



# **Supporting a Smarter Scotland - a consultation on supporting learners in higher education**

## **ATL's response to the Scottish Government's consultation document**

**30 April 2009**

The Association of Teachers and Lecturers (ATL), as a leading education union, recognise the link between education policy and our members' conditions of employment. Our evidence-based policy making enables us to campaign and negotiate from a position of strength. We champion good practice and achieve better working lives for our members. We help our members, as their careers develop, through first-rate research, advice, information and legal support. Our 160,000 members – teachers, lecturers, headteachers, support staff and students – are empowered to get active locally and nationally.

ATL is affiliated to the Trades Union Congress (TUC), Irish Congress of Trade Unions (ICTU), European Trade Union Committee for Education (ETUCE) and Education International (EI). The union is a member of the Social Partnership – working with the UK Government, employers and other unions on education issues. ATL is not affiliated to any political party and seeks to work constructively with all the main political parties.

## **Consultation Questions**

### **Option 1a**

- *What are your views on the proposal to begin a move to grants by extending the Young Students Bursary?*
- *Do you feel that the focus of bursary support should continue to be on dependent students?*

### **Option 1b**

- *What are your views on the extension of bursary support to independent students as part of the transition to grants?*

ATL believes that students' access to education should not be inhibited by the high levels of debt they currently find themselves burdened with. We would welcome a move to extend the Young Students Bursary and believe that the needs of all students would be best served by extending bursary support to include independent students. ATL recognises that independent students are often mature students with families and mortgages.

### **Option 1c**

- *What are your views on the proposal from the ASC to introduce full bursary/grant support for higher education courses in colleges?*
- *In particular, what are your thoughts on the potential for this to change the nature of support so that it would be based on what type of institution you were attending rather than your level of study?*

ATL does not believe that the potential benefits from the introduction of full bursary/grant support for all higher education courses would outweigh the potential impact upon institutions if students were to choose their course of study by type of institution

## Option 2

- *What are your views on the NUS proposal to increase the overall support available by increasing the grant support currently available?*
- *How should we address the potential effect on parental or partner contributions?*
- *How should the increase in income be addressed for independent students who receive no bursary support?*

ATL supports the NUS proposal to increase the overall support thus giving a 'minimum income guarantee' of £7,000. (seven thousand pounds.) Feedback from ATL student members showed that student teachers were more concerned about the money they had to live on day-to-day than the potential increase in their accumulated debt.

## Option 3

- *What are your views on this hybrid option aimed at those on the lowest incomes?*

ATL would ordinarily support increased assistance for the lowest income groups. In this instance given the small amount of monies available, then we do not believe that the potential debt reduction of £590 each year is likely to be a significant factor when students are deciding upon their options.

## Other options

- *Are there any other initiatives or ideas that you believe we should explore further?*

ATL does not believe that the student support system should be linked to rewards or incentives i.e. performance and attainment. We do not believe in the current economic climate that more support from employers will garner favour despite its potential merits.

## Fairer entitlement to support

- *What are your views on the options proposed to ensure that the funds available are used as fairly as possible to give students adequate support for their first degree?*
- *Do you agree that we should consider removing student loan support for second degrees?*
- *Alternatively, should we be maintaining funding for this group to explore more avenues to support opportunities to retrain or upskill those who may face redundancy as part of the effects of the economic situation?*

We would like to know how the Scottish Government is defining a fair use of funds to give students adequate support for their first degree. Is this something which will apply to everyone or be targeted?

ATL believes that second degrees are often more than a luxury for those who can afford them. We would want to preserve students' opportunity to undertake a second degree, particularly those interested in the PGDE for student teachers.

### **Minimum loan**

- *Do you believe there is a case for removing the minimum loan?*

We remain to be convinced that the minimum loan is currently set at such a figure as to significantly impact on potential students' choices. We would be more concerned about the proposal to remove the minimum loan if it were set at the level in England (£2,000).

### **Travel expenses**

- *Do you think that support for travel expenses should be subsumed into the main grant pot, or should it remain a separate, claim-based fund?*
- *Should we differentiate between day-to-day travel expenses and trip to and from home from those who stay away from home?*

We would be content if the support for travel expenses were to be subsumed into the main grant. We would however be keen to ensure that placement travel is treated separately, as this can place a significant burden on student teachers.

### **Servicing existing student loan debt**

- *What are your views on our proposals to service existing student debt if funding becomes available in future?*

ATL has a stated policy position of being in favour of grants and abolishing tuition fees where they exist elsewhere in the UK. We would in principle welcome proposals to service existing student debt, if the economic climate was favourable. We do recognise that this is not currently possible and would instead suggest that the Scottish Government concentrates on ensuring students have a minimum income to live-on whilst studying.

**This submission was prepared on behalf of  
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