

The Association of Managers in Education is the leadership section of ATL (the Association of Teachers and Lecturers). We represent Directors, Deputy Directors and middle managers in Further Education Colleges in Northern Ireland as well as leaders and managers in schools.

In responding to the Review of the Common (Schools) Funding formula, we have an interest in the 14-19 agenda and, in particular, the manner in which the school funding formula supports collaboration between schools and FE Colleges and the “roll out” of the Entitlement framework.

With our experience of the Vocational Education Programme and, latterly, collaboration funding we are strongly of the view that some element of school funding should reside with, or be channelled through, FE Colleges.

The manner in which this is done could range, on a continuum, from on one hand, simply providing channelled funding through FE Colleges and obliging FE College Directors to agree a prospectus with the Schools/School Principals within their catchment area and, on the other hand, a more radical consideration to locate the developing University Technical College (in England) with the FE Colleges in Northern Ireland.

Placing an onus on FE Directors/Colleges to agree a Prospectus with schools within their catchment area would, we believe, better utilize both the capital investment in technical education at Colleges and make rational and sustainable the range of course/curriculum options on offer. If all funding under the Common Formula were placed with schools alone, this would have the unfortunate consequence of encouraging a defensive, “school as island”, approach which would be undermining of the the principal of pupil entitlement.

A more radical approach would be to develop the FE Colleges (as opposed to Universities) as emerging Technical Colleges, such as is happening within the English University Technical Colleges. Obviously, this would have to be undertaken in a manner consistent with local legislation, and may start at 16, rather than 14 (as in England). I have set out the background to the UTC concept in England, below.

### **The University Technical College concept**

Education Minister Michael Gove in England has placed privatisation at the heart of his education policy. The growth of “Free Schools” and academies have not been simply to sideline the “*dead hand*” of local authority control, but to ‘*liberate*’ schools to set their own wages, moving away from national teachers pay bargaining. Gove is also set to re-establish the Private Finance Initiative to clear up a backlog of school building. The aim is to establish a huge UK education market, estimated at over £100 billion, is well underway. This has sparked active interest from private education providers such as AMEY, ARK, BPP Holdings, Capita, Cognita Group, E-Act, Harris Group, Edison Learning, Kunskapskolan, Mouchel, Oasis, Pearson Education, Serco, Synarbor, Tribal Education, United Learning and VT FourS. Some of these will be well known to educationalists in Northern Ireland.

To date, successive Sinn Fein Ministers have rightly decided not to engage with this agenda. Indeed, the education policy of England under Gove is diverging at pace from the policies adopted in Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland. Yet there is one part of the Gove landscape which may be worthy watching.

Recently, the Government in England approved a further 15 university technical colleges (UTCs), bringing the total to 34. At a University Technical College pupils start at 14 and can go on to 19, with Colleges open daily from 8-30 to 5.30pm. They operate five eight week terms, two more than a normal school. Each UTC is supported by a university or college, and employers are asked to shape the specialist curriculum. Two days each week are spent in the workplace and three days in College undertaking the academic study required to support the technical.

The UTC idea was originally pressed by the late Ron Dearing in the early new Labour years. Minister Andrew Adonis allowed for 2 experimental UTCs but there now appears to be cross party consensus in England on rolling out UTCs with a wide geographical spread across England.

Warwick UTC specialises in engineering and is supported by Jaguar Land Rover, Plymouth UTC focuses on marine engineering supported by Babcock International, Heathrow UTC specialises in aviation engineering supported by British Airways, the RAF and Virgin, MediaCity UTC (Salford) focuses on creative and digital technologies and is supported by BBC, ITV, Lowry and the Aldridge Foundation, Norfolk UTC (Norwich) specialises in Energy skills and is supported by East Anglia Offshore Wind, and so on. Nearly 300 companies support UTCs now contributing in a direct and significant way to shaping the curriculum. For example, Rolls Royce apprentices in Derbyshire recently drafted an 8 week course in the manufacture of piston pumps. Employers cannot complain about the absence of skills as they are substantially responsible for what is being taught.

Research on these initial technical colleges shows that behaviour has improved, pupils are more engaged, seeing the potential in fulfilling and rewarding careers. Truancy has reduced, retention post 16 has improved. There has been improvement in the basic subjects of Maths, English and Science. The UTC's appear to facilitate social mobility, with socially mixed intakes becoming the norm<sup>1</sup>.

Former Conservative Education Minister, Ken Baker is a strong supporter and consciously compares the emerging UTC system to the German model. To date, trade unions have not been involved and if the UTC experiment is to move towards the German *Mittelsand* that would need to be addressed.

The German system of "*different routes of equal value*" works because there is a bias in the German economy towards the productive manufacturing economy. It is impossible to understand German education without understanding the development of workers control - *Mitbestimmung*, or "co-determination" - which has developed in post war Germany. This is a system of corporate governance and labour relations similar to that proposed (and rejected) in Britain in the late 70's. *Mitbestimmung* developed in way that determines the workforce as a non disposable asset, as opposed to the "*hire n fire*" culture of the UK's "flexible labour" model. The *Mitbestimmung* legislative framework predisposes Germany to take a "*high tech, high valued added*" route which puts quality skills training at the heart of both employee development, and education. Careers in manufacturing and in technical vocational areas are culturally valued, sought after and rewarded. The difference between Germany (indeed most of mainland Europe) and the UK is that Europe, by and large, makes what it consumes. The UK, including Northern Ireland does not!

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<sup>1</sup> Further Reading: see <http://www.ippr.org/articles/56/9226/a-new-dawn-for-technical-education-expansion-of-utcs-offers-opportunities-but-poses-big-questions>

The relevance in Northern Ireland, is that we are in the midst of a potentially radical schools rationalisation. Could we make room for, say, six UTCs across the region? Close to 50% of our young people go to University, yet our main skills needs are at *technician* and *associate professional* level – or, in educational jargon, at “Level 3”. Research shows that fewer than 15% of our graduates need or use their degree skills to get or retain their jobs. Massive over production of graduates has no proven benefit to economic competitiveness! Such diverse interests as the CBI, the British Chambers of Commerce, the Federation of Small Businesses and the trade unions have all raised such concerns.

Within our local Northern Ireland context, a few UTCs and “pathways at fourteen” may be a useful ambition. It is a common arrangement in Europe. Why should Northern Ireland not have UTCs, perhaps linked to the 6 Institutes of Further Education, and focussed on the Northern Ireland Skill priority areas?

**AMiE Recommendation:**

- That the Salisbury Review, as a first step, recognize the important role of Further Education Colleges as best placed to deliver a range of technical education in Northern Ireland
- That an element of funding from the Common Funding formula be channelled through FE Colleges to deliver a Prospectus, agreed with schools/Principals in their local catchment area, which will meet the delivery requirements of the Entitlement Framework
- That the Salisbury Review recommend to the Minister that he consider a contextualised version of the University Technical Colleges concept, located within Further Education.