

Trade union membership: an analysis of data from the autumn 2001 LFS

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Key points

- In autumn 2001, 7.6 million of those in employment in the UK were trade union members, a reduction of 30,000 since 2000. This is still an increase of 178,000 since 1997.
- The proportion of employees who were union members in the UK decreased from 29.5 per cent in 2000 to 29.1 per cent in 2001.
- The number of employees in workplaces in the UK where trade union members were present decreased from 12.0 million in 2000 to 11.9 million in 2001.
- There has been a decrease in union membership in Great Britain since 1991 of 1.3 million, a fall over the ten-year period of 15 per cent.
- The fall in union membership has been steeper for men than for women over the past decade. In Great Britain, union density for men was 42 per cent in 1991 and 29 per cent in 2001, whereas density for women was 32 per cent in 1991 and 28 per cent in 2001.

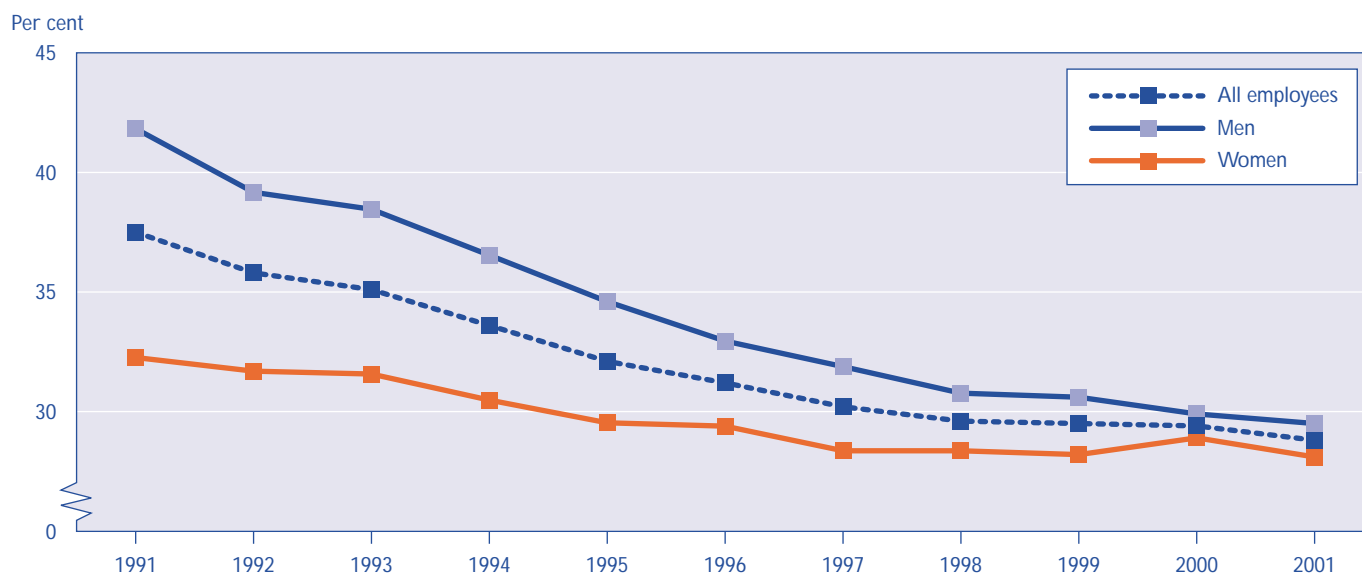
This article presents an analysis of the most recent information from the Labour Force Survey on union membership and shows current patterns together with changes in trends over recent years.

Introduction

THIS ARTICLE contains information on the number of trade union members in the UK and Great Britain. The Labour Force Survey (LFS) provides detailed information on the characteristics of trade union members, for example in terms of sex, occupation and size of company. The survey includes questions on union membership status, whether a trade union is present at the workplace and whether pay and conditions are affected by

a collective agreement. The LFS currently collects data on trade unions in the autumn quarter for all respondents who are in employment. LFS data analysed in this article are from autumn 2001.

A second source of available data is the summary within the *Annual Report of the Certification Officer (CO) for Trade Unions and Employers' Associations*, collated using administrative records. The Trade Union and

Figure 1 Union density; Great Britain; spring 1991 and autumn 1992 to autumn 2001^a, not seasonally adjusted

Source: Labour Force Survey

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

Labour Relations Act 1992 requires that every trade union in existence for 12 months or longer must submit an annual return to the CO. These returns provide details of the number of members within each trade union irrespective of employment status. Consequently, this gives a slightly higher figure than the LFS data, which do not include those who are not in employment. For further discussion of

the differences between the two sources of union information, see *technical note*. Although the CO data are not directly comparable with the LFS data they have been included in previous trade union membership articles, although for a different calendar year to the LFS data. The CO report is published some months after the LFS data become available in early spring. In order to improve the timeliness of the

publication of the LFS trade union membership data, the CO data are not included in this year's article. Following publication of their annual report, the CO data will be available on its website at www.certoffice.org. A copy of this article, together with the time series for the LFS and CO data, will also be available on the Department of Trade and Industry website at www.dti.gov.uk/er/emar/.

