



Consultation on Regulations to Reduce Primary 1 Classes to a Maximum of 25 Pupils

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

11 June 2010

ATL – the 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.

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.

Introduction

ATL Scotland welcomes the opportunity to comment upon the *Consultation on Regulations to Reduce Primary 1 Classes to a Maximum of 25 Pupils* document. In research for our *Manifesto for Education* for the UK General Election members identified class size as being an important factor in their ability to work on with individual pupils and meet their needs.

Views are sought on whether regulations to provide for the statutory maximum for P1 Classes of 25 from August 2011 should be introduced.

We acknowledge that there is conflicting research in the area of class size and its impact on pupil attainment. The *Class Sizes, Staffing and Resources Working Group*, commissioned by the previous Scottish Executive, issued its Final Report in 2007 confirming 'there is some disagreement amongst researchers about how much classes must be reduced in size to achieve significant improvements in pupil performance'. The report however went to state (paragraph 14):

"Evidence from the STAR project in Tennessee showed that the benefits of class size reduction are most marked in the early stages of a child's schooling, i.e. kindergarten through Grade 3 (5-8years), and with children from minority ethnic backgrounds. The impact on younger and less able children is confirmed by English evidence".

Research produced by Estyn (2003) for the Welsh Assembly Government suggested that 'teaching and learning are much better in classes of under 30 where the pupils: are in early years education and in the early stages of Key Stage 1 [P1 to P3 equivalent]; have additional educational needs; speak English as an additional language and live in areas of high social and cultural disadvantage'. In a survey of members in 2009 ATL found that class size has a direct impact on pupils and staff. There is an impact on pupils' concentration, participation and the ability of pupils to forge relationships with staff.

ATL therefore supports policies to reduce class size, while recognising the resource trade-off between class size and the number of staff in each class. ATL particularly supports small classes in the early years. This proposal would affect only around 8% of P1 classes, but ATL Scotland accepts that local authorities would benefit in their ability to manage placement requests from the reduction in the statutory limit and supports the reduction of the statutory maximum for P1 classes. We further support that maximum as being set at 25 pupils and agree that it should be introduced from August 2011.

Views are sought on whether we should regulate to introduce a maximum of 25 for P2 and P3 Classes too.

We believe based on the best evidence available that it would be sensible to introduce a maximum of 25 for P2 and P3 classes too. Not to introduce such a measure would in our opinion have the potential to reduce the positive educational benefits of P1 class sizes. In the view of ATL Scotland, research suggests that the resources required to implement this would be money well spent.

Views are sought on what would be an appropriate timescale for an extension to P2 and P3 classes.

We believe that the extension to a statutory maximum of 25 for pupils in P2 and P3 classes should also begin as of August 2011. We would support a two year phased introduction to enable resource and planning issues to be resolved, with the statutory limit of 25 applied across P1 – P3 by August 2013.

Views are sought on the merits of replicating the approach adopted in the 1999 Regulations of permitting the class size to be interpreted as a pupil:teacher ratio limit in exceptional circumstances.

ATL Scotland would support this proposal as long as it is used in exceptional circumstances. By way of a safeguard we would like to see a monitoring system whereby local authorities were not able to continually claim 'exceptional circumstances' and flout the spirit if not the interpretation of the regulations.

Views are sought on whether the "excepted pupil" provisions in the 1999 Regulations have worked effectively and whether the same approach should be replicated in the new regulations.

We do not see any reason why the "excepted pupil" provisions should not be replicated in the new regulations.

Views are sought on whether Gaelic medium immersion classes at P1-P3 and Gaelic medium composite classes need lower class size maximum numbers.

The previously referenced report by Estyn (2003) for the Welsh Assembly Government also found that smaller class sizes were beneficial for pupils in 'Welsh-medium education but from English speaking home backgrounds'. We can see the merits in applying similar principles to Gaelic-medium education and setting a lower class size maximum number. We recognise that this may place additional strain however on local authorities' budgets during a difficult financial climate.

Conclusion

While recognising that these proposals are for a modest improvement in class size, ATL Scotland is supportive of the measures suggested in the consultation document. We do believe that not to have taken forward the *Class Sizes, Staffing and Resources Working Group* recommendation for a 'longitudinal study into the impact of class sizes' is a missed opportunity by the Scottish Government to provide data allowing for an evidence based approach to the issue which could have marshalled arguments for the additional resources which will undoubtedly be required to implement the policy. Further, ATL Scotland looks to see further improvements in class size across the whole age range as resources allow and supports the Concordat aspirations relating to P1 – P3.

**This submission was prepared on behalf of
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