

FEATURE

Labour disputes in 2007

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SUMMARY

The 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 the Office for National Statistics has been notified of a dispute from press reports.

In 2007, just over a million working days were lost in the UK from 142 stoppages of work arising from labour disputes, with 96 per cent of these being lost in the public sector. This article analyses the disputes by industry, region, cause, size and duration, and also compares the 2007 figures with previous years.

The article presents final figures on labour disputes for 2007 and analyses the figures in more depth than the provisional estimates published in the monthly Labour Market Statistics First Release.

Annual changes

A comparison of statistics on labour disputes in 2006 and 2007 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 2007 total of 1,041,100 working days lost is significantly higher than the 2006 total (754,500). The 2007 total is also 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 142 stoppages total in 2007 is lower than the 2006 total of 158. There were six stoppages beginning in 2006 which continued into 2007. 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.

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

United Kingdom		
	2006	2007
Working days lost through stoppages		
In progress in year ¹	754,500	1,041,100
Beginning in year	747,800	1,034,400
Workers involved in stoppages		
In progress in year ²	713,300	744,800
of which		
Directly involved	690,200	742,200
Indirectly involved	23,100	2,600
Beginning in year	710,800	740,400
of which		
Directly involved	687,800	739,600
Indirectly involved	23,000	800
Stoppages		
In progress in year	158	142
Beginning in year	155	136

Notes:

- 1 Stoppages that began in 2006 and continued into 2007 accounted for 6,700 days lost in 2007.
- 2 Workers in progress figures also include workers who did not strike initially, but who joined at a later date.

There were 744,800 workers involved in labour disputes during 2007; this compares with 713,300 in 2006. 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).

Table 2
Number of stoppages and working days lost

United Kingdom

	Working days lost (000s)	Working days lost per thousand employees ¹	Workers involved (000s)	Stoppages involving the loss of 100,000 working days or more	
				Stoppages ²	Stoppages ²
1988	3,702	157	790	781	8
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

Notes:

- 1 Based on the September 2007 estimates of employee jobs.
- 2 Stoppages in progress during year.

Review of 1988 to 2007

Table 2 presents labour dispute figures for the period 1988 to 2007 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 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 1988 to 2007. This is the standard method that has been used to convert working days lost into a strike rate, taking account of 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 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. The 1,041,100 working days lost in 2007 is equivalent to 38 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 2007, an estimated 42.1 billion hours were worked in the UK. Comparing this with 8.1 million hours lost through strikes shows that approximately one in every 5,200 potential working days were lost through strikes in 2007. The equivalent figure for 2006 was one in every 7,100.

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 shifts 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 2007 broken down into 27 industrial

