



A is for austerity

The impact of coalition government policies on equality and opportunity for young people

ATL Future – a steering group made up of ATL’s student and newly qualified (NQ) members that represents the views of around 50,000 students and NQs across the UK – has the future of the teaching profession and the education of young people at the heart of all we do. But recent coalition government policies in England are threatening that future. This paper explores why we believe this to be the case. We hope it will provoke further discussion and that union members and young people will work together more closely to raise their concerns and resolve their issues. We want a generation of young people with high aspirations and engagement in their education, supported by adequate resources, services, and motivated and talented education professionals who will help them achieve their full potential in life. We implore our ministers and political leaders to work towards the same goal.

Carly Prout, ATL Future convenor

Introduction

Consider the trebling of tuition fees, the removal of the education maintenance allowance (EMA), the dismantling of state education, the closure of Sure Start centres, the decimation of local authority education support services and youth service provision, the abolition of the Future Jobs Fund and the fact that almost one million 16 to 24-year-olds are not in employment, education or training (so called NEETs), and the UK is not looking a good place to be young.

In addition to the direct impact of the above, other facets of contemporary Britain will further disadvantage young people, including impending cuts to welfare and housing costs and the removal of universal child benefit. Combine this with the increasing likelihood that young people will have first-hand experience of unemployment, and the outlook for their future is bleak.

Reduced engagement in future learning is the reality of the twin squeezes on the opportunities available to young people. On the one hand, university places are being cut, fees are being increased and FE courses are being abandoned. On the other hand, apprenticeships are scarce and the labour market is deteriorating, particularly for the young for whom unemployment has been stubbornly stuck at over 20 per cent for the last few years. This combination means that the incentive and support for young people to engage and achieve their life goals is fast diminishing. Young people are less inclined to engage in education and dedicate three years to a degree, taking on board all the associated debts, if there are no jobs at the other end.

In a 2011 response to the Education Select Committee inquiry into 16-19 participation in education and training, ATL called for further investment and a cohesive approach from the government in the future of young people:

Aside from the resources associated with ensuring employers are providing suitable and sufficient high quality training to benefit the additional young people staying in education, it will be necessary to increase the number of teachers, lecturers and other staff. They will require the resources to develop their students and encourage them to stay in education. Public expenditure must not simply subsidise employers, but must make a significant impact, beyond short-term statistic chasing, in reducing the number of young people classified as NEET.

From cradle to job centre

The policies being pursued by the coalition government mean that many of the benefits and support services currently afforded to children and young people

are being removed or greatly reduced. Many of these 'benefits' are already modest compared with those of our neighbours across the EU.

Sure Start centres

Sure Start centres are widely considered to be one of the greatest successes of the previous government. There are 3,600 such centres across the UK but especially in disadvantaged areas, offering a variety of public services from child and family health services to advice on parenting and citizens advice (beyond a small common core, there is no fixed formula: services are provided according to local need). They, along with others, also provide free early learning for three- and four-year-olds in recognition of the fact that disadvantaged children under five find it particularly difficult to catch up.

Independent research by the charities 4Children and Daycare Trust in January 2011 has shown that the centres are under severe threat. After surveying children's centre managers across the country they found that:

- 250 (7 per cent) will close or are expected to close, affecting an estimated 60,000 families
- 2,000 (56 per cent) will provide a reduced service
- 3,100 (86 per cent) will have a decreased budget
- staff at 1,000 centres (28 per cent) have been issued with 'at risk of redundancy' notices.

Both the Conservatives and the Liberal Democrats made explicit commitments to protect these centres before the 2010 election.

State education

The breakneck speed with which the new government pursued its ill-conceived Academies Bill is of grave concern to all the unions representing members in education, who are actively campaigning against the marketisation of state schools. The Department for Education's website boasts that it takes only three months from a registration of interest on their website to the school becoming an academy. All schools in the UK are now able to apply and break away from the local authority family of schools, with ever more 'pre-approved' under the fast-track programme. For these schools the governing body need merely

agree to apply — they can consult with 'interested parties' at a later date.

According to a poll by the Association of School and College Leaders in March 2011 almost half (46 per cent) of England's secondary schools are already academies, in the process of converting or intend to do so as soon as eligible. The freedoms afforded to academies will almost certainly lead to the deterioration in collective pay and conditions of teachers. The Schools Minister Lord Hill recently sent a letter out to headteachers of prospective academies encouraging them not to commit to paying new teachers by the national pay scale, suggesting that such commitment would hinder their approval as academies.

