

# Trade union membership 1998-99: an analysis of data from the Certification Officer and Labour Force Survey

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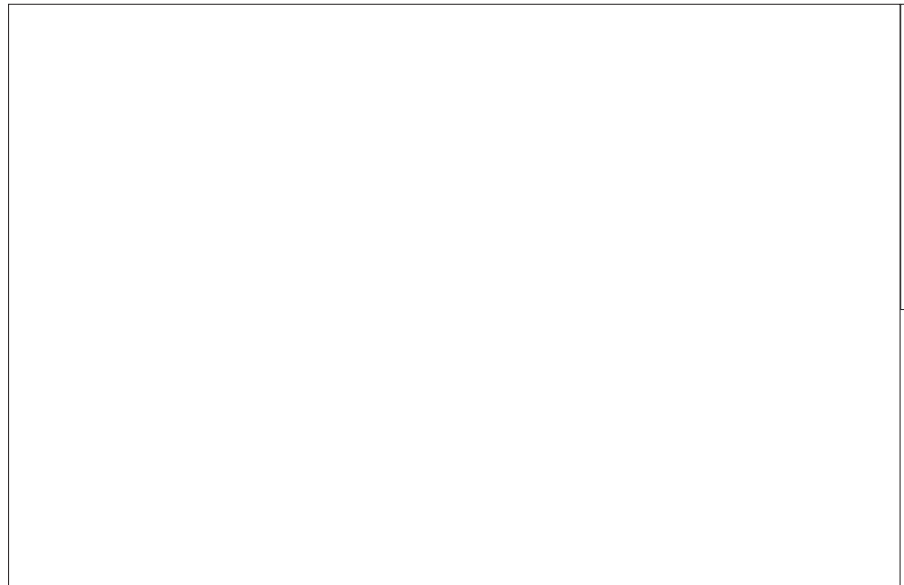
## Key points

According to the Certification Officer:

- At the end of March 2000 there were 221 listed trade unions in Great Britain.
- Total membership of those listed unions that submitted annual returns was 7.8 million at the end of 1998: an increase of 12,000 since the end of 1997.
- This was the first increase in union membership in listed trade unions measured in this way since 1985. The level is still around 40 per cent below its 1979 peak level.

According to the Labour Force Survey (LFS):

- The proportion of all employees who were union members (union density) has fallen from 39 per cent in 1989 to 30 per cent in 1999.
- Union density fell by 0.1 percentage point in the year to autumn 1999. The number of union members increased by 105,000 – the first increase since the LFS series began in 1989. However, these changes are not statistically significant.
- Union density varies widely by industry, ranging from just 6 per cent in hotels and restaurants, to 61 per cent in public administration.
- Union density varies widely by age, with only 6 per cent of employees aged less than 20 being union members, compared with 39 per cent of 40-49 year olds and 34 per cent of those aged over 50.
- In autumn 1999, almost 8.5 million people, or 36 per cent of employees, said that their pay and conditions of employment were affected by collective agreements. These people were most likely to work in larger organisations and in the public sector.



**Two main sources of information measure changes in trade union organisation in Great Britain: records collected by the Certification Officer and the Labour Force Survey. This article uses the most recent data from both to look at changes in union membership.**

## Introduction

THIS ARTICLE provides information on numbers of trade unions and union membership in Great Britain. It also outlines the changes to the trade union questions that have been made in the 1999 Labour Force Survey (LFS). Differences in the presentation of Certification Officer (CO) data in different publications are also discussed.

There are two main sources of regular information that are used to measure trade union membership in Great Britain. The first of these is the administrative details provided annually to the CO for Trade Unions and Employers' Associations. This is a legal requirement for all trade unions and can be used to calculate both the total number of unions and the present level of union membership according to trade union records. The second is the estimates of union membership from the LFS, which provides more detailed information on the characteristics of union members.

Information on union membership provided by the CO refers to the situation at the end of December 1998 while data from the LFS relate to the position during the autumn quarter of 1999. While the LFS covers the whole of the UK, the information in this article is restricted to Great Britain.

The major advantage of the CO data is that they provide a long and consistent time series of both trade union numbers and membership figures. The LFS has the advantage of a wealth of other information collected on the respondent's individual and workplace characteristics, which enables a more detailed analysis of patterns and changes in union membership. This includes details of whether an employee's pay and conditions of employment are affected by a collective agreement.

The two sources of information are compiled in very different ways and as such produce very different estimates of

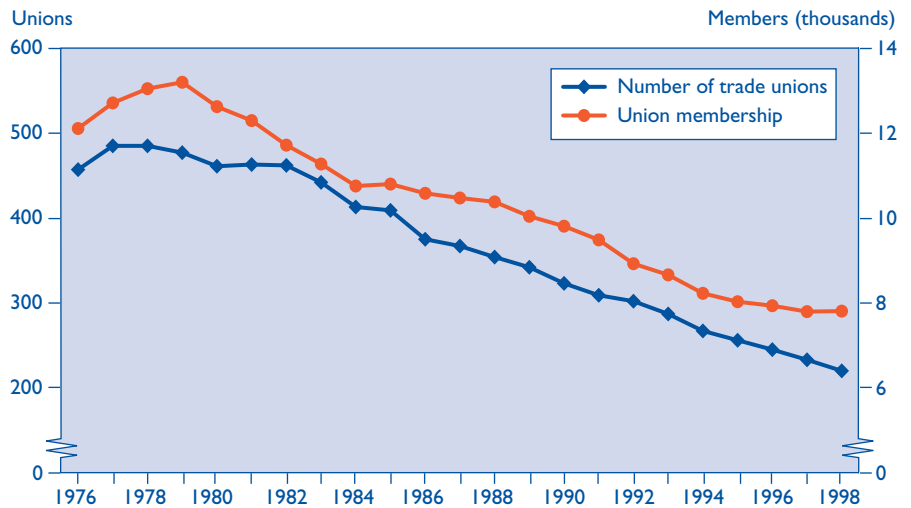
trade union membership. A significant part of the difference can be explained by the ways that the CO and LFS deal with particular classifications of union membership. For example, data provided by the CO include members of trade unions who are currently unemployed, and could include those who are retired or whose usual residence is no longer in the UK. The LFS excludes these groups as questions on trade union membership are asked only of those in employment in the survey's 'reference week'. A more thorough explanation of the differences can be found on pp403-13, *Employment Gazette*, August 1990.

