

APPG for Education Inquiry Call for Evidence: Do schools prepare young people for their future careers?

Response from the Association of Teachers and Lecturers 13 June 2016

1. About the Association of Teachers and Lecturers (ATL)

ATL, the education union, is an independent, registered trade union and professional association, representing approximately 160,000 teachers, head teachers, lecturers and support staff in maintained and independent nurseries, schools, sixth form, tertiary and further education colleges in the United Kingdom. AMiE is the trade union and professional association for leaders and managers in colleges and schools, and is a distinct section of ATL. We recognise the link between education policy and members' conditions of service.

ATL exists to help members, as their careers develop, through first rate research, advice, information and legal advice. Our evidence-based policy making enables us to campaign and negotiate locally and nationally. ATL is affiliated to the Trades Union Congress (TUC), European Trade Union Committee for Education (ETUCE) and Education International (EI). ATL is not affiliated to any political party and seeks to work constructively with all the main political parties.

2. Summary

- a.** Schools must prepare rounded, well-balanced individuals through a broad and balanced career that develops transversal skills as well as teaching subject knowledge.
- b.** Schools can play a part in developing 'soft', financial and entrepreneurial skills through offering a broad and balanced curriculum. However, this is now challenging because of the narrowing of the curriculum. Furthermore, this should not be the sole responsibility of schools, as parents and other external relationships will play a part, as should employers.
- c.** The reduction in funding and resources is resulting in schools and colleges finding it increasingly difficult to support young people's development of skills in preparation for the workplace. Furthermore, as a result of the accountability system, the majority of schools' resources are deployed to ensuring that young people pass exams.
- d.** There are examples of good practice in schools, and the APPG should learn from what currently exists. Although there are also some good examples of employer-led initiatives, many ATL members are not aware of any. Furthermore, this provision is fragmented and often too superficial to have a meaningful impact.

3. What should our schools be focusing on in order to prepare young people for the future?

As ATL stated in its submission to the Education Select Committee's inquiry into the purpose and quality of education in England, education is complex and there will be a number of different purposes. Schools should support the development of a well-balanced, rounded individual with the social, thinking and appropriate academic skills to benefit themselves and society. This holistic preparation will ensure that the school leaver is able to engage in their community as well as be a productive employee.

ATL members believe that schools should produce individuals who reach their potential academically and who are also well-informed about their future pathway opportunities, and aware of the skills and attributes needed for the world of work. The latter should have the same kudos as academic learning, and not seen by the students (and staff) as 'it's just careers/PSHEE'.

Young people's ideas about possible future careers are often incompletely formed. It is therefore important that they should have opportunities to experience careers that they may not have thought about pursuing. Contact with employers and employees in small groups, to allow good quality interaction, is vital to this process. It is also important to remember that, many of the jobs that young people will do in the future have not yet even been imagined

Literacy and numeracy skills are crucial to ensure that young people are prepared for the future. In addition, they must be supported to develop the confidence to express themselves in writing and verbally. Whilst young people need to be equipped with the subject and technical knowledge relevant to their chosen career, they should also understand how this is applied to real life.

Transversal skills are as important as subject knowledge. These skills include interpersonal, problem-solving, team-working, communication and self-sufficiency. ATL believes that a broad and balanced curriculum can support the development of these skills in young people. Such a curriculum should include a variety of experiences, including practical, artistic and creative, to support the development of these skills. It should also encourage a love of learning and a passion for life-long learning.

4. Should schools play a role in developing skills, or should subject knowledge be prioritised?

ATL believes that schools should and must develop young people's skills as well as teaching subject knowledge, as both are essential for the world of work and society as a whole. Skills acquisition should go hand in hand with gaining subject knowledge as developing each will improve the other. Knowledge should inspire the curiosity that motivates young people to explore, discover, improve and progress, as a result of which, students will become more proficient in the application of the relevant skills.

Employability skills can be developed within the teaching of traditional subjects through embedded careers education across the curriculum. This would raise students' awareness of what these skills are, encourage them to understand what

skills they already possess, and realise they cannot only rely on examination grades. The application of skills should be rewarded through assessment.

Accountability measures have resulted in a further narrowing of the curriculum within subjects. Recent research commissioned by the NUT (*Exam factories: The impact of accountability measures on children and young people*) shows that children in England today are experiencing a narrower curriculum than in the past because of high-stakes testing. The use of test results to judge the quality of schools and teachers as well as pupils, and the sanctions imposed when targets are not met have increased the stakes around testing, the result of which is that teachers 'teach to the test', narrowing the curriculum in their subject area.

Employers have deplored this trend for an increasingly narrow curriculum as not preparing young people for life beyond school. The Institute of Directors' recent report Lifelong Learning-Reforming education for an age of technological and demographic change, stated that:

"UK education policy is at risk of turning our schools into 'exam factories' still teaching method and recall, the easiest skills to automate...Schools must refocus on the application of knowledge rather than simply the acquisition of it, to boost the level of soft skills in future generations."

