

## FEATURE

*Dominic Hale*  
Office for National Statistics

# Labour disputes in 2008

## SUMMARY

Labour disputes led to 758,800 working days being lost in the UK in 2008. In total, there were 144 stoppages of work, 94 per cent of which were in the public sector.

This article analyses the three main measures of labour disputes - working days lost, stoppages and workers involved - by industry, region, cause, size and duration. The statistics are put into context by considering estimates of working days lost per 1,000 employees and working time lost through strikes as a proportion of time actually worked.

Data are taken from a number of sources including regular centralised returns from some industries and public bodies, as well as directly from the employer or trade union involved after ONS has been notified of a dispute from press reports.

## Key points

In the calendar year 2008:

- there were 758,900 working days lost through labour disputes
- there were 144 stoppages of work because of labour disputes. This compares with 142 stoppages in 2007 and 158 stoppages in 2006
- the majority of working days lost (94 per cent) were in the public sector, as were the majority of all stoppages (52 per cent).
- 99 per cent of working days lost were due to pay disputes.

## Introduction

There were 758,900 working days lost in the UK in 2008 from 144 stoppages of work arising from labour disputes. The majority of these (94 per cent) being lost in the public sector. This article analyses the disputes by industry, region, cause, size and duration, and also compares the 2008 figures with previous years.

This article presents final figures on labour disputes for 2008 and analyses the figures in more depth than the provisional estimates published as part of monthly first release of Labour Market Statistics.

## Annual changes

A comparison of statistics on labour disputes in 2007 and 2008 is shown in **Table 1**. There are three core components to the figures: the number of working days

lost through stoppages, the number of workers involved in those stoppages and the number of stoppages.

The 2008 total of 758,900 working days lost is lower than the 2007 total (1,041,100). But the total is higher than the average number of working days lost per year in the 1990s (660,000). However, it is considerably lower than the average for both the 1980s (7.2 million) and the 1970s (12.9 million).

The total of 144 stoppages in 2008 is marginally higher than the 2007 total of 142. There were two stoppages beginning in 2007 which continued into 2008. As well as this, there was also one stoppage that started in 2006 and continued into 2008. The number of stoppages has fallen sharply since the 1980s when the average annual number was 1,129. The average number in the 1990s was 273 per year.

There were 511,200 workers involved in labour disputes during 2008; this compares with 744,800 in 2007. The number of workers involved is higher than the average number involved in the 1990s (201,600) but below the average in the 1980s (1,040,300).

## Review of 1989 – 2008

**Table 2** presents labour dispute figures for the period 1989 to 2008 and **Figure 1** and **Figure 2** illustrate working days lost and the number of stoppages. The high number of days lost in 1996 was due to one very large stoppage in the transport, storage and communication group. This shows the impact that large disputes can

**Table 1**  
**Number of stoppages, workers involved and working days lost**

United Kingdom		
Working days lost through stoppages	2007	2008
In progress in year <sup>1</sup>	1,041,100	758,900
Beginning in year	1,034,400	757,500
<b>Workers involved in stoppages</b>		
<b>In progress in year<sup>2</sup></b>	<b>744,800</b>	<b>511,200</b>
Of which: directly involved	742,200	509,500
indirectly involved	2,600	1,700
<b>Beginning in year</b>	<b>740,400</b>	<b>509,100</b>
Of which: directly involved	739,600	507,400
indirectly involved	800	1,700
<b>Stoppages</b>		
In progress in year	142	144
Beginning in year	136	141

**Notes:**

Source: ONS Labour Market Statistics

- 1 Stoppages that began in 2007 and continued into 2008 accounted for 1,200 days lost in 2008.
- 2 Workers in progress figures also include workers who did not strike initially, but who joined at a later date.

jobs has not changed dramatically over the last 20 years, the rates for the UK as a whole show the same pattern of general decline. Occasional peaks can be seen on the working days lost series due to the reasons mentioned earlier. The 758,900 working days lost in 2008 is equivalent to 28 working days lost per 1,000 employees.

An alternative way of putting strike statistics into a wider context is to consider working time lost through strikes as a proportion of time actually worked. In 2008 an estimated 42,100 million hours were worked in the UK. Comparing this to 5.9 million hours lost through strikes shows that approximately one in every 7,100 potential working days were lost through strikes in 2008. The equivalent figure for 2007 was one in every 5,200.

**Industrial Analyses**

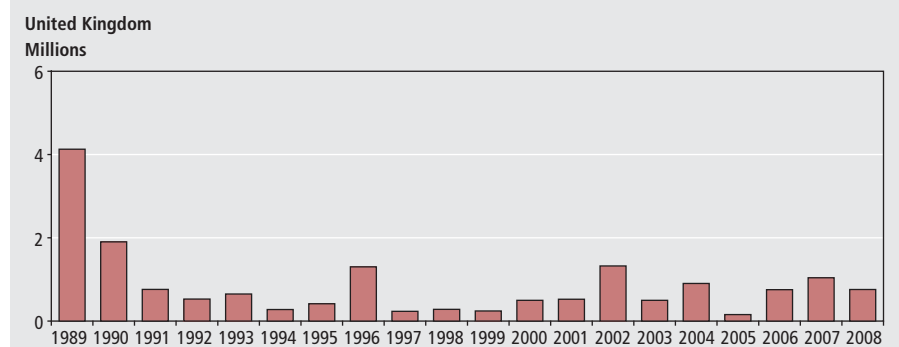
Historically, certain industries have been more prone to strike than others and breaking the strike statistics down into separate industries can reveal some interesting patterns and shift over time. However, it should be noted that comparisons between industries can also be affected by the methodology that is used for compiling the figures. For example, because small stoppages are excluded from the figures, it is more likely that industry groups with large firms will have disputes included in the statistics.

**Table 3** shows labour dispute statistics for 2008 broken down into 27 industrial groups (classified according to the Standard Industrial Classification 2003). **Table 4** shows working days lost per 1,000 employees in 2007 and 2008 for the same industries.

Eighty one per cent of the working days lost in 2008 were a result of 16 stoppages in public administration and 14 per cent of the days lost were from 40 stoppages in education. There were also 28 stoppages in transport, which resulted in 24,800 working days being lost. The decline in the UK manufacturing industry is again evident with a total of only 6,900 days lost compared to 15,600 in 2007. This is a record low for manufacturing disputes.