**Trade union membership data compiled by the Certification Officer**

The latest information available from the Certification Officer shows that at 31 March 2000 there were 221 listed trade unions in Great Britain, compared with 224 at the end of December 1998. The latest available information on trade union membership refers to December 1998. At this time, 220 listed trade unions had submitted annual returns, 14 less than the previous year. The analysis reported below is based solely on information from these trade unions.

The number of trade unions has fallen greatly over time. In 1920, there were as many as 1,384 trade unions. The trend since 1976 is shown in *Figure 1*. This decline has been caused principal-

**Figure 1 Number of trade unions and union members; Great Britain; 1976-1998**



Source: Certification Officer/DTI

ly by union mergers. What is less obvious from the raw figures alone is that while unions amalgamate or cease to exist, new unions are still being created.

*Figure 1* also shows listed trade union membership figures from the CO. The recorded increase in membership of 12,000 members (0.2 per cent) from 1997 to 1998 is the first increase since 1985. These figures apply to those trade unions whose name is entered on the CO's list and that have submitted annual returns. There are other unions that, for whatever reason, do not seek to be listed yet meet the statutory definition of a trade union. In the year ending 1998 there were 18 trade unions that the CO

was aware of, and that had submitted annual returns, yet had not sought to be on the list. If the membership of these 'unlisted' unions is included (as the CO does in his annual report) then the increase in membership from the year ending 1997 to 1998 is almost 51,000 members. If the unlisted unions were included, 1998 saw the first increase in membership since 1979. The reasons for these and other small differences in the presentation of CO data in different publications are outlined in *Box 1*.

*Table 1* shows the distribution of these 7.8 million union members across trade unions. Most unions are very small, with nearly two-thirds having a

**Table 1 Trade unions distributed by size; Great Britain; December 1998**

Number of members	Number of unions	Membership (000s)	Number of unions		Membership of all unions	
			Per cent	Cumulative per cent	Per cent	Cumulative per cent
Under 100	30	1	14.0	14.0	0.0	0.0
100 - 499	52	13	23.5	37.6	0.2	0.2
500 - 999	20	16	9.0	46.6	0.2	0.4
1,000 - 2,499	29	51	13.1	59.7	0.7	1.0
2,500 - 4,999	23	83	10.4	70.1	1.1	2.1
5,000 - 9,999	14	104	6.3	76.5	1.3	3.4
10,000 - 14,999	5	70	2.3	78.7	0.9	4.3
15,000 - 24,999	7	123	3.2	81.9	1.6	5.9
25,000 - 49,999	18	592	8.1	90.0	7.6	13.5
50,000 - 99,999	6	354	2.7	92.8	4.5	18.0
100,000 - 249,999	6	941	2.7	95.5	12.1	30.1
250,000 and over	10	5,458	4.5	100.0	69.9	100.0
<b>Total</b>	<b>220</b>	<b>7,807</b>	<b>100.0</b>		<b>100.0</b>	

Source: Certification Officer/DTI

Note: Figures in this table vary from those reported in the annual report of the Certification Officer, as only those listed unions who submitted annual returns are included above.

## Box 1 Presentation of trade union membership statistics from the Certification Officer

At present, there are differences in how the trade union data from the CO are presented in different publications. There are small differences in the number and membership of trade unions. The Department of Trade and Industry (DTI) has been looking into reconciling these differences and wishes to consult users on proposed changes to the way the CO data are presented.

Currently the CO publishes his data in an annual report that is now released shortly after the end of the financial year. The union membership data in this report are presented using data from both listed and unlisted unions. Trade unions may apply to be added to the public lists of trade unions that the CO keeps in accordance with the provisions of sections 2-4 of the Trade Union and Labour Relations (Consolidation) Act 1992. However, because it is entirely voluntary that unions apply to be on the list, there are unions that fall within the legal definition of a trade union but do not seek to be entered on the list. These unions are considered 'unlisted' unions and the CO includes these in his membership and union statistics. In addition, regional branches are sometimes treated as separate unions when counting the total number of unions.

In this article, the trade union membership data from the CO does not include the unlisted unions, although the regional branches are treated in the same way as in the CO annual report.

Trade union membership data from the CO are also published in the National Statistics publication *Annual Abstract of Statistics*. In this, numbers and membership of trade unions are for the UK; it does not include unlisted unions and does not separate out the regional branches of the unions. The differences between the various presentations of the CO data in the above publications are summarised in the table below.