Quite apart from the impact on staff as national pay scales are undercut (allied with current attacks on public sector pensions), there are a number of concerns around the impact of these changes on young people. Special educational needs (SEN) provision, support for disabled children to stay in mainstream schools and responsibility for excluded pupils are provided more effectively by a local authority through economies of scale. For example, it is not viable for a small primary school with a small number of staff to offer the individualised learning support that many children need, particularly in poorer areas.

Furthermore, some of the freedoms afforded to academies are open to interpretation and 'creative' implementation, such as admissions policies and curriculum. The local authority loses its right to challenge a school's admissions criteria and cannot make a school re-admit pupils it has wrongly excluded. Indeed Mary Bousted, ATL general secretary, recently warned of the removal of local authority control:

Insofar as admissions criteria will become the business of the academy trust there are widespread concerns — not least for ATL members — that this leaves the door open to opaque decision-making. Those children deemed 'difficult', such as those with SEN or from disadvantaged backgrounds, may be looked over in favour of middle class children.

Likewise the freedom to set curriculum may in some cases lead to children being pushed towards certain subjects that are considered easier to pass and less academic in the interests of published school results. This is facilitated by academies' exemption from Freedom of Information legislation.

And yet do academies improve the academic attainment for all young people? A 2008 review by PricewaterhouseCoopers of the academies introduced by the previous government infamously concluded that there was “insufficient evidence to make a definitive judgement about academies as a model for school improvement”.

Evidence continues to mount suggesting that breaking away from local authority control disproportionately benefits children from wealthier backgrounds at the expense of the rest. This is reflected in the geography of the schools that immediately applied for academy status in the summer of 2010, with rates multiple times higher in, for example, the Home Counties than the north east. This trend, identified by research by Education Data Surveys, led to chief executive John Howson to remark:

It shows that social capital matters. The first people out of the blocks are middle class parents who know the system and who know how to put pressure on governing bodies. The figures show that it is more likely that middle class Home Counties go for it, rather than inner city authorities.

Though not yet in place, the free schools provided for in the Academies Bill are an even more extreme version of academies that threaten the notion of comprehensive state education in a more fundamental way. Only a handful has been approved for opening in September 2011 but some of these are religious schools. Not only might these schools give their pupils a limited educational experience, but it could also mean that other pupils have to travel to find a school that accepts their beliefs or ethos and potentially further segregates the community.

Graham Stuart, Chair of the Education Select Committee, has been quoted as saying that “free schools don’t make sense if they cannot be run for profit” (*TES*, February 2011). This was presaged in the 2010 ATL publication, *England’s schools: not open for business*, which presents a wide range of private companies that are seeking to run or provide services to academies and free schools. ATL believes in schools as a public service under direct local democratic control, administered by people who know the schools, the area and the local people. ATL does not believe in the use of public money to implement academies and free schools policies at the expense of services and support for the learning and development of our young people. Profits should not be made from running state schools.

Youth services

According to *Children and young people now*, a news outlet for managers and senior practitioners working with children, young people and their families, an expected average of 28 per cent of funding cuts by April 2012 will lead to the loss of up to 3,000 local authority youth workers. As is often the case with such cuts, even more draconian figures emerge when we start to scratch the surface. In the study, carried out by the Confederation of Heads of Young People’s Services among the heads of local authority youth services, open-access youth clubs and centres were under severe strain. In fact 96 per cent said that these would either be reduced or halted altogether by April 2012.

Widespread dismantling of youth services is hugely damaging given the role of a traditional youth worker as a link between a possibly disaffected young person and his or her education and broader society. Even within continuing services, many practitioners are concerned by the way in which the role has shifted towards a ‘new managerialism’ and youth workers as agents of behavioural modification. The ‘In defence of youth work’ campaign has involved over 500 youth work practitioners since it emerged in 2009. Among their concerns are the “changing role of the youth worker, from being a social educator to a social entrepreneur, submitting plan after bid after plan, selling both themselves and young people in the marketplace”.

This is symptomatic of the way in which marketisation has infected public life, including all levels of state education. It alienates young people by turning them into numbers within a culture of targets to be met, prescribed outcomes to be satisfied and tables to be published.

Careers advice service

A further way in which 16 to 19-year-olds will be penalised is through the severe cuts to careers advice services, which are seeing many Connexions advice centres close while the government devises plans for an all-ages careers advisory service to replace Connexions. These plans are at a preliminary stage while Connexions centres are already closing.