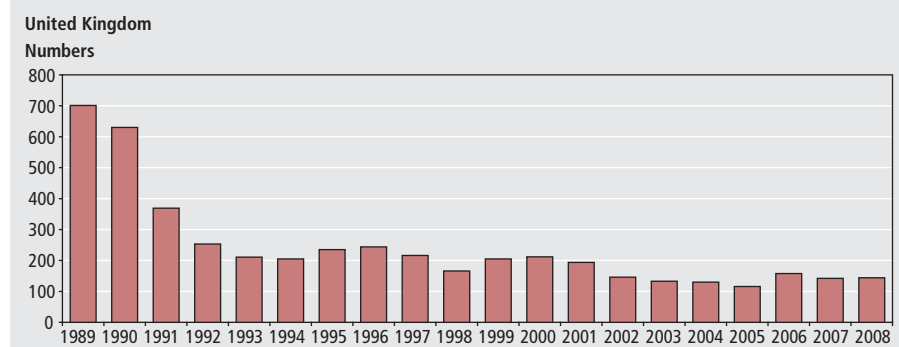
Table 4 presents the strike rates for 2007 and 2008. The rate for the service sector has significantly decreased in 2008. The main reason for this can be found in the transport sector which has decreased significantly from 422 in 2007 to 16 in 2008. The strike rate for manufacturing continues to fall having decreased again

**Figure 1**  
**Working days lost**



Source: ONS Labour Market Statistics

**Figure 2**  
**Stoppages in progress**



Source: ONS Labour Market Statistics

have on the statistics. This was also evident in 2002 when two disputes in public administration accounted for 60 per cent of the total days lost over the year.

Both Figures 1 and 2 show a substantial decline in strike activity in the 1990s. Figure 2 in particular shows that the number of strikes has been on a downward trend over the last 20 years.

The second column of Table 2 shows working days lost per 1,000 employees for each year from 1989 to 2008. This is the standard method that has been used to convert working days lost into a strike rate, taking account the size of the labour force. This also enables comparisons to be made across industries and regions that differ in size. Since the number of employee

**Table 2**  
**Number of stoppages and working days lost**

United Kingdom

Year	Working days lost (000s)	Working days lost per 1,000 employees <sup>1</sup>	Workers involved (000s)	Stoppages <sup>2</sup>	Stoppages involving the loss of 100,000 working days or more
1989	4,128	172	727	701	6
1990	1,903	78	298	630	3
1991	761	32	176	369	1
1992	528	23	148	253	-
1993	649	28	385	211	2
1994	278	12	107	205	-
1995	415	18	174	235	-
1996	1,303	55	364	244	2
1997	235	10	130	216	-
1998	282	11	93	166	-
1999	242	10	141	205	-
2000	499	20	183	212	1
2001	525	20	180	194	1
2002	1,323	51	943	146	2
2003	499	19	151	133	-
2004	905	34	293	130	3
2005	157	6	93	116	-
2006	755	28	713	158	1
2007	1,041	38	745	142	4
2008	759	28	511	144	2

**Notes:**

- 1 Based on the (September 2008) estimates of employee jobs  
2 Stoppages in progress during year

Source: ONS Labour Market Statistics

decreased from five in 2007 to two in 2008. In this sector, there was a significant fall in the rates for manufacturing of transport equipment, and food products products. Conversely, there was a significant rise in the coke, refined petroleum products industry.

**Table 5** shows strike rates over time for the mining, energy and water supply industries, manufacturing and services sectors. In recent years, the services sector strike rate has tended to be higher than the rate in manufacturing. The mining, energy and water rate has tended to be erratic. It is worth noting however, that the employment in both mining and manufacturing has dropped dramatically over the last decade. **Figure 3** shows the strike rates for the manufacturing and services sectors separately for the period between 1999 and 2008. This chart depicts that the service has a larger strike rate per 1,000 employees when compared to the manufacturing industry. In all but one of the last ten years the strike rate in the service sector has been higher than that of the manufacturing sector. Although this is the case, the figures are generally high due to large strikes in the public administration and transport sectors.

## Regional Analyses

**Table 6** shows regional strike rates at the Government Office Region level between 2004 and 2008, with a further breakdown of the figures for 2008 by industry. The rates for 2008 are also illustrated in **Map 1**. When interpreting these figures, it is important to bear in mind that the industrial composition of employment in a region is a major influencing factor on the scale of labour disputes it experiences. Having noted this point, the region with the highest number of working days lost per 1,000 employee jobs in 2008 was the Scotland with 60. Significantly though, nine of the 12 regions saw a decrease in their strike rates compared to 2007. Northern Ireland showed the sharpest fall from 45 in 2007 to 4 in 2008. The South West, Eastern England, London and South East also showed significant decreases in 2008.

## Causes of disputes

**Table 7** shows stoppages in 2008 by principle cause and industry group and **Table 8** provides a time series of working days lost by cause. **Figure 4** illustrates the number of working days lost in 2008 by principle cause of dispute. In 2008,

99 per cent of working days lost were due to disputes over pay, this accounted for 67 per cent of all stoppages. The remaining numbers were split between hours worked, discipline, redundancy and trade union, with hours worked having the highest percentage. It should be noted that disputes over pay also include stoppages over feared or alleged reductions in earnings as well as disputes over pay increases.

**Figure 5** shows the distribution of working days lost by cause in each year from 1999 to 2008 for four causes; pay, redundancy, staffing & work allocation and other. This shows the percentage of days lost due to disputes over pay increased further in 2008. The figures are often dominated in most years by one or two very large strikes which will, in turn, dominate all of the detailed analyses and can make comparisons over time difficult.

## Disputes by duration

The statistics cover the number of days that strike action took place, not the number of days the parties involved in the dispute were actually in disagreement.

