ATL – leading education union

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. We are affiliated to the TUC, and work with government and employers by lobbying and through social partnership.

ATL offers free student membership to all undergraduate and post-graduate students undertaking a teacher training course. We have a dedicated student website www.new2teaching.org.uk and encourage students to make an active contribution to their school, local community and the association during their time as a student and beyond.

ATL Scotland is the fastest growing section of the Association. A National Official was appointed in the summer to develop the Association’s capacity in Scotland in relation to recruitment, organising, policy development and campaigns. We believe in positive engagement with Government at all levels across the UK. ATL Scotland looks forward to developing a positive working relationship with the Scottish Government.

Introduction

ATL is pleased to be able to submit evidence to the Education, Lifelong Learning and Culture Committee on the Graduate Endowment Abolition (Scotland) Bill. We recognise that with this Bill the Scottish Government has moved to deliver on its manifesto promise to reduce student debt.

Principles of the Bill

ATL believes that access to education should not be inhibited by the high levels of debt that students currently find themselves burdened with. ATL found upon conducting a survey earlier this year amongst student and newly qualified members that 38.3% of student teachers knew someone who had dropped out of teacher training for financial reasons. 49.3% of survey respondents estimated their debts would be in excess of ten thousand pounds by the end of their course.

Speaking at the time of the publication of the results of the survey ATL General Secretary, Dr Mary Bousted, said “We are worried about the impact of debt on those going into teaching. This survey shows it is a real problem for many new teachers. ”

Upon its introduction in 2001 the Graduate Endowment Fee was intended to promote social inclusion by reducing barriers to widening access and participation. We do not believe it has achieved this aim. Nor has it raised the level of income originally predicted, with students adding the fee to their loan capacity rather than paying the fee. For these reasons ATL supports the principles of the bill to abolish the Graduate Endowment Fee.

Consultation

ATL is content with the manner of consultation with stakeholders prior to the publishing of the bill.

Policy Memorandum

The policy memorandum and financial memorandum accompanying the bill were helpful.
Conclusion

We welcome the Scottish Government’s commitment to ensure that the current levels of student support will not be impacted upon by the enactment of the bill. That said ATL remains concerned about the general level of debt that students find themselves in upon graduation.

References

2,769 student teachers throughout the UK responded to an ATL survey between February and March 2007