



Association of Teachers and Lecturers (ATL Cymru's) and ACM/AMiE Response to the Enterprise and Learning Committee Transformation Agenda for Post-16 Education- Response from the Minister for Children, Education and Lifelong Learning

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.

The Association for College Management is the TUC affiliated trade union and professional association that champions, represents and supports managers in the post-16 education and training sector throughout the United Kingdom. Our membership embraces academic and business managers at all levels up to and including college principals. In Wales the Association is governed by the ACM Wales Committee, an autonomous committee of the ACM National Executive Council. There are over four hundred further education college managers in membership of ACM in Wales.

In 2008, realising the common shared values and commitments of Associations, ACM and ATL joined together to form AMiE – the Association of Managers in Education. AMiE represents managers across the spectrum of colleges and secondary and primary schools. As an organisation that crosses the traditional divide between schools and colleges it is thus uniquely placed to voice concerns and provide innovative solutions to the challenges of post-16 education. The formal merger of the two organizations will take place in January 2011.

- 1. Although we appreciate that the Welsh Assembly Government does not play the lead role in defining relationships between partners in individual local education authorities, we would like to know what influence you could bring to bear on achieving better buy in between all those involved in the transformation process, including the teaching professionals? As noted in the Ministerial foreword of Y Siwrnai, better progress has been made in some local authorities than in others. Is the Welsh Government able to encourage progress in those areas where transformation is happening at a slower pace?**

Much progress has been made in schools and colleges regarding partnership building but this is often hampered by the fact that many local partnerships are too small or are perceived simply as aggregations of differing vested interests. There are concerns from some colleges that, although they span Local Authorities, there is insufficient communication between adjoining Local Authorities.

This can be particularly problematic in cases of merger. Transformation, in the context of Local Authorities, can involve issues of institution closure with a consequent lack of desire of some institutions to engage in partnership. In some rural areas there are concerns regarding practicality in terms of transport and logistics. In some cases there is concern that there is a lack of liaison between different groups that operate in the same geographical area. For example, there may be a regional group, a 14 – 19 network (with subgroups) and a learning partnership (with its own subgroups) and there is no overall coordinating body. There are still areas where institutional vested interests are the main strategic driver.

One school member reported that partnership in Wrexham is working in theory but tensions are developing between competitive providers with particular focus on the likely impacts from the “Transformation Agenda” for school sixth forms, etc. He believed that while the partnership was meeting its obligations to the Welsh Assembly Government it was not entirely meeting the needs of the learner or the home schools.

We note the Minister, in his reply, comments: “We are, however, reaching a stage where consideration and debate must end and decisions must be made for the sake of all learners”.

We are pleased to see the Minister calling Local Authorities to account. This is the clearest indication yet that the Minister is going to start using levers to force Local Authorities to make decisions. So far, Transformation has been extremely patchy. Some authorities have been extremely proactive and have progressed the agenda with much local buy in and cooperation, while others do not really seem to have engaged. While we support the Government in exercising its powers we would also wish it be reminded that it must take responsibility for enacting changes.

2. We would welcome any further thoughts you may have had since your appearance before the Committee on 29 April, on cross-border delivery of the Transformation Agenda.

We seek further clarification about what the Minister means exactly when he says: "It is not inconceivable in future that some larger local authority areas will collectively be operating five or six units delivering the same support function".

ATL has long called for the reduction in the number of Local Authorities in Wales. While we accept that full scale reorganisation is unacceptable at present we believe the current number of administrative bodies for education in Wales operating autonomously is unacceptable. We believe that clusterings working in collaboration would be ideal and ensure that more money goes to front line rather than back office functions. This builds on the Beecham agenda for joined up government and would result in better quality services, greater efficiency, and financial savings.

11. What role does the Welsh Assembly Government have in incorporating workforce planning into the Transformation Agenda and in consulting the teaching professionals, and what would be your response to the suggestion that all transformation plans should contain an impact assessment on the school and/or college workforce?