**Table 9** shows the duration of the stoppages in progress in 2008 and

**Table 3**  
**Number of stoppages and working days lost: by industry, 2008**

United Kingdom

Industry group (SIC 2003)	SIC class	Working days lost (000s) <sup>1</sup>	Workers involved (000s) <sup>1</sup>	Stoppages <sup>2</sup>
<b>All industries and services<sup>3</sup></b>		<b>758.9</b>	<b>511.2</b>	<b>144</b>
Mining, energy and water	10-14, 40, 41	0.7	0.8	1
Manufacturing	15-37	6.9	4.8	21
Services	50-99	748.5	502.6	116
Agriculture, hunting, forestry and fishing	01, 02, 05	0.1	0.1	2
Mining and quarrying	10,14	-	-	-
<b>Manufacturing of:</b>				
Food products, beverages and tobacco	15, 16	0.2	0.3	1
Textiles and textile products	17, 18	0.1	0.1	1
Leather and leather products	19	-	-	-
Wood and wood products	20	0.1	-	1
Pulp, paper and paper products; printing and publishing	21, 22	0.7	0.2	3
Coke, refined petroleum products and nuclear fuels	23	2.1	1.2	1
Chemicals, chemical products and man-made fibres	24	-	-	-
Rubber and plastic products	25	-	-	-
Other non-metallic mineral products	26	-	-	-
Basic metals and fabricated metal products	27, 28	1.3	0.7	6
Machinery and equipment not elsewhere specified	29	-	-	-
Electrical and optical equipment	30-33	0.6	0.4	3
Transport equipment	34, 35	1.5	1.7	3
Manufacturing not elsewhere specified	36, 37	0.3	0.2	2
Electricity, gas and water supply	40, 41	0.7	0.8	1
Construction	45	2.7	2.7	4
Wholesale and retail trade; repair of motor vehicles, motorcycles and personal and household goods	50-52	0.7	0.4	3
Hotels, restaurants, canteens & catering	55	-	-	-
Transport, storage and communication	60-64	24.8	19	28
Financial intermediation	65-67	-	-	-
Real estate, renting and business activities	70-74	0.7	0.5	7
Public administration and defence; compulsory social security	75	614.3	370.3	16
Education	80	103.4	110.3	40
Health and social work	85	1.7	0.5	4
Other community, social and personal service activities, private households with employed persons, extra-territorial organisations and bodies	90-93, 95, 99	2.9	1.6	18

**Notes:**

Source: ONS Labour Market Statistics

- 1 The figures for working days lost and workers have been rounded and consequently the sums of constituent items may not agree precisely with the totals.
  - 2 Some stoppages involved workers in more than one of the above industry groups, but have each been counted as only one stoppage in the totals for all industries and services.
  - 3 Stoppages in progress during year.
- Nil or negligible.

**Table 4**  
**Working days lost per 1,000 employees: by industry 2007 and 2008<sup>1</sup>**

## United Kingdom

Industry group (SIC 2003)	SIC Class	2007	2008
<b>All industries and services</b>		<b>38</b>	<b>28</b>
Mining, energy and water	10-14, 40, 41	-	4
Manufacturing	15-37	5	2
Services	50-99	46	33
Agriculture, hunting, forestry and fishing	01, 02, 05	-	-
Mining and quarrying	10,14	-	-
<b>Manufacturing of:</b>			
Food products, beverages and tobacco	15, 16	8	1
Textiles and textile products	17, 18	-	1
Leather and leather products	19	-	-
Wood and wood products	20	1	1
Pulp, paper and paper products; printing and publishing	21, 22	1	2
Coke, refined petroleum products and nuclear fuels	23	-	87
Chemicals, chemical products and man-made fibres	24	-	-
Rubber and plastic products	25	-	-
Other non-metallic mineral products	26	4	-
Basic metals and fabricated metal products	27, 28	9	3
Machinery and equipment not elsewhere classified	29	-	-
Electrical and optical equipment	30-33	1	2
Transport equipment	34, 35	23	5
Manufacturing not elsewhere classified	36, 37	7	2
Electricity, gas and water supply	40, 41	-	4
Construction	45	2	2
Wholesale and retail trade; repair of motor vehicles, motorcycles and personal and household goods	50-52	-	-
Hotels, restaurants, canteens & catering	55	-	-
Transport, storage and communication	60-64	422	16
Financial intermediation	65-67	-	-
Real estate, renting and business activities	70-74	-	-
Public administration and defence; compulsory social security	75	215	422
Education	80	13	43
Health and social work	85	1	-
Other community, social and personal service activities, private households with employed persons, extra-territorial organisations and bodies	90-93, 95, 99	2	2

**Notes:**

1 Based on the latest (September 2008) estimates of employee jobs.  
 - Nil or negligible.

Source: ONS Labour Market Statistics

**Table 5**  
**Working days lost per 1,000 employees: by industry group<sup>1</sup>**

United Kingdom

	Mining, energy and water	Manufacturing	Services	All industries and services
1999	-	14	7	10
2000	17	13	20	20
2001	141	11	22	20
2002	1	6	62	51
2003	2	18	20	19
2004	29	6	41	34
2005	34	5	6	6
2006	74	6	32	28
2007	-	5	46	38
2008	4	2	33	28

