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***Check against delivery***

I have had, as some of you may know, a varied career within the field of education. I worked as a teacher in comprehensive schools in London for eleven years. I worked in higher education, training teachers for another eleven years, and then, in 2003, I became General Secretary of ATL, the Education Union.

So I have taught; I have taught teachers and now I am proud to hold the position of General Secretary of ATL, representing teachers, lecturers and support staff throughout all stages and phases of education.

I am sometimes asked which of my several educational roles has been most demanding and challenging. My answer is clear – the hardest job I have ever done is to be a teacher.

Lots of people talk and write about education, and everyone has an opinion on teachers and teaching. I face a dilemma every time I get into a taxi, should I answer the driver's inevitable question 'what do you do?' honestly, by saying I am a union leader, and then opening myself up to the inevitable torrent of abuse as I am blamed for the dead not being buried, dustbins not being emptied, the bubonic plague, the collapse of the manufacturing industry and the credit crunch? Or should I say, what I still think I am, a teacher, take the rap for bringing the nation to its knees because I am, individually and collectively, responsible for the absence of morals and respect in today's youth, the decline in grammar teaching, the loss of the cane and, to add insult to injury, my easy working life (start at nine, finish at three, don't you darling?)

It's a dilemma, and one that I still have not resolved. But these diatribes do say something, I think, about the parlous state of the public discourse about education which is, in my view, harmful to the body politic of the nation. Did you know that not one editor of a national newspaper sends their child to a state school? Did you know that the education reporter of one, major, national newspaper

told me not to bother sending him any stories of success in state schools – his editor would not be interested and would not print the story. There can be no successful state school stories in his paper.

Catch 22 comes to mind. If exam results rise it's because exams are getting easier. If results fall it's because teachers aren't doing their job properly. Teachers cannot win. The debate on teachers and teaching is reductive, parlously poor and, ultimately, insulting.

I know what it takes to be a teacher. I recall the days, weeks, months and years I spent trying to teach working-class pupils the importance of standard English – how to speak it and how to write it. I called it their passport to professions. I recall the hours I spent after the last bell tutoring pupils who needed my help when they got stuck with their homework or they didn't understand what we had done in class. I recall the work we did as an English department, writing new courses and teaching materials, introducing multi-cultural literature into our work so that all our pupils could see, through what they read, that literature, and writing, and the world of the imagination, were not just for the white middle class but for them too. I recall the friendship of my colleagues; pulling together when the going got tough and some of the pupils we had tried so hard to help were less than grateful for our efforts. I remember the exhaustion we felt as the end of term approached. I remember, routinely, being ill at the start of the holidays, either getting flu, or, on one memorable occasion, chicken pox – or, more routinely, going down with a virus, which, my husband used to complain, never affected me in term time.

Of course it didn't. I had no time to be ill during term time. My pupils needed me, and I, like teachers throughout the nation, responded to that need. Teachers somehow get to school and work when they are ill; when they are exhausted; they are there because they have a vocation and a commitment to their pupils and students. It is a commitment that, too often, goes unacknowledged in public discussion about education, schools and schooling.

ATL, our union, is clear. We know that to be a teacher is to be a highly skilled professional. In our statement on new professionalism we state, unambiguously, the complex range of skills and knowledge that teachers use, every day, in their work with their students. We say that teaching is an intellectual profession, based on an in-depth knowledge of learning: how pupils learn, potential obstacles to learning and how learning develops. This expertise in pedagogy is underpinned by teachers' knowledge of their subjects. We say that teachers have a responsibility to their pupils as

individuals and as learners – knowledge developed through assessment and through relationships with pupils, families, communities and other professionals. And we recognise that this professional knowledge and understanding is not static: it changes and develops over time as our understanding of effective teaching and learning, and the new forms of knowledge which will be needed as we prepare for a future very different from the past.

...talking about possible futures, I have become a devotee of the science fiction series 'Torchwood' – a spin off from another favourite of mine, Dr Who. In the opening credits of Torchwood we are told that the 21<sup>st</sup> century is where everything changes – and I have reflected that this maxim is as true for schools as it is for alien life forms which, in every episode of Torchwood, attempt to invade the planet.

The 21<sup>st</sup> century is also central to the government's thinking on schools and education, and is encapsulated in the concept of the 21<sup>st</sup> century school.

Much is written in government policy documents about the 21<sup>st</sup> century school. The 21<sup>st</sup> century school will provide an excellent personalised education and development for all pupils. The 21<sup>st</sup> century school will provide a range of activities and opportunities to enrich the lives of children, families and the wider community.

The 21<sup>st</sup> century school has a highly skilled and motivated children's workforce in schools that is well led and effectively deployed.