We are deeply disturbed by the Minister's response at this point when he says: "It is important to say at the outset that, where Transformation proposals are brought forward, we are not the employers". The Welsh Assembly Government is clearly trying to distance itself from the implications of the Transformation Agenda and is not taking responsibility for its actions. An illustrative parallel would be if the WAG had embarked upon an ambitious strategy for upgrading the road system in Wales, directed LAs to commence major road works, and then tried to exonerate itself from the resultant traffic jams!

If the Welsh Assembly Government had not initiated the reforms associated with the Transformation Agenda then rationalisation of staff would not have occurred in the first place. If the WAG believes that Transformation is necessary and will improve the lot of students then it needs to convince others that the resultant upheaval is worthwhile and that it is concerned to minimise. Otherwise we will be treated to the disedifying spectacle of politicians eager to seize the praise but not prepared to shoulder the flack. Such manoeuvres have no place in post-devolution Wales. This issue is very important from the workforce's point of view as it may well lead to redundancies and changes to working conditions. Workers in schools and colleges will not accept the WAG's waiver of responsibility. It should be noted that unions are not represented on 14-19 networks that may well be making decisions that have serious consequences for the workforce.

Members report that School-based teachers of KS 4 and KS 5 only subjects are very concerned for their futures. This is affecting the morale of staff. If the principle of no compulsory redundancies were accepted this would be assuaged.

13. Could you respond to the concern that funding additional posts such as learning coaches should add value and not detract from the standards of teaching in secondary schools, and could you clarify whether the Welsh Assembly Government is still committed to promoting and supporting Learning Coaches in schools or whether this has become a more generic role that you expect to be undertaken by both teaching and non-teaching staff?

There is slow progress, regarding learning coaches, due to funding restrictions. Whilst the Minister states that there is no requirement to appoint additional staff as learning coaches, many networks have established the posts in schools. We are concerned by the Minister's comments that he does not envisage the need for schools and colleges to appoint new staff to deliver the functions of the learning coach role. In many cases schools have chosen to extend the functions of existing members of staff who may already have a pastoral role. Staff have no additional pay for their extra responsibilities and it raises issues related to who is taking on the additional duties of staff required to undertake this role.

Some members have suggested that it is difficult for learners to obtain genuinely impartial advice. One school member reported that in their institution they have recently proclaimed that every member of staff is a learning coach. This is a far cry from the initial ideal for a team of specialist coaches in each school. All that schools can realistically do now is to ensure they have something that answers the need in their pastoral programme using existing staff and resources.

Colleges provide a wide range of support for learners, and the learning coaches have, anecdotally, made a difference. Learners have access to a wide suite of support services; personal tutors, learning coaches, student support officers attached to at risk students in faculties, links with appropriate support from external agencies, learning support, basic skills support, enrichment programs, learn direct etc. This support is continually developing.

14. In transforming post-16 education, what store do you place on student choice, in addition to the statutory entitlements of the Learning and Skills (Wales) Measure? What account is taken of learners' views, and those of their parents or carers, not just about choice of courses, but also about the type of institution they want to learn in, and how can there be more parity between the value placed on academic and vocational education?

We are pleased that the Minister is committed to the parity of esteem between vocational and academic qualifications. We have previously been concerned that some academic courses could be axed to make room for more vocational courses as indicated by the Minister recently. We agree 'radical solutions' will have to be considered to achieve parity of esteem between academic and

vocational options but it would be a retrograde step to cut the number of academic courses on offer.

We agree that Transformation is not a one size fits all process and must reflect the needs of the learner but there needs to be a realistic approach that takes on the needs of the majority whose education can suffer cuts in funding as a result of extra resources being diverted.

We are pleased to hear that there has been a significant increase in the number of vocational courses being offered to learners across Wales. There is still much to be done though in changing the prejudice in some parents and learners minds regarding vocational education. In one members school only 17/280 in the year 9 opted for a vocational program. This can lead to difficulties in offering financially viable courses in the partner FE institution, although grouping students from several schools can assist in ensuring viability. It will be important to monitor whether choice made translates into courses actually being run. We welcome the Minister's recognition of the need to raise awareness of vocational courses and pathways amongst learners and parents.

Contact:

Dr Philip Dixon

Director, ATL Cymru

Tel: 02920 465 000

Email: cymru@atl.org.uk