**Notes:**

1 Based on the latest (September 2008) estimates of employee jobs.  
- Nil or negligible.

Source: ONS Labour Market Statistics

**Table 6**  
**Stoppages in progress: by Government Office Region and industry group, 2008<sup>1,2,3,4</sup>**

United Kingdom

	North East	North West	Yorkshire and the Humber	East Midlands	West Midlands	South West	East of England	London	South East	Wales	Scotland	Northern Ireland	United Kingdom	
<b>Days lost per 1,000 employees – all industries and services</b>														
2004		33	19	37	20	23	13	11	18	16	28	160	99	34
2005		7	7	4	3	11	1	4	11	1	2	7	15	6
2006		51	43	23	18	15	8	8	10	5	51	49	30	28
2007		45	44	34	19	28	27	34	44	26	41	40	45	39
2008		54	38	24	17	22	12	7	13	7	48	60	4	28
<b>2008 by industry group (SIC 2003)</b>														
<b>Working days lost (000s)</b>														
Agriculture, hunting, forestry and fishing	-	-	-	-	-	-	0.1	-	-	-	-	-	-	0.1
Mining, quarrying, electricity, gas and water	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	0.7	-	0.7
Manufacturing	0.2	0.6	0.1	0.2	1.4	0.2	-	0.1	0.2	-	3.6	0.2	6.8	
Construction	-	0.1	-	-	-	0.1	-	-	-	-	2.5	-	2.7	
Transport, storage and communication	-	0.5	2.2	0.4	1.2	1.1	0.5	6.3	0.5	-	1.7	-	24.8	
Public administration and defence	50.7	97.3	41.6	26.8	39.3	17.1	9.9	24.3	13.2	45.6	133.7	2.4	614.3	
Education	4.8	14.0	9.2	5.2	10.0	7.8	6.1	20.1	11.3	9.3	1.1	0.3	103.4	
All other services	-	1.5	0.7	-	0.3	-	0.1	0.8	0.2	0.2	0.2	0.2	6.7	
<b>All industries and services</b>	<b>55.7</b>	<b>114.0</b>	<b>53.8</b>	<b>32.6</b>	<b>52.2</b>	<b>26.4</b>	<b>16.5</b>	<b>51.5</b>	<b>25.4</b>	<b>55.1</b>	<b>143.4</b>	<b>3.1</b>	<b>758.9</b>	
<b>Workers involved (000s)</b>														
Agriculture, hunting, forestry and fishing	-	-	-	-	-	-	0.1	-	-	-	-	-	-	0.1
Mining, quarrying, electricity, gas and water	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	0.8	-	0.8
Manufacturing	0.1	0.3	-	0.3	1.3	0.2	-	0.1	0.1	-	2.3	0.2	4.9	
Construction	-	0.1	-	-	-	0.2	-	-	-	-	2.5	-	2.7	
Transport, storage and communication	-	0.6	0.6	0.2	0.1	0.4	0.2	3.5	0.3	-	1.3	-	19.0	
Public administration and defence	30.1	56.6	27.5	18.1	29.2	10.8	6.5	14.7	8.7	28.7	85.9	1.3	370.3	
Education	5.5	14.7	9.7	5.6	11.0	8.2	6.5	21.3	12.6	9.9	0.2	-	110.3	
All other services	-	0.7	0.3	-	0.1	-	0.1	0.6	0.2	0.2	0.2	0.2	3.1	
<b>All industries and services</b>	<b>35.7</b>	<b>73.0</b>	<b>38.0</b>	<b>24.1</b>	<b>41.6</b>	<b>19.9</b>	<b>13.2</b>	<b>40.3</b>	<b>21.8</b>	<b>38.9</b>	<b>93.2</b>	<b>1.7</b>	<b>511.2</b>	
<b>Stoppages</b>														
Agriculture, hunting, forestry and fishing	-	-	-	-	-	-	2	-	-	-	-	-	-	2
Mining, quarrying, electricity, gas and water	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	1	-	1
Manufacturing	2	3	1	1	4	2	-	1	1	-	5	1	21	
Construction	-	1	-	-	-	2	-	-	-	-	1	-	4	
Transport, storage and communication	-	3	3	3	1	1	2	9	1	-	5	-	28	
Public administration and defence	2	3	4	2	4	2	2	2	2	2	4	1	16	
Education	3	9	6	5	4	5	2	13	4	2	1	1	40	
All other services	-	5	3	-	2	1	1	8	2	1	3	3	32	
<b>All industries and services</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>24</b>	<b>17</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>15</b>	<b>15</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>33</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>20</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>144</b>	

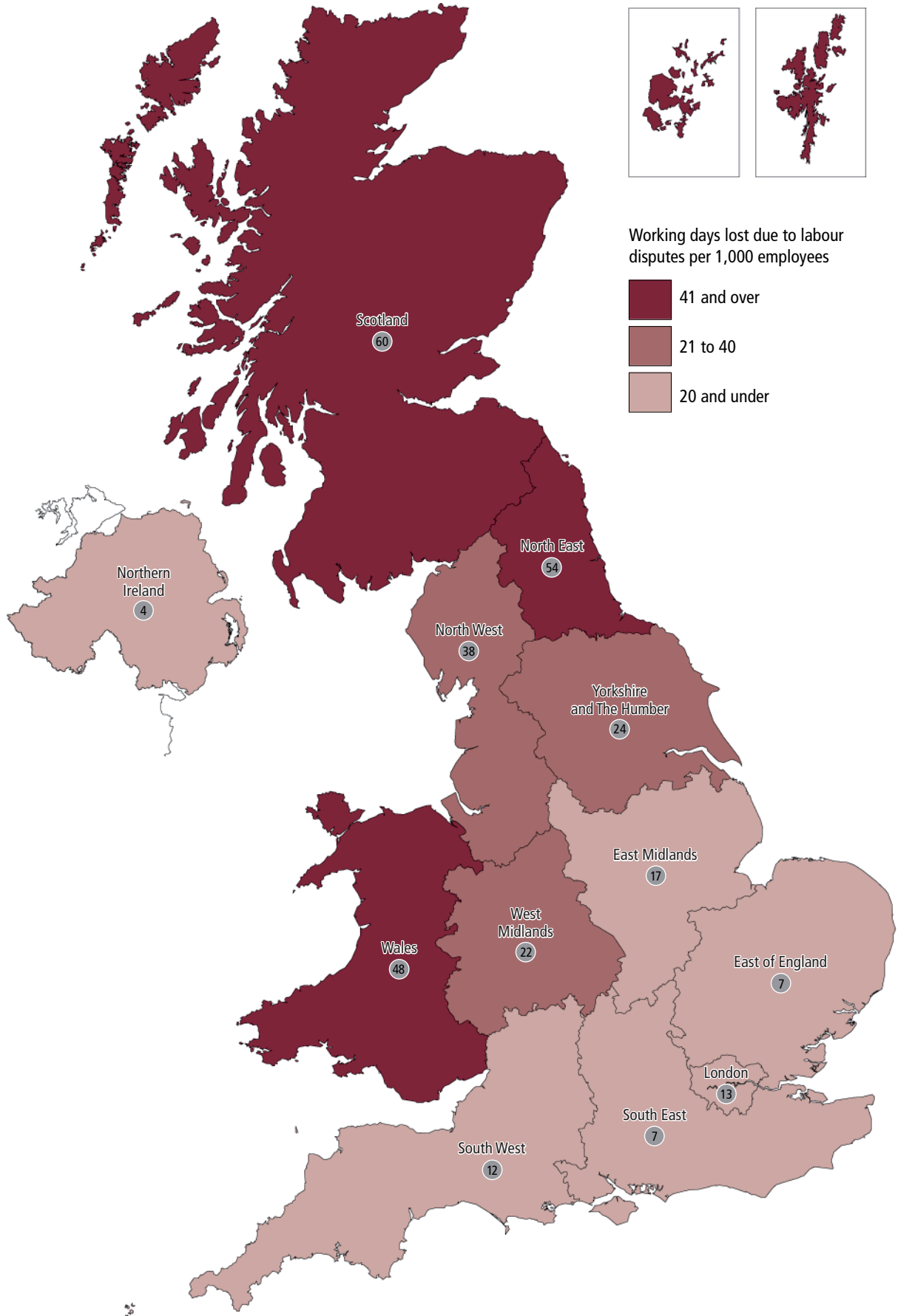
**Notes:**

- 1 The figures for working days lost and workers involved have been rounded and consequently the sum of the constituent items may not agree precisely with the totals.
- 2 Figures for widespread stoppages which cannot be broken down to Government Office Regional level are included in the UK total but excluded from the regional figures in the table above. This accounts for 129,200 days lost in 2008.
- 3 When a stoppage has been identified as covering more than one broad industry group, the actual number of working days lost and workers involved will be allocated to the specific broad industry group, however, the stoppage will be included.
- 4 Based on the latest (September 2008) estimates of employee jobs.  
- Nil or negligible.

