



Class Size – The Struggle Continues

A paper from Executive

1 Introduction

1.1 The problem of class size

There has been considerable work by PPTA and its members over the last decade to introduce class size limits in our secondary and area schools.

We know that the class size problem is concentrated predominantly in large secondary and area schools because of the poorer staffing ratios they generate from the staffing formula (although over-large classes are found in schools of all sizes, for a range of reasons). While in some schools, teachers rarely if ever experience class sizes greater than 30, there has been wide support for the introduction of controls from across the membership. This is because teachers have a professional concern to establish the best teaching and learning conditions for students and teachers, as well as collegial concern for the excessive workloads that large classes generate.

The issue of class size, therefore, has been one which has been widely felt and deeply held.

1.2 Reasons for the paper

This paper considers the work undertaken to date, the progress that has been made and the future direction for work on achieving class size limits. It seeks confirmation that members continue to feel deeply about the issue of class size. The Association has pursued an interest in class size issues for a long time. This paper picks up the trail from the outcome of the 1998 claim around class size.

1.3 Progress

Appendix 1 reviews activities and progress up until the 2010 Annual Conference. Below, we consider what has happened since the last Conference and pose the question – what now?

2 Progress since Annual Conference 2010

2.1 Widespread support for smaller class sizes

In the preparation for the 2010 STCA round, members overwhelmingly indicated that they wished to have included in the claim a provision for limiting class sizes. For most teachers, maximum class size in 'regular' classes is seen as optimal at about 25 students, with classes in

subjects with higher health and safety risks (particularly practical classes in laboratories and workshops) restricted to about 18 students. Work undertaken by Windshift Research in 2004 indicated that parents have a similar view of what constitutes appropriate class size. MMRResearch, engaged this year to investigate parental issues in secondary education,¹ identified that 50% of parents have concerns about class size.

2.2 The 2010 claim

The 2010 claim was comparatively modest. It asked for a maximum class size of 30 students, backed with an additional claim for 700 FTTE of additional staffing, targeted to large schools, to make this happen.

2.3 Ministry response to claim

The Government refused to consider collective agreement controls on large class sizes. It cited a number of reasons:

- the cost of the additional teachers required;
- a philosophical opposition to having such provisions per se in the STCA;
- a philosophical opposition to engaging in professional discussions in the bargaining round; and
- the philosophical position that staffing is a matter of government policy and not up for discussion with teachers.

The Ministry of Education negotiators failed to engage at all in any considered discussion of class size issues, in terms of either the impacts on students (a professional matter) or the workload of teachers (an industrial matter). While they argued that the 'research' says class size does not matter, they referenced only very selective research and had little analysis of the research findings on which they based their position.

2.4 Secondary School Staffing Group

The Ministry did, however, recognise that large class sizes were a significant issue for secondary teachers and that some response was required. It agreed to a forum, outside the industrial negotiations, for consideration of class size. This is the Secondary School Staffing Group (SSSG), which met for the first time on 4 July and is due to produce a final report to the Secretary for Education by 16 October this year.

¹ MMRResearch, 'Parental Attitudes Towards Secondary Education in New Zealand', July 2011

The SSSG has no funding allocated for any outcomes. It has representatives from SPANZ, focused primarily on increasing resourcing to secondary schools, NZSTA, concerned primarily with preventing any outcomes that might reduce the 'flexibility' of local schools, the Ministry, concerned with not producing results that might create an expectation that further resourcing will be made available to schools, and from NZSPC and PPTA, seeking to address the issues that large class sizes create in our schools. Ironically, given its refusal to discuss professional matters in an industrial round, the Ministry representatives are from its industrial relations wing. So far, the Ministry has refused to agree on a definition of what constitutes a large or a small class.

The SSSG has been able to agree on one piece of research, involving case studies of a number of our secondary schools to find out how and why they use their staffing, and the constraints around the use of staffing that relate to the creation of large classes. It was a considerable struggle to get the Ministry and NZSTA representatives to agree to any discussion of the research on class size – even simply to identify why there is disagreement about its interpretation, why it is contestable and what the research actually says about class size. And this despite the fact that it was a component of the agreed terms of reference!

A verbal update on the progress of the SSSG will be given to the Annual Conference.

3 Where to from here?

3.1 Parents' concerns about class size

This year PPTA commissioned independent research company MMRResearch to find out what issues in secondary education were of concern to parents. The company conducted focus groups and produced a questionnaire, which was issued to a representative sample of about 1000 parents.

