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Trade union membership 2016

The overall membership of trade unions fell last year, and, allied with a growth in employment, union density fell again, the latest official figures show.

The key findings in the annual survey, *Trade union membership 2016*, published by the Department for Business, Energy & Industrial Strategy were as follows.

Membership Around 6.2 million employees in the UK were trade union members in 2016. That was a 275,000 or 4.2% decrease on the year before.

Union density The number of UK employees increased between 2015 and 2016. As a result, the proportion of employees who were trade union members – union density – fell slightly to 23.5% in 2016, from 24.7% the previous year. This is the lowest rate of trade union membership recorded since 1995.

Public and private sector Union membership levels in both sectors fell. In the private sector, there was a 66,000 reduction on 2015 to around 2.6 million members. However union density fell slightly from 13.9% to 13.4%, reflecting the fact that employment growth outpaced the growth in union membership.

In the public sector, union membership levels were down by 209,000 to 3.6 million in 2016. Union density in the sector fell from 54.9% to 52.7% in 2016.

Gender The number of male union members decreased by 81,000 to 2.82 million, while for women the decrease was 194,000 to 3.34 million.

Female employees are more likely to be a trade union member. The proportion of female employees who were in a trade union was around 25.9% in 2016, compared with 21.1% for male employees.

Collective bargaining Employees who worked in larger workplaces (with 50 or more staff) were more likely to be in a trade union and were more likely to have a trade union present in the workplace. Employees in larger workplaces were also more likely to have their pay affected by a collective agreement.

The proportion of employees who belonged to a trade union in larger workplaces was 31.5% in 2016, compared with 14.6% in the workplaces with less than 50 employees. About 56.7% of employees in larger workplaces reported that a trade union was present, compared with 23.8% in smaller workplaces.

The proportion of employees who had their pay affected by a collective agreement was around 37.1% in larger workplaces, compared with 14.4% in workplaces with less than 50 employees.

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Employees are more likely to have their pay affected by collective agreements if they work in “public administration and defence” (58.7%) compared with the other sectors, in Northern Ireland (41.7%) compared to the other nations, and in the North West (31.0%) compared to the other regions.

In the public sector, the proportion of employees who had their pay affected by a collective agreement was marginally down on 2015 at 59.0%. In the private sector, the proportion fell to 14.9% in 2016.

Wage premium The trade union wage gap, defined as the percentage difference in average gross hourly earnings of union members compared with non-members, was 14.5% in 2016 in the public sector, down from 16.1% in 2015. The private sector trade union wage gap was 7.6% in 2016, down only slightly from 7.7% in 2015.

For the public sector this amounted to a 1.6 percentage points fall when compared with 2015.

For all employees, the premium narrowed by 0.4 percentage points from 14.1% to 13.7%.

www.gov.uk/government/statistics/trade-union-statistics-2016

Growth in number and usage of food banks

There are at least 2,000 food banks operating in the UK, giving out emergency food parcels on a weekly basis to people in hardship, according to research that highlights the rapid growth of charity food provision in austerity Britain.

The research complements established information on UK food bank use compiled by the Trussell Trust, Britain's biggest food bank network, which collects extensive data from its members. It recently reported that it gave out a record 1.2 million food parcels to families and individuals in need in 2016-17, the ninth successive year in which demand had risen.

Emerging results from the mapping project undertaken by the Independent Food Aid Network (IFAN), confirm that the Trussell figures represent only a partial picture of the scale of organised food bank provision, and suggest that the level of food bank use is far greater than headline figures indicate.

IFAN's findings suggest that there are at least 651 grassroots food banks operating independently of the Trussell network, ranging from tiny voluntary

groups that give out a few food parcels each week, to larger charity operations that hand out thousands of parcels to hundreds of clients each year.

The chair of IFAN, Professor Jon May of Queen Mary University of London, said the figures emphasised the rapid rise in the number of food banks over the past five years, and the changing geography of poverty.

