responsibility for the running of schools would be transferred from the 32 local authorities to 12 Regional Boards with increased devolution of authority to headteachers. Since the reorganisation of local government in 1995 and the emergence of the 32 unitary authorities the issue of capacity, opportunity and relevance has often been raised in relation to education function.

Conclusion

If, as the Cabinet Secretary is keen to see, a cross-party consensus on education policy can be achieved for the long-term then all parties should strive for this. We would advocate that when considering all possible different models of delivery and their potential for implementation in Scotland we must ask ourselves must be how will this improve the standard of learning and teaching in Scotland's schools? There is ample international evidence that few schools have the culture and management expertise to be independently and continuously self-improving. Improving learning and teaching often requires external inputs, whether it be through collaboration with other schools or advisers. This implies the need for support at a level between the school and the government.

ATL is proud of its evidence-based approach to policy development and we would wish to see irrefutable evidence that the benefits of any significant changes to delivery models will outweigh the negatives. Pupils, parents and teachers deserve no less.

On behalf of ATL Scotland

Keith Robson
National Official (Scotland)