Figure 1
Working days lost

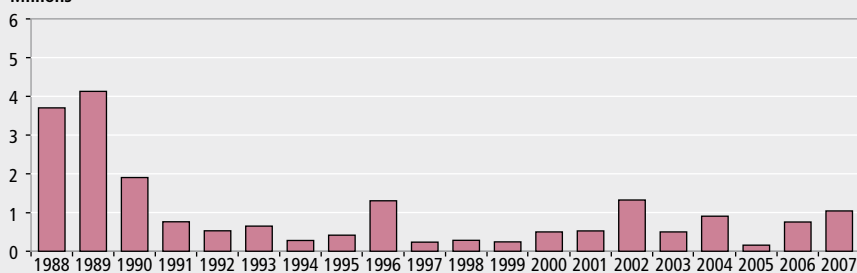
United Kingdom
Millions

Figure 2
Stoppages in progress

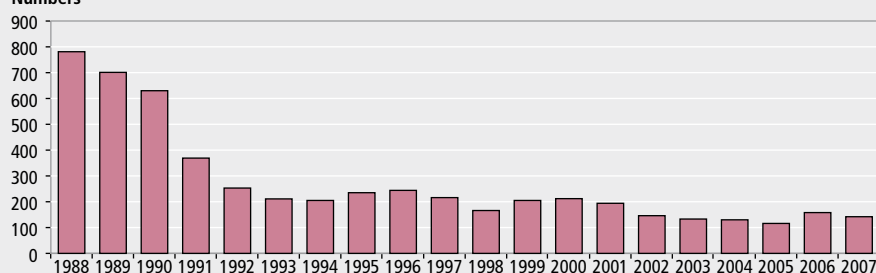
United Kingdom
Numbers

Table 3
Number of stoppages and working days lost: by industry, 2007

United Kingdom				
Industry group (SIC 2003)	SIC class	Working days lost (000s) ¹	Workers involved (000s) ¹	Stoppages ²
All industries and services³		1,041.1	744.8	142
Mining, energy and water	10–14, 40, 41	–	–	–
Manufacturing	15–37	15.6	13.5	22
Services	50–99	1,023.2	730.5	118
Agriculture, hunting, forestry and fishing	01, 02, 05	–	–	1
Mining and quarrying	10, 14	–	–	–
Manufacturing of:				
Food products, beverages and tobacco	15, 16	3.1	2.6	3
Textiles and textile products	17, 18	–	–	–
Leather and leather products	19	–	–	–
Wood and wood products	20	–	–	1
Pulp, paper and paper products; printing and publishing	21, 22	0.3	0.3	2
Coke, refined petroleum products and nuclear fuels	23	–	–	–
Chemicals, chemical products and man-made fibres	24	–	–	–
Rubber and plastic products	25	–	–	–
Other non-metallic mineral products	26	0.4	–	1
Basic metals and fabricated metal products	27, 28	3.3	0.2	4
Machinery and equipment not elsewhere specified	29	–	–	–
Electrical and optical equipment	30–33	0.3	0.3	1
Transport equipment	34, 35	6.9	8.1	6
Manufacturing not elsewhere specified	36, 37	1.2	1.8	4
Electricity, gas and water supply	40, 41	–	–	–
Construction	45	2.3	0.8	4
Wholesale and retail trade; repair of motor vehicles, motorcycles and personal and household goods	50–52	–	–	–
Hotels, restaurants, canteens and catering	55	–	–	–
Transport, storage and communication	60–64	657.5	399.3	55
Financial intermediation	65–67	–	–	–
Real estate, renting and business activities	70–74	2.2	1.5	6
Public administration and defence; compulsory social security	75	324.7	317.4	20
Education	80	30.5	8.7	21
Health and social work	85	4.7	2.1	12
Other community, social and personal service activities, private households with employed persons, extra-territorial organisations and bodies	90–93, 95, 99	3.5	1.6	11

Notes:

- 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

groups (classified according to the Standard Industrial Classification 2003). **Table 4** shows working days lost per 1,000 employees in 2006 and 2007 for the same industries.

Some 63 per cent of the working days lost in 2007 were a result of 55 stoppages in transport and 31 per cent of the days lost were from 20 stoppages in public administration. There were also 22 stoppages in manufacturing, which resulted in 15,600 working days being lost. Of these 15,600 days lost, 44 per cent were from six stoppages in the manufacturing of transport equipment. There were also four stoppages in the basic metals sector, which resulted in 3,300 working days lost.

Table 4 presents the strike rates for 2006 and 2007. The rate for mining has decreased significantly from 74 in 2006 to zero in 2007. There were no strikes recorded in this sector for 2007 and there is also a decrease in employment rates. The rise in services' strike rates between 2006 and 2007 is due to transport, which has increased from 25 in 2006 to 422 in 2007. The strike rate for manufacturing decreased slightly from six in 2006 to five in 2007. In this sector, there was a significant fall in the rates for manufacturing of both rubber and plastic products, and textiles and textile products. Conversely, there was a significant rise for transport equipment.

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 that this is only the second year on record that the mining, energy and water supply industries group had a nil strike rate. In 1999, the level of employee jobs in these industries was also at a record low. **Figure 3** shows the strike rates for the manufacturing and services sectors separately for the period between 1998 and 2007. This shows the large increase in the services sector over the last five years. Although this is the case, the figures are generally high due to large strikes in the public administration sector.

Regional analyses

Table 6 shows regional strike rates for Government Office Regions between 2002 and 2007, with a further breakdown of the figures for 2007 by industry. The rates for 2007 are also illustrated in **Map 1**. When interpreting these figures, it is important to bear in mind that the industrial

