



yr undeb dros addysg

**THE RESPONSE OF
THE
ASSOCIATION OF TEACHERS AND LECTURES
TO
*SKILLS THAT WORK FOR WALES:
A SKILLS AND EMPLOYMENT STRATEGY***

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.

1. Do you welcome the broad policy direction set out in *Skills that work for Wales*?

ATL Cymru welcomes the broad direction set out in this document. It accepts the skills deficit that several investigations, including Leitch and Webb, have revealed. It provides a challenging but achievable vision of full employment with quality jobs for Wales. It accepts the need for upskilling the present and future workforce. It recognises the importance of the employer's voice in helping to determining the skills needed in the Welsh economy, although as we will outline below we think that other voices have been neglected in the document. We are also pleased to note that the document realises the vital role played by 14 -19 learning, and the need for a more skills based curriculum (5.18) for which ATL has been pressing for some time.¹

2. What should be the priority actions if we are to deliver in line with our ambitions for skills and employment?

Wales has an opportunity to be genuinely innovative in its employment strategy. The WAG needs to extend its social partnership approach as found in its dealings with the public sector. As outlined below we feel that the union voice, as representative of the employee, needs to be more fully engaged in the process of discerning skills needs and delivering learning. We are pleased to note the endorsement of ULRs and the increased funding proposed for the WULF and would urge that these developments are used as models of best practice.

The contribution of education professionals needs to be appreciated beyond the rather functional delivery model accorded to them in the strategy.² Along with the First Minister, Rhodri Morgan, we believe that we need to put 'the workforce at the centre of the reform agenda'.³ We would urge the department to realise that practitioners in schools and FEIs in

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

² See ATL's position statement on 'New Professionalism' at http://www.atl.org.uk/atl_en/education/postition_statements/new_prof.asp

³ The Rt. Hon Rhodri Morgan AM speaking at the 'Working with Government Conference' held at Cardiff University, 7th April 2008

particular – lecturers, teachers, and support staff – have an unique and essential role to play in the delivery of skills and learning, and that their unions have a positive and productive role to play in delivering the ambitions contained within the strategy.⁴

3. Does the strategy strike the right balance between the needs and responsibilities of individuals, businesses, and communities?

No. The strategy is far too weighted towards the needs of employers, with the needs of individuals and communities receiving scant if any attention.

We accept and welcome the need for greater employer contribution to discerning the skills that will be needed in the twenty first century and we are pleased to welcome the revision of the SSCs as one means of securing this involvement. We believe the department must develop robust mechanisms for ensuring that all employers' voices are heard and not just larger employers who are able to participate in more formal consultation settings. The FSB must be fully involved in developing the mechanisms as well as the CBI, and given the nature of the Welsh economy with a preponderance of SMEs and micro-businesses, the voices of those employers must be ensured a platform. The department must find ways of ensuring that the SSCs are truly representative of all employers in the sector.

We are very disturbed by the neglect of the needs of individuals in this strategy. We believe that employees are acutely aware of their skills needs, and also of the support and assistance they will require if they are to move up the career ladder and gain higher quality jobs. We are convinced that the best way of ensuring that the voices of employees are heard is through the Wales TUC which is the voice of Wales at work. All mechanisms and networks for discerning skills needs should engage the unions in Wales, including the SSCs. Only in this way can the understandably short term focus of many employers be balanced with a longer term perspective.

We are similarly concerned about the scant attention given to the needs of communities in the strategy. The public sector is Wales' biggest employer, and the communities it serves need to be better represented in the strategy. We believe there is a role for LEAs and LHBs to play, for example, in determining the skills that their workforces will require in the future.⁵

⁴ We would urge the development of a social partnership model for the sector based on that operating successfully in the maintained sector in Wales and England. See, for instance, the WAMG web site at <http://www.tda.gov.uk/remodelling/nationalagreement/wamg.aspx>

⁵ This is surely explicit in partnership agreement signed by the Assembly Government, the Wales TUC and others in March 2007. See 'Partnership and Managing Change: A Partnership Agreement for Public Services in Wales'.