Table 1 Trade union membership in Great Britain and United Kingdom; 1991 to 2001, not seasonally adjusted

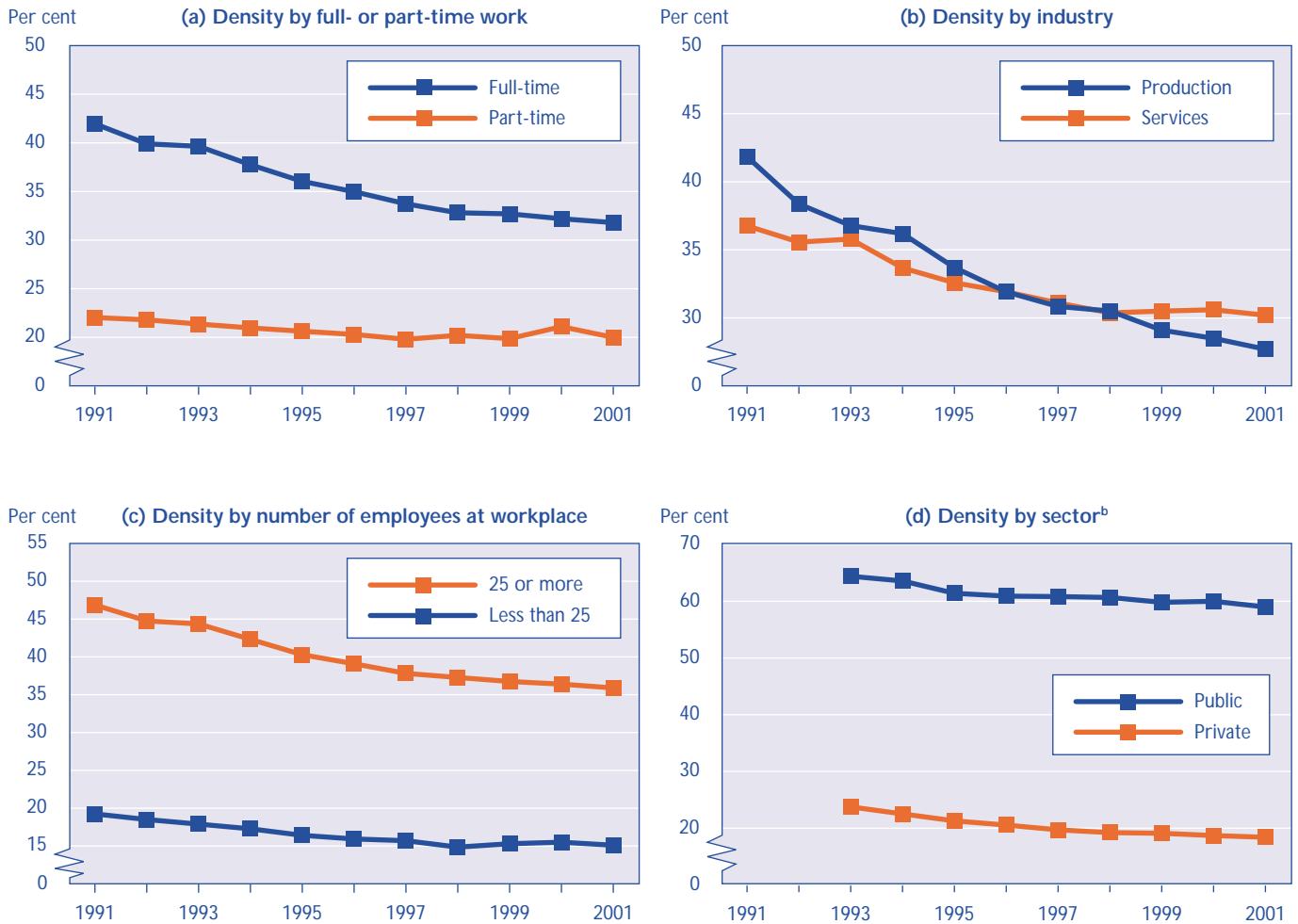
	Great Britain ^a			United Kingdom ^a		
	Number of members ^b (thousands)	Union density		Number of members ^b (thousands)	Union density	
		All in employment (%)	Employees (%)		All in employment (%)	Employees (%)
1991	8,602	33.6	37.5	-	-	-
1992	7,956	32.2	35.8	-	-	-
1993	7,767	31.5	35.1	-	-	-
1994	7,530	30.1	33.6	-	-	-
1995	7,309	28.8	32.1	7,532	29.0	32.3
1996	7,244	28.2	31.2	7,472	28.4	31.5
1997	7,154	27.3	30.2	7,372	27.4	30.4
1998	7,155	26.9	29.6	7,396	27.1	29.9
1999	7,277	27.0	29.5	7,498	27.1	29.6
2000	7,351	27.0	29.4	7,580	27.1	29.5
2001	7,295	26.5	28.8	7,550	26.8	29.1

Source: Labour Force Survey

a Trade union questions were included in the LFS in Great Britain from 1989 and in Northern Ireland from 1995.

b Includes all those in employment, excluding members of the armed forces, unpaid family workers, and those on college-based schemes. From 1989-1991 union membership questions were asked in the spring quarter. 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.

