

Students decide that gay is good

By JOHN EZARD

The movement to expand social freedom for homosexuals scored what is potentially its biggest success since the Wolfenden Report when the 500,000-strong National Union of Students embraced it yesterday by an overwhelming majority.

By a card vote of 363,789 to 10,382, with 12,000 abstentions, delegates at the Easter Conference in Exeter made the union the first 'sizeable group in Britain to endorse this policy. It passed a "Gay Rights" motion which commits the NUS to giving not only moral support to produce a "change of consciousness" in public acceptance of homosexuals but practical aid running into thousands of pounds from national and local funds.

Forty homosexual clubs, called Gaysoes, have sprung up at colleges in four years since the word gay came to mean homosexual.

Yesterday's motion instructs the remainder of the 600 colleges in Britain to provide finance to start societies.

A duty has been placed on the NUS executive to exert pressure on any colleges which do not pay the necessary grant—estimated at a minimum of £10 a year—out of their allowances

from local authority funds. This alone could cost a minimum of £10,000.

The union's London headquarters was ordered to provide a national homosexual dating service. The present "aggressively heterosexual" atmosphere of students' dances is to be changed by the specific invitation of homosexuals—who are to be given as much freedom as other people to embrace and kiss in public.

Societies are to be encouraged to "spread their influence into the locality via local pubs and press." The NUS is also mandated to prepare a report on "discrimination in personal relationships," as well as in employment, and to campaign to reduce the guilt, loneliness, and fear said to be felt by student homosexuals, whose activities remain illegal under the 1967 Sexual Offences Act. This fixed the homosexual age of consent at 21.

On paper, the barrage of instructions aims at a revolution which would shatter the bounds of behaviour which homosexuals regard as acceptable to other students. While previous motions by the conference on social topics have produced little concrete result because of lack of interest by college unions, there are exceptions: a recent decision to boycott products of the Distillers Company produced real public impact.

The motion was proposed by 14 students, seven of them avowed homosexuals. Two, a man and a woman, said their parents would not know this until they read today's newspapers.

The main proposer, Mr Jamie Gardiner, aged 25, of University College, London, a mathematics student, told the conference: "Being a homosexual is simply one of the many valid ways of being a human being. By 1973, a homosexual preference should be as unremarkable as a preference for coffee or tea."