



Trade Union Membership: Statistical Bulletin

30 May 2019

National Statistics

Headline Statistics

- The number of employees who were trade union members rose by 103,000 on the year to 6.35 million in 2018. This was the second successive annual increase in employee union membership levels following the fall to the series low of 6.23 million in 2016.
- The proportion of employees who were trade union members also rose slightly on the year to 23.4% in 2018, from 23.3% in 2017.
- The proportion of male employees who were members of a trade union fell to 20.7%, whilst the proportion of female employees who were members of a trade union increased to 26.2%.

Public and Private sector

- The number of public sector employees belonging to a trade union increased by 149,000 on the year to 3.7 million in 2018, whilst private sector membership levels have fallen by 47,000 to 2.65 million, over the same period.
- The proportion of employees belonging to a trade union in the public sector increased to 52.5% in 2018 from 51.9% in 2017. This contrasted with a fall of 0.3 percentage points to 13.2% in the private sector.

Characteristics

- Trade union members are more likely to be older workers – almost 77% of employees who were trade union members in 2018 were aged 35 or older, while just 4.4% were aged between 16 and 24.

Nations and regions

- The North East (28.9%), North West (28.2%) and Yorkshire and the Humber (27.2%), have higher proportions of trade union membership among employees than the English average of 22.1% and London (18.2%), the South East (18.2%) and East of England (19.5%) (Table 4.1).
- All countries across the UK experienced an increase in the number of employees who were trade union members, with Wales (9.4%) and Northern Ireland (6.0%) recording the highest percentage increases.

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Introduction

The Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy is responsible for publishing the National Statistics on trade union membership.

An annual question on trade union membership was introduced into the Labour Force Survey (LFS) in 1989 and it has been asked in the fourth quarter (Q4) every year since 1992. Questions on trade union presence were added in 1993, and the question on collective agreements between an employer and a trade union was introduced in 1996. The LFS trade union questions have United Kingdom coverage from 1995 onwards.

Trade Union Membership statistics have been produced as an annual National Statistics bulletin since 2004. This bulletin succeeded the annual article in the Office for National Statistics journal Labour Market Trends. It contains annual estimates of trade union membership from the Labour Force Survey up to the fourth quarter of 2018 (October to December 2018).

Official government statistics on trade union membership have been collected on a regular basis since 1892 from administrative records. These statistics are presented in Table 1.1 and have a greater coverage than the population of employees reported elsewhere in the report, with statistics since 1974 provided by the Certification Officer (see technical note).

This bulletin presents estimates on the proportion (density) of employees who are trade union members, and the proportion whose pay and conditions are directly affected by collective agreements as reported by employees. These estimates are also presented by age, gender, ethnicity, income, major occupation, industry, full and part-time employment, sector, nation and region. Industrial sectors are presented based on Standard Industrial Classification 2007. The occupations figures from 2011 onwards are based on the Standard Occupational Classification 2010 (SOC2010), which has replaced the previous version, SOC2000, in LFS datasets from 2011. Some estimates for those in employment, which includes the self-employed, are provided in Chapter 1.

We have revised our estimates of trade union presence (the percentage of employees that are based in a workplace where there are union members), after re-considering the calculation used to derive the estimates. The revision was first made for the 2017 bulletin. The revised approach has produced rates of union presence higher by around 7.9 percentage points on average since 1999. More details of the change are contained in the technical annex.

We have used LFS data reweighted to 2018 weights for the years 2011 onwards.

The data behind this bulletin are available in the accompanying Excel spreadsheet.

About Labour Market Analysis

Labour Market Analysis is a multi-disciplinary team of economists, social researchers and statisticians based in the Labour Market Directorate of the Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy. Members of the team are responsible for producing this bulletin.

Statistical contacts

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Code of Practice for Official Statistics

National Statistics are produced to high professional standards set out in the Code of Practice for Official Statistics. They undergo regular quality assurance reviews to ensure that they meet customer needs. They are produced free from any political interference.

The UK Statistics Authority has designated these statistics as National Statistics, in accordance with the Statistics and Registration Service Act 2007 and signifying compliance with the Code of Practice for Official Statistics.

Designation can be broadly interpreted to mean that the statistics:

- Meet identified user needs;
- Are well explained and readily accessible;
- Are produced according to sound methods, and
- Are managed impartially and objectively in the public interest.

Once statistics have been designated as National Statistics it is a statutory requirement that the Code of Practice shall continue to be observed.

Conventions

The statistics presented in this bulletin are based on fourth quarter estimates (October to December) from the Labour Force Survey unless otherwise specified. Members of the armed forces are excluded from analysis. All tables and charts relate to employees (population aged 16 or over in paid employment) in the United Kingdom with the exception of those specified in Chapter 1 (Long Term Trends).

Estimates are presented for those in employment. This is defined as the population aged 16 or over in paid employment (employees) in addition to those in self-employment or government employment & training programmes. Unpaid family workers are excluded from the population in employment in this bulletin.

More detailed information on the concepts, methods, and quality of data used in this bulletin is available in the technical note.

Symbols

The following symbols are used:

- * sample size too small for a reliable estimate
- data not available

Weighting

This publication uses the latest available Labour Force Survey weights for each year for its statistics. For the datasets for the years 2011 to 2018, the latest available weights are the 2018 weights.

Key Findings

1. Long Term and Recent Trends

Trade union membership levels reached their peak in 1979 and declined sharply through the 1980s and early 1990s before stabilising from the mid-1990s to the mid-2000s. After falling during the recession and years following, the trade union membership levels among employees again stabilised between 2011 and 2015, before falling again in 2016. There was a marginal rise in trade union memberships in the period between 2016 and 2017, a trend that has continued into 2018 with a slightly larger, yet still small rise in memberships. However, trade union membership levels among employees in 2018 remains around 579,000 lower than in 2008 (Tables 1.1 and 1.2a).

The proportion of employees who were in a trade union has been on a generally downward trend since 1995. A significant reason for the general decline in membership densities is the failure of membership levels to keep pace with the increase in the total number of employees in the UK over the period (of around 25%). While union membership levels among employees have remained relatively stable in periods since 1995, interspersed with sharp falls in membership levels between 2007 and 2011, and 2015 and 2016, overall employee numbers have increased steadily in most years (Table 1.2b).

Trade union membership levels have increased between 2017 and 2018

The number of employees in the UK who were trade union members in 2018 was equal to 6.35 million, 103,000 more than in 2017 (a 1.6% increase). There has also been a slight increase in the proportion of employees who are members of a trade union to 23.4% (a 0.1 percentage point increase from 23.3% in 2017). This is due to growth in trade union membership among employees in 2018 being slightly faster than the rise in employee numbers over the same period (Tables 1.2a and 1.2b).

Private sector membership has fallen whilst public sector membership has increased

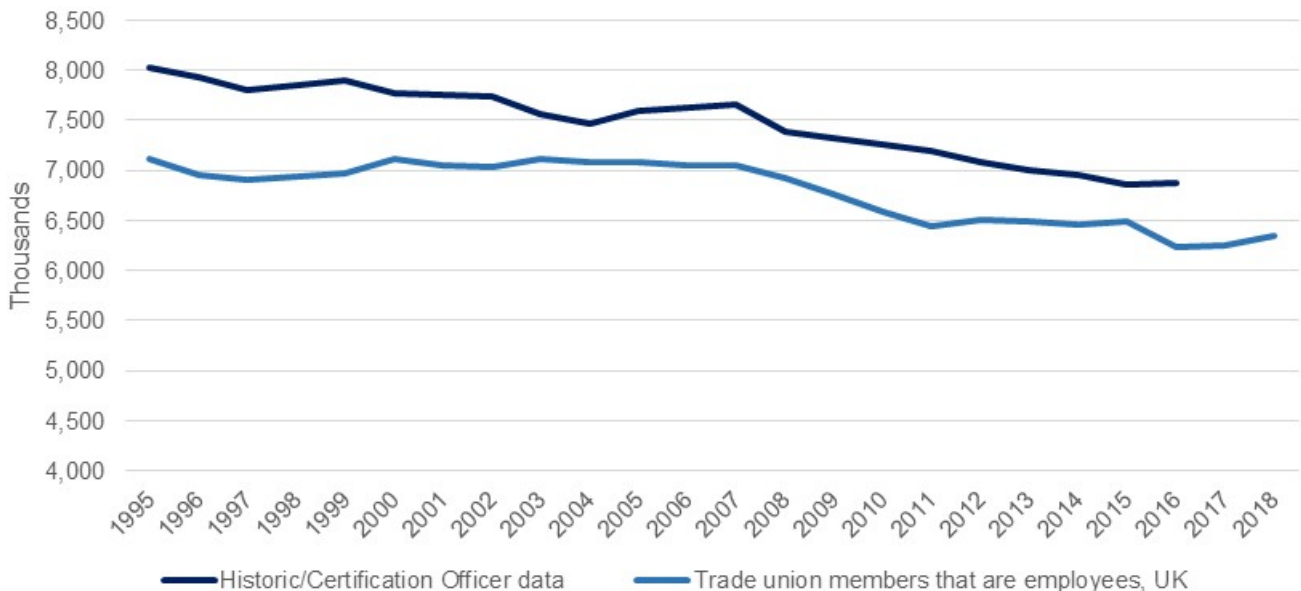
Private sector trade union membership decreased by 47,000 in 2018 after recording an increase of 70,000 in 2017. Meanwhile there was a 149,000 increase in public sector trade union memberships in 2018, offsetting the 53,000 decrease in 2017 and going against a general downward trend seen since 2010. There remains a large disparity in the proportion of public sector workers (52.5%) who are trade union members when compared to private sector workers (13.2%) (Tables 2.1a and 2.2).

