

Consultation questions

About ATL Cymru – the education union

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.

Our response

ATL Cymru welcomes the opportunity to respond to this consultation.

Whilst there are some welcome elements to the budget, overall we are concerned about the spending within the education sector. We believe that spending in the education sector should be increased and would emphasise the importance of education sector as underpinning the future of Wales. If our children and young people cannot fulfil their potential within our education system we will not succeed as a nation.

Unpicking the 2016-17 budget allocations is a challenge due to the lack of detail at this stage and we would prefer to have a fuller picture before commenting.

1. What, in your opinion, has been the impact of the Welsh Government's 2015-16 budget?

Underfunding in the education system in Wales has long been a problem. We don't know the precise figures now, but when WG last reported it, the schools funding gap between Wales and England as £604 per pupil¹. That means the average Primary school is underfunded in Wales by nearly £118,000 per year, and the average Secondary school by over £540,000².

¹ <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-wales-12280492>

² <https://statswales.wales.gov.uk/Catalogue/Education-and-Skills/Schools-and-Teachers/Schools-Census/Pupil-Level-Annual-School-Census/Pupils> Number of pupils divided by number of schools:

The FE sector is facing an unprecedented funding crisis. With cuts of up to 10% in individual College budgets, the FE sector needs investment to safeguard the future of Wales. With the adult sector decimated by the last budget, the 16-19 sector is 'not immune'³ from the challenges and is facing an average of 6% cuts.

A huge amount of experienced staff have taken voluntary redundancy, with 200 full time equivalent jobs gone in the FE sector between 2012/13 and 2013/14⁴. We do not yet have the figures for 2014/15, but it is likely to be even higher.

Colleges Wales pulls no punches when it talks about the 50% budget cuts to adult learning:

“With a 50% reduction in funding for part-time adult learning, Wales will have to brace itself for a workforce that has lower skills. Lower skills reap lower wages and affects health and wellbeing. All factors combined, there will be a negative impact on the nation’s economy.”

Investment is needed now to ensure we have a skilled workforce for the future and that everyone can take the training they need to fulfil their potential.

Welsh Government have released figures which 2014 /15 show part-time learner numbers in FEIs fell by 9.7% and those in local authority adult and community learning declined by 38%.⁵

Underfunding in the FE sector

Our FE members tell us that the current funding arrangements for Wales are unsustainable – with expectations that FEIs will deliver extra courses this year with no extra funding.

Primary school = 195, secondary schools = 898 pupils per school. Actual figures underfunded:
Average primary school by £117,780 a year, and the average Secondary school by £542,392

³ http://www.collegeswales.ac.uk/en-GB/steep_cuts_to_adult_skills_will_affect_wales_economy-728.aspx

⁴ <https://statswales.wales.gov.uk/Catalogue/Education-and-Skills/Post-16-Education-and-Training/Further-Education-and-Work-Based-Learning/Staff-at-Further-Education-Institutions/fulltimeequivalentstaffnumbersatfurthereducationinstitutions-by-institution>

⁵ <http://gov.wales/docs/statistics/2015/151125-further-education-work-based-learning-community-learning-2014-15-provisional-en.pdf>

Changes to course content and assessment methods have not been met with equivalent funding provision and expansion of the Welsh Baccalaureate and GCSE retakes mean that FEIs have been met with huge extra costs – in a year that has seen budgets decline.

The FEIs are expected to ensure that young people without a GCSE grade C or above in English and Maths undertake a retake. This is great news in principle. But in practice College members tell us they cannot deliver a fit for purpose course – with only about a third of students achieving a higher grade.

Indeed, Colleges have in the past given about 30 hours a year to students needing to undertake Essential Skills training. They are still expected to deliver this, with 75 hours a year for each GCSE on top – and with no extra money.

Our members are clear. If Welsh Government want a the Welsh Bacc, GCSE retakes and Essential Skills training in FEIs in Wales to be fit for purpose and help young people achieve their potential, more money is needed.

2. Looking at the draft budget allocations for 2016-17, do you have any concerns from a strategic, overarching perspective, or about any specific areas?

As an education union we are obviously concerned about funding within the education sector. Whilst there was so-called ‘protection’ for the FE budget, we are concerned that simply maintaining the status quo will not mitigate the effects seen by huge cuts to the sector thus far.

Whilst Welsh Government claims to be supporting schools⁶, through a 1% above block grant budget allocation, we have heard contradictory evidence as to whether this included the Pupil Deprivation Grant⁷. We would reiterate that the PDG was designed as *extra* money for schools to support specific groups. We therefore think it is essential that WG ensures the PDG is extra money and not included within the 1%.

⁶ <http://www.llanelliherald.com/wg-claims-success-on-schools-budget/>

⁷ <http://www.walesonline.co.uk/incoming/concerns-over-grant-wales-poorest-7016274>

3. What expectations do you have of the 2016-17 draft budget proposals? How financially prepared is your organisation for the 2016-17 financial year, and how robust is your ability to plan for future years?

Our members tell us that funding in education, especially within the FE sector is on a knife edge. We would also note recent news reports which suggested that schools will be expected to spend their reserves⁸, whilst Rhiwbeina primary school has reportedly written to parents⁹ asking for money.

Whilst we have largely mentioned news reports, our members tell us that underfunding of the education system is a serious and real problem which could lead to children and young people left unable to fulfil their potential.

4. The Committee are would like to focus on a number of specific areas in the scrutiny of the budget, do you have any specific comments on the areas identified below?

- Preparation for the Wales Bill
- Local health board financial arrangements
- Approach to preventative spending and how is this represented in resource allocation (Preventative spending = spending which focuses on preventing problems and eases future demand on services by intervening early)
- Sustainability of public services, innovation and service transformation
- Welsh Government policies to reduce poverty and mitigate welfare reform
- Impact of the Welsh Government's legislative programme and whether its implementation is sufficiently resourced
- Scrutiny of Welsh language, equalities and sustainability

We cannot emphasise enough the importance of education and the disappointment our members feel about the underfunding of education in Wales.

In terms of preventative spending, education is of central importance. Helping children and young people – and indeed adults too – to fulfil their potential through education is central to the prosperity of Wales as

⁸ <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-wales-politics-34938673>

⁹ <http://www.walesonline.co.uk/news/education/school-asks-parents-money-fix-10357626>

a nation. With a good education system, Wales will have a firm base on which to build a solid and sustainable future.

Therefore, the education budget should be not just 'protected' as the Welsh Government states, but should be sufficient to meet the needs of the sector.

If you would like to read about our Put Education First campaign, in which we ask for the next WG to Invest in education is one of our five key asks, please see our website: www.atl.org.uk/PutEducationFirst