Table 4
Working days lost per thousand employees: by industry¹

United Kingdom			
Industry group (SIC 2003)	SIC Class	2006	2007
All industries and services		28	38
Mining, energy and water	10–14, 40, 41	74	–
Manufacturing	15–37	6	5
Services	50–99	32	46
Agriculture, hunting, forestry and fishing	01, 02, 05	–	–
Mining and quarrying	10,14	476	–
Manufacturing of:			
Food products, beverages and tobacco	15, 16	6	8
Textiles and textile products	17, 18	17	–
Leather and leather products	19	–	–
Wood and wood products	20	–	1
Pulp, paper and paper products; printing and publishing	21, 22	6	1
Coke, refined petroleum products and nuclear fuels	23	–	–
Chemicals, chemical products and man-made fibres	24	–	–
Rubber and plastic products	25	17	–
Other non-metallic mineral products	26	4	4
Basic metals and fabricated metal products	27, 28	6	9
Machinery and equipment not elsewhere classified	29	3	–
Electrical and optical equipment	30–33	–	1
Transport equipment	34, 35	14	23
Manufacturing not elsewhere classified	36, 37	–	7
Electricity, gas and water supply	40, 41	–	–
Construction	45	11	2
Wholesale and retail trade; repair of motor vehicles, motorcycles and personal and household goods	50–52	–	–
Hotels, restaurants, canteens and catering	55	–	–
Transport, storage and communication	60–64	25	422
Financial intermediation	65–67	–	–
Real estate, renting and business activities	70–74	1	–
Public administration and defence; compulsory social security	75	412	215
Education	80	13	13
Health and social work	85	1	1
Other community, social and personal service activities, private households with employed persons, extra-territorial organisations and bodies	90–93, 95, 99	1	2

Notes:

- 1 Based on the latest (September 2007) estimates of employee jobs.
– Nil or negligible

Table 5
Working days lost per thousand employees: by industry group¹

United Kingdom				
	Mining, energy and water	Manufacturing	Services	All industries and services
1998	1	8	12	11
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

Notes:

- 1 Based on the latest available (September 2007) estimates of employee jobs.
– Nil or negligible

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 thousand employee jobs in 2007 was the North West with 55. Significantly, nine of the 12 regions saw an increase in their strike rates. London showed the sharpest rise from ten in 2006 to 44 in 2007. The South West, South East and Eastern England also showed significant increases in 2007.

Causes of disputes

Table 7 shows stoppages in 2007 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 2007 by principle cause of dispute. In 2007, 66 per cent of working days lost were due to disputes over pay; this accounted for 50 per cent of all stoppages. In comparison, disputes concerning hours worked accounted for 30 per cent of days lost and 25 per cent of all stoppages. Redundancy questions accounted for 2 per cent of days lost and 11 per cent of all stoppages.

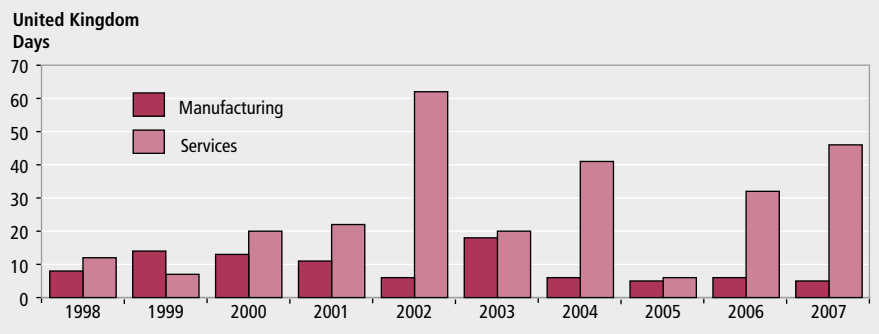
Figure 5 shows the distribution of working days lost by cause in each year from 1998 to 2007 for four causes: pay, redundancy, staffing and work allocation and other. This shows the percentage of days lost due to disputes over pay increased further in 2007, though the category other had the most significant increase. This was due to a substantial increase in the sub-category duration and pattern of hours worked. 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. The figures are often dominated 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 2007 and this information is also displayed in **Figure 6**. Some 46 per cent of stoppages lasted just one day, involved 296,100 workers and accounted for 25 per cent of the total working days lost. At the other extreme, two stoppages lasted over 50 days, involved a total of 100 workers and accounted for 0.4 per cent of the total working days lost.