Figure 1: Trade union membership levels in the UK, 1892 to 2018



Source: Historic data is administrative data on union membership from Department for Employment (1892-1973); and the Certification Office (1974-2017). Data on UK employees that are trade union members is based on the Labour Force Survey, Office for National Statistics

Figure 2: Trade union membership levels in the UK, 1995 to 2018



Source: Historic data is administrative data on union membership from Department for Employment (1892-1973); and the Certification Office (1974-2017). Data on UK employees that are trade union members is based on the Labour Force Survey, Office for National Statistics

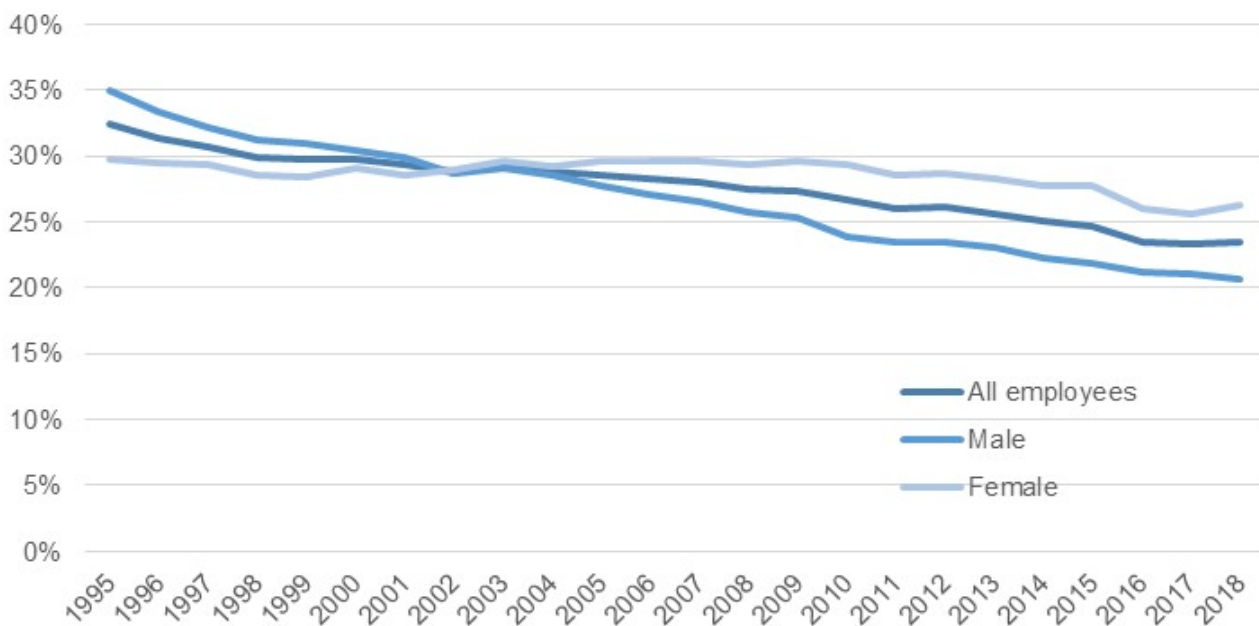
Female union membership rates rise, but male union membership rates fall again

The proportion of UK male employees who were in a trade union in 2018, at 20.7%, was the lowest since the series started being recorded in 1995. However, the proportion of female employees who are members of trade unions increased to 26.2%, the highest recorded since 2015 (27.7%).

Membership levels for male employees fell by 0.9% between 2017 and 2018 to 2.83 million, while increasing by 3.7% to 3.52 million for female employees over the same period. The increase in female membership levels, from 3.39 million in 2017 to 3.52 million in 2018 was a significant factor in explaining the increase in the proportion of female employees that were trade union members. These figures reflect the longer-term trend that the decline in the proportion of employees who are trade union members since 1995 has been significantly weaker for women than men. In 1995, the proportion of male employees who belonged to a trade union was around 35%, compared with just below 30% for female employees. High falls in union membership densities among male employees narrowed the gap between males and females. In 2002, the proportion of employees who belonged to a trade union was around 29% for both genders.

These trends continued between 2002 and 2018, with union membership densities among male employees falling by 8 percentage points from 28.7% in 2002 to 20.7% in 2018. Over the same period the proportion of female employees with union membership had remained comparatively stable, decreasing by 2.8 percentage points. The decline was driven by a 3.1 percentage point decrease between 2012 and 2017, which was partially mitigated by the 0.6 percentage point rise between 2017 and 2018 (Tables 1.2a and 1.2b).

Figure 3: Employee trade union membership by gender, 1995 to 2018



Per cent of UK employees who are trade union-members
 Source: Labour Force Survey, Office for National Statistics

UK born and Black ethnic group employees are more likely to be union members

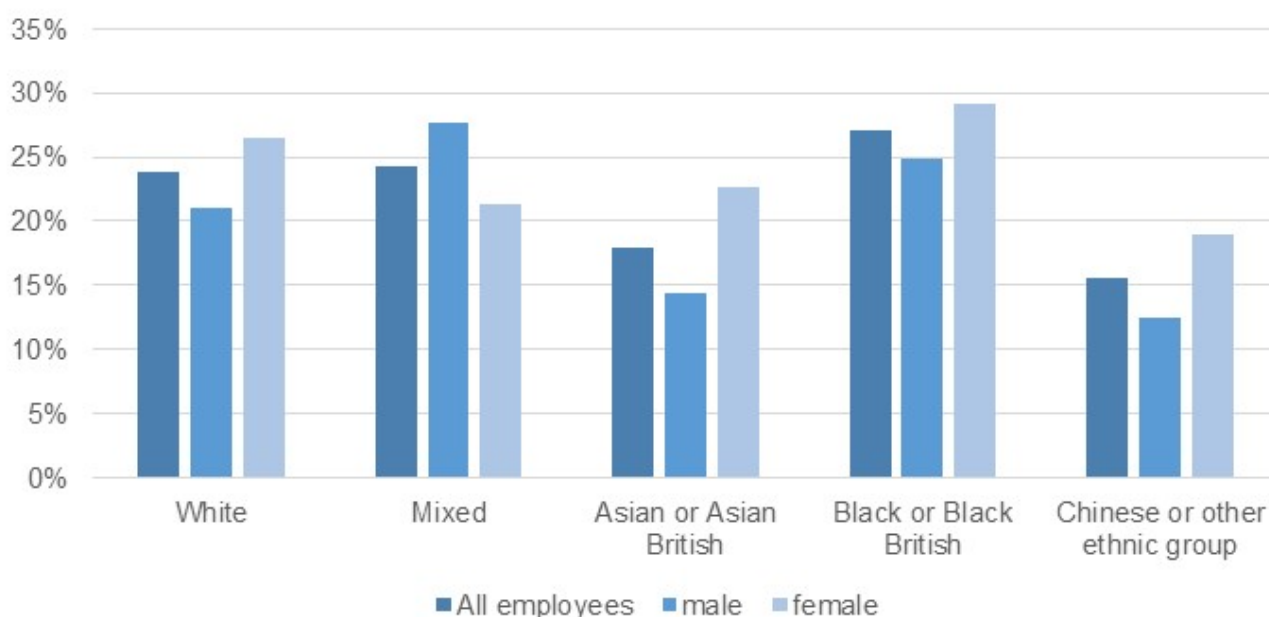
UK born employees are significantly more likely to be a member of a trade union than non-UK born employees. 24.8% of UK born employees were trade union members in 2018, compared with 16.6% of non-UK born employees (Table 1.5).

Trade Union Membership Statistics 2018

The proportion of employees who were trade union members was highest in the Black or Black British ethnic group (27.1%), followed by the Mixed ethnic group (24.3%) and the White ethnic group (23.8%). The proportion of trade union members was lowest amongst the Asian or Asian British and Chinese or other ethnic group employees, at 18% and 15.5% respectively.

A higher proportion of female employees than male employees were trade union members in each of the ethnic groups apart from the Mixed ethnic group. The largest disparity between the proportions of male and female employees who are members of trade unions was within the Asian or Asian British ethnic group, with a difference of 8.2 percentage points. In the Mixed ethnic group, around 27.7% of male employees were trade union members, compared to 21.4% of female employees (Table 1.5).

Figure 4: Trade union density by gender and ethnicity, 2018



Per cent of UK employees who are trade union-members

Source: Labour Force Survey, Office for National Statistics

Highly educated employees are more likely to be union members

The proportion of employees who were trade union members was greater for people with a higher qualification, such as a degree, compared with those with lower level qualifications, or no qualifications (Table 1.5).

The proportions of employees with a Degree or equivalent, or another form of higher education qualification (Other higher education) who were trade union members in 2018 were 28.7% and 29.6% respectively. This was significantly higher than the proportions of employees with no qualifications and Other qualifications who had trade union membership, at 16.7% and 16.3% respectively.

The size of the disparity in trade union membership density between those with higher education qualifications and those with lower level or no qualifications differs substantially between men and women. Among women employees, 34.9% with a Degree or equivalent and 36% with other higher education qualifications were union members, compared to 18.4% or lower for those with lower levels of qualification or no qualifications. However, among male employees the difference was only around 6 percentage points between the 22% of those with a Degree or equivalent or other higher education qualification and the 15.7% with no qualifications who are union members.

Employees in larger workplaces are more likely to be member of a trade union

Employees who worked in larger workplaces (with 50 or more staff) were more likely to be members of a trade union and were more likely to have a trade union presence in the workplace. They were also more likely to have their pay directly affected by a collective agreement between their employer and a trade union (Table 1.10).

The proportion of employees who belonged to a trade union in larger workplaces was 30.6% in 2018, compared to 15.2% of employees who are employed in a smaller workplace (less than 50 employees). 63.3% of employees working in larger workplaces had a trade union presence in the workplace, compared to 29.5% of employees based in smaller workplaces. The proportion of employees whose pay was affected by a collective agreement between their employer and a union was 36.2% in larger workplaces and 14.5% in smaller workplaces (Table 1.10).

The proportions of employees who belong to a trade union were significantly higher in the Education sector (47.6%) and in Public Administration and Defence (45.4%) than for the UK economy as a whole (23.4%). Consequently, a high proportion of employees in both industries had a union presence in their workplace (81.2% in Public Administration and Defence, and 82.2% in Education). Similarly, in both industries a high proportion of employees had their pay influenced by collective agreements between their employer and a trade union (57.3% in Public Administration and Defence, and 48.4% in Education) (Table 1.10).

Northern Ireland was the nation with the highest proportion of employees who's pay was affected by collective agreements between their employer and a trade union (44.2%), whilst among English regions it was the North East (30.5%) (Table 1.10).

Employees are more likely to be trade union members in permanent jobs and full-time jobs

Overall, 24% of employees in permanent positions belonged to a trade union in 2018, compared to 14.8% of employees in temporary positions (Table 1.4).

A higher proportion of full-time employees (24.5%) compared to part-time employees (20.4%) had trade union membership in 2018. This trend was reflected across all industries and occupations aside from employees within professional occupations (37.1% full-time, compared to 52.8% part-time), Wholesale and Retail Trade (11.3% compared to 12.8%), Financial and Insurance Activities (11.5% compared to 21.9%) and Professional, Scientific and Technical Activities (6.9% compared to 7.0%) (Table 1.4).

Of those employees who were members of a trade union in 2018, 77.5% worked full-time, above the proportions working full-time among all UK employees (74.6%), and employees who are not union members (73.2%) (Table 3.1).