“There are now food banks in almost every community, from the East End of London to the Cotswolds. The spread of food banks maps growing problems of poverty across the UK, but also the growing drive among many thousands of people across the country to try and do something about those problems,” he said.

Dominic Raab, the former justice minister and the Conservative candidate for the Esher and Walton constituency has been accused of making “stupid and deeply offensive” comments after saying people who use food banks typically do so not because of poverty, but because they have an occasional “cashflow problem”.

Raab said the claim came from the Trussell Trust, Britain's largest provider of food banks. However, the trust said that while delays to benefit payments were one of the main reasons people turned to food banks, such crises tended to be exacerbated by poverty and low pay, which were also direct causes for many to seek help.

www.theguardian.com/society/2017/may/29/report-reveals-scale-of-food-bank-use-in-the-uk-ifan
www.theguardian.com/politics/2017/may/29/tory-mp-dominic-raab-jeered-over-food-bank-comments

UK economic growth revised down

The estimate of growth in the UK economy has been revised downwards in official figures.

UK gross domestic product (GDP) is now estimated to have increased by 0.2% during the first quarter of the year compared with the final quarter of 2016, not the 0.3% of first estimates.

The slowdown was mainly due to broad-based downward revisions within the services sector.

In first quarter of 2017, all four sectors show positive growth; agriculture increased by 0.3%, total production increased by 0.1% and construction and total services both increased by 0.2%.

Within the production sub-industries, output from mining and quarrying (including oil and gas extraction) increased by 1.8%; manufacturing (the largest component of production) increased by 0.3%; and electricity, gas, steam and air conditioning supply industries decreased by 4.3%. Water supply and sewerage increased by 0.7%.

GDP in the first quarter of 2017 was 2.0% higher than the same quarter 2016, not the 2.1% of the preliminary estimate.

www.ons.gov.uk/economy/grossdomesticproductgdp/bulletins/secondestimateof-gdp/quarter1jantomar2017

Equal pay victory at Glasgow council

Public services union UNISON has won an equal pay victory which will affect thousands of low-paid workers in Glasgow.

Women in Glasgow had been excluded from sizeable bonuses for many years. UNISON argued that while the claimants had been unfairly discriminated against before the new system was introduced, the council's decision to continue the unequal pay was also discriminatory as it excluded women claimants from pay protection.

The court's judgment will be welcome news to the 6,000 claimants of which UNISON – Scotland's largest public service union – represents 1,400 claimants. Many have equal pay claims dating back to 2006. The Court of Session has also been asked to consider whether the current council pay system is a valid pay scheme.

Mike Kirby, UNISON's Scottish secretary, said: "The pay protection win is great news. The way Glasgow rates and pays workers has been the source of conflict and division for 10 years. These women have already waited long enough to receive the pay they have worked hard for and deserve. It's time for Glasgow City Council to do the right thing and pay up on equal pay."

UNISON is also awaiting the Court of Session's judgment in a second appeal.

The separate appeal concerns UNISON's challenge to the Glasgow City Council's Workforce, Pay and Benefits Review (WPBR). In 2006, UNISON was not satisfied with the council's way of measuring the value of jobs. In particular, it objected to the use of different scales, one for core pay and others for non-core pay. The union believed that the system

made it impossible for employees to know if they were being paid equal pay for equal work, as the law requires.

<http://www.unison-scotland.org/2017/05/30/unison-tells-glasgow-city-council-time-pay-following-equal-pay-victory/>

Increase in days lost to strikes in 2016

The number of working days lost to industrial action in 2016 was the eighth lowest annual total since records began in 1891, the Office for National Statistics (ONS) said.

In 2016, 322,000 working days were lost in the UK from 101 stoppages of work arising from strike action, according to the review of 2016 labour disputes published by the ONS.