4. What are your views on our proposed financial contributions policy? (see Chapter 2)

In particular:

a) do you agree with the case for change?

We fully accept the limitations on funding identified in 2.11. However, as we have outline above, we believe that there is a genuine and unique voice that trades unions can provide to the discernment of skills needs, and we would like to see the SSCs required to demonstrate engagement with unions as well as employers.

b) do you agree that public funding should focus on ensuring that everyone is equipped with the basic platform of skills necessary for employment and participation in community life?

We are pleased to endorse the consensus about the public funding of basic skills and its free provision for 16 -19 students and adults in need of basic skills upgrading. Study after study has shown that the provision of basic skills has most impact on future career prospects.

5. Do the proposals go far enough in giving employers, as customers of the skills system, influence on the content and delivery of skills programmes? (see Chapter 3)

Yes. But as we have outlined above we believe very strongly that employers should not be regarded as the only customer of the skills system. We are concerned that employees are not sufficiently recognised as customers in their own right. We are also concerned that the voice of providers, especially in FEIs and to a lesser extent in schools, will not be heard during the dialogue. This voice is one which employers must engage with if provision is to be deliverable and sustainable.

6. This document sets out many specific proposals. We would welcome comments on all of these and in particular we would like to know if you support our proposals in the following areas:

a) recognising and rewarding excellent provision (2.18-2.23);

We are prepared to give this proposal a cautious welcome with the proviso that those institutions which are not initially to be awarded this status are not stigmatised, and that all institutions are given the necessary support to become excellent providers. We are pleased that the department recognises the value of peer to peer type networks which aim to spread best practice. This methodology has been proven to give deeper and longer lasting improvement than top down imposition. We would also like to stress that the evaluation of provision needs to take due account of measures such as 'value added' which give a truer perspective on the effectiveness of teaching and learning in an institution.

b) a focus on priority sectors and businesses in our workforce development programmes (3.7);

Yes, but again we would like to see the voice of unions and third sector more involved in the discernment process. We welcome the intention to reward the provision of transferable skills more fully.

c) directing more of the existing resource into a discretionary Workforce Development Programme and a new Sector Priorities Fund (3.8-3.14);

We agree and are keen to endorse the requirement that FEIs be closely involved in the programme

d) encouraging stronger links between employers, Further Education Institutions and Higher Education Institutions (3.13-3.14, 3.21-3.26);

We agree and believe that such partnerships are essential for the delivery of the strategy

e) establishing an integrated skills and employment service based on the overarching 'Careers Ladder' model (4.11-4.25);

We agree and believe this will be very useful in the process of helping re-entry into the labour market.

f) reviewing the operating model for Careers Wales (4.10);

Our members value this service and we welcome the opportunity for further consultation on how it can be improved

g) refocusing Skillbuild and Individual Learning Accounts (4.21);

We think that caution needs to be exercised in this proposed refocusing to ensure that the invaluable ILAs are still sufficiently geared to the needs of the individual learner and promote genuine lifelong learning. Due and proper account must also be taken of community learning that is not accredited and is done for personal and leisure interests. ATL does not accept the proposition that education be delimited to skills, training and accreditation. Such a narrow understanding gives priority to the utilitarian and economic aspects of education. ATL argues that education must be seen in far broader terms and would press for a wider, more enriched, view of education and therefore for appropriate funding.

h) funding and support for basic skills (5.5-5.9);

We share both the concern at the low levels of basic skills among the Welsh workforce and also the conviction that equipping with basic skills leads to a very significant step change in the quality of life and employment prospects. We are keen to endorse the proposed statutory entitlement to basic skill learning outlined in 5.8. ATL has been in the vanguard of pressing for curriculum reform to ensure that young people are equipped with the skills necessary for life in the twenty first century, and wants to see the continued development of a curriculum that moves away from too narrow a focus on subject content.⁶ We would urge the department to be rigorous in assessing employers' concerns in regard to present qualifications, and that hard and overwhelming evidence is produced to support the contention at 5.9. In our experience such concerns are too anecdotal at present!

i) identifying and targeting groups most at risk (5.10-5.14);

We fully support the proposals aimed at targeting these groups. We would remind the department that practitioners on the ground – teachers, lecturers and support staff - are uniquely placed to comment on the barriers to learning and employment experienced by these

⁶ Please refer to the publications mentioned in footnote 1.

groups, and are also often best placed to share best practice and innovative thinking and action

j) supporting community-based learning through the reform of Adult Community Learning (5.15-5.17).