	Great Britain	United Kingdom	Listed	Listed and unlisted	Some branches treated separately
CO Annual Report	✓	✗	✓	✓	✓
<i>Labour Market Trends</i> article	✓	✗	✓	✗	✓
<i>Annual Abstract of Statistics</i>	✗	✓	✓	✗	✗

These differences in scope and definition mean that estimates of the numbers of trade unions and their membership differ slightly in all of these publications. DTI is currently investigating means by which the data can be published on a consistent basis. There appear to be some difficulties in producing a consistent time series. A paper that describes the situation in more detail can be found on the DTI website at the following address: <http://www.dti.gov.uk/er/emar/trade.htm>. Any comments that users of the data wish to make on the issues explored in this paper need to reach the DTI by 30 September 2000.

membership of less than 2,500. However, these unions account for just 1 per cent of total union membership. At the other end of the scale, there are a few large unions – 16 with membership in excess of 100,000, although these account for over 80 per cent of union membership.

At the end of 1998 the largest union was UNISON with 1.3 million members. The next largest was the Transport and General Workers Union, followed by the Amalgamated Engineering and Electrical Union, and then the GMB.

In 1998 there were five mergers affecting a total of 282,120 members. The Public Services Tax Commerce Union and the Civil and Public Services Association amalgamated to form the Public and Commercial Services Union. This was the largest merger, affecting 265,902 members. The remaining four mergers were a result of transfers of engagement, which occur when one union is subsumed by another and loses its legal identity.

## Trade union membership and density based on LFS data

Questions on union membership were first added to the LFS in 1989. LFS data published in this article differ slightly in some instances from previous articles. This is primarily<sup>1</sup> due to a major revision to the LFS data – the regrossing project – that ONS has carried out over the past year. Estimates of union membership have therefore been revised. The autumn 1998 figure, for example, has increased by 42,000 and the autumn 1999 figure is 47,000 larger than it would have been if the regrossing had not been carried out. Density figures for total union membership have, at most, changed by 0.14 percentage points due to the regrossing. Please refer to the *technical note* at the end of this article for more detailed analysis of the changes to trade union data from the LFS.

*Table 2* presents headline figures indicating trends in union membership and union density (union density is defined as the proportion of a specified group who are union members). The figures for all in employment reported in this article exclude members of the armed forces, unpaid family workers and those on

college-based schemes. Trade union membership increased in 1999 for the first time since the series began. The LFS estimate of union membership now stands at 7.3 million, an increase of 105,000 from 1998, although this increase is not statistically significant.

Union density among those in employment has risen slightly. In autumn 1999, 27.0 per cent of all those in employment at the time of the survey were union members, up from 26.9 per cent a year earlier. Union density for employees (excluding members of the armed forces), however, has fallen by 0.1 percentage point. These small changes in union density are not statistically significant.

The remainder of this article focuses on employees only, excluding the self-employed and those on government training schemes. Members of the armed forces have also been excluded from the analysis. Union membership among the self-employed has always been low with less than a tenth saying they were union members in 1999.

Figure 2 shows trends in union density among employees across various individual, job-related and employer characteristics. There has been a steady decline in union density since 1989 when the LFS first covered union membership (or 1993 in the case of sector). There were falls in density in the year to December 1999 in some cases while in others density has levelled off or increased slightly.

Over the longer term there have been quite marked differences in the degree to which union density has fallen. Traditional strongholds of trade unionism have suffered some of the greatest reductions. For example, manual occupations have seen a reduction of 15 percentage points since 1989; density is similar now to that of non-manual occupations.

Union density among men fell from 44 per cent in 1989 to 31 per cent in 1999. Union density among women has fallen by less, from 33 per cent to 28 per cent over the same period.

When looking at figures of this sort, it is easy to forget that the estimates of union membership and density presented here are stock estimates. Each year will see substantial flows of people join-

Table 2 Union membership; Great Britain; 1989-1999

Year	Number of members (000s)	Percentage change in membership since previous year	Union density for all in employment (per cent)	Union density for employees (per cent)
1989	8,939		34.6	39.0
1990	8,835	-1.2	33.9	38.1
1991	8,602	-2.6	33.6	37.5
1992	7,956	-7.5	32.2	35.8
1993	7,767	-2.4	31.5	35.1
1994	7,530	-3.0	30.1	33.6
1995	7,309	-2.9	28.8	32.1
1996	7,244	-0.9	28.2	31.2
1997	7,154	-1.2	27.3	30.2
1998	7,152	0.0	26.9	29.6
1999	7,257	1.5	27.0	29.5
Change since 1989	-1,682		-7.6	-9.5

Source: Labour Force Survey

Note:

Includes all those in employment, excluding members of the armed forces, unpaid family workers, and those on college-based schemes.

The final column is for employees only and excludes members of the armed forces.

From 1989 to 1991 union membership questions were asked in the spring. Since 1992 they have been asked in the autumn quarter.

Those who did not report their union status or were not contactable in the autumn quarter have been allocated on a pro-rata basis.

ing and leaving trade unions (see p357, *Labour Market Trends*, July 1998).

### Individual characteristics

Table 3 presents levels of union density among employees by a number of individual characteristics, presenting results separately for men and women.

