

ASSOCIATION OF TEACHERS AND LECTURERS

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***Information, Advice and Guidance Services for Young People:
Directions and Statutory Guidance for Local Authorities***

– A DCSF consultation

Response from the Association of Teachers and Lecturers

Date: 16 June 2010

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 and support staff – are empowered to get active locally and nationally. We are affiliated to the TUC, and work with government and employers by lobbying and through social partnership.

ATL policy

ATL believes that teachers as professionals must be recognised for their knowledge, expertise and judgement, at the level of the individual pupil and in articulating the role of education in increasing social justice. Within light national parameters, development of the education system should take place at a local level: the curriculum should be developed in partnership with local stakeholders; assessment should be carried out through local professional networks. Schools and colleges are increasingly encouraged to work collaboratively to offer excellent teaching and learning, and to support pupils' well-being, across a local area. Accountability mechanisms should be developed so that there is a proper balance of accountability to national government and the local community, which supports collaboration rather than competition.

ATL response

In our recently published position statement, *14-19 curriculum and its assessment*,¹ we say:

“Education must be equitable; a two-tier system is not acceptable. The 14-19 system must, for **all** students, offer flexibility and meaningful choice of subjects, qualifications and ways of learning. This is best achieved through cooperation and collaboration between institutions.”

To navigate an increasingly complex educational landscape and the pressures of competition for university places, apprenticeships and careers, young people need to understand what choices and opportunities

¹ See www.atl.org.uk/1419curriculum

lie in front of them; now and in the future, inside and outside of education.

Information, advice and guidance (IAG) can play a part in ensuring young people are equipped with the information, ideas, resources and ambition to make the right choices, enjoy a stimulating education, contribute to society and progress into the world of work. The provision of high quality, impartial IAG is central to meeting the goal of an equitable education offer, and can – and should – be developed cooperatively by partnerships of professionals working in education, training, local government, and small businesses.

ATL hopes that the Coalition government will retain a commitment to supporting IAG provision. We noted the removal of IAG guarantees from the Children, Schools and Families Bill during negotiations prior to the dissolution of parliament and seek reassurance that this is not an indication of the new government's priorities for aiding all young people.

We are aware that as a consequence of the general election result, the context this statutory guidance sits in now is different to that during the period it was written and published. Nevertheless, this response takes the opportunity to highlight ATL's existing policy on information, advice and guidance, demonstrate our commitment to its importance, and comment on some of the key issues the guidance document raises.

Qualifying almost everything we say in this response is a question: *what about academies?* The importance of IAG is not limited to the students who attend schools remaining under local authority control. We urge the government to make clear how this statutory guidance impacts upon those young people who will attend academies. And if it doesn't, or if different guidance emerges, then it is essential that the high quality level of information, advice and guidance which is advocated does not become absent for the increasing number of young people being educated in academies from September 2010.

Making an impact with IAG

ATL believes that the importance of high quality IAG cannot be underestimated; choice is nothing without guidance. The impact is felt before, during, and (often long-) after 14-19 education and can be felt disproportionately by the least advantaged. We recognise that the previous government attempted to address provision² but broad, detailed IAG has not kept pace with the size and complexity of 14-19 curriculum.

ATL believes that IAG should raise aspiration, support participation in learning, help overcome inequality and assist in making goals achievable. The sentiment of the Nuffield Review that young people must be taught to develop the 'competence to make decisions about the future in the light of changing economic and social conditions'³ is crucial and highlights the importance of decision-making skills alongside knowledge of the 14-19 landscape. It does not take a big jump to realise that education staff also need both skills and knowledge to provide this for young people whether in or out of schools and colleges; but also that they need freedom in the

² DCSF, *Quality, Choice and Aspiration: a strategy for young people's information, advice and guidance*, 2009

³ Nuffield Review of 14-19 Education and Training, *Summary, Implications and Recommendations*, 2009, p3

curriculum to go beyond teaching subject knowledge so they also have the space to cultivate skills such as decision-making that are central to a young person's development. It should not be forgotten that young people need to have the capability to take advantage of the support they are offered from IAG services.