Figure 3
Working days lost per thousand employees: by sector



Disputes by size

Table 10 shows disputes in 2007 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 86 per cent of working days lost in 2007 resulted from stoppages where more than 5,000 days were lost in total, but that only 4 per cent of stoppages were that large. There were five stoppages with more than 25,000 working days lost; these stoppages accounted for only 4 per cent of all stoppages. The highest proportion of

Table 6
Stoppages in progress: by Government Office Region and industry group,^{1,2,3} 2007

United Kingdom	Yorkshire												Northern Ireland	United Kingdom
	North East	North West	Yorkshire and The Humber	East Midlands	West Midlands	South West	East of England	London	South East	Wales	Scotland			
Days lost per thousand employees⁴ – all industries and services														
2002	119	76	44	50	41	32	26	60	36	74	54	34	51	
2003	2	10	8	6	8	7	4	51	6	9	39	101	19	
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	53	23	18	15	8	8	10	5	51	49	30	28	
2007	45	55	34	19	28	27	34	44	26	41	40	45	39	
2007 by industry group (SIC 2003)														
Working days lost (thousands)														
Agriculture, hunting, forestry and fishing	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	
Mining, quarrying, electricity, gas and water	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	
Manufacturing	0.9	1.1	–	–	0.4	2.7	–	–	–	5.1	4.2	–	15.6	
Construction	–	–	–	–	–	0.2	1.1	–	–	0.9	–	–	2.3	
Transport, storage and communication	20.9	86.9	49.2	27.3	54.8	47.6	70.0	115.0	80.2	26.7	51.9	11.0	657.5	
Public administration and defence	25.8	37.4	26.7	7.8	9.8	8.6	8.3	50.7	14.1	15.8	37.3	2.8	324.7	
Education	–	0.1	0.1	0.1	0.4	–	0.7	9.4	–	–	1.3	18.4	30.5	
All other services	–	5.5	0.2	0.1	–	0.3	0.1	3.2	0.5	0.2	0.2	0.1	10.4	
All industries and services	47.7	131.0	76.2	35.4	65.4	59.4	80.3	178.2	94.8	48.7	95.0	32.1	1,041.1	
Workers involved (thousands)														
Agriculture, hunting, forestry and fishing	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	
Mining, quarrying, electricity, gas and water	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	
Manufacturing	0.1	1.1	–	–	1.1	3.0	–	–	–	5.1	2.4	–	13.5	
Construction	–	–	–	–	–	0.2	0.2	–	–	0.5	–	–	0.8	
Transport, storage and communication	13.6	52.6	30.4	24.9	33.7	29.6	43.3	70.6	48.0	15.9	32.1	6.9	399.3	
Public administration and defence	30.0	42.2	31.3	8.9	11.0	9.6	9.3	57.2	15.4	17.4	28.3	3.1	317.4	
Education	–	0.1	0.1	–	0.4	–	0.2	3.4	–	–	0.3	7.4	8.7	
All other services	–	2.2	0.1	0.1	–	0.3	0.1	1.3	0.3	0.2	0.3	0.1	5.1	
All industries and services	43.7	98.2	61.9	33.9	46.2	42.7	53.1	132.5	63.7	39.3	63.4	17.5	744.8	
Stoppages														
Agriculture, hunting, forestry and fishing	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	1	–	–	–	–	1	
Mining, quarrying, electricity, gas and water	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	0	
Manufacturing	1	3	–	–	2	5	–	–	–	5	6	–	22	
Construction	–	–	–	–	–	1	1	–	–	2	–	–	4	
Transport, storage and communication	4	10	4	4	9	4	5	15	4	3	11	2	55	
Public administration and defence	3	5	2	2	3	2	5	4	4	3	7	3	20	
Education	–	2	2	1	3	1	2	6	1	1	2	3	21	
All other services	2	11	5	4	2	5	2	11	4	6	6	1	29	
All industries and services	10	31	13	11	19	18	15	37	13	20	32	9	142	

Notes:

- 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.
- Figures for widespread stoppages which cannot be disaggregated 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 96,900 days lost in 2007.
- 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 in each industry category.
- Based on the latest (September 2007) estimate of employee jobs.
 - Nil or negligible

