

Trade union membership: estimates from the autumn 2003 Labour Force Survey

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Key points

- In autumn 2003, 7.42 million people in employment in the UK were trade union members, a small increase of around 30,000 since 2002.
- The proportion of employees who were union members in the UK increased marginally from 29.0 per cent in 2002 to 29.1 per cent in 2003.
- The number of employees covered by a collective agreement was 8.75 million in autumn 2003, 35.8 per cent of all employees.

Main findings on trade union membership using the most recent Labour Force Survey data.

Introduction

THIS ARTICLE contains estimates of the number and proportion of people in employment who were trade union members in the UK, and on employees whose pay and conditions are affected by collective agreements. It also provides basic information on the characteristics of trade union members, the proportion of employees that were union members by age and sex, whether they worked full-time or part-time and by government office region and country. The Labour Force Survey (LFS) currently collects annual data on trade unions for all respondents who

are in employment. This article includes the latest estimates for autumn 2003.

Trade union estimates in this article are published as interim revised LFS estimates consistent with the latest population estimates published by ONS (see http://www.statistics.gov.uk/about/methodology_by_theme/downloads/interim_reweighting_methodology_article.pdf for methodology). The number of union members will therefore differ slightly from those previously published (see p338, *Labour Market*

Table 1 Trade union membership and coverage of collective agreements; United Kingdom; autumn quarters 2001 to 2003, not seasonally adjusted

	Union membership		Coverage of collective agreements		
	Number of members ^a (000s)	Union density (%)		Number (000s) of employees whose pay is affected by collective agreements ^b	Percentage of employees whose pay is affected by collective agreement
		All in employment	Employees		
2001	7,370	26.7	29.0	8,670	35.6
2002	7,390	26.6	29.0	8,750	35.6
2003	7,420	26.5	29.1	8,750	35.8

Source: Labour Force Survey

a Includes all those in employment, excluding members of the armed forces, unpaid family workers, and those on college-based schemes. Those who did not report their union status or were not contactable in the autumn quarter have been allocated on a pro-rata basis.

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

Note: numbers rounded to the nearest 10,000.

Trends, July 2003). Given the interim nature of these results all levels have been rounded to the nearest 10,000.

ONS is currently undertaking a program of work so that the weights in the LFS micro-datasets produce population estimates consistent with the 2001 Census. Revised LFS micro-datasets are planned for release in March 2004, and the Department of Trade and Industry will produce revised trade union estimates based on these. This will likely see small revisions to estimated levels of trade

union members and collective agreement coverage. The effect on union density will be minimal.

Trade union membership and coverage of collective agreements

Table 1 shows the number of trade union members for those in employment in the UK for 2001 to 2003. In autumn 2003 trade union

membership in the UK among those in employment was 7.42 million, which is a small rise of around 30,000 since autumn 2002 and is not statistically significant. Despite this marginal increase, the proportion of all people in employment that were union members (generally known as union density) declined slightly by 0.1 of a percentage point to 26.5 per cent in autumn 2003. The proportion of employees that were union members, however, increased marginally from 29.0 per cent in autumn 2002 to 29.1 per cent in autumn 2003.

Table 2 Union density by sex, age and type of employment;^a United Kingdom; autumn 2003

	Full time	Part time	Per cent All
All			
16 and over	32	21	29
16 to 24 years	14	5	11
25 to 34 years	26	22	25
35 to 49 years	38	28	35
50 years and over	40	23	35
Men			
16 and over	31	12	29
16 to 24 years	13	5	11
25 to 34 years	24	12	23
35 to 49 years	36	22	35
50 years and over	39	17	36
Women			
16 and over	34	23	29
16 to 24 years	15	4	10
25 to 34 years	30	23	28
35 to 49 years	41	28	35
50 years and over	42	25	33

Source: Labour Force Survey

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

Table 3 Union density by government office region or country and type of employment; United Kingdom; autumn 2003

	Full time	Part time	Per cent All
United Kingdom	32	21	29
Great Britain	32	21	29
England	30	20	28
North East	43	24	38
North West	38	23	34
Yorkshire and the Humber	36	24	32
East Midlands	31	22	29
West Midlands	32	19	29
East	26	16	23
London	27	21	26
South East	23	16	21
South West	29	20	26
Wales	43	25	38
Scotland	38	27	35
Northern Ireland	43	24	39

Source: Labour Force Survey

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

Table 1 also shows that in autumn 2003 there were 8.75 million employees whose pay and conditions of work were covered by a collective agreement. The proportion of employees covered by collective agreements rose slightly from 35.6 per cent in autumn 2002 to 35.8 per cent in autumn 2003.

Characteristics of union members

Table 2 shows that union density in autumn 2003 was 29 per cent for both men and women. It also shows that union density is higher among older employees. Just over a third (35 per cent) of employees aged 50 and over were union members compared with only 11 per cent of employees aged 16-24 and 25 per cent of employees aged 25 to 34.

Full-time employees are more likely to be union members than part-time employees. In 2003, 32 per cent of full-time employees were union members compared with 21 per cent of part-time employees. Union density for full-time men in 2003 was 31 per cent (3 percentage points lower than for full-time women whose union density was 34 per cent). Part-time women were

almost twice as likely to be union members as part-time men (23 per cent compared with 12 per cent for male part-time employees).

Table 3 shows union density by government office region and country for employees in both full-time and part-time employment. Within England, union density by government office region ranged between 21 per cent in the South East and 38 per cent in the North East. Wales (38 per cent), Scotland (35 per cent) and Northern Ireland (39 per cent) all had higher levels of union density than England, which averaged 28 per cent.

Data from the Certification Officer

A second source of available trade union data is the summary within the Annual Report of the Certification Officer (CO) for Trade Unions and Employers' Associations, collated using administrative records. Each year unions are required to submit annual returns to the CO that provide details of the number of members within each union irrespective of individuals' employment status. These data are therefore not directly comparable to the LFS figures. (For a fuller discussion of

the differences, see *technical note*, pp353-4, *Labour Market Trends*, July 2002.) CO estimates of trade union membership are available from the Employment Market Analysis and Research (EMAR) trade union statistics home page <http://www.dti.gov.uk/er/emar/trade.htm>.

Further information

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