#### Age group

There is an association between age and likelihood of being a union member (Table 3). In 1999 only 6 per cent of employees under 20 were union members compared with around one third among those aged 30 and above. Older women (40 and above) are less

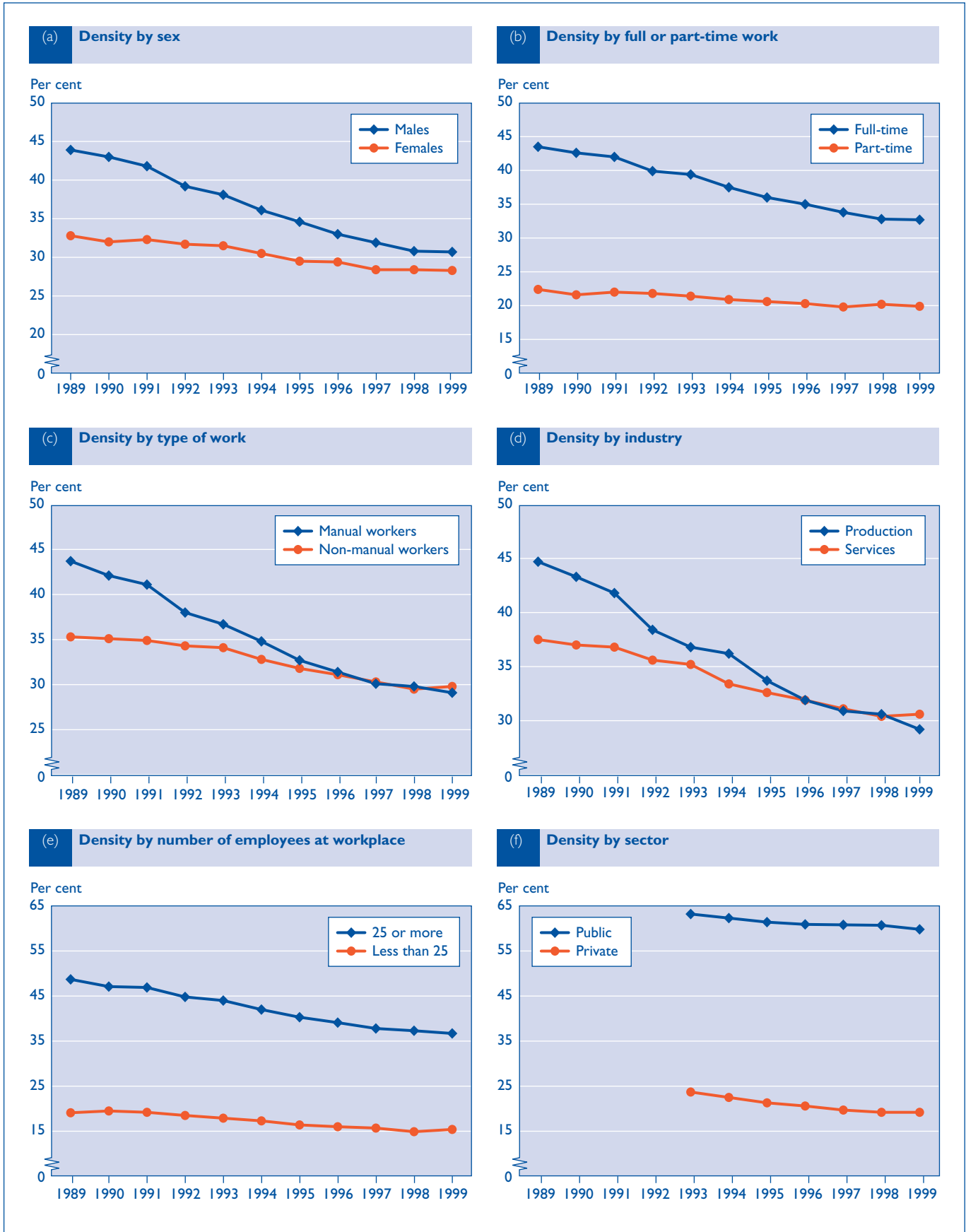
likely to be union members than their male counterparts, although there is no such difference for younger age groups.

#### Ethnic origin

Although there is no substantial difference in union density between White and non-White employees, proportionally more White men are union members than non-White men and slightly more non-White women are union members than White women.

Black employees are more likely to be union members than employees in any other ethnic group. Some 34 per cent are union members compared with 30 per cent of white employees, the next

Figure 2 Union density; Great Britain; 1989-99



Source: Labour Force Survey

highest category. Black women remain the group most likely to be union members with a density of 39 per cent.

### Educational qualifications

Looking at the highest qualification that an individual has obtained, it can be seen that employees with some form of higher education are considerably more likely to be members of a union than those without post-school training or education. Union density among those with higher education qualifications below degree level is the highest of any educational background, standing at 44 per cent. The lowest level of union membership is among those with GCSE or equivalent qualifications, where only 22 per cent are union members.

The profiles of men and women across different qualification levels are very different. There is comparatively little variation in union membership among men of different educational backgrounds (ranging from 25 to 35 per cent). Among women the differences are greater (ranging from 20 to 53 per cent).

### Job-related characteristics

Table 4 considers a range of characteristics relating to the respondent's job, with a particular emphasis on the differences between full-time and part-time employees. The higher level of union membership for full-time employees is sustained across almost every category of job-related characteristic examined. This may reflect the difficulties that unions have in recruiting and organising part-time employees.

### Length of service

The figures for length of service reflect a similar pattern to that for age, with density increasing substantially with length of service. Employees who have been less than a year with their employer have low levels of membership, just 12 per cent. Density increases steadily with length of job tenure; six in ten employees who have been in their jobs for over 20 years are members of a union.

### Occupation

There is wide variation in union density across the different occupation-

al groups, ranging from just 11 per cent among employees in sales occupations to nearly half of professional employees. Density is higher among full-time employees in all occupations with the exception of associate professional and technical, which includes such occupations as nursing staff and social welfare professionals. The differences between full- and part-time employees are less pronounced in the professional occupations.

### Managerial status

Managerial status is based upon the employee's response when asked if their day-to-day work entails any managerial or supervisory duties. Foremen or supervisors have the highest membership density at 38 per cent. The next highest density is found among those without any managerial duties (29 per cent) while managers have the lowest density (26 per cent).