Middle-income earners are more likely to be trade union members

Higher proportions of employees within the middle earnings bands (weekly earnings between £250 and £999), had trade union membership relative to employees whose earnings fell into the lower band (less than £250, per week) or the upper earnings band (£1,000 and above, per week) (Table 1.5). The proportions of employees who were trade union members by weekly earnings were:

- 13.4% of those earning less than £250
- 23.8% of those earning between £250 and £499
- 33.0% of those earning between £500 and £999
- 18.4% of those earning £1,000 or more

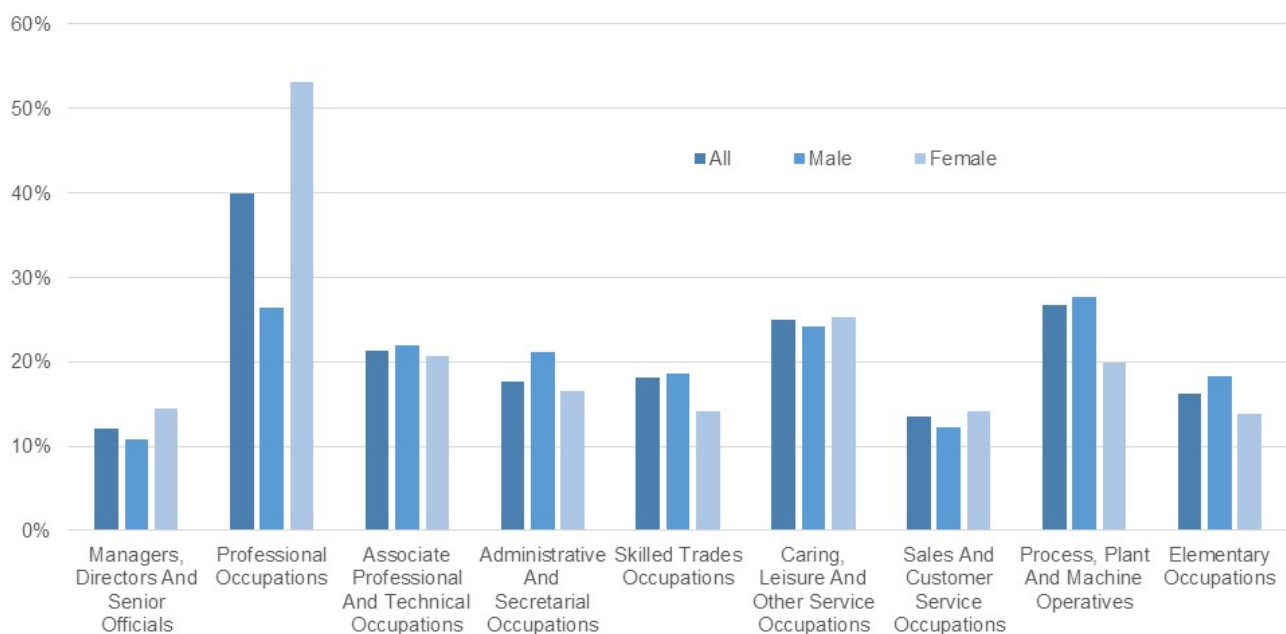
Employees in professional occupations are more likely to be trade union members

Those working in Professional occupations accounted for nearly four-in-ten (39%) of employees who were trade union members in 2018, but only 22.1% of UK employees overall, indicating that this occupational group is relatively highly unionised. The other occupations which accounted for a higher proportion of employees who were trade union members than employees overall were Caring, Leisure and Other Service occupations (9.7% compared to 9.2%) and Process, Plant and Machine Operatives (6.7% compared to 6.0%) (Table 3.1).

This was reflected in the high proportion of employees in Professional occupations that were trade union members in 2018 (39.9%). However, this was 5.6 percentage points lower than in 2011 (45.5%), the largest percentage point drop in union density since 2011 among the nine occupation groups. Comparison with earlier years is affected by the change in Standard Occupational Classification (SOC) definitions in 2011. For instance, the decrease in the proportion of employees within Associate Professional and Technical occupations who were trade union members, from 40.2% in 2010 to 21.3% in 2018 is mainly explained by the moving of nurses and midwives, and therapy professionals, both relatively highly unionised occupations, into the Professional group in the new SOC definitions, from ‘associate professional and technical’ (Tables 1.7a and 1.7b).

Despite generally being more likely to be a union member than male employees, female employees had higher union membership proportions in only four of the nine occupation groups: Professional occupations, Caring, Leisure and Other Service occupations, Sales and Customer Service occupations, and Manager, Directors and Senior Officials (Table 1.4).

Figure 5: Trade union density by gender and occupation, 2018



Per cent of UK employees who are trade union-members

Source: Labour Force Survey, Office for National Statistics

Employees in public sector and utility industries more likely to be in a trade union

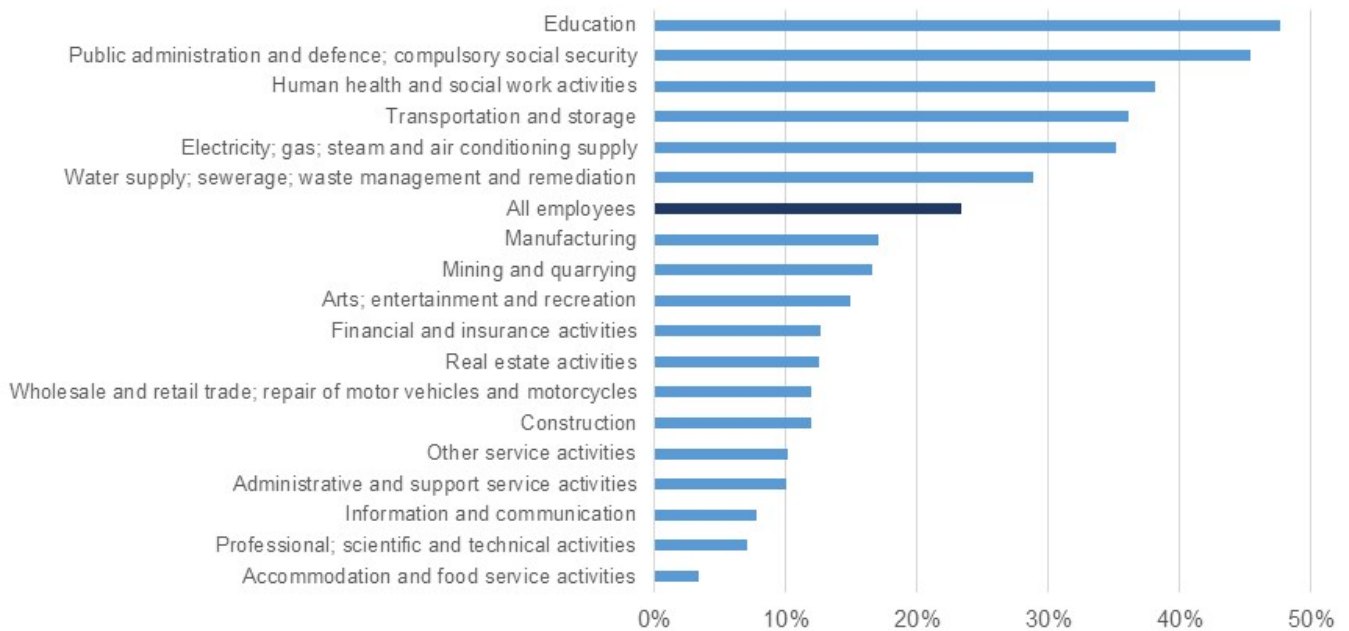
The likelihood of belonging to a trade union varies substantially by sector. Employees in industries with higher proportions of public sector workers are more likely to belong to trade unions, including the Public Administration and Defence and Education industries.

Trade Union Membership Statistics 2018

The rate of union membership in many industries has been in sharp decline since 1995. Electricity, Gas, Steam and Air Conditioning Supply occupation has seen the proportion of workers belonging to a trade union fall by 36.7 percentage points since 1995, whilst Water Supply, Sewage, Waste Management and Remediation Activities (28.7 percentage points) and financial and Insurance Activities (24.6 percentage points), have witnessed similar decreases. However, an exception is the Wholesale and Retail Trade, Repair of Motor Vehicles and Motorcycles industry, which experienced a modest 0.9 percentage point increase between 1995 and 2018 in the proportion of employees that were trade union members.

In line with historical trends, Education (47.6%) and Public Administration and Defence (45.4%) were the two industries with the highest proportions of employees who were trade union members in 2018. Outside of the public sector dominated industries, the Transport and Storage industry had the highest proportion of employees who were trade union members, at 36.1% (Table 1.8).

Figure 6: Trade union density by industry, 2018



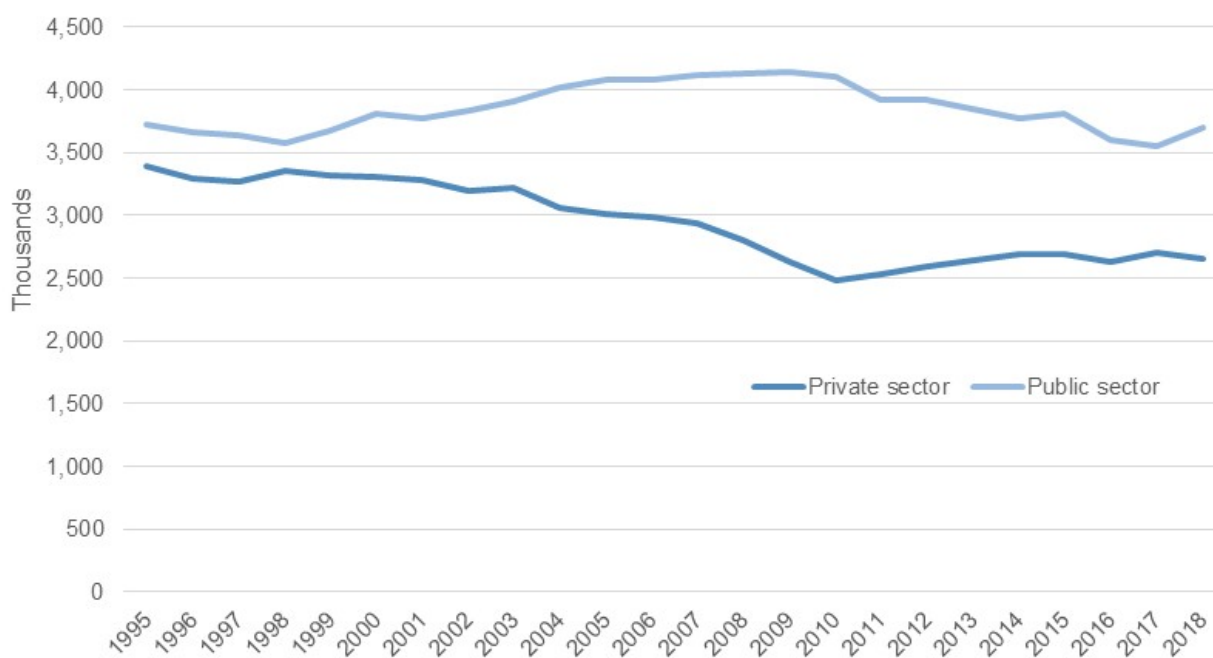
Per cent of UK employees who are trade union-members
Source: Labour Force Survey, Office for National Statistics

2. Public and Private Sectors

In 2018, the number of public sector employees belonging to a trade union increased by 149,000 to 3.7 million after recording a record low of 3.55 million in 2017. Over the same period, private sector trade union membership levels fell by 47,000, from 2.7 million in 2017 to 2.65 million in 2018. This fall follows a 70,000 increase in membership levels between 2016 and 2017, when the highest private sector membership levels since 2008 were recorded. Overall, since 2010, union membership levels have increased by 6.7% in the private sector, while falling by 9.9% in the public sector. These changes may be at least in part due to transfers of jobs from the public sector into the private sector (for instance with the Royal Mail in September 2013).