Figure 2 Union density: Great Britain; spring 1991 and autumn 1992 to autumn 2001^a, not seasonally adjusted



Source: Labour Force Survey

^a From 1989 to 1991 union membership questions were asked in the spring quarter. Since 1992 they have been asked in the autumn quarter.
^b Data not available before 1993.

Trade union membership and density based on LFS data

Trade union membership questions were first added to the LFS questionnaire in 1989. Analysis of those in employment includes the self-employed, but excludes members of the armed forces, who are prohibited from becoming union members, those on college-based government-supported training and employment programmes and unpaid family workers. Since the trade union questions were not included for Northern Ireland until 1995, trade union membership data which have been published in previous *Labour Market Trends* articles

have been given for Great Britain rather than the UK. The data given in this year's article for 2001 trade union membership have generally been given on a UK basis. However, the data for union membership, which are given in *Table 1*, have also been given on a Great Britain basis to allow a longer time series to be presented. The Great Britain data between 1998 and 2001 have also been subject to small revisions compared with the data published in 2001. This is due to a regrossing carried out recently for these years by ONS that has provided new LFS estimates based on more up-to-date population data.

Table 1 shows the number of trade union members for those in employment in the UK between 1995 and

2001 and for Great Britain between 1991 and 2001. In autumn 2001 union membership in the UK among those in employment was 7.6 million, which is a reduction of around 30,000 members (0.4 per cent) since 2000. The increases in membership which were reported during the past few years have not been sustained, although the latest drop can be partly attributed to sampling variation.

The proportion of all people in employment who are union members in the UK (generally known as union density) declined by 0.3 percentage points, to 26.8 per cent, since 2000. The proportion of employees who are trade union members also decreased from 29.5 per cent in 2000 to 29.1 per cent in 2001.

The remainder of the article excludes the self-employed and covers employees only. The self-employed have traditionally had low union membership – only 9.4 per cent of the self-employed were reported to be union members in 2001. The time series of union membership shown in *Figures 1* and *2* are given for Great Britain since UK data are not available before 1995.

Figure 1 shows union density in Great Britain since 1991 for all employees, with a subdivision by sex. The proportion of male employees with union membership dropped by 13 percentage points between 1991 and 2001. During the same period, female employees' union density decreased by only 4 percentage points, leaving density for both at just below 30 per cent.

Figure 2 shows union density in Great Britain among various groups over time. Union density among full-time workers fell by 10 percentage points between 1991 and 2001 to 32 per cent, although the trend appears to be levelling off. The density for part-time employees remains fairly constant over time and was 20 per cent in 2001. The large gap between the union density of full-time and part-time employees may reflect the difficulties that unions encounter in recruiting part-time employees.

Union density for employees in the production industries fell by 14 percentage points, from 42 per cent in 1991 to 28 per cent in 2001. Density in the service sector, as in recent years, continues to be greater than for production and appears to be stabilising at around 30 per cent. This illustrates the extent of the decline of unionisation in occupations and industries that were traditionally heavily unionised.

In 2001, union density was 36 per cent for workplaces with more than 25 employees and 15 per cent for those with less than 25 employees. The proportion of union members in the public sector was much greater than in the private sector but both have reduced at a similar rate between 1993 and 2001. The decreases in union density between 2000 and 2001, which are shown in *Figure 1* for women and in *Figure 2* for part-time employees, are both at similar rates to the increases

Table 2 Union density by individual characteristics;^a United Kingdom; autumn 2001

	Per cent		
	All	Men	Women
Age group			
Under 20 years	5	6	4
20 to 29 years	19	18	20
30 to 39 years	30	30	30
40 to 49 years	38	39	36
50 years and over	35	37	32
Ethnic group^b			
White	29	30	28
Non-White	26	24	28
of which			
Mixed	25	22	27
Asian or Asian British	25	25	26
Black or Black British	30	27	33
Chinese and other ethnic groups	22	20	24
Highest qualification			
Degree or equivalent	37	31	44
Other higher education	44	33	52
A-level or equivalent	28	31	21
GCSE or equivalent	23	26	21
Other	25	29	21
No qualifications	24	29	20
All employees	29	30	28

Source: Labour Force Survey

a Includes all employees except members of the armed forces.

b This table uses the National Statistics classification of ethnic group consistent with the 2001 Census.

shown between 1999 and 2000. The change in union density between each of these years can be partly attributed to sampling variation.

A comparison of union density for manual and non-manual employees has been published in previous years but this is no longer possible due to the introduction of the SOC2000 classification for occupation. The concept of a manual and non-manual worker is no longer available or considered to be appropriate. The new occupational classification is reflected in the results presented for 2001 in *Table 3* of this article.

The remaining tables and figures give data on a UK basis, whereas the data have been given on a Great Britain basis in previous years. The difference in union density between UK and Great Britain is typically only about 0.1 percentage point for a particular category.