The differences in union membership between full-time and part-time employees are comparatively small for

all groups, aside from those without any management responsibility.

### Permanent/temporary status

Table 4 also considers differences in union density by permanent/temporary status. Unsurprisingly, union membership is far more prevalent among employees who say they are in permanent employment.

### Special working arrangements

Non-standard working arrangements are associated with increased flexibility in the labour market and there is some evidence that the incidence of these is on the rise in Britain. Table 4 presents an analysis for employees who say they have one of a set of specified working arrangements. Employees with these working arrangements have rates of union membership above the national average. However, there are exceptions. Only 14 per cent of employees with zero hours contracts were union members, while density among those who worked from home was 7 per cent.

Table 3 Union density by individual characteristics; Great Britain; autumn 1999

	All	Men	Per cent Women
<b>All employees</b>	<b>30</b>	<b>31</b>	<b>28</b>
<b>Age group</b>			
Under 20 years	6	7	4
20 to 29 years	20	19	20
30 to 39 years	31	31	30
40 to 49 years	39	41	36
50 years and over	34	37	32
<b>Ethnic origin</b>			
White	30	31	28
Non-white	27	25	29
<i>of which</i>			
Black	34	28	39
Indian	28	29	26
Pakistani/Bangladeshi	22	23	20
Other	20	19	22
<b>Highest qualification</b>			
Degree or equivalent	37	30	45
Other higher education	44	35	53
A-level or equivalent	29	33	22
GCSE or equivalent	22	25	20
Other	27	32	22
No qualifications	25	30	21

Source: Labour Force Survey

Note: includes all employees, except for those in the armed forces. See technical note for details on classifications.

## Workplace characteristics

Table 5 presents estimates of union density among employees by industry, region and workplace size, placing the emphasis on the difference between those who work in the private and public sectors. In broad terms there are substantial differences between these sectors with an estimated 19 per cent of employees in the private sector being members of a union compared to 60 per cent in the public sector.

### Industry

There is wide variation in union density across the different industries, ranging from 6 per cent in hotels and restaurants to 61 per cent in public administration. Within the private sector, the electricity, gas and water supply

industry has a union density of 52 per cent, significantly higher than transport and communication, the next highest, with 36 per cent. Significant parts of these industries were formerly nationalised and it is likely that their high levels of union membership have been inherited from their public sector days.

### Region/country

Table 5 also shows large regional variations in union density. In all, 40 per cent of employees in the North East were members of unions compared with only 22 per cent in the South East (excluding London). There is a general trend for higher levels of union membership among employees in the northern regions compared with those in the south. Wales and Scotland both had

levels of union density well above the rate for England. These regional estimates refer to the region that employees work in rather than where they live. This year the data are presented by government office region (GOR), whereas in previous LMT articles the data were presented by standard statistical region (SSR). Users should be aware that data for some of the GORs are not directly comparable with data for some of the SSRs (see *technical note*).

### Workplace size

Table 5 finally presents density for two broad workplace size-bands. In 1998, union density stood at just 15 per cent in work places with fewer than 25 employees, compared with 37 per cent among workplaces with 25 or more employees.

There is a large difference between public and private sectors in union density for small establishments. Only 9 per cent of employees working in small establishments in the private sector were union members compared with 51 per cent in small establishments in the public sector.

## Changes to trade union questions in the LFS

The questions on trade union status, presence and coverage of collective agreements in the autumn 1999 LFS are different to those of previous years. These changes were made to ground the questions in personal circumstances and to make sure that the questions were asked of all the necessary respondents in the most efficient way possible.

The previous question on trade union recognition was dropped. It was felt that the term 'recognition' was not widely understood by individuals, and should not be used in a household survey. The LFS no longer provides an estimate of the number of employees working in organisations where unions are formally recognised by employers. It is more useful to obtain recognition data from workplace-based surveys, for example the Workplace Employee Relations Survey<sup>2</sup> (WERS).

Union presence in the workplace can still be estimated by analysing results from a question that asks respondents whether any of the people in their work-

Table 4 Union density by job-related characteristics; Great Britain; autumn 1999

	All	Full-time	Per cent
			Part-time
<b>All employees</b>	<b>30</b>	<b>33</b>	<b>20</b>
<b>Length of service</b>			
Less than one year	12	14	8
One to two years	16	18	12
Two to five years	22	24	15
Five to 10 years	33	34	28
10 to 20 years	46	48	38
20 years or more	61	64	43
<b>Occupational group</b>			
Managers and administrators	20	21	16
Professional	49	50	44
Associate professional/technical	43	41	48
Clerical and secretarial	23	25	19
Craft and related	32	33	13
Personal and protective	28	39	17
Sales	11	12	10
Plant and machine operatives	37	39	16
Other occupations	27	37	17
<b>Managerial status</b>			
Manager	26	27	23
Foreman or supervisor	38	38	36
No managerial duties	29	34	18
<b>Permanent/temporary status</b>			
Permanent	31	34	20
Temporary	18	19	17
<b>Special working arrangements</b>			
Flexitime	41	45	28
Job sharing	33	*	32
Term-time working	46	73	25
Annualized hours contract	47	51	32
4.5-day week / 9-day fortnight	42	43	*
Zero hours contract	14	20	*
Work mainly in own home	7	*	*

Source: Labour Force Survey

\*Sample size too small for reliable estimate.

Note: includes all employees, except for those in the armed forces. See *technical note* for details on classifications.

place are members of a trade union. The wording of this question was revised in the 1999 LFS to make it clear to the respondent that the intent of this question is not to identify whether there is a formal union presence on site (i.e. recognition or trade union representatives), but simply whether, to their knowledge, anyone working there was a union member. Data derived from this question are therefore not comparable to those of previous years.