And teachers and support staff in 21<sup>st</sup> century schools will work with colleges, universities, employers, local authorities and the full range of children services to offer, between them a comprehensive, highly responsive and personalised service which focuses on what every child and young person needs in order to succeed.

Now, ATL supports the government's ambitions that schools are centres of excellence which provide a full range of support services for children and young people, and particularly those who are vulnerable and in need. As a key player in social partnership we have played a major part in driving forward the remodelled workforce which has seen a huge increase in support staff, and an increase in teachers, to meet the changing needs of today's children.

We applaud the government's drive to rebuild schools so that they are fit places in which to work. We acknowledge the huge investment that this government has made in early year's

education; in Sure Start, in the development of co-located services on school sites. I have visited newly built children's centres and seen the resources and the support which has been made available to the most deprived communities in England – support which is desperately needed if the endemic cycle of poverty and under-achievement is to be tackled.

So there is much to congratulate this government for. It has put its money where its mouth is, and has begun the difficult and labour intensive task of putting the infrastructure in place to support the most deprived sections of our society and I, for one, am not slow to say well done, because this investment, and the emerging successful results receives little acknowledgement either from the opposition parties or from the press.

You know what's coming now, don't you. Yes, it's that useful word...but... what is missing from the government's concept of the 21<sup>st</sup> century school is a vision of the 21<sup>st</sup> century teacher. I am afraid that the government's idea of what a teacher is, and does, is still ruled by the 'that's the way to do it' mentality of the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

Is there, I wonder, any profession which is more watched over, more regulated and more directed than teaching? There's a saying – big fleas have little fleas upon their back to bite them. The teaching profession is, I am afraid, flea ridden – bitten by armies of advisers and inspectors who are firm adherents of what I call the 'that's the way to do it' approach.

Conference, remember the triumphs of 'that's the way to do it school of education management'... Remember the first incarnation of the literacy strategy in which there was no speaking and listening strand because Chris Wood Head, that great education guru, said that children didn't need to be taught how to speak and how to listen... And so a whole generation of children have lost the opportunity, in school, to learn how to talk and how to listen to others – and for those children who spend their lives at home cocooned in front of the television, interacting with no one, this loss will be incalculable.

The 'that's the way to do it' school believes that teaching should be compartmentalised and codified. Teachers should follow a common pattern: the lesson should start with the explanation of learning objectives; it should be paced; it must be full of activity. It is teaching as a performance, ready for inspection at all times.

And the inspectors are everywhere...inside and outside. I have been sent a lesson observation drop in form used by the senior management team in a school as they go on 'learning walks' around the school. The SMT is instructed to ensure, in their monitoring, that teachers 'meet and greet' students at the door. Learning objectives must be made clear within the first three minutes of the lesson. All lessons must have a starter, a middle section and a plenary; lesson plans must show evidence of differentiation; pupils must spend part of the lesson engaged in 'interactive learning'. Senior leadership teams should engage in a scrutiny of teachers' planning to ensure delivery reflects the planned content. They should scrutinise pupils' work to focus on curriculum coverage, differentiation, progression through year groups, volume, presentation and marking. When observing lessons they should ensure that teachers clarify the learning intentions at the planning stage; that they share the learning intentions of the lesson. And all teachers must do hand stands at the start of the lesson and cartwheels at the end of it – to model a healthy approach to physical fitness and well being. (O.K. I made that last one up.)

But I am only half in jest because, although this level of control is ridiculous, and laughable, in reality it makes teachers working lives a misery. It robs them of choice; it denies them control of what they should be in control of – the content, the pace and the focus of their lessons. Why should teachers have to tell pupils exactly what is going to happen in the lesson, every lesson? Why can't teachers introduce an element of surprise? Why can't they play on the powerful impetus of suspense – what's going to happen next? Why must our pupils be bored rigid by the repetition of the same lesson structure again and again and again?

But the problem goes deeper even than this. The 'that's the way to do it' mentality goes to the heart of our professional practice – the curriculum. It affects the way in which subjects are perceived and taught.

You may know that I was an English teacher, so I have a professional interest, indeed passion, for language and literature in education. But, Conference, my subject – English – is no more. It has been replaced by a newcomer – literacy. What is the difference between English and literacy? Well, quite a lot, as it happens....

Because literacy, as a subject, is based on the naming of parts. Children rarely read whole books; they read parts of books - extracts. These extracts are mined for adjectives, and adverbs, and active verbs, and nouns. The belief is, once the parts have been named, then they can be used, independently, in the children's

writing. But they cannot choose what they will write; they cannot choose the form they want to write in - that would be far too dangerous...

