



ATL Cymru's Response to HES Committee

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 has taken a leading role in publicizing the benefits of healthy eating for school pupils. ATL Cymru represents over 6,500 education professionals in colleges and schools across the whole of Wales.

1. Is there a need for an Assembly Measure to promote healthy eating in schools in the view of existing initiatives in this area?

There is a definite need for an Assembly Measure in this area in light of the fact that 22% of boys and 17% of girls aged 13 are overweight or obese¹. Obesity in childhood increases the likelihood of obesity in adulthood leading to life expectancy being reduced by nine years. ATL believes it is necessary and timely that this measure is introduced to enable the coordination of current initiatives in this area.

ATL broadly welcomes this measure but would like to see more emphasis placed on educating children about the benefits of healthy eating to encourage their commitment rather than simply directing and instructing children to eat healthily without necessarily explaining the full benefits to them.

2. Do you support the key provisions set out in the measure

ATL supports the key provisions set out in the measure; we particularly welcome the commitment to taking reasonable steps to ensure that every pupil who is entitled to receive free school lunches does so. We also welcome the provision to ensure those who receive free school lunches cannot be identified as a pupil who receives free school lunches. ATL would like to see a commitment to the introduction of cashless canteens for all schools to be incorporated into this measure. A cashless system would mean all pupils would use a personal payment card which prevents them from being identified as a pupil who receives a school lunch free of charge. This would fulfil one of the key provisions in the measure. This would also help fulfil the key provision to encourage pupils to

¹ 2006 Welsh Health Survey

consume school meals which are, in general, more nutritious and healthy than off site options. A recent Estyn report² highlights the success of one school that introduced a cashless payment system who saw an increase from 51% up to 97% of eligible pupils taking their free school meal entitlement.

ATL also supports the key provision set out for Local Education Authorities in Wales to ensure that there is a supply of drinking water available, free of charge on all school premises that it maintains. ATL welcomes this but would like to highlight concerns that the impact of this policy could be diminished by the current state of school toilets in Wales. In schools surveyed by Estyn, half the toilets in secondary schools visited and a quarter in primary schools were unsatisfactory. Where pupils are not happy with the condition of school toilets, they are more likely not to drink enough water so they don't have to visit them³.

ATL supports Estyn in its call to the Welsh Assembly Government to introduce minimum standards for school toilets and changing facilities.

3. Are there any further provisions that you would like added to the proposed measure

ATL would like to see a provision for pupils to be educated about where healthy food can be obtained from outside school. Pupils need to be taught how to cook or prepare food themselves. Currently there are not enough facilities to do this⁴. ATL supports Estyn's recommendation that the Welsh Assembly Government needs to work with schools and local authorities to fund improvements to facilities in schools to help them teach healthy living. Clear lines of funding for healthy eating initiatives also need to be secured so that schools can plan activity more effectively.

A provision for 'safe' food needs to be added to this measure. Food safety laws around school food need to be tightened up to ensure the provision of safe, uncontaminated food for all pupils. The recent E.coli enquiry into the death of a Welsh school pupil and illness of a considerable number of others found that Bridgend and Rhondda Cynon-Taff Local Authorities systematically failed in protecting the public, replicating the experiences of the E.coli outbreak in Scotland 12 years ago. The enquiry found that food safety and that of pupils was compromised by procurement procedures. Steps need to be taken to ensure that lessons are learnt and that there are robust mechanisms in place to prevent this.

4. Do you believe the proposed measure will achieve its overall purpose- to enable a holistic, made in Wales policy to be developed and implemented?

² Estyn, "Food and Fitness in School: A report on how well schools in Wales support children and young people to be healthy and active", May 2008

³ Estyn, May 2008

⁴ Estyn, May 2008

Yes. ATL broadly welcomes the proposed measure and believes it will help facilitate a more holistic, coordinated made in Wales policy to be developed and implemented.

ATL Cymru does not wish to give oral evidence to the committee.