

Children and Young People Committee

CYP(4)-09-11 Paper 1

Inquiry into the implementation of the Learning and Skills Measure 2009

Evidence from ATL



Association of Teachers and Lecturers (ATL Cymru) and AMiE's response to The Children and Young People Committee inquiry into the implementation of the Learning and Skills (Wales) Measure 2009

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.

In January 2011, ATL and the Association of College Management (another TU affiliated union), realising their common shared values and commitments, formally merged. **The Association of Managers in Education, AMiE**, is the department of ATL that represents managers across the spectrum of colleges, secondary and primary schools.

As an organisation that crosses the traditional divide between schools and colleges, ATL is thus uniquely placed to voice concerns and provide innovative solutions to the challenges of post-16 education.

Response to terms of reference:

The effect that the implementation of the *Learning and Skills (Wales) Measure 2009* has had on young people aged 14-19 years old

The implementation of the *Learning and Skills (Wales) Measure 2009* has increased the choice offered to learners by schools and colleges. There are good examples of additional courses being offered to cater better for students that previously may have been overlooked, for example, level 1 vocational courses offered in collaboration with an FE institution. However, the pressure of targets and level 2 threshold, etc is in the opposite direction. In addition there are examples of schools offering inappropriate courses that generate little genuine demand from students taught by staff with little understanding of the course structure or the subject and have been added to the menu merely to achieve the arbitrary 30 options.

There is a demand for level 2 vocational programmes for under 16 learners but it is often the case that the existing qualifications are not appropriate for under 16s. This issue is an important one and needs to be addressed. It is also imperative that there is impartial advice and guidance given to pupils in year 9 about vocational qualifications. If there is little understanding of vocational qualifications, then how can pupils be given appropriate advice? Is this advice objective enough?

The unrealistic equivalence value of vocational courses (e.g. a 2 GCSE equivalent NVQ that can be taught comfortably in the time for 1 GCSE and to pupils that are much younger or of much lower ability) has served to put pressure on schools to push students into courses for the purposes of the school's targets and position. We are concerned that the new banding initiative will increase this pressure. At the outset we wish to state our firm conviction that qualifications are for the young person and not the institution.

The collaborative provision of subjects is fine in principle but in practice has had an effect on the rest of the curriculum for the majority of other students. For instance, providing an afternoon a week during which collaborative delivery can take place restricts what the other students can do in school; this in turn has an effect on KS3 curriculum delivery. The Welsh Government suggests that collaboration can be used to deliver other subjects that are under pressure within the curriculum to cut costs e.g. MFL courses. This may be financially appealing but is pedagogically flawed. Language teachers argue that language teaching is best delivered little and often.

Whether the implementation of the *Learning and Skills (Wales) Measure 2009* has had any effect on the numbers of young people choosing to stay on in education or training after the end of compulsory education at age 16
It is unclear whether the implementation of the *Learning and Skills (Wales) Measure* has had an effect on the numbers of young people choosing to stay on in education. Many members believe that increased rates of retention are more influenced by the current lack of opportunities for work than any desire on the part of young people to remain in education.

There are concerns over the managing of progression of learners from a level 1 vocational course to a level 2 vocational course. Many schools expect the progression to be automatic, whereas the entry requirements for the level 2 course at the college may be more than simply a level 1 qualification. There needs to be agreement between providers to ensure appropriate progression for learners between institutions. Currently there is no offer post -16 for a student to study a mix of academic and vocational programmes. There are few vocational courses offered that fit alongside academic programmes of study. It still remains one or the other for the vast majority of students' post 16

Some members believe there are cases where a school, offering level 3 vocational courses, retains students that would not have coped with AS/A levels because they can cope with the less academically rigorous NVQ or BTEC, etc. Some students have therefore remained in school who may have traditionally gone into work based training or FE. These qualifications can foster the desire for a university place but many universities are reluctant to accept students thus qualified.

Whether young people aged 14-19 have a wider choice for academic and vocational courses as a result of the *Learning and Skills (Wales) Measure 2009*

Young people do undoubtedly have a wider choice of academic and vocational courses as a result of the measure, but the absolute value of such a wider choice is disputed within the profession.

In schools the pressure for additional choice has often meant additional vocational courses. These are appropriate for some, but other pressures on schools mean that students may be steered towards them for other ends. The GCSE equivalence can cause distortion. It must also be remembered that there is more to education than merely preparation for work. Academic qualifications tend to be more general and equip students for a wider range of employment or further study, vocational qualifications tend to be more narrowly focused on a particular vocation that may not be needed in such numbers in a local community.

Vocational course are valuable for many students but where a school encourages 'academic' children to follow a course in order to boost the school's performance the student could find that the qualification is not highly valued in higher education (for example, students who take a BTEC in Science, which is the equivalent to 4 GCSEs for the school, find they cannot study A Level Sciences but only Level 3 BTECs, which then preclude entry to many Universities).

What practical problems have been addressed in order to implement the *Learning and Skills (Wales) Measure 2009*

There are still many practical problems that need to be addressed. Clarification is needed regarding who is responsible for the behaviour of pupils, particularly when there are students from different schools with little or no direct supervision. Another issue to be addressed is the cost of transport. Transport is expensive, complex to organise, and in a rural area can lead to unreasonable travel times or sometimes impossible journeys. One member from North Wales stated that it is impossible for some of their students to get home by bus from an afternoon session in the local FE college. In some cases there are no buses to some areas until the following morning! There has been an absence of forward planning transport locally due to implementation timescales.

Synchronised timetabling is an issue that can lead to the timetable being written for a relatively small proportion of the cohort and being detrimental to the vast majority.

The suspension of NPFS has meant that money no longer follows students. This has been a disincentive to larger institutions providing the additional courses to their smaller neighbours.

The management time invested in collaboration is out of all proportion to any benefit. If meetings were properly costed as well as including the transport costs, the true cost of collaboration would be seen.

There are still unresolved problems regarding pastoral care. Colleges usually refer issues back to the home school to be dealt with. The differing rules and culture of a school and college can cause confusion. Many college staff have relatively little experience of dealing with the 14 year old age group which can prove difficult. One member in FE commented that in their area a fair amount of training had been provided to staff dealing with the 14 year old age group. There may be a longer term need for a different contract for staff delivering sessions to 14-16 year olds.

There are also issues around monitoring student progress and behaviour across institutions.

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