So, in a lesson plan a despairing teacher sent me recently I noted that children are to 'in mixed pairs act out verbs'. Then the teacher is to write a sentence on the whiteboard containing a verb, adjective and noun. (Use different colours for the different types of words). Ask the children what the noun word is, recap on nouns, discuss example.

Then in group work. Teacher to give verb cards and the children are to write sentences in their literacy books using the cards. Groups are to have a pot of verb cards and a pot of nouns. They are to pull one card from each pot and write a sentence containing these words.

So, there we have it. The naming of parts. And when children actually get to write, they use not their own words, but the ones they have picked out from pots, which they then have to join together.

Conference, where has the concept of pleasure gone? Where has the personal response to a book, or a poem, disappeared to? Where is the experience of children choosing what it is they want to write about? Where is their sense of agency? Where is their developing voice as speakers and listeners and as writers? I don't want to get misty eyed about the past, but it is clear to me that something important has been lost – for both teachers and taught. And that is the heart of the subject – the subject which is dear to my heart – the subject of English

It is the 'that's the way to do it mentality' which is behind this absurd regulation of every aspect of teachers' professional practice. And what is lost to teachers is incalculable – and at its heart, a sense of professional pride and a feeling of proper professional autonomy.

The 'that's the way to do it' approach is behind the daft idea that teachers can be trained in six months.. and the even dafter Tory idea that teachers can be trained in six weeks.

And how does a six month, or six week training course fit with the government's other professed desire, to make teaching a master's level profession? Michael, if we can train teachers in six weeks, how long will it take to get an MA – three months?

Colleagues, I don't know about you, but I do hope that those bankers who squandered our money on toxic debts are not going to become maths teachers, or, for that matter, citizenship teachers...

Conference, we have to do much more to convince others, parents, the press, politicians, to raise the level of debate and policy on education. We have to stop the search for easy answers which leads to the 'that's the way to do it' approach. I said in my conference speech last year, and I repeat it this year. What do we know about good work? We know that good work, fundamentally, rests upon a level of discretion. Good work enables workers to make choices based upon their professional knowledge; it enables them to choose how a task is to be completed. It gives them a proper measure of control.

I asked you last year, and I ask you again, are teachers getting good work at the moment? Do they feel able to exercise a proper level of control over their work? Are they able to make decisions about the curriculum and the teaching methods they wish to employ with their pupils? Are they treated as professionals? Your answers say it all. They do not, and ATL will continue to campaign for a change of heart and a change of approach so that teachers can let their professional skills and knowledge flourish for the benefit of all our students.

Professional skills and knowledge flourish when the conditions are right. I have talked about the micro management of teachers – and this must stop. But it is only right for me to acknowledge success, particularly when ATL has played such a major part in it - and one huge success, for ATL and for teachers is the hard fought for and lately won position on rarely cover.

Who'd have thought it? Nobody likes cover, or taking split classes. Nobody thinks it contributes much to learning. But nobody ever thought we'd do away with it. Well we have. We have, ATL, working in social partnership, has ensured teachers are released from this burden from September 2009.

I know that the guidance on rarely cover was long delayed. This is because it was extremely difficult to get an agreement. And I'm sorry that too many local authorities jumped the gun with what has turned out to be highly inaccurate guesswork on what the contract will now say.

Which is that teachers will have to cover only in exceptional, unforeseen circumstances. Let me be clear: colleagues, ringing in

sick is foreseeable. So is the November peak in sickness. So is absences on courses and trips. The February snowfall was not in most parts of the country, and nether would be a major transport accident.

There will be a new section of the School Teachers' Pay and Conditions Document that removes the requirement for teachers to cover in all but exceptional circumstances. This is a remarkable achievement and one that many thought would never happen. For secondary school teachers, in particular, it is a real gain as it is the most tangible improvement in their conditions of service achieved through the national agreement.

What we have to do now is to ensure the agreement is kept. I am afraid that some school leaders (not, of course, ATL and AMiE members) will try to argue that there is not enough money in the budget to implement rarely cover. Their argument has no merit or worth. We must remember, and remind school leaders who try to make this argument, that the requirement to implement rarely cover was in the national agreement signed in 2003. It was intended to be implemented in September 2008, but NAHT and ASCL said that their members weren't ready. Well, we gave them a year's grace – they need to be ready now, and we will be watching them.

ATL has grown its support staff membership by 25% in the last year. We now have nearly 12,000 members, and we are acutely aware that much needs to be done to ensure that they are treated as professionals, with rights as well as responsibilities. We congratulate the government for setting up the new national negotiating body for support staff – it is long overdue and, from our members' feedback much needed. We recently did a comprehensive survey of support staff members working in the maintained sector and found that they were facing real problems in their work. You will not be surprised to hear that cover supervisors tell us that they are being required to cover long term absence, because they are cheaper than a supply teacher; our support staff members tell us that they are working excessive hours – more than a third of members report that they work at least four hours a week on top of their contractual hours, and more than two thirds are not paid for this overtime. And then there is the perennial issue of term time only contracts which artificially depresses support staff pay. So, the new national negotiating body will have a great deal to do and, again, we will be watching its work very carefully.