Individual characteristics

Table 2 shows that employees in the UK aged more than 40 have the highest union density, between 35 and 38 per cent. About a fifth of 20 to 29-year-old employees were union members, while those under 20 had the lowest density of all the age groups at 5 per cent.

Union density was 29 per cent for white employees and 26 per cent for all other ethnic groups combined. Black and Black British employees had a density of 30 per cent while mixed, Asian and other ethnic groups had lower densities that varied between 22 and 25 per cent. The categories for ethnicity are different from those used in previous articles because they have been changed in the LFS to be consistent with the ethnicity question used in the 2001 Census.

Union membership among those with higher education qualifications

Table 3 Union density by job-related characteristics;^a United Kingdom; autumn 2001

	Per cent				
	All	Full-time	Part-time	Private sector	Public sector
Length of service					
Less than one year	12	14	7	8	33
One to two years	16	18	11	10	41
Two to five years	22	24	17	15	50
Five to ten years	32	34	27	21	62
Ten to 20 years	45	47	39	31	71
20 years or more	60	62	48	45	81
Occupational group (SOC2000)					
Managers and senior officials	17	18	15	12	57
Professional	48	48	47	21	73
Associate professional and technical	42	40	47	20	72
Administrative and secretarial	24	27	19	13	47
Skilled trades	30	31	10	27	61
Personal service	29	34	23	11	48
Sales and customer service	13	16	11	12	48
Process, plant and machine operatives	37	39	13	35	59
Elementary	22	31	12	16	44
Managerial status					
Manager	30	30	31	15	71
Foreman or supervisor	37	38	34	24	71
Not manager or supervisor	27	32	18	19	52
Permanent/temporary status					
Permanent	30	33	21	19	62
Temporary	19	20	16	11	32
Special working arrangements					
Flexitime	41	44	28	21	61
Job sharing	40	*	40	19	64
Term-time working	46	71	26	24	51
Annualised hours contract	48	50	37	33	74
4.5 day week/ 9 day fortnight	45	46	*	41	73
Zero hours contract	14	*	*	*	*
Work mainly in own home/same grounds	11	17	*	8	35
All employees	29	32	20	19	59

Source: Labour Force Survey

^a Includes all employees except members of the armed forces.

* Sample size too small for a reliable estimate.

below degree level was 44 per cent compared with 37 per cent for those with a degree or equivalent. For those with qualifications below this level, the proportion of union members varied between 23 and 28 per cent.

Although men and women were almost equally likely to be trade union members, there were some differences for individual characteristics such as ethnic group and educational level. Women from ethnic minority groups

had a higher membership rate than their male counterparts by up to 6 percentage points. Women with higher education have a much higher union density than men with a difference of between 13 and 19 percentage points. However, for highest qualification at A-level or below the opposite occurs, with men having a higher union density than women, with a difference of between 5 and 10 percentage points.

Job-related characteristics

Table 3 shows union density in the UK for a number of job-related characteristics subdivided first into full-time and part-time workers, and secondly into the private and public sector. The density was significantly higher for full-time workers than part-time workers, being 32 and 20 per cent respectively for all employees. The same trend is generally evident

Table 4 Union density by workplace characteristics;^a United Kingdom; autumn 2001

	Per cent				
	All	Full-time	Part-time	Private sector	Public sector
Industry (SIC92)					
Agriculture, forestry and fishing	9	11	*	6	*
Mining and quarrying	25	26	*	25	*
Manufacturing	27	28	10	27	61
Energy and water	53	54	*	53	*
Construction	19	20	*	14	69
Wholesale and retail trade	12	12	11	12	*
Hotels and restaurants	5	8	3	4	32
Transport and communication	42	44	27	37	75
Financial intermediation	27	25	35	27	*
Real estate and business services	11	11	7	8	54
Public administration	59	63	43	33	61
Education	53	65	33	29	57
Health	45	52	35	16	62
Other activities	22	27	13	11	49
Workplace size					
Less than 25 employees	15	18	11	8	52
25 employees or more	36	38	28	25	62
Government office region, or country					
England	28	31	19	18	58
North East	39	43	27	27	68
North West	34	38	23	22	64
Yorkshire and the Humber	31	34	24	21	62
East Midlands	28	31	21	18	64
West Midlands	30	33	21	21	60
East	23	26	14	15	49
London	26	27	20	15	57
South East	22	24	15	14	49
South West	26	31	16	17	54
Wales	39	44	27	24	69
Scotland	35	39	24	21	66
Northern Ireland	40	44	30	26	70
All employees	29	32	20	19	59

Source: Labour Force Survey

^a Includes all employees except members of the armed forces.

* Sample size too small for a reliable estimate.

by length of service, occupational group and the other characteristics which have been considered.

The union density for all employees in the public sector was significantly higher than in the private sector, being 59 and 19 per cent respectively. This pattern is consistent for all the job-related characteristics shown. Union density increases significantly with length of service, and this demonstrates a similar pattern to that of density by age groups shown in *Table 2*.