Staff must be able to offer the most appropriate advice to meet the needs of the student rather than the needs of the institution. The highly-charged culture of accountability and institutional competition undermines the principle of impartiality. We also think it is important to recognise not only that IAG must be impartial with regard to schools' own provision but also that it should be impartial in reference to Government's education initiatives, policy or those qualifications or progression routes in which Government feels it has a significant investment. The offer to young people should be able to survive general elections.

Information, advice and guidance available to students must be able to tackle openly the status issues between different learning routes, whilst not undermining any particular route or qualification – thus allowing individuals to make informed decisions. If employers or educational institutions are failing to understand one type of qualification and favouring candidates with another, it is fair that students are made aware of this in such a way that they are not being guided down a particular route, but can avoid taking decisions that will have a negative effect on what they are trying to achieve.

ATL members recognise the significant role parents and carers play and we encourage young people to engage, where appropriate, in discussion with their parents, other family members, their peers, and other networks. Local authorities should seek to engage parents wherever possible – as well as helping young people this will also reduce the likelihood of complaints down the line, which seems to be the main concern the guidance has with parents.

Statutory Guidance for local authorities: the general duty

ATL is in broad agreement with paragraph 15 of the guidance which sets out a local authority's duty with regard to the IAG service it provides. We welcome the focus on young people needing IAG to maximise their potential and agree that it is not contradictory, and indeed not just very possible but necessary, to offer a service that is universal and targeted at those who most need it and/or are most vulnerable. Though not explicit in this section of the guidance, we hope that this includes those already not in education, employment or training as well as those at risk.

We agree that, alongside teaching, IAG is something which can help young people rise above social disadvantage and are pleased to see the guidance expects of local authorities that they 'place IAG at the centre of their strategies to increase participation and improve 14-19 outcomes'.

Localism not parochialism

ATL advocates a curriculum designed locally by partnerships of professionals. The benefits of this approach to the development of an IAG strategy are obvious and – providing local authorities undertake this with school staff and others – we welcome what the guidance says in this regard. At the same time though, we believe it is crucial to emphasise to LAs and those leading strategic development to avoid being too parochial.

Yes, local industries will be significant but young people should not feel contained in a geographic area and must have the belief that they can take their talents anywhere. Ultimately IAG strategies should have the flexibility to respond to local and changing needs, but never feel limited by them.

Partnership working

In our position statement, *14-19 curriculum and its assessment*, we have been clear that responsibility for IAG should be shared within partnerships of professionals. The principle and its benefits here override whether this is undertaken through a formal or informal mechanism such as Local Area Agreements, 14-19 Partnerships, and/or specified IAG Partnership Agreements. But cross-sector working is essential – from local authorities to schools and colleges, universities to young offenders institutions, employers to Jobcentre Plus.

Where most young people will access support is at school. ATL supports the statutory guidance where it is clear that ‘an effective partnership with every school must be at the centre of the local authority’s plans for ensuring that pupils receive effective and impartial support’.

We believe requiring LAs to develop an IAG strategy which ‘supports effective relationships between all schools, colleges and work-based learning settings and employers’ is essential. The collaboration of all key stakeholders and delivery partners in shaping integrated IAG and the CPD which fuels its effectiveness is crucial.

The Workforce and continuing professional development (CPD)

The guidance is right to expect that local authorities should ensure that IAG staff training needs are audited annually and that all staff have access to a range of continuing professional development opportunities plus structured opportunities to evaluate professional practice. However, though the guidance promotes partnership working to ensure good practice is shared, we believe it should go further and specify that this offer to the workforce will include staff in schools.

It is important to understand that students will potentially turn to any member of staff in school for help and advice, whether or not they formally provide IAG. Providing CPD in IAG for the wider workforce can have a significant impact upon young people’s engagement at school and their life beyond.

QTS marks the expectations of trainee teachers to have familiarity with the range of curriculum options, but these are constantly evolving and so we believe support for staff in schools and colleges cannot be limited to initial teacher training. The results of a survey ATL conducted earlier this academic year demonstrate that confidence in providing information, advice and guidance is mixed at best. Education staff should advise on only what they know is up-to-date. Ofsted too has noted a knowledge and experience gap.⁴ ATL recommends a thorough programme of continuing training – in IAG skills and in curriculum knowledge – be provided at the earliest opportunity. Local authorities should coordinate joint CPD provision, which may be developed in partnership, across the local area.