Source: ONS Labour Market Statistics

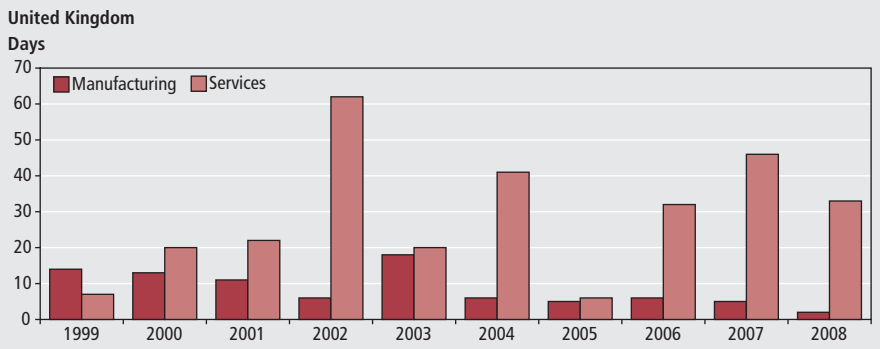
Map 1

Working days lost per 1,000 employees, all industries and services, 2008



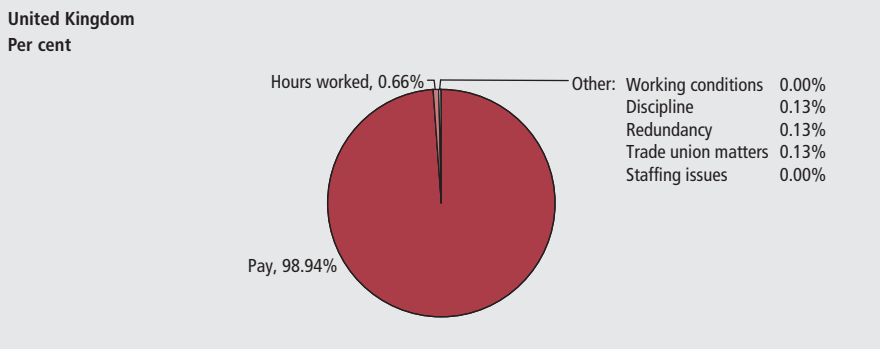
Source: Office for National Statistics

**Figure 3**  
**Working days lost per 1,000 employees: by sector**



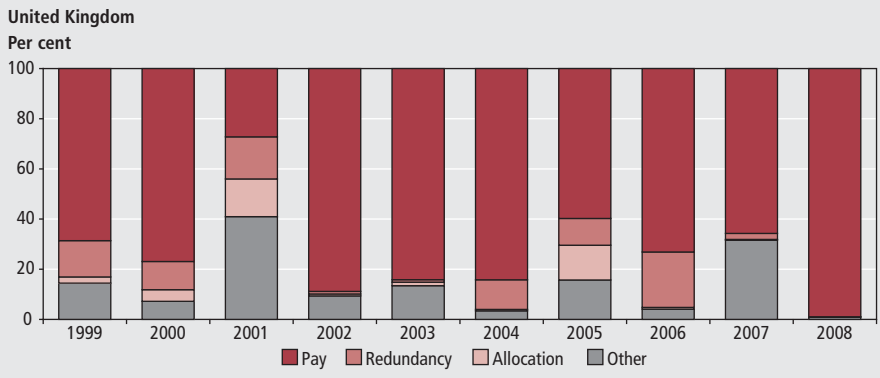
Source: ONS Labour Market Statistics

**Figure 4**  
**Working days lost: by principal cause of dispute, 2008**



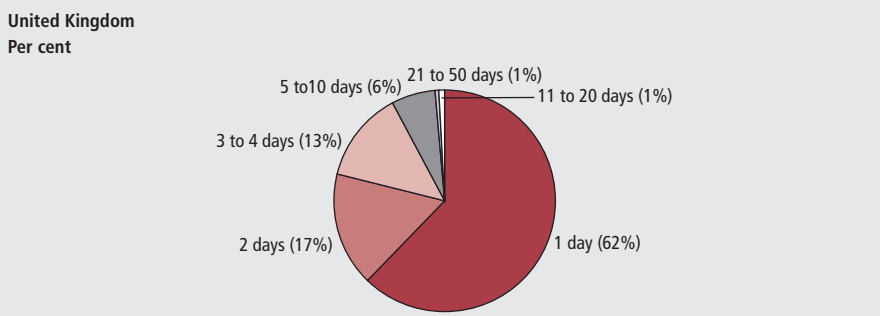
Source: ONS Labour Market Statistics

**Figure 5**  
**Working days lost by principal cause of dispute**



Source: ONS Labour Market Statistics

**Figure 6**  
**Proportions of stoppages in progress: by duration, 2008**



Source: ONS Labour Market Statistics

this information is also displayed geographically in **Figure 6**. Some 62 per cent of stoppages lasted just one day, involved 239,400 workers and accounted for 37 per cent of the total working days lost. At the other extreme, only one stoppage lasted over 50 days, involved a total of 100 workers and accounted for 0.1 per cent of the total working days lost.

**Disputes by size**

**Table 10** shows disputes in 2008 by size and **Figure 7** illustrates that a large proportion of days lost result from large stoppages, but very few stoppages are large. The chart shows that 87 per cent of working days lost in 2008 resulted from stoppages where more than 50,000 days were lost in total, but that only 3 per cent of stoppages were that large. There were six stoppages with more than 5,000 working days lost, these stoppages accounted for only 4 per cent of all stoppages. The highest proportion of stoppages was within the under 250 day's category, accounting for 65 per cent of all stoppages, although this category recorded one of the lowest working days lost percentage of 1.1 per cent.

**Disputes by public/private sector**

**Figure 8** and **Figure 9** illustrate the breakdown of working days lost and the number of stoppages between the public and private sectors respectively. The figures are also shown in **Table 11**. The number of working days lost in the public sector fell from 1,000,200 in 2007 to 711,000 in 2008. The proportion of working days lost from the public sector has fallen again this year, from 96 per cent in 2007 to 94 per cent in 2008. With the 2007 percentage of 96 per cent being a high since data were recorded in 1996.