The collective agreement data published in previous articles are still available, although the question used to produce these estimates has been rephrased and its position in the routing of the questionnaire changed. Data derived from this question are therefore not directly comparable to earlier years. For more detailed information on these changes please refer to the *technical note* at the end of this article.

### Trade union presence and coverage of collective agreements based on LFS data

LFS respondents are asked if anyone at their place of work is a trade union member, regardless of their own membership status. In autumn 1999, there were around 11 million people, or just under half of all employees, who said that someone at their place of work was a member of a trade union (*Table 6*). Although trade unions may be present in the workplace this does not mean that all of these people's pay and conditions were determined by collective agreements. *Table 6* shows that, in autumn 1999, almost 8.5 million people, or 36 per cent of employees, were covered by a collective agreement that affected their pay and conditions of employment.

### Workplace characteristics

*Table 7* highlights the impact that workplace size plays upon coverage of collective agreements. In private sector workplaces with fewer than 25 employees, coverage is only 10 per cent, compared with 31 per cent in establishments with 25 employees or more. The difference in establishment size

**Table 5** Union density by workplace characteristics; Great Britain; autumn 1999

	Per cent		
	All	Private	Public
<b>All employees</b>	<b>30</b>	<b>19</b>	<b>60</b>
<b>Industry</b>			
Agriculture, forestry and fishing	9	8	*
Mining and quarrying	37	37	*
Manufacturing	28	28	62
Electricity, gas and water supply	52	52	*
Construction	21	15	72
Wholesale and retail trade	12	11	*
Hotels and restaurants	6	4	38
Transport and communication	42	36	75
Financial intermediation	30	30	*
Real estate and business services	11	8	56
Public administration	61	32	62
Education	54	29	58
Health	45	15	62
Other services	24	12	46
<b>Government office region, or country</b>			
England	28	19	59
North East	40	27	69
North West	34	24	65
Yorkshire and the Humber	34	23	64
East Midlands	30	20	60
West Midlands	31	21	61
East	23	15	50
London	27	16	58
South East	22	13	52
South West	26	16	54
Wales	39	26	66
Scotland	35	22	66
<b>Workplace size</b>			
Less than 25 employees	15	9	51
25 employees or more	37	26	62

Source: Labour Force Survey

\*Sample size too small for reliable estimate.

Note: includes all employees, except for those in the armed forces. See *technical note* for details on classifications.

**Table 6** Union presence and coverage of collective agreements; Great Britain; 1996-1999

Year	Number of employees where there are trade union members at workplace (000s)	Percentage of employees working where trade union members are present	Number of employees whose pay is affected by collective agreement (000s)	Percentage of employees whose pay is affected by collective agreement
1996	11,009	49.5	8,096	36.4
1997	10,970	48.1	8,053	35.3
1998	11,009	47.2	8,031	34.5
1999*	11,384	48.2	8,453	35.8

Source: Labour Force Survey

Note: Includes all employees, except for members of the armed forces.

Those who did not report their union recognition status, or who were not contactable in the autumn quarter, have been allocated on a pro-rata basis.

\* 1999 data are not directly comparable to earlier years due to changes in the trade union questions in the LFS (see *technical note* for details).

**Table 7** Percentage of employees covered by collective agreements, by workplace characteristics and union membership; Great Britain; autumn 1999

	All	Private		Public		Per cent
		Less than 25 employees	25 or more employees	Less than 25 employees	25 or more employees	
<b>All employees</b>	<b>36</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>31</b>	<b>62</b>	<b>75</b>	
<b>Industry</b>						
Agriculture, forestry and fishing	15	13	*	*	*	
Mining and quarrying	32	*	32	*	*	
Manufacturing	32	8	37	*	69	
Electricity, gas and water supply	62	53	63	*	*	
Construction	26	11	26	78	86	
Wholesale and retail trade	17	6	27	*	*	
Hotels and restaurants	10	5	11	*	70	
Transport and communication	47	19	47	58	89	
Financial intermediation	41	46	39	*	*	
Real estate and business services	12	4	11	59	79	
Public administration	77	*	33	73	80	
Education	63	*	33	65	69	
Health	52	12	17	61	76	
Other services	30	9	21	53	70	
<b>Union membership</b>						
Member	77	56	75	80	83	
Not a member	17	5	15	43	61	

Source: Labour Force Survey

\* Sample size too small for reliable estimate.

Note: Includes all employees, except for those in the armed forces. See technical note for details on classifications.

has a less dramatic impact in the public sector.

The table shows that there is considerable variation across industries in coverage of collective agreements. This follows a similar rank order to that for union density (see *Table 5*) – highest in public administration, at 77 per cent, and lowest in hotels and restaurants at just 10 per cent.

## Union membership

*Table 7* also shows that employees covered by a collective agreement may not themselves be a member of a trade union, and vice versa. In fact, only four-

fifths (77 per cent) of union members were covered by a collective agreement in autumn 1999. Conversely, 17 per cent of employees who were not members of a trade union said that their pay and conditions were covered by a collective agreement.

## Conclusion

The overall level of trade union density remains at just under a third of all employees. There has been no significant change in union density since 1998. There still remains significant variation between industries and among different types of employees.

Data from the two sources relate to different time periods, which makes it difficult to draw firm conclusions about the recent trend. The Certification Officer shows a small increase of 12,000 in union membership in the year to the end of 1998, the first increase since 1985. The LFS shows union density almost unchanged in the year to autumn 1999, while union membership has increased by 105,000 members. This increase, however, is not statistically significant.