MMRResearch found that, in reference to their own school and their own children, parents were dissatisfied or very dissatisfied with:

- the ability of teachers to manage difficult student behaviour in the classroom (39%);
- the ability of teachers to respond to their child's individual needs (29%); and
- the number of children in their child's class (23%).

In reference to secondary schools in general, parents were concerned or very concerned about:

- bullying by students (75%);
- troublemakers in classes making it hard for other students to learn (72%);
- teachers being overworked (52%); and
- classes being too large (50%).

All of these factors are related to class size. There are various pieces of research which show that reducing class sizes leads to positive impacts on the behaviour of students, improvements in the safety of students, improved individual attention and feedback to students, and reductions in teacher workload and stress.²

3.2 What is needed?

Eliminating large classes requires two things:

- Funding – some large classes are a result of the resourcing given to schools (especially large schools, which are disadvantaged by the current staffing formula).
- Collective agreement or other regulatory controls – some large classes are a result of idiosyncratic decision making at the local school level.

Clearly, funding requires a decision from Government to increase, in a targeted way, the resourcing it is allocating to secondary schools. The parents taking part in the MMR research exercise were asked if increased funding for state secondary schools should be a priority in the current economic climate. Only 10% answered no, probably not or did not know, while 66% answered that yes, it should, and 24% thought that maybe it should.

3.3 The Government's view

The funding allocations in the last two Budgets have forced cuts in spending in real terms in the secondary sector, both in terms of resourcing to schools and in terms of teacher salaries. There is no indication that the current Government will give any priority to improved funding for secondary schools, particularly for class size controls. Despite its earlier promises to increase front-line staffing in the state sector, the Government's decisions to date have led to the opposite. While secondary schools have avoided actual staffing cuts in this parliamentary term, they did suffer a series of staffing cuts in the 1990s under governments with ideological positions similar to the current one. A second term government is less likely to show restraint in implementing unpopular policies.

² A starting point for connecting to this body of class size research is: <http://www.ppta.org.nz/index.php/-issues-in-education/class-size?start=4>

There is also no desire on the part of the current Government, for ideological reasons, to do anything which employers might feel constrains their discretion to decide how to use (or misuse) their workforce.

3.4 How are we to make progress?

There are several options open to secondary teachers in pursuing class size controls:

1. Continue the ongoing campaign to raise awareness among the community of the advantages of limiting class size, with the intent that the pressure of community wishes will influence future governments.
2. Engage in political campaigns before general elections to make class size an election issue for each major party to address as part of its manifesto. (This may require campaigning over several elections.)
3. Continue to lobby those political parties which are more likely to agree to resourcing schools to restrict large class sizes when they next form a government.
4. Reintroduce class size limits as a claim in the next STCA round as an industrial (workload) issue, backed by industrial activity.
5. Mount school-by-school campaigns to reduce introduce class size limits at the local level.

Of course, there is also the option to cease to pursue class size limits, if members no longer feel that such limits are a priority.

3.5 Industrial action will be needed

With regard to option 4 above, PPTA is aware that the current Government is seeking from Treasury an analysis of the cost of teacher industrial action. It is the Association's assessment that the Government is considering introducing legislation in its next term to deny teachers the right to strike in pursuit of a collective agreement. Clearly, the purpose behind such a move would be to eliminate the right to fight for fair and reasonable pay increases and improvements in conditions through collective agreement claims, and to eliminate the threat of industrial action as a response to any significant policy changes during the next parliamentary term to which secondary teachers would be strongly opposed.

Removal of the right to take industrial action would also undermine the right of members to be covered by a collective agreement. During its term of office, the National-led Government has shown an ideological preference for individual agreements and a consistent pattern of

undermining employee rights. Without the pressure of industrial action, a future National-led Government would have no reason to settle a collective agreement.

3.6 Branch-based action

With regard to option 5 above, there are some cases where strong branch-based action would eliminate large classes through the mechanism of the timetable policy. Some schools already have such policy statements and seek to adhere to them. However, PPTA is aware that for some schools it is the lack of entitlement staffing that creates large classes, rather than any desire by the principal or board to allow large classes to operate. It is also the case that, where a local solution is reached without the underpinning of a provision in the STCA or some other enforceable mechanism, even the strongest branch may need to fight the same battles over again with each change in principal or board. In addition, Executive does not consider it is equitable to secure reasonable class sizes for some members and some students in some schools, while others are unable to enjoy the same benefits.