Map 1

Working days lost per thousand employees, all industries and services, 2007

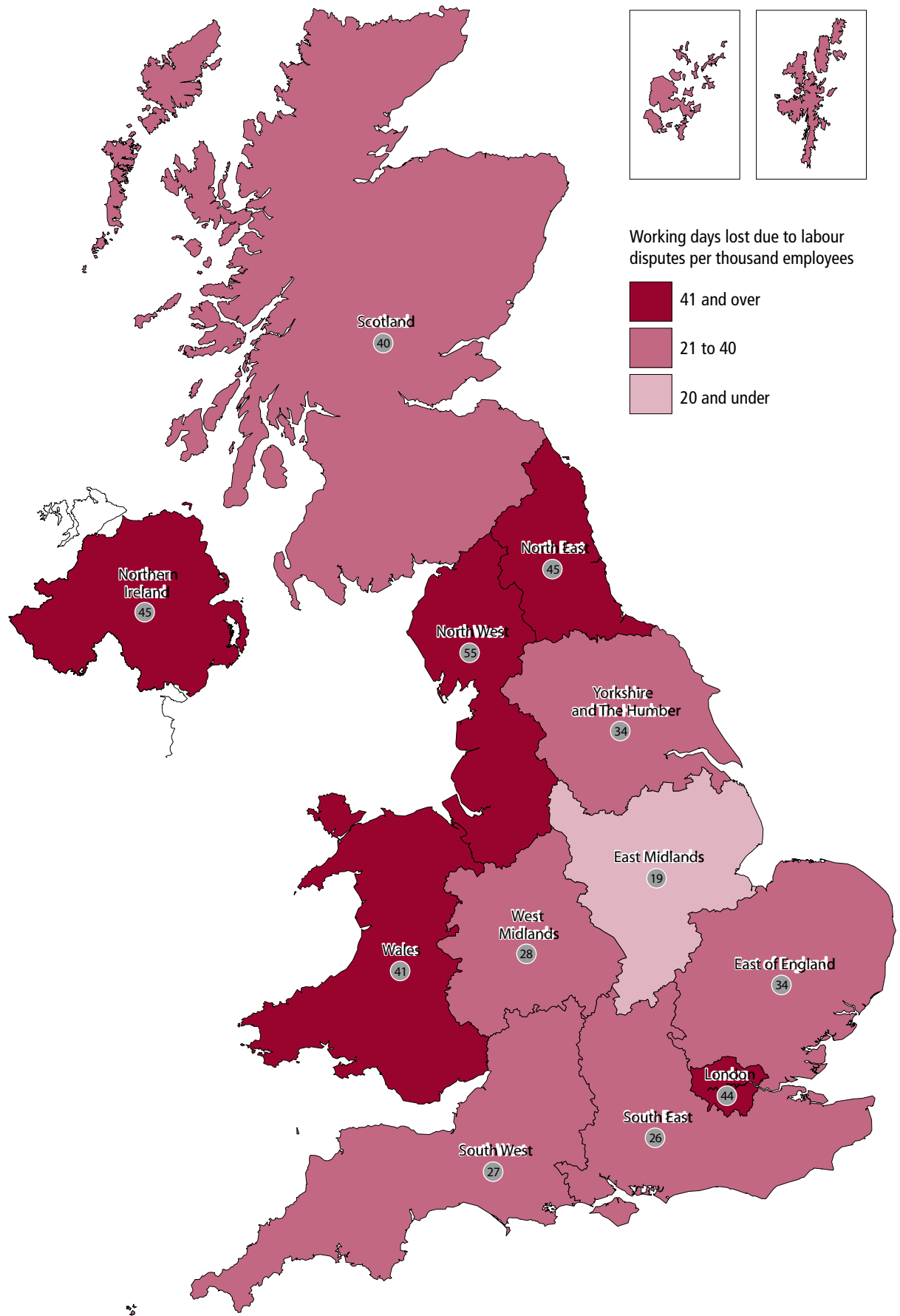


Table 7

Working days lost, workers involved and stoppages in progress: by main cause and broad industry group, 2007