### Further information

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## Notes

- In addition, changes have been made to the way those in the armed forces are filtered out of the analysis and also to the way those who did not report their union status have been allocated on a pro-rata basis. This affects all LFS estimates in this article, although revisions are slight.
- The 1998 Workplace Employee Relations Survey is conducted jointly by the Department of Trade and Industry, the Economic & Social Research Council, the Advisory, Conciliation and Arbitration Service, and the Policy Studies Institute. A summary of findings can be obtained at <http://www.dti.gov.uk/er/emar/1998wers.htm>. Full details of the results are in Cully, M., Woodland, S., O'Reilly, A. and Dix, G. (1999) *Britain at Work: As depicted by the 1998 Workplace Employee Relations Survey*, London and New York, Routledge.

## Technical note

**Certification Office (CO) data**

The data covers the membership of all organisations known to the department of Trade and Industry (DTI). Since 1975 they concern organisations that fall within the definition of a trade union under section 28 of the Trade Union and Labour Relations Act of 1974, and more recently, Section 1 of the Trade Union and Labour Relations (Consolidation) Act 1992. The figures are based on data supplied by the Certification Officer for Trade Unions and Employers' Associations.

Included in the data are home and overseas membership figures of contributory and non-contributory members, under the rules of those trade unions whose head offices are in Great Britain. The employment status of individual members is not provided and the figure may therefore include some people who are self-employed, unemployed or retired.

All the figures given in this article are provisional and subject to revision as later information becomes available. Figures published in earlier years have been revised in line with the latest information.

**Statutory list of trade unions**

For a trade union to be included in the CO list, it must be an organisation composed wholly or mainly of workers, which has the regulation of relations between those workers and employers as one of its main purposes.

With the co-operation of the CO, the DTI has been able to use the former's information about membership and so avoid having to carry out a separate survey. The figures reported here replicate data from the CO's annual report.

This article only refers to estimates for Great Britain whereas the reporting of CO data in recent years has been for the United Kingdom.

The *Annual Report of the Certification Officer*, published in May 2000, contains the names of those trade unions listed as at 31 March 2000. The lists are open to public inspection at the Certification Office, Brandon House, 180 Borough High Street, London, SE1 1LW, tel: 020 7210 3735. For organisations with their head offices in Scotland, the lists can be viewed at the office of the Assistant Certification Officer, 58 Frederick Street, Edinburgh, EH2 1LN, tel. 0131 226 3224. For organisations with their head offices in Northern Ireland, the lists can be viewed at the Northern Ireland Certification Office, 2-8 Gordon Street, Belfast BT1 2LG, tel: 01232 237 773.

**The Labour Force Survey (LFS)**

The LFS is a survey of around 60,000 private households throughout Great Britain. The survey was conducted once every two years between 1973 and 1983, and once every year from 1983 until 1991, always in the spring. From 1992 onwards, the survey has been conducted on a quarterly basis in Great Britain and, since 1995, for the United Kingdom as a whole.

**Regrossing of the LFS**

In 1998 users expressed concern that LFS data were being grossed up using out-of-date population figures. Before the regrossing project that ONS conducted earlier this year, LFS data were grossed up using 1992-based population projections. Now they are based on 1996-based population projections. A more thorough explanation can be found on pp83-90, *Labour Market Trends*, February 2000. The regrossing has meant that estimates of union membership have been revised for the years 1993-1999. Table 8 shows the effect that the regrossing exercise has had on the estimated number of union members.

The effects of the regrossing on estimates of union density are very small. For the overall membership density figures the largest change has been 0.14 percentage points. For the density figures by individual, job-related and workplace characteristics, and also for the trade union presence and collective bargaining figures, the changes due to regrossing have been, at most, 1.2 percentage points of the relevant denominator. All the revisions to union membership data arising from the regrossing are within sampling variability.

**Trade union questions**

The question on trade union membership has been asked annually since 1989 of all individuals *in employment* (or away temporarily) during the reference week, either as employees or as self-employed, or of people on government employment or training programmes who were based with an employer during the reference week. The remaining trade union related questions were introduced as annual questions in the autumn 1993 survey and the data are analysed in respect of *all employees*. The question on coverage of collective agreements was introduced in 1996. The questions asked in the 1999 LFS have been reworded and the sequence of the questions altered.

Table 8 Number of union members; Great Britain; 1993-1998

Year	Before regrossing exercise (000s)	After regrossing exercise (000s)	Difference (000s)
1993	7,765	7,767	1
1994	7,519	7,530	11
1995	7,285	7,309	24
1996	7,218	7,244	26
1997	7,121	7,154	33
1998	7,110	7,152	42
1999	7,210	7,257	47

Source: Labour Force Survey

Note: Includes all those in employment, excluding members of the armed forces, unpaid family workers, and those on college-based schemes.

## Technical note

The exact wording and sequence of the questions as they are now and as they were previously are as follows:

Previous union questions	Current union questions
All in employment: TUPRES At your place of work, are there any unions, staff associations or groups of unions?	All in employment: UNION Are you a member of a trade union or staff association?
If yes: TUREC Is it / are any of them recognised by management for negotiating pay and conditions of employment?	If no: TUPRES Are any of the people at your place of work members of a trade union or staff association?
If yes: TUCOV Are <b>your</b> pay and conditions of employment directly affected by agreements between your employer and any trade union(s) or staff associations?	All in employment: TUCOV Are <b>your</b> pay and conditions of employment directly affected by agreements between your employer and any trade union(s) or staff association?
All in employment: UNION Are you a member of a trade union or staff association?	