⁴ Ofsted report, *Moving through the system – information, advice and guidance*, March 2010

Equality and diversity⁵

We are pleased that the statutory guidance to local authorities highlights the IAG Quality Standards' stipulation that 'promoting equality and diversity and challenging stereotypes are key features of a high quality IAG service'. The effectiveness of such services will also be aided by the recruitment of an IAG workforce that reflects the wider community: we welcome guidance to that effect.

ATL believes that all IAG services must feature regular and specific equality impact assessments. This would be particularly beneficial in determining whether a school has adopted a whole-school approach to, for example, tackling gendered subject and career choices. In coordinating partnership working, the local authority has a key role to play in doing this.

Whilst services should be useful and accessible to every young person, there should always be recognition that a one size fits all approach to IAG is not appropriate. Qualification of the desire to be 'impartial' is important. For example, the existing obstacles that disabled pupils face in making their own life choices should be recognised. Those with learning difficulties or health problems do have access to real choice in 14-19 education restricted. 'Impartial' would not mean abandoning realism about age and so cannot lead to blindness towards race, gender, disability, sexuality or religion. Young people may require a specific rather than a strictly 'impartial' careers education / IAG service.

Those not in education, employment or training

Our members individually, and our organisation collectively, believe in the power of education to change lives. ATL is therefore very supportive of directing specific services within IAG provision to those not in education, employment or training. It is right that this includes advising young people on financial support and that action is taken swiftly and a dialogue begun as soon as it is apparent that someone has left education without securing stable employment with training. We agree that staff in schools are better placed than colleagues in local authorities to identify early those young people potentially at risk of disengaging from education or employment with training.

Analysis of NEET data published by the government shows trends over the academic year which see numbers lower in autumn, rising in spring and peaking in the summer. One reason for this is young people being on the wrong course or pathway. Effective, impartial IAG, coupled with developing decision-making skills, is a solution.

The imperative to offer tailored support to those not in education, employment or training was set out succinctly by the former Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for 14-19 Reform and Apprenticeships:

⁵ There is significant evidence, for example, on: the impact of gender on educational and career aspirations and choices; the likelihood of a young person with a disability not being in education, employment or training; the challenges faced by those with economic or geographic disadvantages (e.g. living rurally), which IAG must deal with realistically and positively at the same time as seeking to overcome. ATL presented some of this evidence in its response to the DCSF consultation in July 2009 on statutory guidance for impartial careers education – we would be happy to re-supply a copy if needed.

“Being NEET disproportionately affects vulnerable young people and those from the poorest backgrounds. It is passed on from generation to generation like some sort of grotesque inheritance. It is a moral and social injustice that we have a responsibility to deal with. A progressive government could never write off a generation.”⁶

Conclusion

As a new government considers its priorities, ATL is clear that it strongly urges a commitment to providing a thorough and effective service offering information, advice and guidance, useful and accessible to all young people, including those attending academies.

Though the recent policy direction on information, advice and guidance has been more-or-less sound, it is clear that there is still work to be done. A significant proportion of ATL members surveyed in the autumn term of 2009, did not believe that students have enough high quality information, advice and guidance to make the most of opportunities on offer at 14-19.

We have set out the need for coordinated and comprehensive provision of continuing professional development so that professionals are able to give young people the assistance they require. ATL believes that IAG services can and should raise aspiration, support participation in learning, help overcome inequality and assist in making goals achievable. Whilst providing a universal service is essential, IAG strategies should supply an ability to tailor support to the vulnerable and those at risk of not being in, or remaining outside of, education, employment or training.

Strong local partnerships and national networks are essential in helping young people navigate the educational and occupational landscape in front of them. We believe that this guidance document has the potential to support cross-sector partnership development and are clear that schools and the staff within them continue to have a big role to play in providing young people with the information, advice and guidance they require.

⁶ Iain Wright MP, ippr and Private Equity Foundation Youth Tracker, *Backing young Britain*, Autumn 2009