4 Conclusion

PPTA Executive believes that the class size issue is one that members generally hold to be important. Executive has great hope, but little confidence, that the current class size/Secondary School Staffing Group will produce positive outcomes.

The recommendation to this Conference is that the Association assumes business as usual and commits to pursuing all of the first four options above.

The Executive also expresses the belief that, under a National-led Government, winning resources for class size controls and collective agreement clauses that ensure schools can and will adhere to class size limits will almost certainly require extended industrial action from members at some stage in the future, regardless of the economic circumstances which apply at the time.

Recommendations:

- 1 That the report be received.
- 2 That this Conference note with dismay the Government's failure to resource and introduce class size limits in secondary and area schools.
- 3 That this Conference instruct PPTA Executive to continue to seek class size limits through the following four mechanisms:
 - a. A continuing campaign to raise awareness among the community of the advantages of limiting class size and to influence future government policy.



- b. Engage in political campaigns before general elections to make class size an election issue for each major party to address as part of its manifesto. (This may require campaigning over several elections.)
 - c. Continue to lobby those opposition and coalition political parties which, when they next form part of a government, are most likely to agree to resourcing schools to restrict large class sizes.
 - d. Propose to PPTA membership that class size limits be reintroduced as a claim in the next STCA round as an industrial (workload) issue, backed, if necessary, by industrial activity around that claim.
- 4 That this Conference instruct PPTA Executive to consult with members during the 2012 STCA claims development process on including clauses in the 2013 collective agreements negotiation claim to ensure:
 - a. that schools endeavour to keep all classes below 30 students;
 - b. that schools endeavour to keep all classes in classrooms, laboratories and workshops with identified health and safety hazards below 24 students;
 - c. a link for teachers of those classes to the compensatory mechanisms of the collective agreements in instances where the above genuinely cannot occur; and
 - d. additional targeted entitlement staffing to resource class size limits.

APPENDIX 1: From 1998 claim to Annual Conference 2010

1 Secondary teacher claims on class size

1998 The maximum student contact hours for any teacher not to exceed 450 per week, nor a maximum student contact time of 20 hours per week.

The average maximum class size per teacher not to exceed 20 students.

2001 *None – claims were for non-contact implementation.*

2004 *None – claims were for last stages of non-contact implementation.*

2007 Schools to endeavour to keep all classes below 30 students.

Average individual teacher class sizes of 26 for those who teach two or more classes.

A link to the compensatory mechanism currently required by the STCA for instances where the above genuinely cannot occur.

2010 Average class size to be no more than 26.

Maximum class size to be 30 except for classes where there are hazardous processes, equipment and/or materials, in which case the maximum to be 24.

2 STCA provisions gained

The provisions in the STCA relating to class size are:

- the requirement that a timetable policy be developed in consultation with the teaching staff which includes reference to class size (introduced in 2002); and
- the requirement on the employer to use reasonable endeavour to ensure that teachers with more than one class have an average class size of 26 or fewer, or, where this does happen, to operate a compensatory mechanism (introduced in 2007).

Note: Members will be aware that the latter provision does not prevent any individual class from being larger than 26 (or 30) but does seek to ensure a balance of workload across a number of classes allocated to teachers.

3 Other STCA outcomes

From the 2004 STCA settlement

The Curriculum Staffing Working Party (Ministry, PPTA, NZSTA) was established in 2006 to consider the issues associated with staffing secondary schools. It failed almost immediately as the Ministry would not engage in good faith, even to the extent of refusing to agree on a definition of 'curriculum' (including rejecting an offer to use the one published in the Ministry's own documents). The reason for the Ministry's position became clearer when then Minister of Education, Steve Maharey, told PPTA representatives that he wouldn't allow any recommendations to come from the working party that proposed extra



staffing. The 2006 Work Environment workstream was similarly blocked.

From the 2011 STCA settlement

The Secondary School Staffing Group was established in 2011.

4 Annual Conference activities and decisions

2004 Picking up on growing member concern about class size and workload, Executive produced a Conference paper on class size. The Conference established a Class Size Taskforce (to inform the work of the Curriculum Staffing Working Party, which was supposed to be considering the associated issues).

2005 The Class Size Taskforce presented the paper 'Class Size Taskforce, Education Performance and Teacher Workload' to the 2005 Conference.