In the private sector 47,800 days were lost in 69 stoppages which accounts for only 6 per cent of all days lost in 2008. This compares to 39,000 days lost in 2007 from 52 stoppages which accounted for 4 per cent of all days lost. This was a record low.

The number of stoppages in the public and private sectors has levelled out once again this year; with 52 per cent of stoppages in the public sector and 48 per cent in the private sector. Generally, the breakdowns of stoppages between the public and private sectors have been fairly consistent. Although in 2007 the public sector dominated the strike statistics to a greater extent than the private sector.



Table 7

**Working days lost, workers involved and stoppages in progress: by main cause and broad industry group, 2008**

United Kingdom

	Wage disputes		Other causes							All causes
	Wage rates and earnings levels	Extra wage and fringe benefits	Total Wage Disputes	Duration and pattern of hours worked	Redundancy questions	Trade union matters	Working conditions and supervision	Staffing and work allocation	Dismissal and other disciplinary measures	
<b>Working days lost (000s)<sup>1</sup></b>										
Agriculture, hunting, forestry and fishing	0.1	-	0.1	-	-	-	-	-	-	0.1
Mining, quarrying, electricity, gas and water	0.7	-	0.7	-	-	-	-	-	-	0.7
Manufacturing	3.3	2.1	5.4	0.6	0.4	0.4	-	-	-	6.8
Construction	2.5	-	2.5	-	0.2	0.1	-	-	-	2.8
Transport, storage and communication	20.5	-	20.5	3.1	0.5	0.1	0.3	0.2	0.1	24.8
Public administration and defence	614.0	-	614.0	-	-	-	-	-	0.2	614.2
Education	101.4	-	101.4	1.1	-	0.4	0.4	-	0.1	103.4
Other services	5.5	0.1	5.6	0.4	-	-	-	-	-	6.0
<b>All industries and services</b>	<b>747.9</b>	<b>2.2</b>	<b>750.1</b>	<b>5.2</b>	<b>1.1</b>	<b>1.0</b>	<b>0.7</b>	<b>0.2</b>	<b>0.5</b>	<b>758.8</b>
<b>Workers involved (000s)<sup>1</sup></b>										
Agriculture, hunting, forestry and fishing	0.1	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	0.1
Mining, quarrying, electricity, gas and water	0.8	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	0.8
Manufacturing	2.4	1.2	3.6	0.5	0.3	0.5	-	-	-	4.9
Construction	2.5	-	2.5	-	0.1	0.2	-	-	-	2.8
Transport, storage and communication	17.1	-	17.1	1.2	0.3	0.2	0.1	0.1	0.1	19.1
Public administration and defence	370.1	-	370.1	-	-	-	-	-	0.3	370.4
Education	108.9	-	108.9	0.6	-	0.4	0.2	-	0.2	110.3
Other services	2.8	0.1	2.9	0.2	-	-	-	-	-	3.1
<b>All industries and services</b>	<b>504.6</b>	<b>1.3</b>	<b>505.9</b>	<b>2.5</b>	<b>0.7</b>	<b>1.2</b>	<b>0.3</b>	<b>0.1</b>	<b>0.5</b>	<b>511.2</b>
<b>Stoppages<sup>2</sup></b>										
Agriculture, hunting, forestry and fishing	2	-	2	-	-	-	-	-	-	2
Mining, quarrying, electricity, gas and water	1	-	1	-	-	-	-	-	-	1
Manufacturing	14	1	15	3	2	1	-	-	-	21
Construction	1	-	1	-	2	1	-	-	-	4
Transport, storage and communication	13	-	13	7	1	2	1	2	2	28
Public administration and defence	15	-	15	-	-	-	-	-	1	16
Education	18	-	18	16	-	1	2	1	1	39
Other services	29	1	30	2	1	-	-	-	-	33
<b>All industries and services</b>	<b>96</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>98</b>	<b>28</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>144</b>

**Notes:**

Source: ONS Labour Market Statistics

- The figures for working days lost and workers involved have been rounded and consequently the sum of the constituent items may not agree with the totals.
  - The number of stoppages for the industry groups shown may not sum to the total for all industries and services as some stoppages which affect more than one broad industry group have been counted once only in the total for all industries and services.
- Nil or negligible.

Table 8

**Working days lost: by main cause in all industries and services<sup>1</sup>**

United Kingdom

Thousands

Year	Wage disputes		Other Causes							All causes
	Wage rates and earnings levels	Extra wage and fringe benefits	Total	Duration and pattern of hours worked	Redundancy questions	Trade union matters	Working conditions and supervision	Staffing and work allocation	Dismissal and other disciplinary	
1998	147	19	166	2	54	2	14	16	28	282
1999	159	8	166	5	35	2	15	6	14	242
2000	376	8	383	6	56	0	11	23	18	499
2001	141	3	143	13	88	6	173	79	23	525
2002	1039	137	1176	3	14	5	110	10	7	1323
2003	280	140	420	63	5	0	2	7	2	499
2004	759	3	762	19	107	11	0	5	1	905
2005	87	8	94	7	17	6	9	22	2	157
2006	77	475	552	4	167	2	16	5	9	755
2007	676	9	684	316	25	5	1	3	6	1041
2008	748	2	750	5	1	1	1	0	0	759

**Note:**

Source: ONS Labour Market Statistics

- The figures for working days lost have been rounded and consequently the sum of the constituent items may not agree with the totals.

Table 9  
**Stoppages in progress: by duration in working days, 2008**

United Kingdom

	Working days lost (000s) <sup>2,3,4</sup>	Proportion of all working days lost (per cent)	Workers involved (000s) <sup>3</sup>	Proportion of all workers (per cent)	Stoppages in progress	Proportion of all stoppages (per cent)
Days <sup>1</sup>						
1	277.8	36.6	239.4	46.8	89	61.8
2	363.3	47.9	222.8	43.6	24	16.7
3	100.5	13.2	40.0	7.8	10	6.9
4	3.8	0.5	1.0	0.2	9	6.3
5	9.9	1.3	7.5	1.5	4	2.8
6-10	1.9	0.3	0.3	0.1	5	3.5
11-15	0.3	0.0	0.0	0.0	1	0.7
16-20	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0	0.0
21-30	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0	0.0
31-50	1.2	0.2	0.1	0.0	1	0.7
Over 50	0.1	0.0	0.1	0.0	1	0.7
<b>All stoppages</b>	<b>758.9</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>511.2</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>144</b>	<b>100</b>

**Notes:**

Source: ONS Labour Market Statistics

- The statistics cover the number of days that strike action took place, not the number of days the parties involved in the dispute were actually in disagreement.
  - Classification by size is based on the full duration of stoppages, but the figure for days lost include only those days lost in 2008.
  - The figures for working days lost and workers involved have been rounded and consequently the sum of the constituent items may not agree precisely with the totals.
  - The working days lost figures are in general less than the product of the duration of each stoppage and the number of workers involved, because some workers would not have been involved throughout the dispute - see technical note.
- Nil or negligible.