ATL firmly believes that careers education, information, advice and guidance is vital in raising aspiration, supporting participation in learning, helping overcome inequality and assisting in making the goals of young people achievable.

Removal of the education maintenance allowance (EMA)

The EMA was rolled out nationally in 2004 following successful local pilots and is a payment of up to £30 a week for 16 to 19-year-olds from households with lower incomes who are in full-time education. In some parts of the country it is claimed by nearly 90 per cent of students. EMA is to be abolished from September 2011.

A UCU survey in January 2011 showed that almost 40 per cent of students in receipt of EMA said they would not have started their course without this vital support. The government's announcement in March 2011 of a replacement for EMA will not fill this gap since it represents £400 million less in the budget than for EMA, to be divided between far fewer students.

The NUS said that the overall package represented a "shadow of its predecessor". Martin Freedman, head of ATL's pay, conditions and pensions department, said "we are deeply unhappy about schools and colleges being

allowed to decide which new students should receive the EMA replacement and how much they will receive. This is likely to lead to a postcode lottery in bursaries with similar students receiving different amounts depending on which college they attend.”

Aside from the clear financial disadvantage that the abolition of EMA will pose to young people endeavouring to stay in education and the inequality of the new scheme, it is false economy to cut this student support since it could result in many being priced out of further education, which in turn leads to higher unemployment among young people, potential college closures and job losses for college staff.

Before the 2010 general election, Michael Gove repeatedly cited the statistic that more pupils from Eton College achieved three A grades at A-level than those across the whole country who received free school meals. As the Association of Colleges pointed out, however, 40 per cent of young people taking A-levels do so at colleges rather than schools. These are often the most disadvantaged, receiving EMA to enable them to attend college.

University tuition fees

The near-tripling of the fees that students can, and will, be charged for university tuition to £9,000 has been one of the most contentious pieces of legislation yet enacted by the coalition government. Despite the massive hike, most institutions will in fact be worse off as the rises are largely to offset cuts to teaching budgets of up to 80 per cent. This compares to average cuts to departments in the comprehensive spending review of 19 per cent, which does not reflect well on how highly the government prizes investment in young people in the UK.

Analysis by the university think tank Million+, which is committed to opening up university to people from every walk of life, found that the higher fees are likely to impact much more heavily on modern universities (many former polytechnics), stunting social mobility whilst actually costing the Exchequer more in the long run than the current system. Modern institutions have a

strong tendency to have more students from less privileged backgrounds, who will be deterred by the high levels of debt. The costs will be higher as there will be fewer students being lent far greater sums of money up front, leading to higher write-off costs.

In addition, the removal of bursaries — and support such as the 'golden hello' for postgraduate initial teacher trainees — will make such professions less attractive to students who have struggled financially to get through the education system. Student debt is already a major factor in the rates of would-be students going to university, dropping out or going on to take up graduate-level employment, according to the Joseph Rowntree Foundation.

These developments are of particular concern in a sector where privilege has a knack of reproducing itself: 7 per cent of children in the UK attend independent schools yet they take almost half of the Oxbridge places on offer each year. Data gained by Tottenham MP and former minister David Lammy in late 2010 revealed some illuminating, if disheartening, facts. For example, Oxford only accepted one British black Caribbean applicant last year. Over the last four years the London Borough of Richmond received more than eight times as many offers from Oxbridge as were awarded to Rochdale, Barnsley, Hartlepool, Middlesbrough and Stoke combined.

Future Jobs Fund

The Future Jobs Fund was one of the first casualties of the coalition government. This scheme guaranteed 18 to 24-year-olds who had been out of work for six months temporary employment. While the scheme was by no means perfect, some 50 per cent of those offered such places moved off benefits afterwards.

High levels of youth unemployment are brushed off by the coalition government as a long-standing problem in the UK that is in no way connected to the current policy programme. Yet, as the labour economist David Blanchflower has noted, before the election last year there were signs that youth unemployment was beginning to improve.

Why the cuts?

When the financial crisis engulfed the banking sector in 2008, the government injected huge sums of taxpayers' money in order to prevent a full-scale economic disaster. The figures are eye-watering and worth a recap: in all, £117 billion was spent in buying shares in major British banks. And hundreds of billions more was pledged as insurance to prop up the financial services sector. Most of the above figure was spent on buying shares in the Royal Bank of Scotland (RBS) and HBOS.