The occupational groups are based on the new SOC2000 codes and the data are not directly comparable with figures published in previous years, although generally the same patterns are evident. Total union density for all workers varied widely over the major occupational groups, the lowest being 13 per cent for those working in sales and customer service occupations and the highest being 48 per cent for professional occupations. The latter may be strongly influenced by the high pro-

portion of public sector workers, such as teachers and doctors, who are trade union members (73 per cent). In the private sector, skilled trades occupations and process, plant and machine operatives had the highest union density (27 and 35 per cent respectively).

The breakdown by managerial status shows a density of 30 per cent. This is an increase of 5 percentage points in comparison with the density published in last year's article (see p438, *Table 4*, *Labour Market Trends*, September

Table 5 Proportion of union membership^a by individual and workplace characteristics; United Kingdom; autumn 2001

			Per cent
Sex		Highest qualification^b	Full-time or part-time work
Men	53	Degree or equivalent	23
Women	47	Other higher education	15
		A-level or equivalent	23
		GCSE or equivalent	18
		Other	11
Age band^b		No qualifications	9
Under 20 years	1		
20-29 years	13	Length of service^b	
30-39 years	28	Less than one year	9
40-49 years	30	One to two years	7
50 years and over	27	Two to five years	16
		Five to ten years	17
Ethnic group^c		Ten to 20 years	29
White	95	20 years or more	21
Asian or Asian British	2		
Black or Black British	2		
Chinese and other ethnic groups	1		
		Sector	
		Private	47
		Public	53
		Country^b	
		England	80
		Wales	6
		Scotland	10
		Northern Ireland	3

Source: Labour Force Survey

a Includes all employees except members of the armed forces.

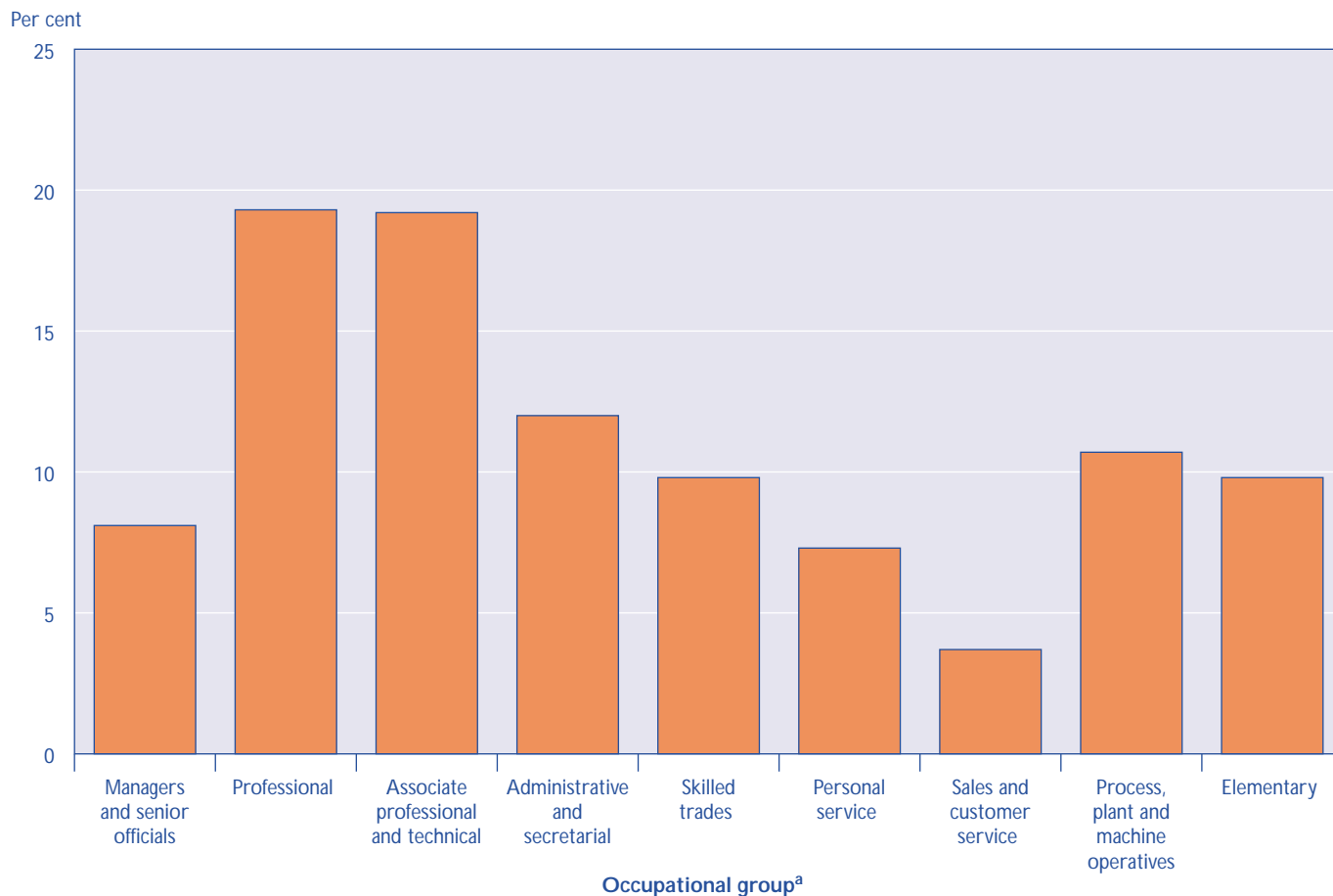
b Estimates do not add up to 100 per cent due to rounding.

c This table uses the National Statistics classification of ethnic group consistent with the 2001 Census.