Table 10  
**Stoppages in progress: by size of dispute, 2008**

United Kingdom

	Working days lost (000s) <sup>1</sup>	Proportion of all working days lost (per cent)	Workers involved (000s) <sup>1</sup>	Proportion of all workers (per cent)	Stoppages in progress	Proportion of all stoppages (per cent)
<b>Working days lost in each dispute</b>						
Under 250 days	8.2	1.1	6.5	1.3	94	65.3
250 and under 500	5.3	0.7	3.6	0.7	15	10.4
500 and under 1,000	7.9	1.0	6.0	1.2	11	7.6
1,000 and under 5,000	27.2	3.6	22.7	4.4	14	9.7
5,000 and under 25,000	54.0	7.1	52.5	10.3	6	4.2
25,000 and under 50,000	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0	0.0
50,000 days and over	656.4	86.5	419.9	82.1	4	2.8
<b>All stoppages</b>	<b>758.9</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>511.2</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>144</b>	<b>100</b>

**Note:**

Source: ONS Labour Market Statistics

- The figures for working days lost and workers involved have been rounded and consequently the sum of the constituent items may not agree with the totals.

Table 11  
**Number of stoppages and working days lost: by private and public sector**

United Kingdom

Year	Working days lost (000s)		Stoppages <sup>1</sup>		Strike rate		Employee jobs		
	Private	Public	Private	Public	Private	Public	Private	Public	Total
1999	172	70	102	103	9	13	19882	5207	25089
2000	136	363	99	113	7	69	20370	5288	25658
2001	128	397	83	111	6	74	20609	5378	25987
2002	200	1,123	85	61	10	205	20600	5485	26085
2003	130	369	87	46	6	65	20505	5641	26146
2004	163	742	62	68	8	129	20587	5756	26343
2005	59	99	56	60	3	17	20758	5850	26608
2006	98	656	71	87	5	111	20916	5899	26815
2007	39	1,002	52	90	2	173	21320	5785	27105
2008	48	711	69	75	2	124	23741	5750	29491

**Note:**

Source: ONS Labour Market Statistics

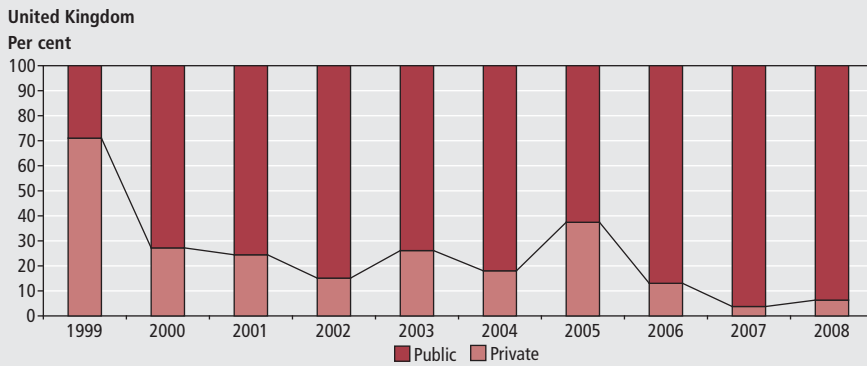
- Stoppages in progress during year.

**Figure 7**  
**Proportions of stoppages in progress and working days lost: by size of dispute, 2008**



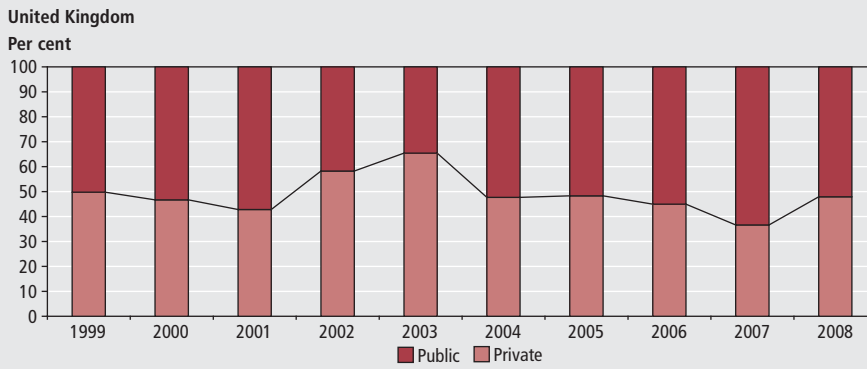
Source: ONS Labour Market Statistics

**Figure 8**  
**Working days lost: by private/public sector split**



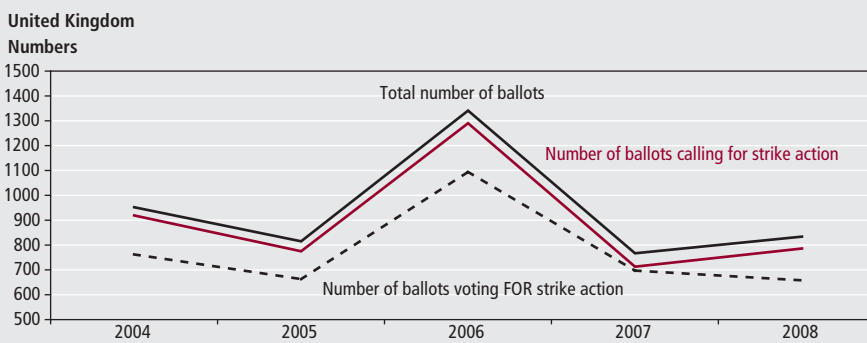
Source: ONS Labour Market Statistics

**Figure 9**  
**Stoppages: by private/public sector split**



Source: ONS Labour Market Statistics

**Figure 10**  
**Ballots resulting in strike action**



Source: Electoral Reform Services

**Trade Union Ballots**

Annual trade union ballot data for the period 2004 – 2008 is presented in **Table 12** and **Table 13**. The number of ballots<sup>1</sup> calling for strike action had increased steadily between 2003 and 2006, peaking at 1290 ballots in 2006, which was 96 per cent of the total number of ballots. The 2007 figures present a much lower number of ballots at 713. However the proportion of those ballots calling for strike action resulting in a ‘yes’ has increased considerably to 98 per cent for 2007, an increase of 13 per cent on the 2006 figure of 85 per cent.