We believe that the work of ACL needs to be supported and welcome the opportunity of further consultation.

7. What are the most important measures of success (1.16-1.19)?

We are in broad agreement about the measures of success outlined here. We believe that they are both visionary and achievable, and will contribute to increasing the economic well-being of the population of Wales. However, as well as the quantitative measures outlined here we would also urge the adoption of more qualitative measures as well. These should capture the impact of the strategy on social justice, communal and individual well being, and other key areas of concern such as health.

Please use the space below to provide any additional comments

At a recent meeting with the Deputy Minister for Education and Skills and representatives of the education unions we were invited to submit our response to the Webb Review of Further Education, *Promise and Performance*, alongside our response to *Skills that Work for Wales*. It appears below. We want to state once again that the Association of Teachers and Lecturers is uniquely placed to comment on the Webb report as it is the only education union to represent substantial numbers of members in both the FE and the schools sector.

ATL Cymru notes with approbation:

- The assessment of the skills deficit in Wales, especially in comparison with the other countries and regions of the UK. We are particularly concerned about the deficit in basic skills (Webb 2.1 – 2.6)
- The exposure of the chronic under-funding of FE in Wales, in particular by comparison to England and even more so to Northern Ireland. We believe that the Assembly Government has to acknowledge that substantially increased funding for the sector is a pre-requisite of any progress (Webb 10.2 – 10.5)
- The key role played by the Curriculum in equipping youngsters with skills for the twenty first century, and reengaging the disaffected. ATL has been pressing for a skills-based curriculum and is encouraged, like Webb, with the start that has been made in this area with recent reforms (passim)
- The vital importance of the 14 -19 agenda in providing young people with a sufficient range of choices for their future lives (Webb 1.19)
- The realisation that parity of esteem for both 'vocational' and 'academic' routes is necessary, and also challenges society's present value judgements (Webb 1.20 – 1.21, and 3.7)
- The support given for Modern Apprenticeships (Webb 3.22ff).
- The encouragement of the development of a more coherent philosophy for the Welsh Bac (Webb 3.9)
- The proposals for CPD for staff (Webb 9.14)

- The proposals for local engagement and accountability of FEIs
- The proposal for statutory entitlement to free basic skills

ATL Cymru has concerns about:

- The almost entire absence of employee voice in the report. We believe that employees have a right and duty to discern alongside employers their developmental needs. While we welcome the acknowledgment of the role given to trades unions (Skills 3.29 – 30), we believe that the role of the Wales TUC, as the voice of employees, needs to be more prominent in the proposed action plan
- The very limited voice the Webb Report gives to lecturers and support staff in FEIs. We believe the workforce should be engaged as an active driver for change in the sector, as they have been in the maintained schools sector. We would recommend that a Social Partnership model be developed between government, colleges, and staff. We think that this should be included as a core principle (cf Skills 1.6)
- The acute democratic deficit of the proposed model of governance for the Consortia and the proposed composition of the Regional Strategic Implementation Group (see Webb, 6.4, and especially bullets at 7.25)
- The feasibility of such consortia operating in rural areas where employers are often small sized enterprises, and transport considerations limit the amount of choice that young people can be presented with realistically
- The apparent ignorance of the school sector displayed at several instances in the Report (passim)

ATL sees as key to success of future reform:

- The development of funding models that reinforce the rhetoric of collaboration. The present funding model encourages, by its very nature, competition between institutions⁷
- The recognition that the workforce, lecturers and support staff, are one of the key drivers for the success of any future reforms; and the need to develop a Social Partnership in the FE sector
- An overall increase in the quantum of funding for the sector

⁷ 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

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