ATL support staff members will not be encouraged by yesterday's news. The Local Government Employers have made an opening pay

offer of 0.5% on all salary pay points for the 2009/2010 pay round. The employers have also stated that the offer is time-limited, in that if no negotiated agreement is reached then the offer will be withdrawn, and there will be no pay rise implemented for the current year.

Colleagues, this is no way to treat local government employees, and no way to treat support staff in schools.

ATL's FE members have just witnessed the biggest fiasco to hit the sector: the freeze on capital spending by the LSC in March 2009. Yet it was known in February 2008 by LSC and DIUS. Sir Andrew Foster has said that the freeze on 144 colleges, 79 of whom are still in limbo in regard to their building programmes, was 'predictable and avoidable.' There are a lot of things about the FE sector that are 'predictable and avoidable.'

The tension between schools and colleges in delivering the diplomas was predictable and avoidable. The contradictions in having teaching staff on different pay and conditions delivering the same qualification on the same site was predictable and avoidable. Finally, the mess of letting Sixth Form staff choose to register with the GTC or IfL and then saying that the issue is still up in the air as to which they should join in the future was predictable and avoidable.

All of these things were predictable because ATL predicted them. We said the roll-out of the diplomas would be a problem from the outset. We said a voluntaristic system of schools and colleges electing to be involved in diploma development would not work. Even now, on the DCSF's own figures for next year, the figure of 50,000 students on the diplomas could mean as little as 300 students in each local authority. While all around them hundreds of thousands of their peers are sitting GCSEs and A levels. It's a little like the 300 Spartans among the hundreds of thousands of the Persian army – there are few doing it and those that are a little worried whether they should be!

It is predictable and avoidable that a national set of reforms rolled out on an uneven playing field will not result in fairness, nor quality of provision for young people. And we know who will be held accountable: the teachers and educational workers who are trying yet again to provide the best possible education in a turbulent sector. That does not mean ATL is negative. We are working with LLUK (Lifelong Learning UK) to professionalise educational workers in the sector. We are working with IfL (Institute for Learning) to open up opportunities for our members' CPD requirements.

But: we are also putting the case for harmonised pay scales and parity of teacher qualifications with the consequent pay and conditions.

Colleagues, we will resolve these issues because they are predictable and unavoidable.

And ATL's 20,000 members in the independent sector also face difficult times, as we have heard this conference. Judging by the calls from ATL members, the recession is having a significant impact: redundancy is now commonplace across the country and a few schools have been forced to close their doors.

Unfortunately, in addition to the painful loss of jobs and schools, the recession is revealing a lack of professionalism amongst some leadership teams.

Recently a number of independent schools have closed abruptly, with little or no notice. Loyal, hard-working, staff have been left unemployed and owed money, in addition to having missed the recruitment round.

No-one doubts the difficult task faced by owners of a business whose financial viability is based on the number of pupils that walk through the door. But there is no excuse, however well-intentioned the motives, in failing to plan for the future; to take timely action; and meet the legal and moral duty to the staff.

So, in the midst of all these challenges, where do we feel strong? We feel strong as ATL. Conference, I hope you have enjoyed the more varied Conference programme over the last few days. I know I have – and I know I'm going to enjoy debating with Michael Gove and David Laws in a minute.

I hope you agree that Conference has conveyed the new reality of ATL. A modern and modernising union. A vibrant and growing union. A union that speaks and acts for its members as professionals. A union helping its members to support each other.

I return to London, tired, yes, but invigorated and renewed in my determination to speak and act for you. And I hope you will return to where you are renewed in your determination to bring ATL members together for mutual support.

I and my colleagues on the staff cannot be everywhere. Even Executive Committee members cannot be everywhere. But, Conference, together we can. Together, we can work to make sure every school and college in the United Kingdom knows who ATL are, what ATL stands for. Together, we can work to gain for every member their contractual and professional entitlements. Of course it is a challenge. Just as it's hard for me to win arguments in Sanctuary Buildings, it's hard for you to recruit and activate our members. They are the challenges we must face together. But because for 125 years ATL has been growing and changing, I know your commitment will enable us to meet the challenges.

I thank you for the work you do. I am the General Secretary. I am a small part of this union. You are the union. Let us promise ourselves we shall meet again in Manchester, bigger, stronger – but always ATL.