2001), but the increase can mainly be attributed to a change to this variable due to the introduction of SOC2000 (see *technical note*). There is also a large difference in the union density levels between the SOC2000 managers and senior officials group and the manager category recorded from the managerial status question, which have densities of 17 and 30 per cent respectively. This is mainly because the latter is self-defined and can include those with managerial responsibilities that are not directly staff related, whereas the SOC2000 manager group is mainly related to the management of other staff. It is noted that the densities for foreman or supervisor and not manager or supervisor have only reduced by 1 or 2 percentage points in comparison with the densities published in last year's article.

The last section of *Table 3* gives union density for employees according to non-standard working arrangements such as job sharing and homeworking. The density rates were generally much higher for these groups, typically between 40 and 48 per cent, compared with 29 per cent for all employees. However, the rate was much lower for those with a zero hours contract, or those working mainly from home or in

Figure 3 Proportion of union membership by occupation;^a United Kingdom; autumn 2001



Source: Labour Force Survey

^a Occupations are coded according to the 2000 Standard Occupational Classification.

the same grounds as home, at 14 per cent and 11 per cent respectively.

Workplace characteristics

Table 4 shows union density for workplace characteristics by industry, size and by government office region or country within the UK. Public administration; education; health; energy and water; and transport and communication had the highest levels of union membership (between 42 and 59 per cent). Density was also higher for workplaces with more than 25 employees, being 36 per cent compared with 15 per cent for workplaces with less than 25 employees. By government office region in England, densities varied between 22 per cent in the South East and 39 per cent in the North East. Wales (39 per cent), Scotland (35 per cent) and Northern Ireland (40 per cent) all had higher levels of union

density than England, which was only 28 per cent.

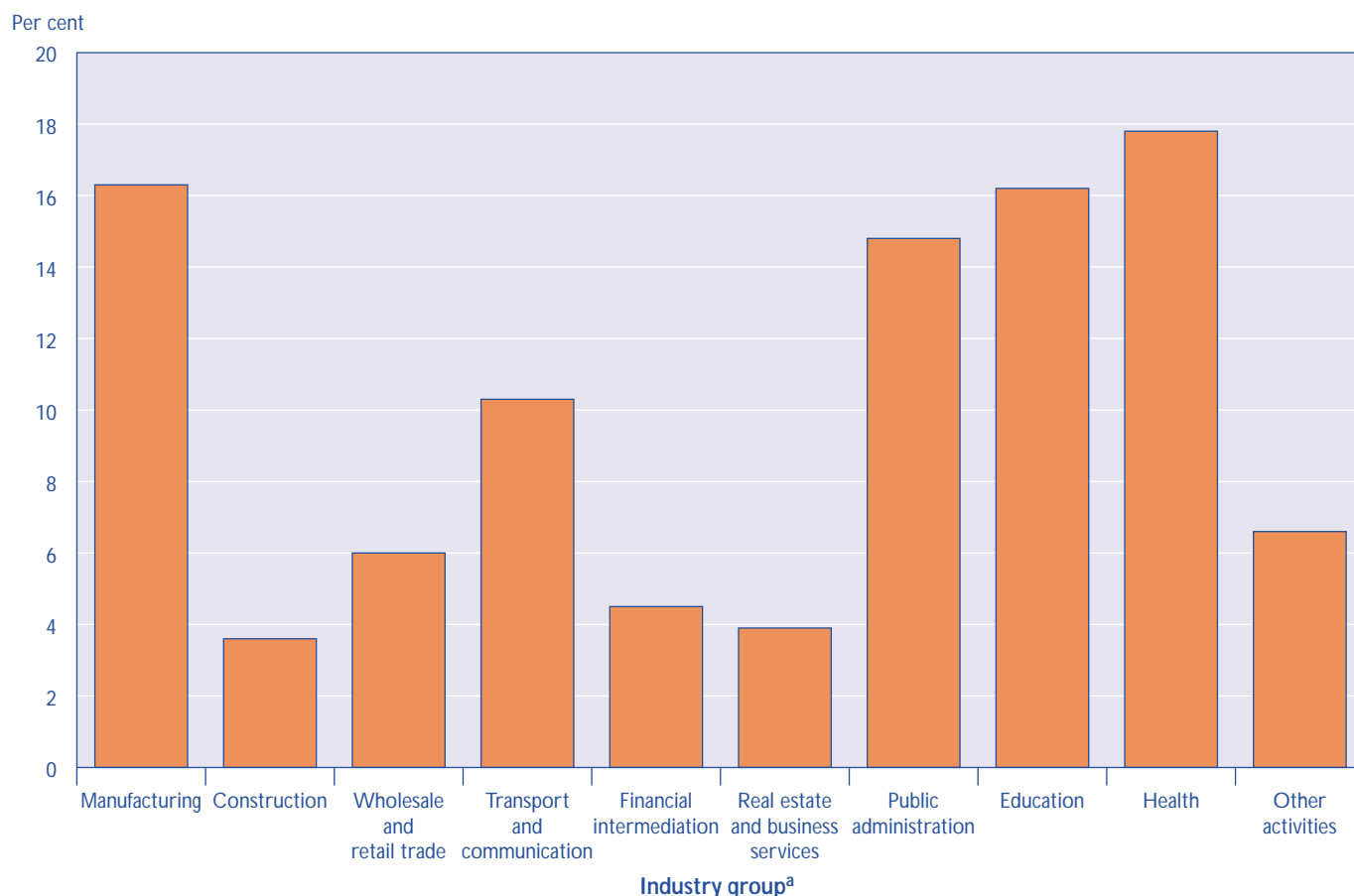
The data for all employees are again subdivided into full- or part-time working and into the private and public sector. As in the previous table, the density for full-time employees was generally higher than for part-time employees, and significantly higher in the public sector than in the private sector.