Research by the British Chamber of Commerce showed that 88% of firms believe that school leavers are not prepared for work. This view was replicated in Of these, 57% of employers believe that this is because of a lack of soft skills such as communication, team working and resilience. Teachers say that the biggest challenge to their ability to teach 21st-century skills was a lack of time within a strictly regulated curriculum.

5. Who should be responsible for ensuring that young people develop soft, financial and entrepreneurial skills?

Schools should play a part, but not be solely responsible for developing these skills in young people as parents, part-time employers, youth leaders, clubs, and wider society, all have a role. It is also important to remember that not all young people aspire to be entrepreneurs. Furthermore, it is increasingly difficult for schools to find time within the curriculum to teach these skills, as was demonstrated by ATL's recent survey, in which 81% members stated that their workload is unmanageable.

A broad and balanced curriculum will foster these skills and this is evident in some schools. However, as long as schools are under severe financial pressures, and are judged primarily on the pupils' performance across a narrow curriculum, the development of these skills will never be high on every school's agenda. Accountability measures have resulted in a further narrowing of the curriculum within subjects.

Ideally, schools should partner with local businesses and the local authority to develop these skills. There are many events, exhibitions, fairs and other activities on offer to young people, but it is difficult to tease out which of these are most relevant to students, for example which skills gaps exist. Some dedicated time within the school day - ideally lesson time - would be valuable here. Furthermore, these should not be one-off activities, but part of a programme of progression where the skills are developed and topics revisited, as in any other subject area.

Employers should also take more responsibility. Whilst complaining that young people lack workplace experience and skills, a 2012 survey by the UK Commission for Employment and Skills showed that less than a third of UK businesses had offered a work experience placement in the previous year. In an ATL survey of members in 2014, 40% reported poor access to and involvement of national employers in their schools' careers education provision, and 10% said that it was non-existent. In addition, employers must understand that the purpose of education is not to train individuals for their specific workplace. Currently, 47% of employers offer no training. Rather than expect schools to do their job for them, employers should invest in developing the skills of their workforce.

6. Do education providers have the resources to prepare young people for the workforce?

The majority of ATL members do not believe that education providers have the resources to adequately prepare young people for the workforce. Whilst resources may be available in schools, accountability measures encourage the deployment of these to ensure the achievement of exam results; teachers are too busy teaching young people to do tests. ATL members state that time is a major constraint and, there is a focus on data and academic subjects to the detriment of employability skills.

The lack of dedicated funding for schools careers education, advice, information and guidance, despite the statutory duty to provide this, has exacerbated the problem of resources. Furthermore, this situation is likely to get worse, with school budgets being reduced in real terms for the first time in 20 years over the course of this parliament. Further Education colleges have had budget cuts of up to 35% imposed over the past six years and this inevitably affects their ability to support young people in this area.

Members also state that their job involves preparing every young person they teach for the future, although each student will have different aspirations and may change careers multiple times during their working lives. It is impossible therefore, to expect teachers to 'future proof' single student for every career choice they make. However, a broad and balanced curriculum can give them the social and study skills to support their first choices.

Potential employers, actual employers or work based opportunities must be central to preparing young people for the rigours of the modern workforce. The majority of teachers have not worked in sectors outside education and do not have the knowledge or experience to prepare young people for specific industries and occupations.

7. To help the APPG create a practical set of approaches and recommendations:

a. What example are there of schools and colleges preparing young people well for the workforce?

Most schools are able to point to examples of groups or individuals who have been well prepared for the workplace. Further education colleges often

prepare young people very well through the provision of vocational education and work-based learning programmes.

Examples given by ATL members include:

- Stratford on Avon High School/Academy has a dynamic careers department linked to In2Action, a company that runs many of their programmes.
- Lawrence Sheriff School in Rugby has a programme for Careers that builds from Year 7 onwards. The providers used are very complimentary about the set-up in the school and the Headteacher, has been very supportive, albeit with a lower budget to commit to the programme more recently.

ATL's [A curriculum that counts](#) website gives further examples of schools that prepare young people well for the workforce. This includes Stanley Park, High, in which students participate in a curriculum that develops '21st century' competencies, such as problem-solving, critical thinking, collaboration and innovation.

b. What examples are there of employer-led initiatives that have had an impact?

Whilst a third of ATL members surveyed are aware of employer-led initiatives, 56% are not. The impact of such initiative is often quite superficial, with teachers preferring longer interventions from employers which result in more meaningful outcomes.

ATL members report that employer-led provision in this area is fragmented. Whilst there are many good quality providers of careers support for young people (for example Barclays Lifeskills and STEMNET), it is too time-consuming for teachers to research all of these adequately and assess which are appropriate to the young people with whom they work.

Examples given by ATL members include:

- National Grid in Warwick have been very pro-active in taking students with special needs, building their confidence and putting them on an apprenticeship programme.
- Stepnell's Ltd (Design and Build) in Rugby is an example of a company that stands out for its dedication to assisting with work experience and careers events. Not employer-led as such but positive employer-involvement at every opportunity.
- The Jaguar Land Rover initiative is a good way of demonstrating the needs of a modern employer to young people.