This contrasted with the previous decade, when public sector union membership accounted for an increasing proportion of overall union membership among employees in the period up to 2010. This was driven by a steady rise in the public sector membership levels in the 2000s up to 2005, followed by a period of stability until 2010. Public sector membership levels rose by 381,000 between 1995 and 2010. Over the same period, private sector union membership levels declined by 905,000 (Table 2.1a).

Figure 7: Trade union membership levels by sector, 1995 to 2018

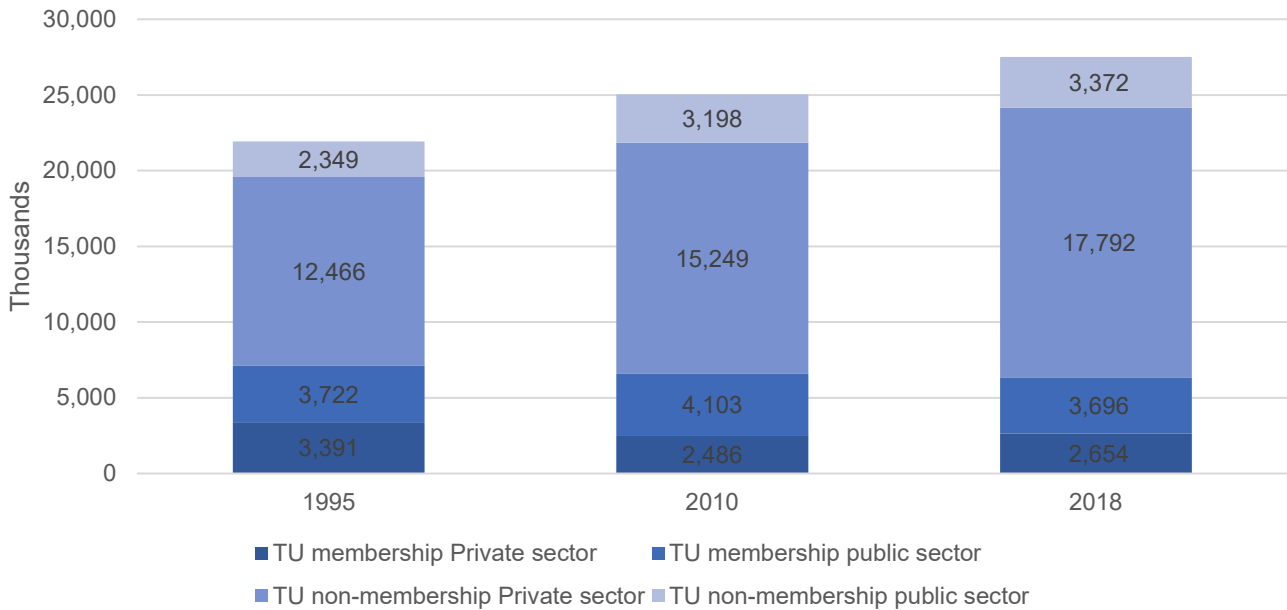


UK employees that are trade union members, Thousands

Source: Labour Force Survey, Office for National Statistics.

The overall proportion of employees who are members of trade unions is significantly higher in the public sector relative to the private sector. 13.2% of private sector employees belonged to a trade union, compared to 52.5% of public sector employees, in 2018. The period between 2017 and 2018 saw a 0.3 percentage point fall in the proportion of private sector employees who belonged to a trade union. Across the same period there was a 0.6 percentage point increase in the proportion of public sector employees affiliated with a union. A higher proportion of female employees than male employees were trade union members in the public sector in 2018, at 53.7% and 50.3% respectively. However, within the private sector a male employee is more likely to be a member of a trade union than a female employee. In 2018, the proportion of female employees in the private sector who were members of a trade union was 11.8%, compared to 14.4% of male employees (Table 2.1a, 2.1b and 2.2).

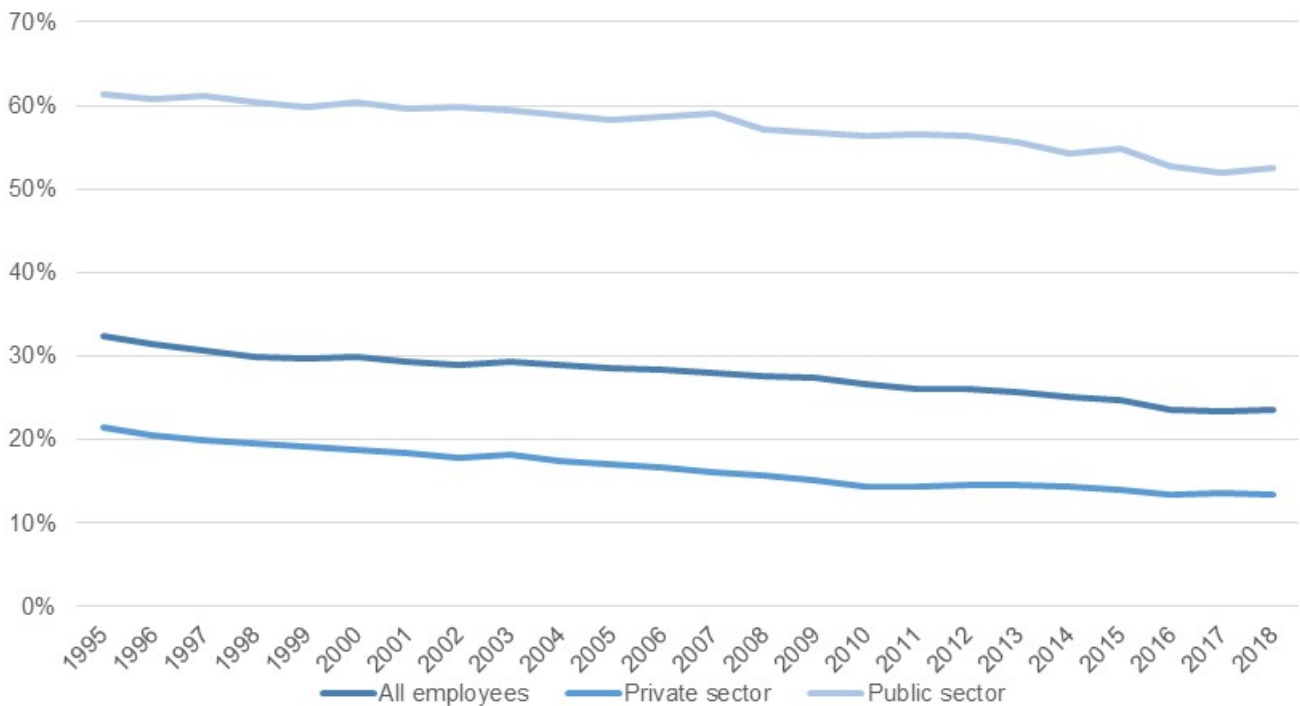
Figure 8: Employee compoition by trade union membership and sector, 1995, 2010 and 2018



UK employees, thousands

Source: Labour Force Survey, Office for National Statistics

Figure 9: Trade union density by sector, 1995 to 2018



Per cent of UK employees who are trade union members

Source: Labour Force Survey, Office for National Statistics

The trade union wage gap has fallen to a record low for public sector employees

The trade union wage gap, defined as the percentage difference in average gross hourly earnings of union members compared with non-members, has decreased for employees in the public sector from 16.9% in 2017 to 11.6% in 2018, the lowest recorded since the series began in 1995.

Following a similar trend, the private sector trade union wage gap also fell significantly, from 7.1% in 2017 to 2.6% in 2018, its lowest level since 2008 (2.4%) (Table 2.3).

Several factors influence this figure, and the size of the premium is likely to be strongly influenced by other differences in the characteristics of unionised and non-unionised employees. It should also be noted that where pay is determined by collective agreements, these are likely to apply to both unionised and non-unionised employees in the bargaining unit. Collective agreements for the UK have remained constant at 26% between 2017 and 2018, however over the same period the private sector has seen a fall, from 15.3% to 14.7%, whilst those employees in the public sector have seen a rise, from 57.6% to 58.9% (Table 2.4b).

3. Personal and job characteristics

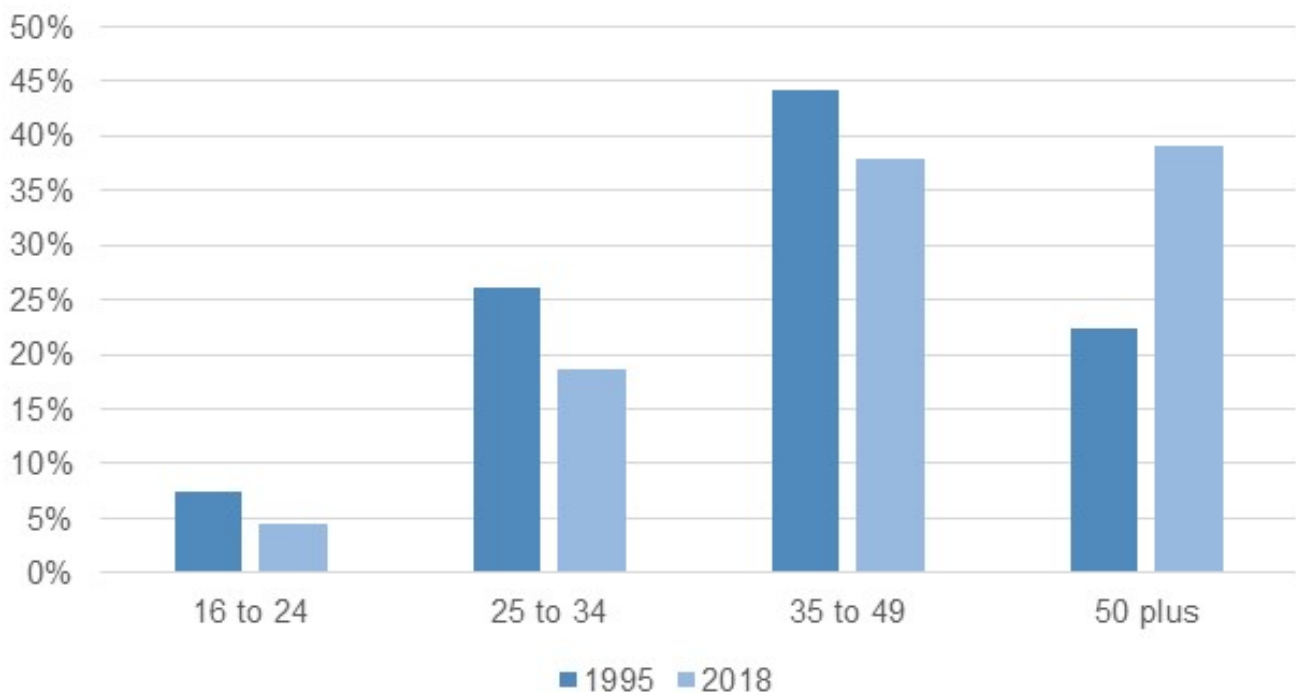
Older employees comprise a higher proportion of trade union members