The figure for days lost was almost double that of 2015 when 169,600 days lost from 106 stoppages. The increase was partly attributable to the junior doctors' dispute which accounted for 129,000 working days lost – around 40% on the 2016 total working days lost.

There were 154,000 workers involved in industrial disputes during 2016.

The main cause of industrial action in 2016, in terms of working days lost, was duration and pattern of hours worked, which accounted for 134,800 working days lost or 41.6% of the total. And most of those days lost were down to the junior doctors' dispute in the NHS in England.

However, in terms of the number of workers involved, the main cause of industrial action in 2016 was redundancies, which accounted for 86,100 workers (55.9% of all workers involved in industrial action in 2016).

Redundancies also took second spot in the number of working days lost with 70,200 days lost (21.8%).

Pay accounted for 69,600 days lost in 2016 or around one in five days lost (21.6%). Disputes over pay also include stoppages over feared or alleged reductions in earnings, as well as disputes over the size of pay increases. Disputes over pension provisions are also classified as disputes over pay.

TUC general secretary Frances O'Grady said: "Going on strike is always a last resort when bosses refuse to negotiate or compromise. Strikes are far less common these days and tend to be short.

“With the average annual wage still worth a thousand pounds less than a decade ago, it is not surprising that many strikes are about fair pay.

“To keep strikes at historic lows, the next government needs to get wages rising. And we need new laws to improve workplace rights and give people more voice at work.”

Other categories for days lost, such as hours, working conditions and staffing, lagged well behind the three main reasons for strikes.

A public sector/private sector breakdown showed that in 2016 the number of working days lost in the public sector increased to 243,000 from 90,000 in 2015. In terms of days lost, the public sector accounted for three-quarters (75.5%).

The number of days lost in the private sector was 79,000 – the same figure as in 2015 – and accounted for 24.5% of days lost.

However, the number of stoppages was down to 41 from 53 in the public sector, while in the private sector the number of stoppages increased to 60 from 53.

On an industry basis, human health and social work accounted for 131,500 days lost – again the junior’ doctors’ dispute dominates – with 21,900 workers involved over four stoppages. The other industry that saw over 100,000 days lost was education where 105,400 days were lost involving 102,800 workers in 21 disputes.

The figures show that most strikes were of a short duration. Around one-third of the number of stoppages (34 out of 101) lasted for only one day. These accounted for 66.1% of workers involved and 81,000 working days lost (25% of all working days lost).

There were 13 stoppages that lasted for more than 10 days, accounting for 44,400 working days lost (13.8% of all working days lost). However, these stoppages involved only 3,500 workers (3.5% of all workers involved in 2016).

Ten years of industrial action

Year	Working days lost (000)	Workers involved (000)	Number of stoppages
2007	1,041	745	142
2008	759	511	144
2009	455	209	98
2010	365	133	92
2011	1,390	1530	149
2012	249	237	131
2013	444	395	114
2014	788	733	155
2015	170	81	106
2016	322	154	101

● Information regarding labour disputes within the UK is collected by ONS from a variety of sources. Certain major industries and public bodies provide regular centralised returns, but more often the information is collected directly from the employer or trade union involved after ONS have identified disputes from press reports.

The statistics exclude disputes that do not result in a stoppage of work, for example work-to-rules and go-slows; this is because their effects are not quantifiable to any degree of certainty. Stoppages involving fewer than 10 workers or lasting less than one day are also excluded unless the total number of working days lost in the dispute is 100 or more.

Stoppages over issues not directly linked to terms and conditions between workers and employers are also omitted.

However, “lock-outs”, where an employer prevents their employees from working by refusing entry to the place of work, and “unlawful” or wildcat strikes are included. Nevertheless, no distinction is made between a “strike” and a “lock-out” or between “lawful” and “unlawful” stoppages.

www.ons.gov.uk/employmentandlabourmarket/peopleinwork/workplacedisputesandworkingconditions/articles/labourdisputes/2016

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