



ATL Cymru's response to the Enterprise and Learning Committee's call for evidence for further information on school funding

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 Cymru represents over 6,500 education professionals in colleges and schools across the whole of Wales.

We welcome the Committee's continued interest in school funding arrangements. The Committee needs to ensure it does not lose sight of the basic need which is an adequate quantum of funding for education in Wales. The lack of proper funding impinges upon our members daily and is a major obstacle to the delivery of the finest quality teaching and learning in too many of our schools. We would urge the committee to give sustained and serious concern to the overall budget settlement for education in Wales as well as the mechanism for its distribution.

Anecdotal evidence of poor school buildings and insufficient provision, rendered particularly visible in border counties, is now overwhelming. Not acknowledging these shortfalls means the WAG is failing pupils, teachers and support staff by its continued denial of inadequate funding, especially in regard to capital projects. ATL Cymru is pleased to see that a culture change seems to be beginning with the acknowledgement by senior DCELLS Officials that there is significant under funding of education in Wales.

The need for effective information

While the deficiency of funding between England and Wales is now almost universally accepted it is still difficult to make comparisons about funding between different LEAs across Wales. Clear comparative information is essential if questions are to be meaningfully asked about the allocation of resources.

The effective use of funding

The current economic climate means the WAG faces significant challenges. It is essential that clear direction regarding education priorities and therefore spending is given to ensure that value for money is achieved. The WAG will need to make tough decisions about key priorities in the face of looming budget cuts. ATL Cymru's view is that bureaucratic costs need to be cut, more money invested directly in frontline services, skills acquisition in early years targeted, and that a moratorium is placed on new initiatives. The WAG needs to trust the profession with more autonomy regarding spending decisions as they are best placed to identify where funding is most needed.

While some of the funding fog has lifted it is still far too dense. Although the mechanisms for funding are now more clearly understood at the theoretical level, it is still very difficult to work out in practice where money actually goes once it enters the distributive tunnel. We would welcome an independent assessment of schools' capital and revenue needs. We think this assessment should then provide a basis for agreement between the Assembly and local authority for the amount of funding required to provide adequate and sustainable education for pupils and students in a particular locality. We believe that funding following on from that assessment should then be ring-fenced for education and not allow siphoning off into other services, as seems to occur in several authorities.

We believe that the bulk of school funding should come via a developed and comprehensive needs-based formula rather than one based on pupil numbers, and that any additional revenue streams be kept to a minimum. The present grants and bids culture is complex, arbitrary, and disproportionately time consuming in terms of auditing requirements. Local Management of Schools (LMS) should mean just that, but there are 22 UA education/ young people's directorates siphoning funding from front line services. Every new initiative from the WAG seems to put increasing pressure on schools, while any extra funding seems to disappear into central costs rather than reaching the classroom.

There are numerous complaints about lack of information about additional funding offers being communicated to school budget holders in sufficient time. We believe that the answer lies not so much in better communication, though this would be welcome, but in the reduction of the number of additional funding streams and the development of a needs-based funding formula. The funding should follow the initiative.

The effectiveness of school budget fora

The operation of school budget fora is patchy with some fora operating reasonably well and others not. The WAG, and the WLGA, surely can no longer tolerate the underperformance of some authorities. Action is necessary.

The fora operating effectively have adequate representation from the teacher and head teacher unions in the locality. We believe that this representation should be

strengthened and made obligatory, and that all teacher and head teacher unions be guaranteed places on the local forum. Only in this way will information about school funding be accurately, widely and effectively distributed.

The quality of school buildings

The fabric of school building gives cause for concern to many members and pupils. A survey of our members in 2007 revealed that 62% identified that the condition of their school had a negative impact on the learning experience of pupils and 46% noted their school posed a risk to the health and safety of both pupils and staff.

ATL would also like to draw attention to the concerns of members about the presence of asbestos in many school buildings across Wales. Asbestos is one of the biggest workplace killers and the number of deaths is increasing and will continue to do so. Between 1980 and 2005 178 school teachers died from Asbestos related diseases. Teachers and pupils are still being exposed to this 'hidden killer'. Children are particularly vulnerable to environmentally induced cancers and thus the total number of asbestos-related deaths will be even higher as other staff and pupils die from exposure. This is why ATL Cymru recently tabled a statement of opinion calling on the WAG to conduct a comprehensive national audit of asbestos in all schools across Wales.

Finally, we would like to reiterate our opposition to PFI as we do not believe that it is a suitable or cost effective option for school building. As well as grave concerns about the real costs of such projects we believe that such schemes runs counter to the entire ethos of Welsh public service provision.

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