The paper reported on factors affecting class size, the impact of very large or very small classes, and issues surrounding how class size is resourced and the limitations that resourcing places on reducing class size.

The huge impact that over-large classes have on teacher workload and stress was identified. None of the issues raised were a surprise to teachers, and many of the flow-on effects identified highlighted the huge impact that resolving this one issue could have on many other aspects of school life.

The Conference established the policy:

- *THAT PPTA establish a goal of introducing class size limits as a mechanism for improving the education outcomes of all students, especially those at greatest risk of educational failure.*
- *THAT from 2006 all schools endeavour to operate an absolute secondary class size maximum of 30 students in face-to-face teaching situations, and to operate each class at a size that is both safe and educationally effective.*

It determined that further work be done on establishing optimal maxima for class size, practical classes and student contact hours, to be reported to the 2006 Conference, and that class size control mechanisms be explored and an implementation strategy developed.

The Conference noted that a class size limit of 30 students would represent the first step in a target of phased, resourced class size reduction in secondary schools. It requested a survey of secondary and area schools in 2006 to establish the level and distribution of additional staffing which would be needed to implement maximum class sizes at various levels, with the findings be presented to the 2006 Conference.

2006 The Conference paper 'Controlling Class Size' recommended:

5. *PPTA continue to demand the full implementation of the recommendations of the Staffing Review Group Report (Stage Three).*
6. *PPTA prepare advice for branches about how to best determine appropriate class size policy for timetabling policy (as per clause 5.2.1 in the STCA), including recommended optimum class sizes, student contact hours and practical class sizes.*
7. *PPTA call on the government to adequately staff pastoral care and management in order to ensure curriculum staffing is fully utilised for the provision of appropriate curriculum breadth and class sizes.*
8. *PPTA ensure that the Working Environment Workstream consider the impact that work environment has on appropriate class size.*
9. *The Association included in its 2007 STCA claims development proposals for STCA clauses requiring:*
 - *schools to endeavour to keep all classes below 30 students;*
 - *average individual teacher class sizes of 26 for those who teach two or more classes; and*
 - *a link to the compensatory mechanism currently required by the STCA for instances where the above genuinely cannot occur.*

2007 & 2008 There were verbal reports to these Conferences on class size matters and the class size campaign.

2009 & 2010 Class size matters were included in industrial updates to these Conferences.

5

Campaign activities

- In November 2007, Executive approved proposals for a long-term campaign for class size reduction leading to the 2010 industrial round. That campaign would include industrial, advertising publicity and membership support components.
- The class size campaign ran during 2008 and 2009, with national advertising including posters and billboards (for example 'How dense do you want them?'). Lobbying kits were sent to branches. Signatures were collected for a class size petition.
- During 2010–11, branch and membership campaign kit material was distributed during industrial negotiations for use with local communities. National media advertising ran as part of the STCA campaign.

6 Other activities

Past activities

- The enacted recommendations of the Staffing Review Group (SRG) report in 2000 provided 1800 additional FTTE of staffing for secondary and area schools between 2002 and 2006. In part, this returned staffing to small schools that had been cut by the National Government in 1994, and in part it resourced the introduction of guaranteed non-contact time, which was phased in from 2002 to 2005 (effectively an additional two hours per week for most teachers). The report made a further recommendation (rec. 3.6) that was to be implemented after the first phase was completed. This included a further 400 FTTE for management staffing improvements, a reduction in curriculum staffing ratios by two at all secondary year levels, and continuing improvement in guidance staffing. Were that recommendation to be enacted there would be no reason (other than very singular ones relating to specific classes and teachers) for any school to have classes of more than 30 students.
- PPTA surveys and reports on class size were completed in 2004, 2006 and 2011.
- PPTA gathered class size data as part of general membership surveys in 2002 and 2009.
- Windshift Researchers examined parent attitudes to class size in 2004
- PowerPoint presentations and other material has been produced for use by branches and activists.
- In 2008, timetable seminars were held in regions, led by the Association's Staffing Committee and trained specialists.
- MMRResearch surveyed parent attitudes to class size in 2011.

Ongoing

- Lobbying national and local MPs from all parties;
- meetings with the Minister of Education;
- pressing for staffing improvements and the implementation of SRG recommendation 3.6 with the Ministry and various Ministers at every opportunity; and
- class size material made available on PPTA website.