The number of ballots calling for action ‘short of a strike’ in 2007 remained stable, with 583 (76 per cent of total ballots) compared to 579 in 2006. The proportion of those ballots resulting in a ‘yes’ vote has shown an increase this year, after falling steadily over the previous four year period.

The five year time series for trade union ballots is illustrated **Figure 10**. It can be seen that the trend for ballots voting for strike action closely follows the trends for the number of ballots calling for strike action and the total number of ballots. Nevertheless, there is still a notable difference in the number of ballots calling for strike action and those resulting in a ‘yes’ vote.

**Notes**

- As the majority of ballots include options for both ‘strike action’ and ‘action short of strike action,’ the total number of ballots does not equal the total of these options added together.

**CONTACT**

✉ [elmr@ons.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:elmr@ons.gsi.gov.uk)

**Table 12**  
**Trade union ballots: strike action**

United Kingdom

Year	Total ballots	Ballots calling for 'strike action'	Ballots voting FOR strike action	Ballots voting AGAINST strike action	Split result
2004	952	919	762	144	13
2005	815	775	663	109	9
2006	1341	1290	1094	140	57
2007	767	713	697	64	12
2008	834	786	658	123	13

Source: Electoral Reform Services

**Table 13**  
**Trade union ballots: action short of a strike**

United Kingdom

Year	Total Number of ballots	Ballots calling for 'action short of a strike'	Ballots voting FOR action short of a strike	Ballots voting AGAINST action short of a strike	Split result
2004	952	756	708	41	9
2005	815	606	562	35	7
2006	1341	579	541	27	9
2007	767	583	555	19	9
2008	834	598	559	30	9

Source: Electoral Reform Services

#### TECHNICAL NOTE

##### Coverage

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 been notified of a dispute from press reports. Up until September 1996, this information was collected by the Employment Service local office network on behalf of ONS. ONS publishes figures on labour disputes each month. They appear in the *Labour Market Statistics first release table 20* and are published in *Tables 6.29 and 6.30* in the Labour Market Data section of *Economic & Labour Market Review*.

##### Definition of stoppages

The statistics cover stoppages of work in progress in the UK during a year caused by labour disputes between employers and workers, or between workers and other workers, connected with terms and conditions of employment. A distinction can be drawn between stoppages that started in the current year and those that started in earlier years.

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 omitted, although in most years this is not significant. For example, in 1986 one stoppage was considered to be political (a protest in the coal industry against the visit of an MP) and it was excluded from the figures. The total working days lost amounted to less than 1,000. The next known dispute to be excluded was in 1991. This involved a boycott by self-employed market traders who, after increased rent and changes to the market rules, kept their stalls closed for about 20 weeks.

The statistics include 'lock-outs', where an employer prevents their employees from working by refusing entry to the place of work, and 'unlawful', i.e. unlawfully organised strikes. However, no distinction is made between a 'strike' and a 'lock-out' or between 'lawful' and 'unlawful' stoppages. This is principally because of the practical difficulty in deciding which category a particular stoppage falls into. It was for similar reasons that a distinction between 'official' and 'unofficial' disputes was no longer made after 1981.

## Working days lost

Working days lost are defined as the number of days not worked by people involved in a dispute at their place of work. In measuring the number of working days lost, account is taken only of the time lost in the basic working week. Overtime work is excluded, as is weekend working where it is not a regular practice. Where an establishment is open every day, and runs two or more shifts, the statistics will record the number of working days lost for each shift. In recording the number of days lost, allowance is made for public and known annual holidays, such as factory fortnights, occurring within the strike's duration. No allowance is made for absence from work for such reasons as sickness and unauthorised leave.

Where strikes last less than the basic working day, the hours lost are converted to full-day equivalents. Similarly, days lost by part-time workers are converted to full-day equivalents. The number of working days lost in a stoppage reflects the actual number of workers involved at each point in the stoppage. This is generally less than the total derived by multiplying the duration of the stoppage by the total number of workers involved at any time during the stoppage, because some workers would not have been involved throughout.

In disputes where employers dismiss their employees and subsequently reinstate them, the working days lost figure includes those days lost by workers during the period of dismissal.

For disputes where employers dismiss their employees and replace them with another workforce the statistics cannot assume that working days lost by the sacked workers continue indefinitely. In such cases the statistics measure the number of days lost in terms of the size of the replacement workforce. For example, where an employer initially recruits 100 workers and wishes to build up to 300, the number of working days lost on day one will be 200 and will then progressively reduce on subsequent days, eventually to zero when the new workforce reaches the target of 300.

## Number of stoppages

There are difficulties in ensuring complete recording of stoppages, in particular for short disputes lasting only a day or so, or involving only a few workers. Because of this recording difficulty and the cut-off applied, the number of working days lost is considered to be a better indicator of the impact of labour disputes than the number of recorded stoppages.

## Workers involved

The figures for workers involved are for workers both directly and indirectly involved at the establishment where the dispute occurred. Workers indirectly involved are those who are not themselves parties to the dispute but are laid off because of the dispute. However, the statistics exclude workers at other sites who are indirectly affected (because of a shortage of material from a supplier who is in dispute, for example). This is partially because of the difficulty in deciding to what extent a particular firm's production problems are due to the effects of a strike elsewhere or some other cause. Workers involved in more than one stoppage during the year are counted in the statistics for each stoppage in which they take part. Part-time workers are counted as whole units.

The statistics try to record the number of workers that are involved at any time in the stoppage. For example, consider a three-day strike where there were 200 workers involved on the first day; 300 on the second day, of whom 100 were involved for the first time; and 200 on the third day, of whom 50 were involved for the first time. The total number of workers involved in the dispute is 350 - the sum of all those involved on the first day, and those joining for the first time on subsequent days. However, the number of workers taking strike action for the first time during a dispute cannot always be easily ascertained. In such cases the statistics record the highest number involved at any one time (300 in the above example). Take another example, where there are 200 workers involved in a stoppage on each of days one, two and three. It may be necessary to assume that there were a total of 200 workers involved, although it is possible, but unlikely, that as many as 600 workers could have been involved. For this reason, the statistics may under-estimate the number of workers involved in a dispute. However, the estimate of the number of working days lost is unaffected by this consideration.