Employees who are older make up a larger proportion of trade union members than younger employees (Table 3.1). Of employees who were trade union members in 2018:

- 4.4% were aged between 16 and 24.
- 18.7% were aged between 25 and 34
- 37.9% were aged between 35 to 49, and
- 39% were aged 50 or older

That the likelihood of an employee being a trade union member increases with age accords with the data showing that employees who have longer lengths of service with an employer are more likely to be a member of a trade union. 29.4% of employees who were trade union members in 2018 had between 10 and 20 years of service, while those with tenure of 20 years or more accounted for 21.4% of total employee union membership. These are significantly higher than the percentages comprised of those with between 1 and 2 years tenure (6.8%) and those with between 2 and 5 years tenure (16.7%) (Table 3.1).

Figure 10: Age distribution of trade union members, 1995 and 2018



Per cent of trade union members

Source: Labour Force Survey, Office for National Statistics

Employees with disabilities are more likely to be a member of a trade union

28.2% of employees who have a disability were members of a trade union in 2018, above the 22.6% membership rate for employees who do not have a disability (Table 1.5).

Trade Union Membership Statistics 2018

Employees with disabilities comprised 17.7% of employees who were trade union members in 2018, a higher proportion than they accounted for of UK employees overall, at 14.5% (Table 3.1).

Foremen or supervisors are more likely to be trade union members

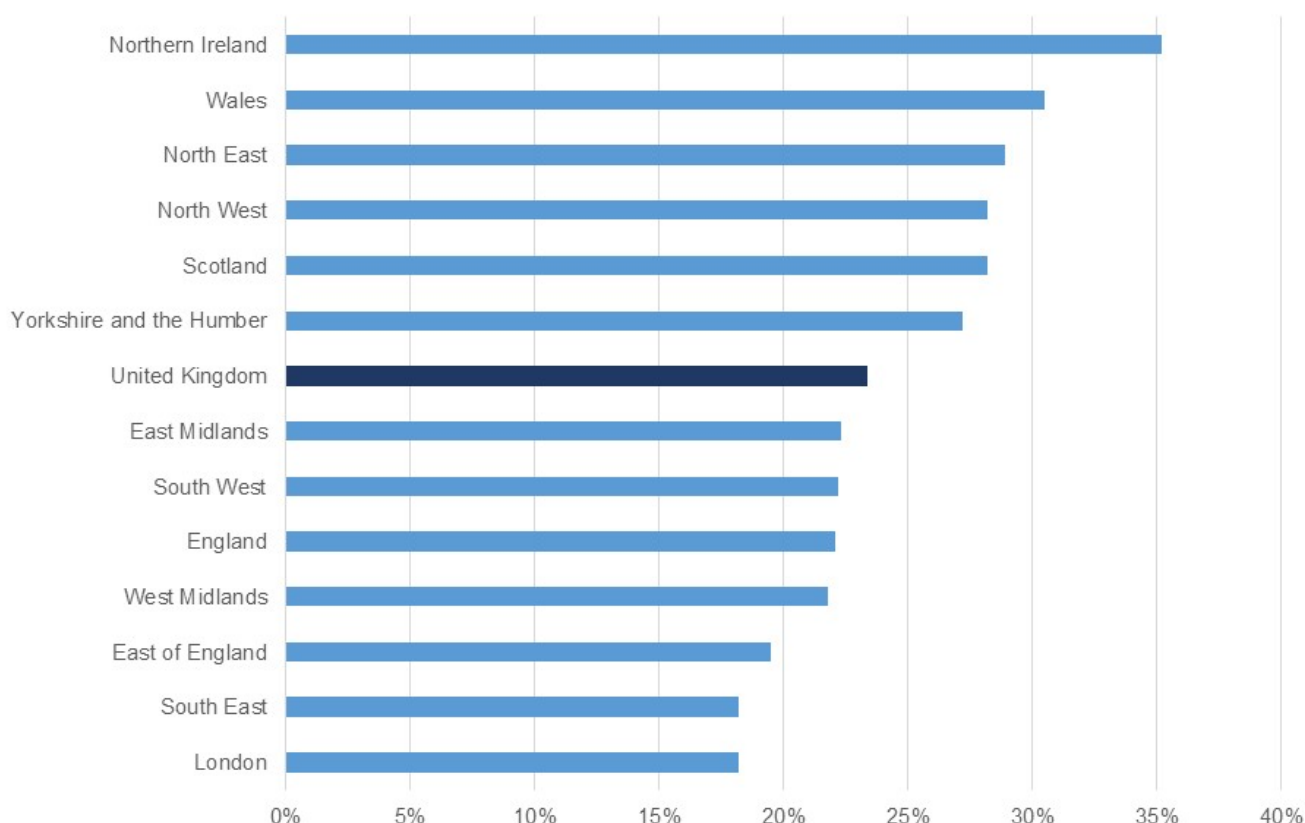
Although employees who are not managers or supervisors are often associated with trade union membership, employees who are foremen or supervisors are more likely to be members of a trade union relative to managers and those who are not managers or supervisors. 33.1% employees who were in foreman or supervisor roles were members of a trade union in 2018, significantly higher than the 22.7% of managers and the 22.1% without managerial or supervisory responsibility who were affiliated with a union (Table 1.5).

4. Country and regional trends

Employees in the northern regions of England more likely to be trade union members

In 2018, the northern regions of England had higher proportions of employees with trade union membership than those regions that are in the south. The North East (28.9%), North West (28.2%) and Yorkshire and the Humber (27.2%), had higher densities of trade union membership than the English average of 22.1% and London (18.2%), the South East (18.2%) and the East of England (19.5%) (Table 4.1). The employee membership rates for the Midlands regions and the South West congregated around the England average.

Figure 11: Trade union density by nation and region, 2018



Per cent of UK employees that are trade union members

Source: Labour Force Survey, Office for National Statistics

Between 2017 and 2018, the North West region had the highest fall in the proportion of employees that were trade union members, decreasing from 29.3% to 28.2%, whilst the South East had the second highest decrease, from 19.1% to 18.2%. Contrastingly, the East Midlands and the South West both experienced increases in the proportion of employees with trade union membership, with the East Midlands seeing membership density increase from 19.7% in 2017 to 22.3% in 2018, whereas the South West recorded a lower increase from 21.1% in 2017 to 22.2% in 2018 (Table 4.1).

Trade union membership levels increase in all countries

There were increases in the level of employees who had trade union membership across all countries within the UK between 2017 and 2018. Wales experienced the largest change in membership levels, increasing by 9.4% from 355,000 to 388,000, although this increase does not fully mitigate against the 16.3% fall between 2016 and 2017. There was a 6.0% increase in

Trade Union Membership Statistics 2018

Northern Ireland between 2017 and 2018, moving from 237,000 employee trade union members to 251,000. England recorded the lowest percentage increase of 0.7% as membership levels increased from 5.02 million to 5.05 million (Table 4.2).

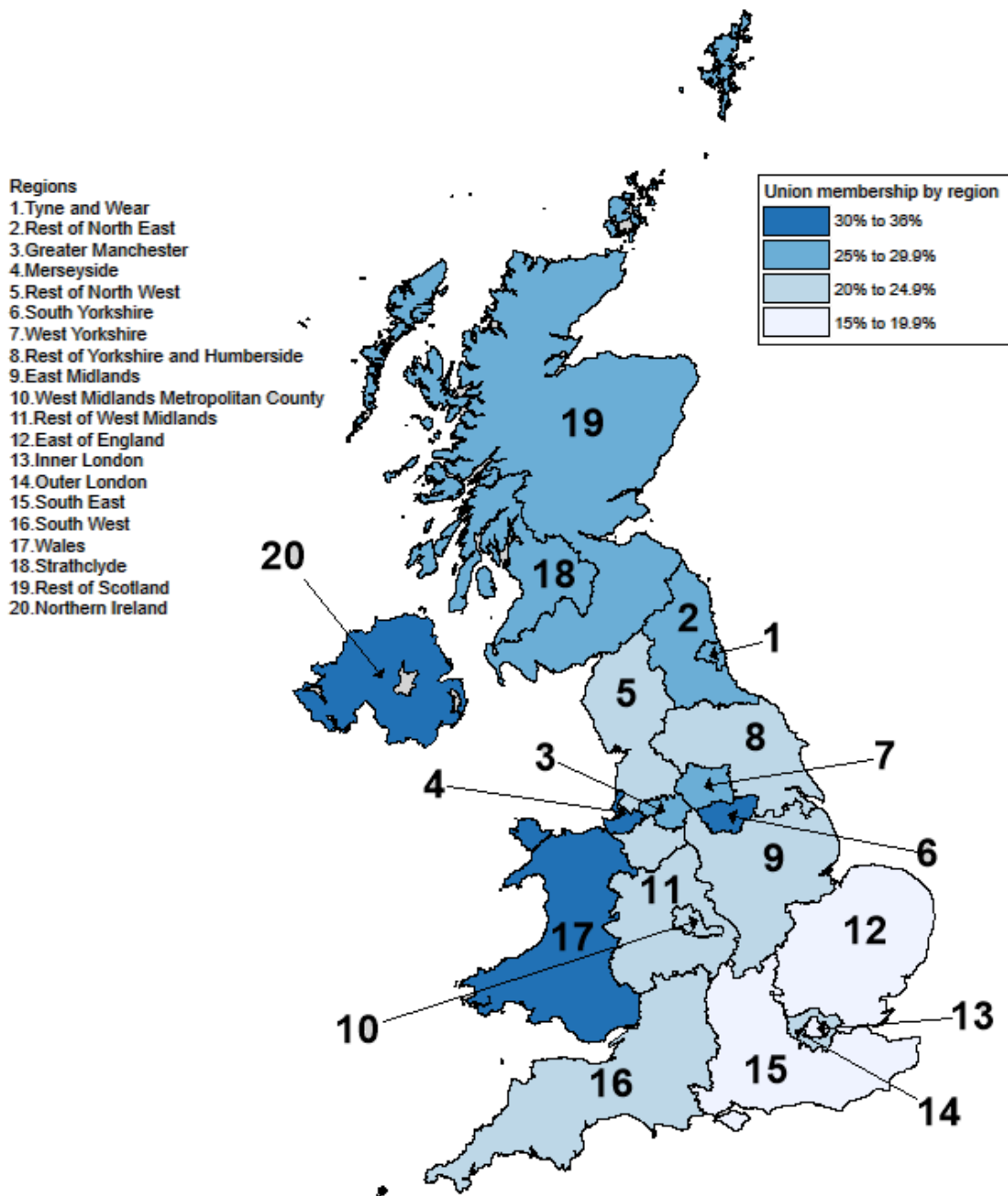
England was the only country in the UK not to experience an increase in the proportion of employees who were trade union members between 2017 and 2018, despite the increase in the level. Northern Ireland saw the proportion of employee trade union members increase by 1.0 percentage point between 2017 and 2018, increasing from 34.2% to 35.2%, after seeing membership levels increase by 5.1 percentage points between 2016 and 2017. Between 2017 and 2018 there were also increases in trade union densities in Scotland and Wales, of 0.2 and 0.5 percentage points respectively (Table 4.1).