United Kingdom

Industry group (SIC 2003)	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	
Working days lost (thousands)¹										
Agriculture, hunting, forestry and fishing	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–
Mining, quarrying, electricity, gas and water	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–
Manufacturing	5.9	1.2	7.1	3.2	4.9	–	–	–	0.4	15.6
Construction	1.4	–	1.4	–	–	–	–	0.9	–	2.3
Transport, storage and communication	317.6	5.9	323.5	312.6	13.9	1.4	–	0.4	5.6	657.4
Public administration and defence	317.4	–	317.4	0.5	4.7	0.8	1.1	0.4	–	324.9
Education	28.5	–	28.5	0.1	0.6	–	–	1.3	0.1	30.6
Other services	4.8	1.6	6.4	–	0.9	2.9	0.1	–	–	10.3
All industries and services	675.6	8.7	684.3	316.3	25.1	5.1	1.2	2.9	6.2	1,041.1
Workers involved (thousands)¹										
Agriculture, hunting, forestry and fishing	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–
Mining, quarrying, electricity, gas and water	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–
Manufacturing	5.4	1.4	6.8	1.3	4.9	–	–	–	0.4	13.4
Construction	0.2	–	0.2	–	–	–	–	0.5	–	0.7
Transport, storage and communication	96.9	2.8	99.7	294.3	2.4	0.3	–	0.2	2.4	399.3
Public administration and defence	310.1	–	310.1	0.5	5.5	0.8	0.4	0.1	–	317.4
Education	7.9	–	7.9	0.1	0.2	–	–	0.4	0.1	8.7
Other services	3.8	0.1	3.9	–	0.6	0.6	0.1	–	–	5.2
All industries and services	424.4	4.3	428.7	296.2	13.6	1.7	0.4	1.3	2.9	744.8
Stoppages²										
Agriculture, hunting, forestry and fishing	1	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–
Mining, quarrying, electricity, gas and water	–	–	0	–	–	–	–	–	–	–
Manufacturing	13	1	14	4	3	–	–	–	1	22
Construction	2	–	2	–	–	–	–	2	–	4
Transport, storage and communication	9	3	12	28	2	3	–	3	7	55
Public administration and defence	12	–	12	2	3	1	1	1	–	20
Education	10	–	10	1	2	1	–	5	2	21
Other services	19	1	20	–	5	2	2	–	–	29
All industries and services	66	5	71	35	15	7	3	11	10	142

Notes:

- 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:¹ by main cause in all industries and services

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	
1997	103	26	128	7	69	2	8	18	4	235
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	1,039	137	1,176	3	14	5	110	10	7	1,323
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	1,041

Note:

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

Figure 4
Working days lost: by principal cause of dispute, 2007

United Kingdom
Percentages

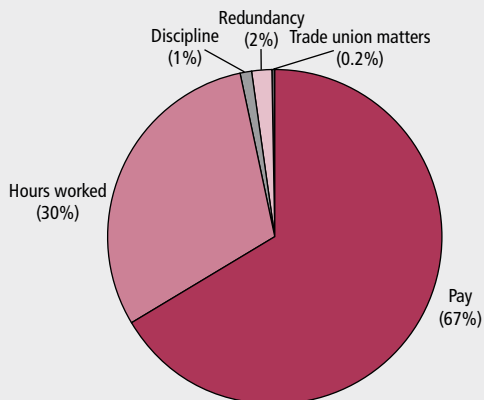


Figure 5
Working days lost: by principal cause of dispute

Percentages

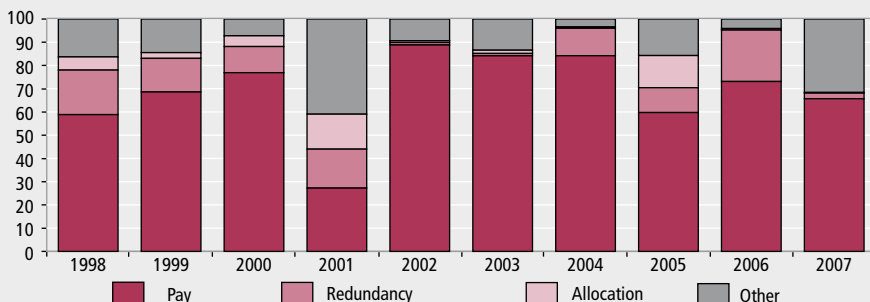
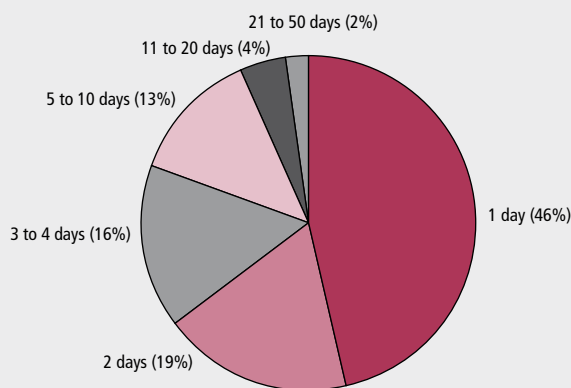


Figure 6
Proportions of stoppages in progress: by duration, 2007

United Kingdom
Percentages



stoppages was within the under 250 days category, accounting for 50 per cent of all stoppages, although this category recorded the lowest working days lost percentage of 1 per cent.