To put this figure into context, the entire schools budget is £35 billion per year. UK spending on universities is to be reduced from around £7.2 billion to £4.2 billion, although this figure includes research — the cuts to teaching budgets alone are more savage.

RBS is 84 per cent owned by the UK tax-payer yet paid out £1.3 billion in bonuses in February 2010 despite losses of around £5 billion (it lost £24 billion in 2008).

Both the deficit and overall debt in the UK have grown hugely as a result of the banking crisis. Clearly the state of the public finances is due to this crisis, though it is worth noting that debt as a proportion of GDP was lower in the UK than all other G7 countries (the US, Canada, Germany, Japan, Italy and France) last year, according to the International Monetary Fund's World Economic Outlook Database.

We believe it is grossly unfair to our young people to simultaneously cut opportunities for education, the benefits and services which support them, the jobs of public sector workers who are committed to them and then to further limit the prospects of employment for young people, in order to pay it off. It is also short-sighted in the extreme.

The obsession with limiting national debt at all costs is particularly incoherent to young people when they are expected to amass huge amounts of it if they want to continue in further and higher education and training.

The impact on young people

In analysing the areas of support for young people that are being cut, it is clear there is a lack of serious research into the lost 'value' to both the future of young people and the future of society.

For example, Sure Start children's centres have not existed long enough for their beneficiaries to have progressed to attaining A-level results and beyond. No rigorous analysis of EMA has been conducted to provide a free school meals-type barometer of how its recipients are moving on to university. Removal of universal benefits such as Sure Start centres further risks social segregation whereby the children of the more affluent never mix with those more disadvantaged.

What if social mobility, in terms of access to university, shows a significant improvement in a few years' time when children's centre users begin applying for places? It will be too late for hundreds of thousands of children — all three main political parties accept research that has consistently shown that inequality of outcomes for the under-fives are very hard to close. At least they did before the election. Indeed the Liberal Democrat-linked think tank Centre Forum noted that by the age of three many disadvantaged children are already up to a year behind the learning of more privileged peers, and that only 17 per cent of young people whose parents are in the bottom income quartile move on to higher education.

ATL's response to the Education Select Committee inquiry into 16-to-19 participation in education and training in March 2011 said:

Young people leaving education at 16 with limited qualifications are disproportionately from disadvantaged backgrounds. Poverty is the single most important aspect of early childhood which has the greatest influence on children's life chances, particularly with regard to education, and the effects of growing up in poverty are often amplified by additional disadvantage, for example, due to ethnic background or disability. For such young people, it is important not just to keep them in education but

to ensure pre- and post-16 education is relevant to them. This should include offering tailored support to mitigate some of the effects of poverty (not just early intervention but consistent intervention according to need) and government committing to bring together communities, disadvantaged families, schools, colleges, and trade unions to devise practical strategies for tackling socio-economic disadvantage in relation to education.

Both ATL and the NUT have conducted separate surveys of members around the issues of accessing higher education, including additional initial teacher training, with alarming results. The ATL survey found that over a third of student teachers had to take on additional part-time work in order to supplement their income, which impacted very heavily on energy levels when in the classroom. It is worth remembering here that this is not students taking on part-time work while at university but trainee teachers, mostly on postgraduate courses which entail full-time teaching for extended periods in addition to academic work. Responses to an ATL survey also found that 57.8 per cent of student teachers would have thought twice about applying to go to university at all if fees had been £6,000 per year, and that over 70 per cent would not have chosen to go into teaching.

Similar surveying by the NUT found that around 88 per cent of their student members found it quite difficult, very difficult or impossible to make ends meet as a student.

The marketisation of education, as well as the deregulation of labour markets, has resulted in the numbers of newly qualified teachers who have failed to secure a permanent post to commence their induction being at a historic high of 52 per cent (General Teaching Council for England, March 2010). Many have been forced into agency work or have not secured employment, alongside the increasing proportion of the rest of the working population. This reflects the difficulties faced by aspiring young professionals in the current labour market.

The most recent unemployment figures released by the Office for National

Statistics show that, for the three months to December 2010, unemployment was 7.9 per cent, representing a 0.1 percentage point rise. However, the unemployment rate for those aged from 16 to 24 increased by 1.5 percentage points in the quarter to reach 20.5 per cent, the highest figure since comparable records began in 1992.

Why equality matters

There is a mounting body of evidence that everybody is worse off in more unequal societies. This includes young people.