Proportion of union membership by individual, job-related and workplace characteristics

This section gives the proportion of UK union members for various individual, job-related and workplace categories. A similar analysis was published in the January 1993 *Employment Gazette*, although some of the data are

not directly comparable due to changes in categories, for example for occupational group. Table 5 shows that men accounted for slightly more than half of all union membership. The three highest age groups 30 to 39, 40 to 49 and over 50 each accounted for about 30 per cent – 85 per cent in total.

When subdivided by highest qualification, the proportion of membership varied between 9 per cent for those with no qualifications and 23 per cent for those with a degree. Those with A-level or equivalent also accounted for 23 per cent of the membership. Those with between ten and 20 years of service accounted for the highest proportion, with 29 per cent, and full-time employees accounted for over 82 per cent. When considered by workplace size, nearly 83 per cent of union members were employed in companies with 25 or more employees. The private and public sector both accounted for about

Figure 4 Proportion of union membership by industry;^a United Kingdom; autumn 2001

^a Industries are coded according to the 1992 Standard Industrial Classification.

Source: Labour Force Survey

Table 6 Union presence and coverage of collective agreements;^a United Kingdom; autumn 1996 to autumn 2001

	Number of employees where there are trade union members at the work place (thousands)	Percentage of employees working where trade union members are present	Thousands and per cent	
			Number of employees whose pay is affected by collective agreements (thousands)	Percentage of employees whose pay is affected by collective agreement
1996	11,358	49.8	8,297	36.4
1997	11,335	48.5	8,247	35.3
1998	11,385	47.6	8,249	34.5
1999 ^b	11,735	48.3	8,771	36.1
2000	12,009	48.7	8,924	36.2
2001	11,948	48.0	8,869	35.6

Source: Labour Force Survey

^a Includes all employees except for members of the armed forces. Those who did not report their union recognition status or were not contactable in the autumn quarter, have been allocated on a pro-rata basis.

^b Data for 1999 onwards are not directly comparable to earlier years due to changes in the trade union questions in the Labour Force Survey (see *technical note* for details).

half of the total membership with the public sector having a slightly higher level at 53 per cent. Within the UK, 80 per cent of members were in England with Wales accounting for 6 per cent, Scotland 10 per cent and Northern Ireland 3 per cent.

Figure 3 shows the proportion of union members in each occupational group, which varied between 4 per cent for sales and customer service occupations and 19 per cent for professional and associate professional occupations. Figure 4 shows that when subdivided

by industry manufacturing, public administration, education and health accounted for about two-thirds of UK union membership, with proportions varying between about 15 and 18 per cent. Other activities includes agriculture, mining, electricity, and hotels,

which each accounted for less than 2 per cent of the union membership.

Trade union presence and collective agreements

Table 6 indicates a small decrease between 2000 and 2001 in the number of employees in the UK who reported that there were trade union members present at the workplace, and also in the number of employees whose pay is affected by collective agreements. Just over a third of employees' pay was affected by collective agreement, while nearly half of all employees had trade union members present at their workplace. Comparisons cannot be made with data prior to 1999 as considerable changes were made to the LFS questions and their routing in 1999. Further details are contained within the *technical note* at the end of this article.

Table 7 gives the percentage of employees covered by collective agreements with a subdivision given first for the private and public sector, and secondly for workplace size. The proportion of employees covered by collective agreements was generally higher in the public than in the private sector, being 73 per cent and 22 per cent respectively for all employees. There was, however, considerable variation by industry in the private sector, which varied between 6 per cent for hotels and restaurants and 64 per cent for energy and water. Employees in workplaces where there were 25 employees or more were more likely to have their pay affected by collective agreements than those in smaller workplaces (44 per cent and 18 per cent respectively).

