



Tackling Poverty, Inequality and Deprivation in Scotland

**ATL's response to the Scottish Government's
Discussion Paper**

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ATL – leading education union

The Association of Teachers and Lecturers (ATL), as a leading education union, recognise 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, support staff and students – 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 Scotland is the fastest growing section of the Association. A National Official was appointed in August 2007 to develop the Association's capacity in Scotland in relation to recruitment, organising, policy development and campaigns. We believe in positive engagement with Government at all levels across the UK. ATL Scotland looks forward to developing a positive working relationship with the Scottish Government.

Introduction

ATL is pleased to be able to respond to the Scottish Government's Discussion Paper on Tackling Poverty, Inequality and Deprivation in Scotland. ATL is a member of both the *Campaign for Global Education* and the *Campaign to End Child Poverty*.

We will focus on the issues relating to education and poverty within our response to the discussion paper. ATL is content to leave some of the more complex economic discussions to other organisations better placed to do so.

Poverty and Education

ATL believes that poverty impacts on learning from an early age. A child in a professional home will hear every day more than three times the numbers of words heard by a child with poor parents. Reading to your child soon becomes a casualty when you're struggling with the stress of living off £19 (pounds) per day, the amount the families of 1.3 million children have to spend. Research has shown that the brightest children in Britain's poorest homes are outperformed by the least gifted children from wealthy homes by the age of seven

The discussion paper does not address directly the relationship between education and poverty. It merely references free school meal provision in relation to its impact on the public purse. ATL believes that education can play a strong role in tackling poverty, particularly in relation to re-educating people about the causes of poverty and its effects on social cohesion. The question of whether economic growth and ever-increasing consumption patterns, for example, can in fact be 'sustainable' could be addressed and debated within an educational context, leading to the development of new and innovative strategies to tackle poverty. The role of education, therefore, is crucial in promoting and advancing an anti-poverty agenda.

More globally, there are also strong links between poverty and climate change. Those who are disproportionately suffering from the consequences of climate change are poor. Tackling climate change will be a key concern for the UK over the coming years. ATL believes that it is important to make action against climate change a firm part of the anti-poverty agenda. In the UK, for example, the lack of public transport, as a 'greener' way of travelling, impacts harder on the rural poor. We believe that (age-appropriate) discussions of these issues should occupy a key place within the *Curriculum for Excellence*.

At its Annual conference in Torquay in March ATL published its latest position statement *Poverty and Social Exclusion in Rural Areas*. This position statement was developed by a Specialist Task Group of members following an Executive proposal. The position statement stresses that breaking the link between poverty and low educational attainment remains as much of a challenge for rural schools as it is for their urban counterparts. Nearly a quarter of 16 year olds in rural schools attain no GCSEs above grade D, and one in twenty does not pass any GCSEs. ATL would like to see a future framework investigate if a similar correlation exists within a Scottish context.

ATL would like to see included within future frameworks a section relating to the poverty of aspiration. A recent study of the aspirations of young people from deprived inner-city areas has suggested that disadvantaged young people overwhelmingly expect to pursue routes into employment that were already 'known' within their families and local communities. These routes into work were commonly seen as promising a higher chance of success, whilst simultaneously enabling young people to draw on existing contacts and networks. Very few expressed 'higher' aspirations to professional careers.¹ ATL believes that the Government needs to have a clear strategy in place to address this 'poverty of aspirations', which in many ways is an important aspect of (financial) poverty and disadvantage.

ATL would also welcome the identification of explicit strategies, proposals and examples of how to tackle poverty, inequality and deprivation in Scotland. The consultation document is very strong on summarising issues around poverty and their multi-dimensional and interlinked nature (i.e. tackling child poverty means tackling women's poverty), but it does not explain how this understanding of the nature of poverty will be translated into relevant action. ATL would expect the future frameworks to move this comprehensive understanding of poverty on into specific action points.

Conclusion

We welcome this opportunity to engage with the Scottish Government in its development of a framework to tackle poverty, inequality and discrimination. We feel however that in order to succeed education must be placed at the heart of the framework and the issue of 'poverty of aspiration' needs to be addressed within a future framework.

References

- ♦ ATL position statement, *Poverty and social exclusion in rural areas*
- ♦ ATL leaflet, *End Child Poverty*

This submission was prepared on behalf of
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¹ L. Archer et.al., 'Dropping Out and Drifting Away: An Investigation of Factors Affecting Inner-City Pupils' Identities, Aspirations and Post-16 Routes.