The wording of the question that asks respondents whether they are a member of a trade union remains the same, only its place in the sequence has changed. The question that asks whether any of the people at the respondent's place of work are members of a trade union or staff association is designed to measure trade union presence. The wording of this question has changed and also its sequence in the questionnaire. Before, it was asked of all in employment. In 1999 it was only asked to those who said they were not union members.

Before 1999, the question on whether the respondent's pay and conditions were directly affected by collective agreements (TUCOV) was only asked if the respondent first identified unions as being present at the workplace (TUPRES), and then whether or not it was recognised (TUREC). This meant that the number of people whose pay and conditions were affected by collective agreement was an underestimate. For this reason the routing of the question was changed in the 1999 LFS and is now asked of all in employment. Users must therefore be aware that data derived from the TUCOV variable in the 1999 data set are not directly comparable with those of previous years due to the change in the question's coverage.

In 1992 the trade union membership question was moved from the spring to the autumn quarter. Consequently estimates since 1992 are not directly comparable with those for earlier years, because estimates before and after this change may reflect seasonal factors as well as longer-term trends. It is not possible to seasonally adjust the data. However, we know that, at the aggregate level, seasonal variations in the number of people in employment – the group that are asked the membership questions – tend to be

relatively modest (see *Employment Gazette*, April and May 1993 for a fuller discussion). There is also a minor discontinuity between 1992 and 1993 due to the inclusion in 1993 of the additional questions on trade unions that preceded the membership question.

### Non-response

Each household in the LFS is in the sample for five consecutive quarters. For the small number of households that were not contactable in the quarter (other than the first), their responses from the previous quarter are brought forward. For questions that do not appear every quarter, such as the trade union membership question, there is no previous response to carry forward, and a 'does not apply' response is therefore recorded. There are also cases where the respondent was interviewed in the quarter, but gave no answer (either because they did not know or refused to answer the question). Both cases have been treated in the same way and allocated pro-rata according to those who did answer the question. In autumn 1999 the 'no answer' category accounted for 1.3 per cent of all responses and the 'does not apply' category accounted for 4.3 per cent of all responses. These proportions represent 336,000 and 1,143,000 people respectively.

### Classificatory variables

Most of the classifications used to place respondents in different categories are based on a direct question relying on the person's self-assessment of their circumstances. Some are based on a combination of more than one question, and others are coded according to standard conventions. Details are provided below.

Sex, age and ethnic origin are self-defined. Highest qualification is principally based on a question asking individuals to nominate what qualifications they have from a list of 40 categories. These have then been aggregated for the purposes of analysis.

With the exception of occupation, all classifications used in this section are self-defined. In particular, it should be noted that the two aspects of employment status – full-time or part-time, and permanent or temporary – are based on direct questions and do not rely on any set criteria (e.g. number of hours worked). The classification for special working arrangements only includes those who work under such arrangements, and the final category of 'work mainly in own home' is taken from a separate question on homeworking.

The occupational classifications are from the 1991 Standard Occupational Classification, and are assigned by ONS staff based on an open-ended question asking people what their job was, and what they mainly did in their job.

Defining the sector in which people work is based on two questions, first introduced in 1993. These ask, first, if they worked in a private firm or business, a limited company, or some other kind of organisation; and secondly, if other, what kind of non-private organisation.

Industry is based on respondents' answers to a question about what the firm or organisation for which they worked mainly made or did, and coded using the Standard Industrial Classification of economic activities 1992 (SIC 92).

Region of place of work is a self-defined variable. In previous articles trade union density was presented by standard statistical region (SSR); this year it is by government office region (GOR). The boundaries for some of the GORs are different to the previous SSRs. The GORs North West, North East, East, London and the South East are not comparable to the SSR equivalents. Users should not directly compare these regions with figures published in previous articles.

The number of employees at the workplace is self-defined.

## Technical note

**Sampling and non-sampling error**

The LFS is a sample survey and, in common with all other sample surveys, estimates are subject to known sampling error and unknown non-sampling error.

Sampling errors relate to the fact that the sample chosen is only one of a very large number of samples which might have been chosen. It follows from this that one quarter's estimate of, say, trade union membership, is only one of a large number of such estimates that might have been made. It is possible to calculate standard errors and assign confidence intervals to estimates, based on standard statistical formulae, which take into account the complexity of the sample design, the estimated proportion, the number of survey respondents and the size of the population. Generally, the more aggregated the results the lower the standard error, giving the estimate a greater degree of precision. All published LFS estimates have relative standard errors of 20 per cent or less.

Non-sampling errors are very difficult to quantify and can be minimised by achieving very high response rates, and by a concentration on quality management in the conduct of the survey and coding responses. LFS response rates are ordinarily above 80 per cent, which is very high for a household survey. Research con-

ducted by ONS comparing the LFS with the Census of Population shows that some groups are under-represented in the LFS sample. These include people from households living in London; those renting from a housing association; those in converted or shared accommodation; and those with only one adult, aged 16-19, in the household.

It is possible that some non-sampling error arises in the series of questions on trade unions because of measurement problems. Around a third of the sample are proxy respondents, and the data show that this group are less likely to be union members than those responding on their own behalf, 24 per cent and 28 per cent respectively.

On the question of coverage of collective agreements, it is known from surveys of employers that only a small proportion of public sector workplaces are not covered, and that these arrangements are generally made at head office level or across many organisations. It is therefore likely that employees who are not union members and who work in small workplaces in the public sector may be unaware that collective bargaining arrangements apply to their organisation. Consequently there may be a downward bias to this measure.