Disputes by private/public sector

Figure 8 and Figure 9 illustrate the breakdown of working days lost and the number of stoppages between the private and public sectors. This information is also shown in Table 11. The number of working days lost in the private sector fell from 98,300 in 2006 to 38,900 in 2007. The proportion of working days lost from the private sector has fallen again this year, from 13 per cent in 2006 to 4 per cent in 2007. This is considerably lower than its peak year in 1999, where 71 per cent of days lost were from the private sector.

In the public sector, 1 million days were lost in 90 stoppages which accounted for 96 per cent of all days lost in 2007. This compares with 656,200 days lost in 2006 from 87 stoppages which accounted for 87 per cent of all days lost.

The number of stoppages in the public sector is considerably higher than that of the private sector, at 63 per cent and 37 per cent, respectively. Generally, the breakdowns of stoppages between the public and private sectors have been fairly consistent. Although this is the case, it has become apparent in the last few years that the public sector is dominating the strike statistics to a greater extent than the private sector.

Trade union ballots

Annual trade union ballot data for the period 2003 to 2007 are presented in Table 12 and Table 13. The number of ballots¹ calling for strike action had increased steadily between 2003 and 2006, peaking at 1,290 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' vote has increased considerably to 98 per cent for 2007, an increase of 13 percentage points 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 with 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

Table 9
Stoppages in progress: by duration¹ in working days, 2007

United Kingdom						
	Working days lost (thousands) ^{2,3,4}	Proportion of all working days lost (per cent)	Workers involved (thousands) ³	Proportion of all workers (per cent)	Stoppages in progress	Proportion of all stoppages (per cent)
Days ¹						
1	260.4	25.0	296.1	39.8	65	45.8
2	81.3	7.8	49.9	6.7	26	18.3
3	13.0	1.2	5.6	0.8	16	11.3
4	9.5	0.9	4.4	0.6	6	4.2
5	2.3	0.2	0.6	0.1	6	4.2
6-10	306.7	29.5	287.7	38.6	12	8.5
11-15	19.5	1.9	2.9	0.4	4	2.8
16-20	24.0	2.3	3.1	0.4	2	1.4
21-30	311.6	29.9	94.1	12.6	1	0.7
31-50	8.9	0.9	0.3	0.0	2	1.4
Over 50	3.8	0.4	0.1	0.0	2	1.4
All stoppages	1,041.1	100.0	744.8	100.0	142	100.0

Notes:

- 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 2007
 - 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

ballots is illustrated in **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.

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

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Figure 7
Proportions of stoppages in progress and working days lost: by size of dispute, 2007

