



Department  
for Business  
Innovation & Skills

**Statistics on Trade Union  
Membership – 2012-13 User Survey  
Report**

MARCH 2013

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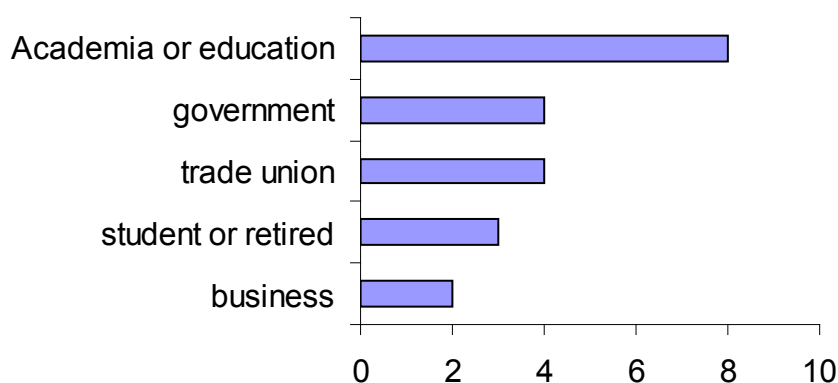
# 2012-13 User Survey Results

We placed a survey on the BIS website alongside the latest, 2011, Statistics on Trade Union Membership publication, asking users of the data to complete the survey and provide some feedback on the statistical release. Thank you to the 21 respondents who took the time to complete at least part of the survey, and provide us with useful information about who uses the statistics, what the uses are, and potential improvements.

## Users

Respondents worked in a range of organisations, with around half being involved in academia or education (including students). Local and central government made use of the statistical release, as did trade unions and businesses.

**Fig.1 Type of organisation that user works for**



The vast majority of respondents used the statistics for research and analysis related to their work or study, though some respondents were motivated by personal interest to use the data.

Specific uses of the data among the respondents included analysis of industrial relations, research into the UK labour market and unionisation, to inform the education and organisation of union members, academic study (for instance considering the history and future of trade unions), and teaching.

## The content of the statistical release

The survey asked users about specific sections of the statistical release – the report, the Excel tables and the technical annex – providing an opportunity for users to identify any

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additional information they may find useful, as well as published information that they thought wasn't required.

### **The Statistics on Trade Union Membership report**

Two thirds of respondents found the statistical report very useful, while around a third found it quite useful.

Around three quarters of respondents who expressed an opinion thought that the level of detail was about right, though smaller numbers thought that there was either too much, or too little detail.

Users thought that it would be beneficial to have more information about confidence intervals, especially for the finer disaggregations, and information on those who had changed their membership status. One user suggested the provision of information on shift-share analysis of trade union membership. There were no suggestions for sections that could be removed from the publication.

### **The data tables published with the release**

The respondents on this topic were positive about the data tables, which provide Excel versions of the tables published in the report, plus some additional information. As with the publication, around two-thirds found the table very useful, while a third found them quite useful. Also, three-quarters said that the detail was about right, with the remainder equally split between those who thought there was too much detail, and those who thought there was too little.

Users identified that information on sampling variability, and trends in membership, as well as information on numbers of non-members benefitting from union collective agreements, would be of interest.

### **The technical annex in the report**

The technical report is there to identify statistical issues that may affect usage and interpretation of the data, but the survey suggested that not all users made use of it – suggesting that it may be beneficial to highlight data issues briefly in the main text of the publication. Around half of respondents to this section found the technical annex either very or quite useful. The remainder largely indicated that they didn't make use of it.

### **Access to and format of the release**

Users were asked about the ease of finding and downloading the trade union membership statistical release, the means by which they located it, and the format they preferred the release to be available in.

All respondents to this section found the release easy to locate on the website. However, it should be noted that in mid-December last year the BIS website was moved across to the new [www.gov.uk](http://www.gov.uk) framework, and there may be some adjustment before this new site is operating optimally.

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Various approaches were used to locate the trade union membership statistical release. Around a third of users found the release through using the BIS website, with a similar proportion using a search engine to locate it. Other users found the release via other websites, the TUC and the National Statistics ones were identified, through a twitter feed (from union-news) or after contacting a BIS official.

Nearly all respondents to this section preferred the current format of a pdf document with a separate Excel workbook for detailed tables. However, there was some interest in using the ONS model of an HTML web page for commentary, with links to relevant Excel spreadsheets.

Ideas for additional information included investigating change in union membership status, and collecting the trade union membership data every quarter.

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