Since 1995, Scotland has recorded a 10.8 percentage point fall in the proportion of employees who are trade union members, while Wales, over the same period, has experienced a 13.8 percentage point fall. Both of these decreases are higher than the 9.0 percentage point fall in the proportion of employees who are members of a trade union recorded for the UK as a whole since 1995.

Trade Union Membership Statistics 2018

Figure 12 shows the proportion of employees who are members of a trade union broken down by 20 geographical regions and nations across the UK in 2018. South Yorkshire and Merseyside had the highest proportions of workers who were members of trade unions, with each having 35.3% of employees as members, closely followed by Northern Ireland (35.2%). Inner London had the lowest proportion of workers affiliated to a trade union, with 15.7% of employees being members (Table 4.3).

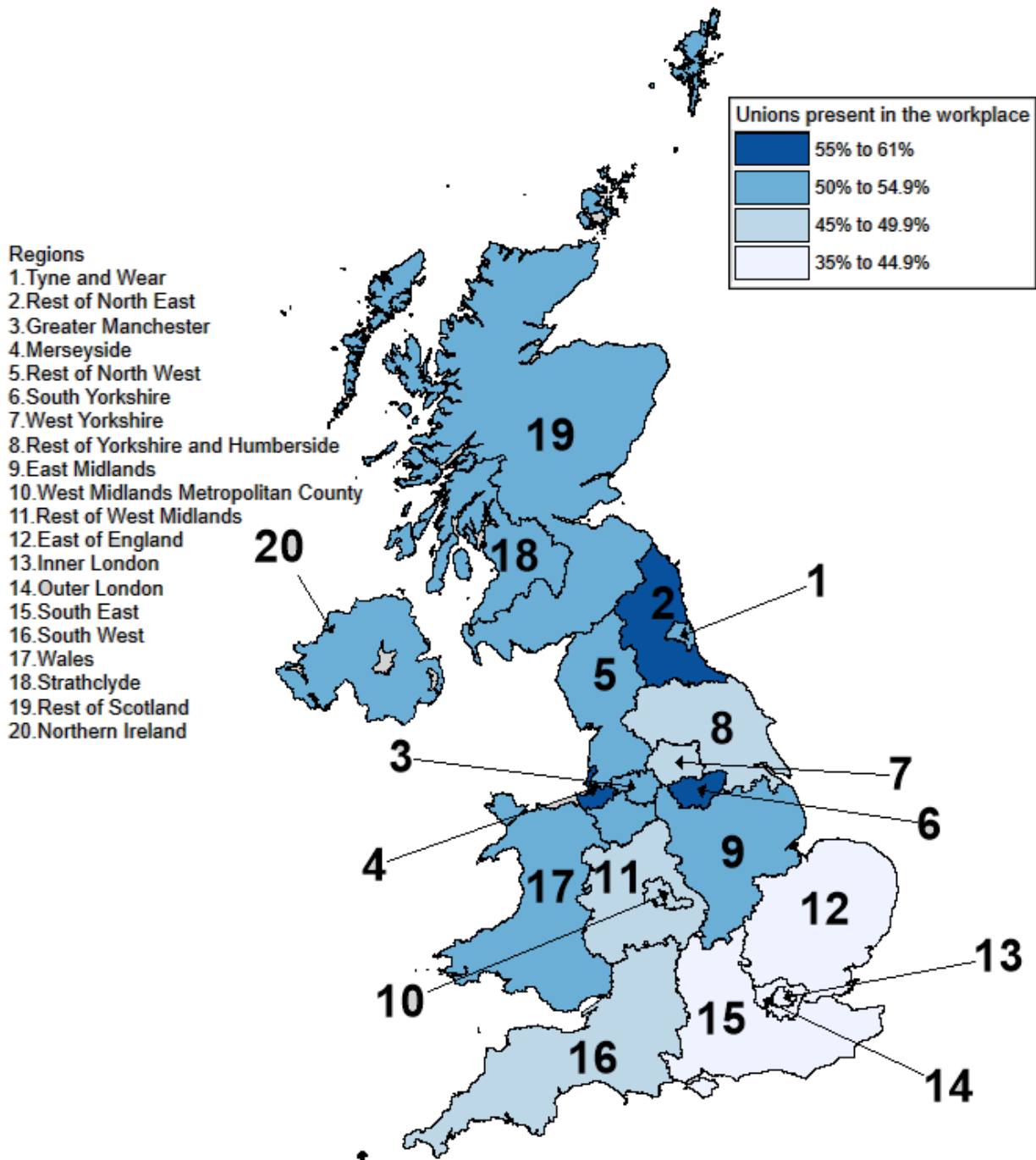
Figure 12: Trade union membership as a proportion of employees, by region, UK employees, 2018



Source: Labour Force Survey, Office for National Statistics
 Contains Ordnance Survey data © Crown copyright and database right 2018

Figure 13 illustrates the presence of trade unions in the workplace across the 20 geographical regions. South Yorkshire had the highest rates in the UK, with 61.0% of employees having a trade union presence in their workplace, down from 65.1% recorded in 2017. Inner London had the lowest rate of trade union presence, with 35.7% of employees having a trade union presence in their workplace.

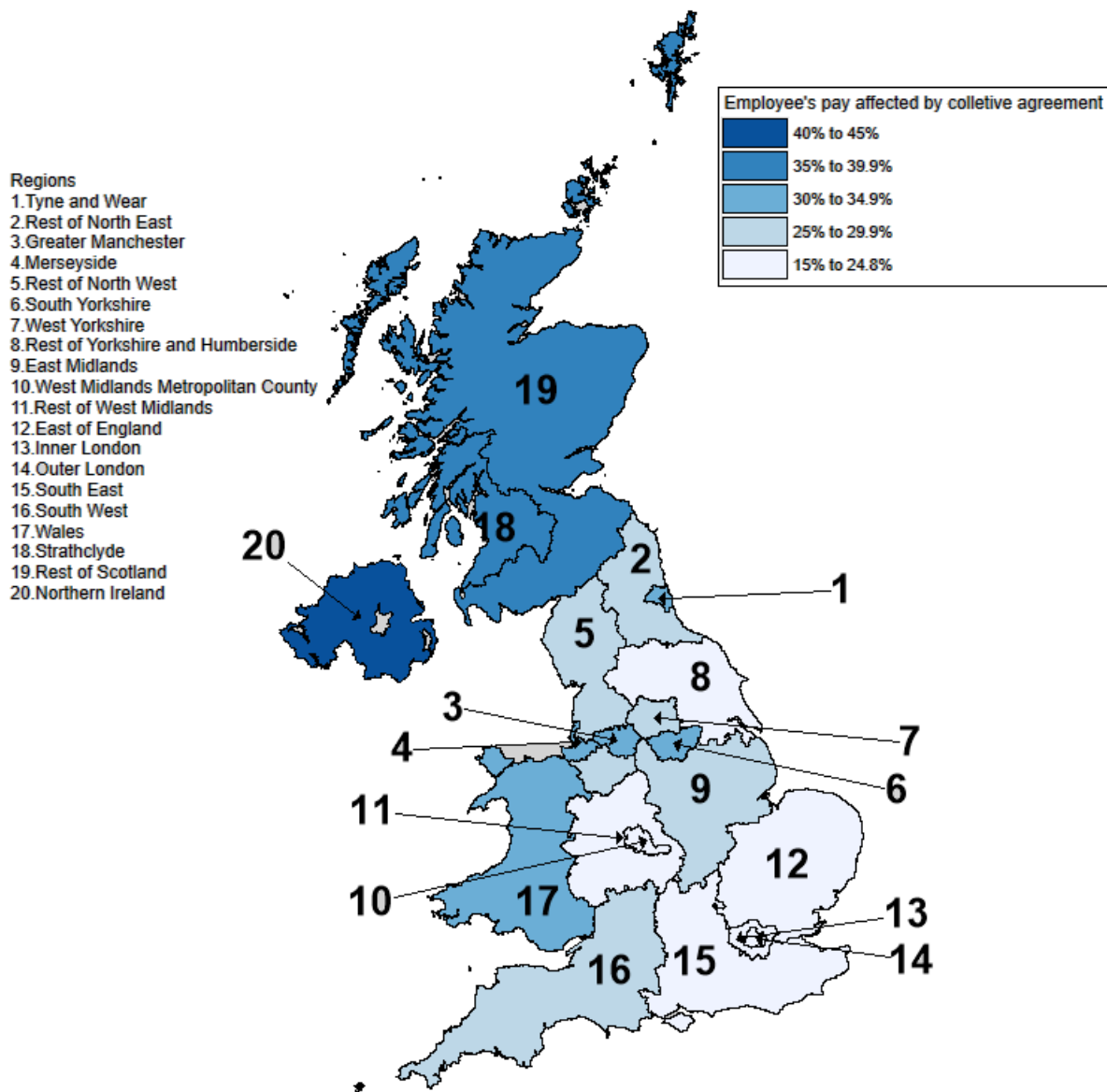
Figure 13: Trade union presence in workplace by region, 2018



Source: Labour Force Survey, Office for National Statistics
 Contains Ordnance Survey data © Crown copyright and database right 2018

Figure 14 gives an overview of the proportion of employees whose pay was affected by a collective agreement between their employer and a trade union. Northern Ireland had the highest proportion of employees whose pay was affected by such a collective agreement, at 44.2%. This compares to 15.7% of employees in Inner London who had their pay likewise affected, the lowest amongst all regions.

