

Class Size

Conference welcomes the Government's recognition of the vital role played by class size in determining the quality of education, but Conference believes that class size is important across all sectors of education, not just at Key Stage 1 and that mandatory maximum class sizes should exist for all stages of education ie primary, secondary, nursery and sixth form colleges. Conference is concerned over the introduction of mandatory class size limits of 30 pupils only at Key Stage 1, and also the insufficient provision of funding over the period to 2002 to assist in the implementation of these limits.

Conference notes, however, that:

1. since May 1997 class sizes across all age groups have remained at the inherited high levels, such that at January 1999 there were still 1.3 million primary pupils in oversized classes of more than 30 pupils;
2. the proportion of pupils in oversized classes at Key Stages 2, 3 and 4 has increased such that at January 1999 (January 1997) the proportion in classes over 30 for Key Stage 2 was 39% (38%). There are still 22% of pupils at Key Stage 1 in oversized classes of more than 30 pupils;
3. the implementation of the 30 pupil maximum for 5 to 7 year olds has itself led to undesirable consequences, in particular an increase in teachers employed on temporary contracts, and an increase in the average Key Stage 2 class size;
4. no commitment has yet been given by the government to the allocation of additional funding on a long term basis to ensure that these limits can be maintained for 5 to 7 year olds or extended to 8 year olds and older, and for those under statutory age.
5. the annual birth rate in the UK has declined from 788,000 (1988) to 762,000 (1993) to 733,000 (1996).

Conference reaffirms the Union's policy on a Minimum Staffing Establishment policy for schools. Conference recognises that the elements of this policy, dealing with class size, non-contact time and cover obligations, are inter-related and that it is essential that improvements in one area are not offset by worsening in another. Conference consequently affirms that campaigning to secure maximum limits in class sizes must be conducted as part of a wider campaign to achieve a Minimum Staffing Establishment.

Conference believes:

- a) the government's present public expenditure plans are inadequate to deliver any significant cuts in class sizes;

- b) that the government's commitment to maximum class size is contradicted by its adherence to open enrolment and greater delegation.

Conference, therefore instructs the Executive to:

- i. actively campaign for the government to implement its commitment to reduce class sizes for 5 to 7 year olds by September 2002 and to commit itself to reduce all classes in line with current Union policy together with the provision of the additional funding necessary to permit these class sizes to be achieved. This campaign should include press releases, press interviews and the submission of a resolution to TUC Congress;
- ii. organise a lobby of Parliament where possible with parents, governors, and organisations such as Campaign for the Advancement of State Education (CASE) and other trade unions, especially teacher unions. The aim of this lobby should be to press the government to increase education funding so that class sizes across all sectors of education can be reduced;
- iii. resist any attempt by the government to include staff other than qualified teachers in any calculation of teacher-pupil ratios;
- iv. publicise Union policy on class sizes for all stages of education ie primary, secondary, nursery and sixth form colleges to schools and local associations and give active support and encouragement to all those schools with oversized classes to take class size action in line with Union policy.