



yr undeb dros addysg

**THE RESPONSE OF
THE
ASSOCIATION OF TEACHERS AND LECTURES
TO
PROPOSALS FOR A LEARNING AND SKILLS (WALES) MEASURE 2008**

INTRODUCTION

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 is uniquely placed to comment on broader 14 – 19 matters as it alone of all the education unions has significant representation in both Further Education colleges and secondary schools. ATL Cymru represents over 6,500 education professionals in colleges and schools across the whole of Wales.

Consultation Questions

Local Curriculum

1. Do you agree with the principle of increasing learner choice via co-operation between organisations and through the production of a local area curriculum?

It would be impossible to disagree with this principle. ATL has long advocated the expansion and development of the curriculum¹, and also believes that learner choice should be paramount in determining provision. We are also convinced that such increased choice can only be attained by greater cooperation between all organisations within a given local area. The production of a local curriculum is something that must involve *all* organisations within that area and be genuinely owned and promoted by them. As we will comment later, certain structural problems can inhibit cooperation.

2. For 14-16 learners registered at maintained schools the responsibility for planning the local curriculum rests with the local education authority and for governing bodies and head teachers to be required to assist the local authority in this regard. Do you agree that the responsibility should lie with local education authorities?

We agree that responsibility for the local curriculum should rest locally and be democratically accountable, but we are not convinced that the present set up of 22 LEAs, some of them very small, is best placed to develop and deliver this curriculum. In particular we are unsure about the ability of some LEAs to deliver adequate vocational provision, and also their ability to plan provision strategically. Given that individual LEAs may not be best placed or resourced to plan the local curriculum we believe that some sort

¹ Please see Martin Johnson, *Subject to Change: New thinking on the Curriculum* (Association of Teachers and Lecturers; London, 2007) and the position statement of the same name at http://www.atl.org.uk/atl_en/education/postition_statements/New_thinking_on_curriculum.asp

of clustering mechanism now needs to be considered to provide broader strategic direction. These clusters of LEAs need to represent the views of schools and colleges and be accountable to the LEAs they cover. We believe that present clustering arrangements among LEAs, shown for example in the services provided by Cynnal and Esis, could provide a strategic and geographical model that is both democratically accountable but also of sufficient size to provide expertise.

3. The responsibility for planning the local curriculum for learners aged 16-19 rests with Welsh Ministers. Do you consider this appropriate, and if not why?

We cannot see why the 14 –16 curriculum must be located locally and the 16 – 19 curriculum located nationally, other than for historic reasons. Given our reply in the previous question we think that similar arrangements should hold for 16 – 19 provision. This would preserve continuity, ensure seamless delivery, and be best placed for coping with future fluidity in 14 – 19 provision. It would also introduce a much needed element of local, democratic accountability into the FE sector. We believe Welsh ministers should provide strategic direction nationally for both curricula and provide regulation for the clustering arrangements

4. Would the setting of a minimum number of courses to be contained within the local curriculum in Key Stage 4 and a minimum number of courses for learners 16-19 years old, assist in ensuring equality of opportunity for learners across Wales?

Yes it would, though we remain concerned that questions of geography and topography may well constrain the number of courses in practice. We would urge that a minimum number of courses are set for a national entitlement but with Ministers given the power to disapply nominated aspects of that minimum number if the local clustering arrangement provides adequate evidence that it cannot reasonably be expected to deliver that specific element for reasons of geography.

5. Is it appropriate that the decision as to an individual learner's entitlement should rest with the head teacher or principal?

We would wish to see these decisions informed by guidelines issued by the clustering arrangement

6. Do you consider the use of minimum option numbers, allied with the use of learning domains succeed in supporting a workable framework for wider choice for learners in the 14-19 phase?

In theory these two elements should provide the broadest of menus. We think that those responsible for planning curricula will need to be given clear guidelines about the intention behind this proposal

7. Is it desirable to set a minimum number of vocational courses that must be included within a local curriculum?

Yes. The local curriculum must cater for all students. However, we must voice some concern at this point about drawing the distinction between 'academic' and 'vocational' too rigidly. As an organisation which has long campaigned for parity of esteem we do not want the prejudice against vocational options reinforced.

8. Should the minimum requirement for vocational courses be specified as having to fall across a range of learning domains?

Yes, we think this is essential for the development of true choice for the learner, and to avoid the danger of the curriculum being narrowed by a too localised focus on employers' immediate interests. Some learning domains can more easily provide vocational courses than others and those responsible for curriculum planning will need support to ensure that all domains contain vocational courses.

Joint Working

9. Would the placing of a duty on local education authorities, governing bodies of schools and further education institutions, to consider co-operation be sufficient to achieve the provision of a local curriculum?

We recognise the need for greater cooperation but are concerned by progress to date. While the present funding mechanism is in place the rhetoric of collaboration will be undermined by the competition for funds.

10. Please identify any barriers to co-operation that may need to be overcome. What possible solutions are there?

The main barrier to cooperation is the present funding mechanism which encourages competition rather than cooperation. ATL is uniquely placed to see how this competitive funding mechanism is destructive of good will in both schools and colleges. It can create a climate of suspicion. While funding, which translates in to resources and, crucially, jobs is organised on a crude per capita basis institutions are bound to compete for students.² The revelation in Webb Report of the chronic under-funding of FE in Wales has only served to increase anxiety within the schools sector which is again under-funded in relation to the rest of the UK. There needs to be a significant and incontrovertible increase in the quantum of education funding for both schools and colleges. This increase could then be used to guarantee present funding levels for institutions, relieving some of the competitive pressures, and the 'extra' allocation be allocated by the

² See the National Audit Office (England) *Partnering for Success: Preparing to Deliver the 14 -19 reforms in England* on the risks posed by the dysfunction of government policy based on the rhetoric of collaboration and a funding system that in practice is based on competition.
http://www.nao.org.uk/publications/nao_reports/07-08/070899.pdf

clustering arrangements to develop and deliver the broadest possible high quality, sustainable options menu for learners.

Differences of ethos and culture between schools and colleges should not be underestimated. This is partly due to the nature of the student body itself and the resultant pedagogies, behaviour and dress codes, internal structures, services, and the like.

Differences in terms and conditions between school teachers and college lecturers cannot be ignored and will need to be addressed. While pay parity has largely been achieved, terms and conditions are still very divergent. This issue must be addressed before larger scale cooperation can take place. It is crucial that issues surrounding terms and conditions are addressed by WAG, *fforwm* and lecturers' unions. Teachers' unions will also be keen to ensure that future cooperation is not to the detriment of their members' terms and conditions of service.

Several members have also highlighted the extreme difficulty of devising and maintaining common timetable arrangements, issues surrounding student tracking, and child protection arrangements,

Learning Coach and Personal Support

11. The proposed measure makes provision for youth support services. Will the provision proposed facilitate young people's access to support services as envisaged within 14-19 Learning Pathways?

We are pleased to welcome the proposed increase in provision. Members in colleges and schools are keenly aware of the variety of issues that can preclude successful learning and personal development. We hope that these services will be properly resourced and targeted.