Figure 14: Coverage of collective agreements between employers and trade unions by region, 2018



Source: Labour Force Survey, Office for National Statistics Contains Ordnance Survey data © Crown copyright and database right 2018

Accompanying tables

The following tables are available in open source format on the department's statistics website <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/trade-union-statistics-2018>

Table 1.1	Trade union membership, unions registered, listed or scheduled in Great Britain, 1892 to 2015-18
Table 1.2a	Trade union membership levels, employees, UK and Great Britain, 1989 to 2018
Table 1.2b	Trade union membership as a proportion of employees, UK and Great Britain, 1989 to 2018
Table 1.3a	Trade union membership levels, in employment, UK and Great Britain, 1989 to 2018
Table 1.3b	Trade union membership as a proportion of those in employment, UK and Great Britain, 1989 to 2018
Table 1.4	Trade union membership as a proportion of employees by gender, full/ part time and permanent/ temporary status, UK 2018
Table 1.5	Trade union membership as a proportion of employees by personal characteristics, and work and job characteristics, UK 2018
Table 1.6	Trade union membership as a proportion of employees by age group and gender, UK 1995 to 2018
Table 1.7a	Trade union membership as a proportion of employees by major occupation group and gender, UK 2005 to 2010
Table 1.7b	Trade union membership as a proportion of employees by major occupation group and gender, UK 2011 to 2018
Table 1.8	Trade union membership as a proportion of employees by industry and gender, UK 1995 to 2018
Table 1.9	Average hourly earnings by union status, UK 2018
Table 1.10	Trade union membership proportions, union presence and coverage of collective agreements between employers and trade unions, UK 2018
Table 1.11	Coverage of collective agreements between employers and trade unions by full/ part time and permanent/ temporary status, UK 2018
Table 2.1a	Trade union membership levels by sector and gender, UK 1995 to 2018
Table 2.1b	Trade union non-membership levels by sector and gender, UK 1995 to 2018
Table 2.2	Trade union membership as a proportion of employees by sector and gender, UK 1995 to 2018
Table 2.3	Average hourly earnings by union status and sector, UK 1995 to 2018
Table 2.4a	Trade union presence by sector, UK 1999 to 2018
Table 2.4b	Coverage of collective agreements between an employer and trade union by sector, UK 1996 to 2018
Table 2.5	Trade union membership levels by Industry, UK 1995 to 2018
Table 3.1	Characteristics of union members and non-members, UK 2018
Table 4.1	Trade union membership as a proportion of employees by nation and region, 1995 to 2018
Table 4.2	Trade union membership levels by nation and region, 1995 to 2018
Table 4.3	Trade union membership proportions, trade union presence and collective agreement coverage by regions, 2018
A1-A13	Individual tables for the nations and regions, covering trade union membership as a proportion of employees by various characteristics, 2018

Trade Union Membership Statistics 2018

- A14 Trade union membership as a proportion of employees, by 2-digit Standard Industrial Classification and gender, 1995-2018
- A15 Trade union membership as a proportion of employees, by 2-digit Standard Industrial Classification and gender, full/part time and permanent/temporary, 2018
- A16 The proportion of Polish employees in the UK that are union members, by nationality and country of birth, gender and full/part-time work, 2018
- A17 Age distribution of employees who are trade union members, UK 1995 and 2018

Annex: Technical Note

National Statistics

National Statistics is a quality marker applied to the United Kingdom's official statistics outputs. National Statistics are regulated by the UK Statistics Authority, established on 1st April 2008. All official statistics accredited as 'National Statistics' are compliant with the UK Statistics Authority's Code of Practice for Official Statistics.

Concepts and definitions

Employee: People who regard themselves as paid wage and salary earners. People with two or more jobs are counted only once.

Employment: The number of people with jobs is measured by the Labour Force Survey and includes people aged 16 or over who did paid work (as an employee or self-employed), those who had a job that they were temporarily away from, those on government-supported training and employment programmes. For this publication, the numbers in employment exclude those doing unpaid family work.

Labour Force Survey (LFS): The main source for information on the labour market in the United Kingdom. It is a random household survey of approximately 37,000 households conducted every three months by the Office for National Statistics (ONS). As well as private households, the survey includes people living in communal establishments (student halls of residence, National Health Service accommodation, etc.). The survey was conducted once every two years between 1973 and 1983 and annually from 1983 until 1991. It has been conducted quarterly since 1992, with a change to calendar quarters from seasonal quarters made in 2006. The LFS is a sample survey and consequently estimates are subject to both sampling and non-sampling error.

Trade union: The Trade Union and Labour Relations (Consolidation) Act 1992 defines a trade union as an organisation which consists wholly or mainly of workers of one or more descriptions and whose principal purposes include the regulation of relations between workers and employers or employers' associations.

Trade union member: A person in employment who self-defines that they belong to a trade union or staff association when asked in the Labour Force Survey (for the question please see table below).

Union density: The rate or proportion of employees or those in employment who are a trade union member. Expressed as a percentage.

Union presence: Whether or not a trade union or staff association is present within a workplace.

Collective agreement: Whether the pay and conditions of employees are directly affected by an agreement between their employer and a trade union.

Trade union questions in the Labour Force Survey

A question on the LFS on trade union membership has been asked annually since 1989 of all individuals in employment. Questions on trade union presence and recognition were introduced in 1993 and the question on collective agreements was introduced in 1996. The questions relating to trade union membership were reordered and reworded in 1999; these changes affect the time-series for trade union presence and collective agreements.

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 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 have 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 between their employer and a union (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.
- 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 identified as union members than those responding on their own behalf. An estimate of the extent of bias is provided below.

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. In addition, because sector is self-reported in the LFS, there may be a number of respondents wrongly classifying themselves as public sector workers. Consequently, there may be a downward bias to this measure. Also, it should be noted that the question in the Labour Force Survey specifically refers to negotiations between the employer and a trade union that affect an employee's pay and conditions.

Table A1: Structure of trade union questions in Labour Force Survey

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 your pay and conditions of employment directly affected by agreements between your employer and any trade union(s) 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?
All in employment: UNION Are you a member of a trade union or staff association?	

Source: Labour Force Survey, Office for National Statistics

Northern Ireland 1997 data issue

In Autumn 1997, incorrect routing of Northern Ireland respondents meant that only those who answered yes to TUPRES were asked UNION. Therefore, there was under-response of unknown size to UNION. Those who should have been asked UNION were instead coded as not having answered the question. BEIS analysis indicates this may mean that there is an undercount of up to 10,000 in 1997 levels or 0.1 percentage points in 1997 proportions.

Variables in the LFS

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

Gender, 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 around 50 categories. These have then been aggregated for the purposes of analysis. The categories for ethnic groups have been changed in the LFS in both 2001 and 2011 to be consistent with those used in the 2001 and 2011 Censuses respectively.

With the exception of occupation, all classifications used in this publication 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 flexible working hours only includes those who work under such arrangements, and the final category of “work mainly at home/same grounds” is taken from a separate question on homeworking. Region and whether an individual is an employee are both self-defined variables.

Revised method for estimating union presence

Prior to the 2017 Bulletin, prompted by correspondence with Rhys Davies of the Wales Institute for Social and Economic Research at Cardiff University, BEIS reconsidered the calculations used to estimate union presence in the workplace from the Labour Force Survey data. Previously, all those who answered 'no' to the 'UNION' question (about whether the respondent was a union member) were included in the population of employees used to estimate trade union presence, even if they did not provide a valid response to the 'TUPRES' question (on whether any people in the workplace were members of a trade union). This included people who said they used their home as their place of work or main base for work. This makes an underlying assumption that those who did not provide a valid response to 'TUPRES' would not have others in their workplace who were members of a trade union. After examining the data, on balance BEIS decided that it would be more appropriate to exclude those who did not provide a valid response to the TUPRES question from the population used to estimate union presence. The revised method introduced for the 2017 Bulletin excludes this group from the estimates of union presence.

Occupational classifications

In 2011, the LFS occupational classifications use the new 2010 Standard Occupational Classification (SOC2010). Between 2001 and 2010, they were defined using SOC2000, while prior to 2000 they were based on SOC90. The 2010 update has resulted in a name change to two of the broad occupation groups: 'Managers and senior officials' has been replaced by 'Managers, directors and senior officials' and 'Personal service occupations' has been replaced by 'Caring, leisure and other service occupations'. The occupation groups are assigned to respondents 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 this publication 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 onwards being significantly different from and not comparable with data from previous years.

The manager and senior official's group in SOC2000 relates to managers who primarily have responsibility for personnel, and this broad occupational group has been further tightened in SOC 2010's 'Managers, directors and senior officials' to focus on higher level, more strategic management. The self-defined manager variable is more widely defined including management responsibility for work-related activities as well as personnel. This accounts for the large difference in the union density levels for the SOC2000 and SOC2010 manager and senior official's 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.

Public and private sectors

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. The LFS defines public sector as that owned, funded or run by central or local government and the private sector is everything else. Some respondents may not know whether their industry is in the public or private sector and, for certain types of activity, there may be no clear answer and the interviewers are given some guidelines to help sort out some common confusion. From July 2009 in the regular labour market statistics published by the ONS, Royal Bank of Scotland Group Plc and Lloyds Banking Group plc (until March 2014) were classified to the public sector, previously they were in the private sector.

From June 2012, English colleges were classified to the private sector in the ONS's published statistics, as was Royal Mail plc from December 2013. However, in the microdata sets that are used for the analyses in this publication the sector that a respondent is classified remains as they answered the question and no adjustments are made to incorporate the reclassifications described above. Analysis of the fourth quarter microdata from 2006 to 2011 suggests that financial services employees in the public sector has remained consistently low across the period, at below 4% of the total number of financial services employees. However, the Royal Mail's move to the private sector has impacted on the LFS data.

Industry classifications

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).

From 2009, the sectoral breakdown of the LFS data has been collected according to the new Standard Industrial Classification (SIC) 2007. From that point onwards, all cases were coded to a new code, even when the respondent's situation had not changed, due to the introduction of SIC 2007. There was no dual coding. The transition to the new classification was accompanied by the implementation of a new automatic coding tool for LFS interviewers. Prior to 2009, industry had been coded manually, using a paper based SIC 92 volume. To enable users to compile a consistent back series ONS devised a program that maps SIC 92 codes onto SIC 2007 according to the assumed relationship between the two classifications. The analyses in this publication are based entirely on SIC 2007.