The OECD, for example, has produced numerous reports stemming from its Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) on the achievement of disadvantaged students in various, largely rich countries. The PISA reports, which have come out every three years since 2003, generate a great deal of discussion around the key issues. Governments genuinely design policy, in part, around their findings.

Danny Dorling is among a number of academics who question this scheme as it ultimately amounts to a group of economists analysing the education systems of various countries. In his article 'The return to elitism in education' (*Soundings*, 2010), he argues eloquently that inequality in society more generally, which comes about due to excessive liberalisation and the marketisation of public services like education, inevitably leads to elitism. The context within which PISA is carried out, as well as the values which are implicit, mean that it is inevitable that they produce results whereby a small number are effectively labelled geniuses as they are able to answer certain prescribed question types in a desired manner, whilst a larger number at the other end are labelled hopelessly 'challenged'. As Dorling notes of those labelled geniuses: "The way this small group of children behave, they could one day even become educational economists themselves."

Such social reproduction of an education elite is far more likely the more unequal a society.

Prior to their hugely influential book *The spirit level* (2009), Richard Wilkinson and Kate Pickett had already demonstrated in a 2007 article in the journal *Social sciences and medicine* that levels of achievement for US students in combined maths and reading were significantly lower in states with greater inequality of income. Their 2009 book makes a comprehensive and meticulously researched case for why high levels of inequality have a detrimental effect on everyone.

The case for tackling inequality of outcomes in education can be summed up in a sentence, citing the work of Sandy Baum and Kathleen Payea:

People with more education earn more, are more satisfied with their work and leisure time, are less likely to be unemployed, more likely to be healthy, less likely to be criminals, more likely to volunteer their time and vote in elections. (Education pays, 2004)

What can young people do?

The most important thing we can do is support one another in the spirit of collectivism. We must rise to the challenges ahead, which are surmountable if we work together with trade unions and organisations that support us.

- Join a union if you are working (ask your rep or look on the TUC website at www.tuc.org.uk).
- If you are in full-time education join the National Union of Students (see www.nus.org.uk).
- Discuss your issues and concerns with family and friends.
- Write or email your MP about your concerns, sign a petition and get involved in local campaigns.
- Student and newly qualified teachers can join ATL and get involved in campaigns and ATL Future regional activity (see below for more).

What can union members do?

- Talk to colleagues about how cuts will impact on their lives and on public sector services or their pension.

- Discuss the issues facing young people today.
- Create opportunities for people to get involved in your union's campaigns.
- Ask non-members to join your union.
- Encourage them to speak out and defend public services, eg write to their MP, sign a petition and get their family and friends to do the same.
- Promote the 'All together for public services' campaign. More information is available on your union's website or visit the TUC website at www.tuc.org.uk.
- Educate young people on the work of trades unions using the teaching resources for schools and young people available on the TUC website at www.tuc.org.uk.

About ATL Future

The ATL Future Steering Group is made up of eight elected student and newly qualified members supported by members of ATL Executive. It represents the views and concerns of around 50,000 student and newly qualified members across the UK.

During 2010/11 the group has listened to the concerns of new education professionals and the young people with whom they work. As a consequence, it has lobbied ministers on the impact of rapid changes to education policy and the cuts to services that matter most to young people, many of which are highlighted in this report. This included contributing to the debate at the roundtable discussion held by Rt Hon Simon Hughes MP on EMA, raising concerns on the educational underachievement of those who are most disadvantaged, and on jobs for new teachers and lecturers in the UK. In addition it has campaigned on world education issues, such as global universal primary education.

The steering group has also commissioned and carried out research into the challenges facing young people and those new to the education profession, through surveys and regional meetings. We have facilitated continuing professional development opportunities for students and new teachers. The

steering group has also promoted debate on the future of education and appeared in the national press highlighting our members' views on these issues. Ultimately, we, along with fellow ATL members, have demonstrated on the streets on a number of occasions to defend the public services and policies that help our young people to achieve their best. We remain firmly committed to equality of education provision for all.

More broadly, ATL has worked closely with other unions active in the education sector to oppose many of the government's most questionable policies, including the academies programme, the abolition of the EMA and more recently the defence of teachers' pensions, which will also impact on younger professionals far more than it will those with more years' service in the scheme. ATL has also been a major supporter of the TUC's 'Altogether for public services' campaign.

To find out more, or to get involved, see www.atl.org.uk/atlfuture or email organise@atl.org.uk.

Research contributed by Ben Egan on behalf of ATL Future Steering Group.