Table 7 Proportion of employees covered by collective agreements by workplace characteristics and union membership;^a United Kingdom; autumn 2001

Industry	All	Private sector	Public sector	Per cent	
				Less than 25 employees	25 or more employees
Agriculture, forestry and fishing	14	12	*	12	21
Mining and quarrying	25	25	*	*	28
Manufacturing	30	30	64	6	37
Energy and water	64	64	*	53	66
Construction	23	17	85	12	33
Wholesale and retail trade	18	18	*	6	29
Hotels and restaurants	9	6	56	7	11
Transport and communication	48	43	86	27	55
Financial intermediation	38	38	*	42	37
Real estate and business services	11	8	70	7	14
Public administration	77	42	79	66	79
Education	63	25	70	53	66
Health	50	15	71	33	60
Other activities	29	13	65	18	41
Union membership					
Member	77	71	83	72	79
Not a member	17	10	56	8	23
All employees	36	22	73	18	44

Source: Labour Force Survey

^a Includes all employees except for members of the armed forces.

* Sample size too small for a reliable estimates.

The proportion of employees affected by collective agreements broadly follows the pattern of union density shown in Tables 3 and 4, with rates for the public sector being far higher than for the private sector.

Conclusion

The LFS reported a steady decline in union density between 1991 and 1997. This was followed by increases in membership between 1997 and 2000,

but a further drop in membership has occurred in 2001. The current membership level, however, was still higher than the 1999 level. A similar trend has been reported between 1996 and 2001 in the number of employees whose pay was covered by collective agreement. The reduction in union membership since 1991 has occurred at higher rates for men, full-time employees and in production industries compared with women, part-time employees and those in service industries.

Further information

For further information, please contact:

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Technical note

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 UK as a whole.

Trade union questions

The union questions were altered substantially in the 1999 questionnaire. The exact wording and sequence of the questions as they are now and as they were previously are shown below. The following issues should be noted:

- 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, routing and sequence of this question has changed. Previously, it was asked of all in employment; now it is only asked to those who say that they are 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 where 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 dataset 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. However, it is expected that there will be little seasonal variation in the data for spring and autumn quarters. 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). It is not possible to seasonally adjust the data. 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.
- 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.

- 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.

Previous union questions

All in employment:

TUPRES

At your place of work, are there any unions, staff associations or groups of unions?

If yes:

TUREC

Is it/are any of them recognised by management for negotiating pay and conditions of employment?

If yes:

TUCOV

Are **your** pay and conditions of employment directly affected by agreements between your employer and any trade union(s) or staff associations?

All in employment:

UNION

Are you a member of a trade union or staff association?

Current union questions

All in employment:

UNION

Are you a member of a trade union or staff association?

If no:

TUPRES

Are any of the people at your place of work members of a trade union or staff association?

All in employment:

TUCOV

Are **your** pay and conditions of employment directly affected by agreements between your employer and any trade union(s) or staff association?

Differences between Certification Office and Labour Force Survey data

The CO data provide a long and consistent back series of the number of trade unions and the number of union members from 1975 onwards. The LFS has a shorter back series, from 1989 onwards, but can provide extensive information on the respondent's individual and workplace characteristics, allowing more detailed analysis.

There are differences in how the two sources report membership. For example, the CO membership count includes all members of unions having their head office in Great Britain, including those members in Northern Ireland, the Irish Republic and 'elsewhere abroad'. These figures may also include union members who are unemployed or retired. The

Technical note

LFS asks questions on the union status of all those in employment that are not on college-based government-supported training and employment programmes or unpaid family workers, thus excluding the unemployed and retired.

The LFS union questions have UK coverage from 1995 onwards. The data within this article are given on a Great Britain basis from 1991 with a shorter UK back series from 1995. The LFS estimates the number of individuals who are union members, rather than the individual memberships – for example, those belonging to two unions would appear twice in the CO data, but only once in the LFS data. Also, due to the specific wording of the union question, the LFS, unlike the CO data, could count a member of a staff association which was not a trade union.

Non-response

Each household in the LFS is in the sample for five consecutive quarters. For the small number of households which 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.

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 by ONS based on standard conventions. Details are provided below.

Sex, age and ethnic group 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. The categories for ethnic groups were changed in the LFS from 2001 and are now consistent with those used in the 2001 Census.

With the exception of occupation, all classifications used in this article 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.

From 2001, the occupational classifications use the new 2000 Standard Occupational Classification (SOC2000) while prior to 2000 they were based on SOC90. They are assigned by ONS staff based on an open-ended question asking people what was their job, and what did they mainly do in their job. A breakdown by managerial status is also given in the trade union article and this is obtained from a separate LFS question where manager status is self-defined. In previous years the responses were validated against the occupational codes but from 2001 this is no longer undertaken and the manager status is now wholly self-defined by the respondent. This has resulted in the number of managers defined from this question in 2001 being significantly different from and not comparable with data from previous years.

The manager and senior officials group in SOC2000 relates to managers who primarily have responsibility for personnel, whereas the self-defined manager variable also includes management responsibility for work-related activities. This accounts for the large difference in the union density levels for the SOC2000 manager and senior officials group and the manager group within managerial status, with the latter being significantly higher. It is noted that the densities for foreman or supervisor and not manager or supervisor are in close agreement with data published in previous years.

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 second, 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 (SIC92). Region of place of work and whether an individual is an employee or self-employed are both self-defined variables.