UK Standard Industrial Classification 2007 (UK SIC 2007)

ONS undertook some analysis based on comparing Q4 2008 (the last occasion when SIC92 was used) and Q1 2009 (when SIC 2007 was first used) to assess the impact of implementing SIC 2007 on historical series. This showed that some adjustments are required to overcome step changes arising from switching from SIC92 to SIC 2007. For example, manufacturing sector which is traditionally seen as having large union membership showed a contraction of 9%. No attempt has been made to separate out the various different effects on each industry and ONS suggest applying the basic approach of simply scaling the entire back series by the

appropriate factor to calculate levels. It should be noted that as trade union membership rates are calculated as a ratio of two levels the effect of scaling cancels out.

Sample size and standard errors

The cell sizes in some tables in this publication are too small to provide reliable estimates and have been marked with an asterisk. In this publication data fewer than 10,000 have not been published because standard errors are likely to be larger than the estimates themselves. Although the ONS has lifted its protocol of not releasing data under the 10,000 threshold, it is now the statistician's discretion whether to release anything under this threshold. For wage related data, the threshold used is 30,000.

As an indication of the standard errors in the trade union estimates, the standard errors around the total employment and employee union membership proportions are likely to be around 0.3 percentage points. Standard errors for union membership proportions by gender are likely to be around 0.4 percentage points. Standard errors for union membership proportions by region average around 1.0 percentage points.

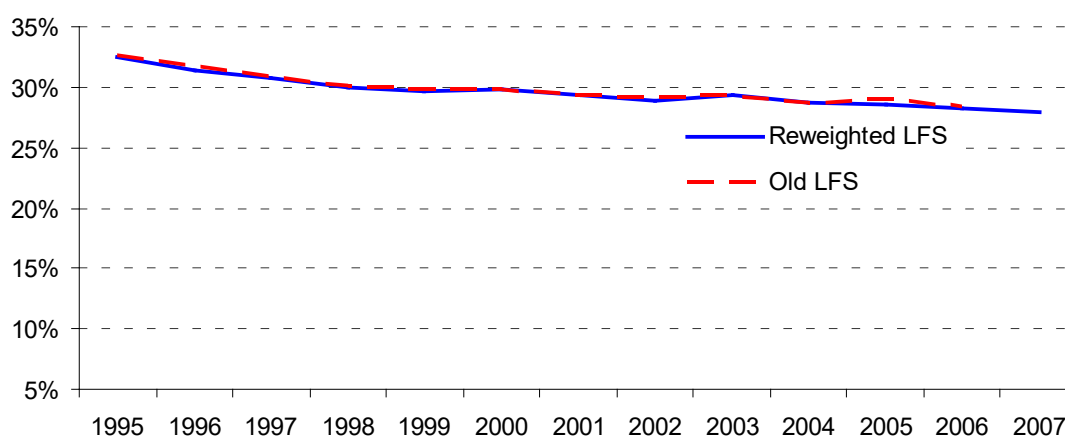
Switch from seasonal to calendar quarters

In 2006, the structure of the Labour Force Survey switched from a seasonal quarter basis to a calendar quarter basis. The last set of published LFS seasonal results covered December 2004 to February 2005. In accordance with European Union regulations, all subsequent quarters have been published on a calendar quarter basis. In 2008, the Office for National Statistics carried out an extensive reweighting programme and all quarterly Labour Force

Survey data are now published on a calendar quarter basis back to 1992. This has eliminated the structural break into the trade union membership time series associated with the change from seasonal to calendar quarters.

Figure A1 shows the trade union density of UK employees from 1995 to 2007, as shown in Table 1.2b and trade union density from the previous LFS. The chart gives evidence that the reweighting of historic LFS datasets has not materially changed the trade union densities from those that were previously published.

Figure A1: Trade union density of UK employees, 1995-2007



Per cent

Source: Labour Force Survey, Office for National Statistics.

Estimating union membership levels

Each household agreeing to take part in the LFS is interviewed on five consecutive quarters (or waves). However, there are cases on subsequent waves when households are not contactable or do not agree to continue taking part so further responses cannot be recorded. When this happens, current data may be imputed by carrying forward answers given by them in the previous interview. However, for questions that do not appear every quarter, as on trade union membership, there is no previous response to carry forward, and a 'does not apply' (DNA) response is therefore recorded.

There are two possible methods of estimating union membership levels. One method relies on calculating an adjusted weight, whereby cases with missing data are assumed to have the same distribution as valid responses. Consequently, missing data is included in the estimates by allocation of their weight along the same distribution as valid respondents. Unfortunately, due to the restructuring of the LFS to calendar quarters (described earlier) this produced too much missing data in the seasonal quarter series to produce reliable estimates. Information was lost for September in converting seasonal to calendar quarters and no information was available to be brought forward from December. Therefore, it was not possible to display a consistent time series including the data originally collected on a seasonal quarter basis using the adjusted weight method.

In order to mitigate these issues a second method was developed to closely approximate the results from an adjusted weights approach (see Table A2) but also allow a consistent time series with the calendar quarter information to be estimated. It consists of union density multiplied by the population (as estimated by the LFS). The method is improved by making the same calculation but by detailed age, gender and regional disaggregations and then aggregating them back up to national and regional levels. Age, gender and region were specifically chosen as they are the basis on which the LFS is weighted (see the Labour Survey User Guide Vol 1.). This approach is further supported by the fact that union density figures are produced on a valid response basis and do not consider any missing data. Furthermore, union densities show a great deal of robustness under change. These estimates of union membership level are now provided as the headline figures in this publication (see Tables 1.2a, 1.3a, 4.2).

To produce trade union membership broken down by public/ private sector, a further step was applied. It consists of union density split by public and private sector multiplied by the union membership population (estimated as above). The calculations involved are similar-to that of the second method described above, apart from the fact that a further breakdown by sector was used. A comparable method was used to calculate membership levels by industry with a breakdown by industry used rather than a breakdown by public/ private sector. The table below (produced in 2011) gives a comparison of the estimates from the two methods between 2006 and 2010 by gender and employment status.

Table A2: Estimated trade union membership levels, United Kingdom, 2006 to 2010

Thousands, not seasonally adjusted

	Employees			In employment		
	Density Population	× Adjusted Weights	Difference	Density Population	× Adjusted Weights	Difference
All employees						
2006	7,021	6,992	29	7,359	7,315	44
2007	7,005	6,978	27	7,334	7,292	42
2008	6,878	6,857	21	7,219	7,188	31
2009	6,715	6,696	19	7,054	7,017	37
2010	6,536	6,530	6	6,854	6,818	36
Males						
2006	3,430	3,400	30	3,649	3,611	38
2007	3,379	3,355	24	3,606	3,574	32
2008	3,278	3,254	24	3,522	3,487	35
2009	3,121	3,099	22	3,344	3,311	33
2010	2,976	2,967	9	3,188	3,162	26
Females						
2006	3,591	3,591	-	3,710	3,702	8
2007	3,625	3,621	4	3,728	3,716	12
2008	3,599	3,601	-2	3,697	3,697	-
2009	3,593	3,596	-3	3,709	3,704	5
2010	3,560	3,562	-2	3,666	3,654	12

Table source: Labour Force Survey, Office for National Statistics

To provide the levels estimates in these statistics, BEIS uses the GOVTOR LFS variable for regions. If this variable isn't available to analysts trying to replicate the results, then GOVTOF, or URESMC would provide a reasonable alternative. However, it would produce marginally different results.

The levels figures presented in the bulletin are rounded to the nearest thousand. The year-on-year changes reported are calculated on the unrounded data (so may differ slightly from the difference between two years calculated from the published tables).

Differences between the LFS and Trade union estimates from administrative data

Another official source of trade union membership data is provided by the Certification Officer and can be seen in Table 1.1. Data collected annually from trade unions by the Certification Officer (CO) provide a long and consistent back series of the number of trade unions and the number of union members. 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 union membership. For example, the CO membership count includes all members of unions having their head office in Great Britain (unions that are listed or scheduled by the CO), 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 LFS asks questions on the union status of all those in employment, thus excluding the unemployed and retired. The LFS also only covers those who are resident in the UK (or in Great Britain for the years 1989 to 1994).

The LFS union questions have United Kingdom coverage from 1995 onwards. The LFS estimates the number of individuals who are union members, rather than the individual memberships. Hence 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,

Trade Union Membership Statistics 2018

unlike the CO data, could count individuals that were members of a staff association but not members of a trade union.

LFS quality measures

Guidance and methodology on the LFS can be found on the ONS website at:

www.ons.gov.uk/employmentandlabourmarket/peopleinwork/employmentandemployeetypes/methodologies/labourforcesurveyuserguidance

And, information on LFS quality measures can be found at:

www.ons.gov.uk/ons/guide-method/method-quality/specific/labour-market/labour-force-survey-quality-measures/index.html

LFS reweighting

In 2014, the ONS published revised LFS data for 2001-2014 to take account of the latest available official population estimates, which reflected the results of the 2011 Census. The microdata based on 2014 weights have been used to update the data from 2001 to 2011 in this publication. The most recent ONS re-weighting of LFS data occurred this year when datasets from 2011 onwards were provided with updated weights (2018 weights). The 2018 dataset has also been provided with 2018 weights. We use the latest weights available for each year's dataset for the statistics produced in this publication.

Annual National Statistic reports

[Trade Union Membership 2017](#), Pierre Baustert

[Trade Union Membership 2016](#), Kirsty Chapman

[Trade Union Membership 2015](#), Cara Maguire

[Trade Union Membership 2014](#), Connor Russell

[Trade Union Membership 2013](#), Andrew Rowlinson

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Trade union membership articles in Labour Market Trends

1. Analysis in brief: Trade union membership: estimates from the autumn 2003 Labour Force Survey, by Stephen Hicks and Tom Palmer. March 2004.

2. Labour Market Spotlight: Trade union membership. July 2003.

3. Article: Trade union membership: an analysis of data from the autumn 2001 LFS, by Keith Brook. July 2002.

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4. Article: Trade union membership 1999-2000: an analysis of data from the Certification Officer and the Labour Force Survey, by Abby Sneade. September 2001.
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Trade union membership: additional analysis

7. [Use and users of BIS statistics on trade union membership](#), April 2013.
8. [Trade union membership statistics: Measuring bias in the Labour Force Survey](#), March 2013
9. [Sampling variance in the trade union membership statistics](#), March 2013
10. [Trade union membership statistics: 2012 to 2013 user survey report](#), March 2013



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