

News Release

Association of Teachers and Lecturers

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For education correspondents / newsdesks

ATL launches critique of government intervention in education

The Association of Teachers and Lecturers (ATL) has published a thought-provoking history of government legislation on education during the second half of the 20th century.

Teachers and government: a history of intervention in education, discusses the autonomy of teachers in the mid-20th century and details how governments since 1981 have intervened in the work of schools and successfully raised standards. But it also describes the mounting opposition from many professional bodies to the continuance of government intervention in children's education.

The research, by Michael Bassey, emeritus professor of education at Nottingham Trent University, argues that while government intervention has raised school standards, it is now becoming counterproductive. It calls for the Government to abandon targets and league tables, for the national curriculum to be made non-obligatory and for legislation which, by transferring power over the curriculum, pedagogy and assessment to schools and teachers, would ensure that education in the 21st century continues to advance.

Commenting on the findings of his research, Professor Michael Bassey said: "I am old enough to remember how schools were before the national curriculum, SATs, league tables, Ofsted inspections and performance management. Then, as now, nearly all teachers were enthusiastic and dedicated people, striving to do the best for the children in their classes. Schools and teachers were free to make their own decisions as to what and how to teach, but in a myriad of different ways.

"In this climate, good teachers were able to be creative and spontaneous in their responses to educational needs. Children in their classes thrived: cognitively, socially, physically, spiritually, creatively, culturally and holistically.

“However, it also meant that weaker teachers could be dull and boring with little sanction. There were other negative features: for example, schools lacked the tools to assess children’s progress, parents rarely had a choice of school and could find out little about what went on in schools and they often had little feedback from teachers on their children’s progress. Also, while some heads were brilliant leaders, others coasted along and rarely worked with their teachers to raise standards.

“All this has changed and both Conservative and Labour governments deserve credit for this. Changes might have been better had they consulted the profession more and if they had centralised power less – but, nevertheless, they have improved the achievements of children, the funding, management and governance of schools, the participation of parents, and the classroom competence of many teachers.

“But government intervention is now counterproductive, as the evidence in this book shows. Giving teachers independence from political control is the key to future educational success. Day by day, it is teachers who know best what their pupils need. It is time to trust the teachers.”

Dr Mary Bousted, general secretary of the Association of Teachers and Lecturers (ATL) said:

“ATL is pleased to further the education debate by publishing this thought-provoking account of how teaching was seen by politicians in the second half of the 20th century. Professor Bassey provides a valuable contribution for those joining the profession and for experienced teachers interested to know how education and the teaching profession have progressed to where they are today.

“This publication comes at a time of uncertainty for the teaching profession. Politicians of all parties are focusing on the education sector and education is, again, a prominent and much debated issue.

“In publishing this document, ATL is signalling that there are legitimate questions to be asked about the role government plays in education today.”

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Notes to Editors

1. *Teachers and government: a history of intervention in education*. A report commissioned by the Association of Teachers and Lecturers, by Professor Michael Bassey. Association of Teachers and Lecturers. 2005. ISBN: 1 902 466 18 7. The publication is free to ATL members and £9.99 to non-members. The ATL order code is PED13. A copy can be obtained from the ATL website at www.atl.org.uk or the ATL Publications Despatch line on 0845 4500 009.
2. The Association of Teachers and Lecturers’ Annual Conference is taking place at the Riviera International Conference Centre, in Torquay, from Monday 21 March to Thursday 24 March 2005.

3. The ATL Annual Conference will be broadcast live on the internet at: www.atl.org.uk
4. The Association of Teachers and Lecturers (ATL) is an independent, registered trade union and professional association, representing approximately 160,000 teachers, lecturers and support staff in maintained and independent schools, sixth form, tertiary and further education colleges in the United Kingdom.
5. ATL exists to protect and improve the status of teachers, lecturers and other professionals involved in delivering education to further their legitimate professional interests.
6. ATL is affiliated to the Trades Union Congress (TUC). It is unaffiliated to any political party and seeks to work constructively with all the main political parties.
7. ATL members receive a regular magazine (*Report*) reflecting ATL policy and other issues affecting the education sector. If you would like to receive a copy of this please call 020 7782 1589.
8. Further information and all press releases are available on ATL's website: www.atl.org.uk