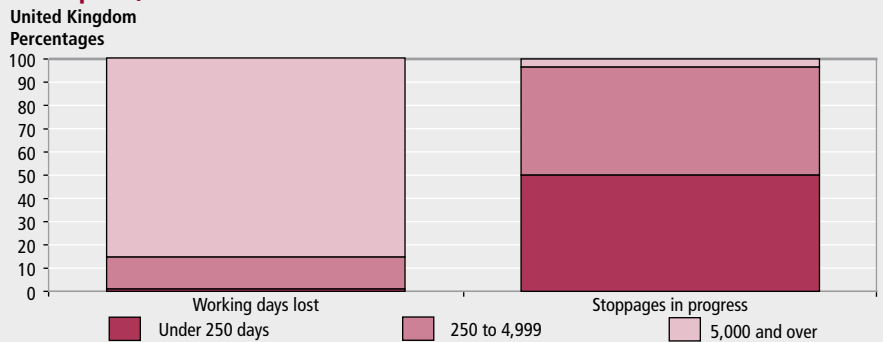


Figure 8
Working days lost: by private/public sector split



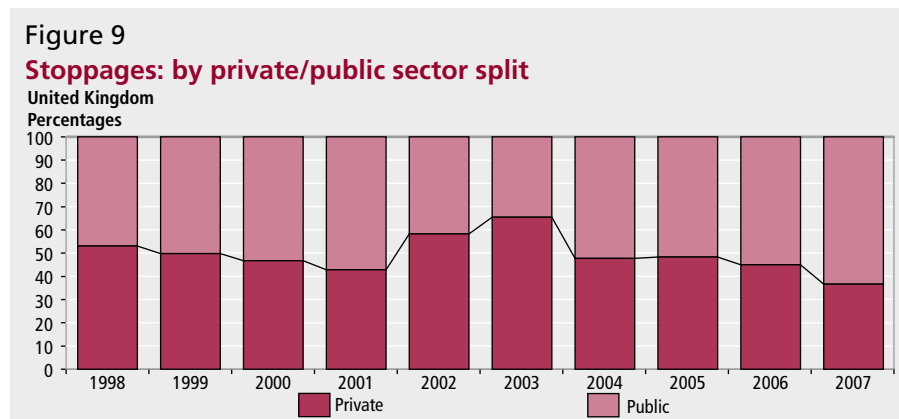


Table 10

Stoppages in progress: by size of dispute, 2007

United Kingdom						
	Working days lost (thousands) ¹	Proportion of all working days lost (per cent)	Workers involved (thousands) ¹	Proportion of all workers (per cent)	Stoppages in progress	Proportion of all stoppages (per cent)
Working days lost in each dispute						
Under 250 days	6.2	0.6	5.2	0.7	71	50.0
250 to 499	6.0	0.6	4.3	0.6	18	12.7
500 to 999	11.2	1.1	6.4	0.9	16	11.3
1,000 to 4,999	49.7	4.8	30.1	4.0	25	17.6
5,000 to 24,999	76.0	7.3	25.8	3.5	7	4.9
25,000 to 49,999	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0	0.0
50,000 days and over	892.0	85.7	672.9	90.3	5	3.5
All stoppages	1,041.1	100.0	744.8	100.0	142	100.0

Note:

1 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									
	Working days lost (thousands)		Stoppages ¹		Strike rate		Employee jobs (thousands)		
	Private	Public	Private	Public	Private	Public	Private	Public	Total
1998	165	117	88	78	8	23	19,568	5,163	24,731
1999	172	70	102	103	9	13	19,882	5,207	25,089
2000	136	363	99	113	7	69	20,370	5,288	25,658
2001	128	397	83	111	6	74	20,609	5,378	25,987
2002	200	1,123	85	61	10	205	20,600	5,485	26,085
2003	130	369	87	46	6	65	20,505	5,641	26,146
2004	163	742	62	68	8	129	20,587	5,756	26,343
2005	59	99	56	60	3	17	20,758	5,850	26,608
2006	98	656	71	87	5	111	20,916	5,899	26,815
2007	39	1,002	52	90	2	173	21,320	5,785	27,105

Note:

1 Stoppages in progress during year.

Table 12

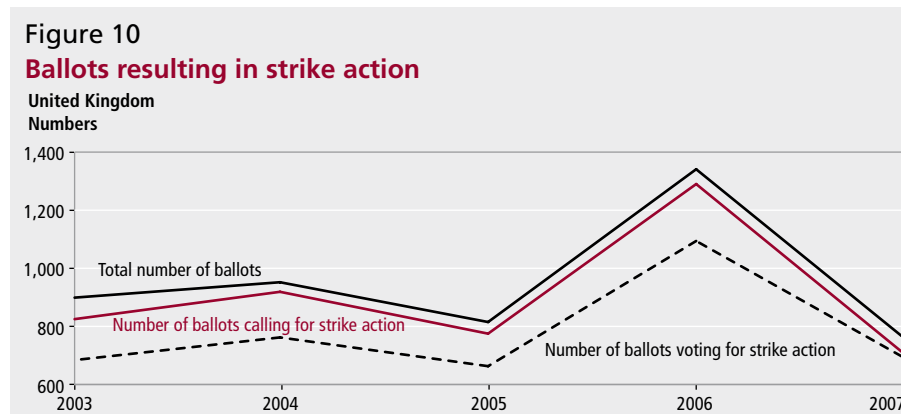
Trade union ballots: strike action

United Kingdom					Numbers
Total ballots	Ballots calling for strike action	Ballots voting for strike action	Ballots voting against strike action		Split result
2003	899	825	684	125	16
2004	952	919	762	144	13
2005	815	775	663	109	9
2006	1,341	1,290	1,094	140	57
2007	767	713	637	64	12

Table 13
Trade union ballots: action short of a strike

United Kingdom					Numbers
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 strike	Split result	
2003	899	637	601	31	6
2004	952	756	708	41	9
2005	815	606	562	35	7
2006	1,341	579	541	27	9
2007	767	583	555	19	9

Source: Electoral Reform Services



TECHNICAL NOTE

Coverage

Information about labour disputes in the UK is collected by the Office for National Statistics (ONS) from a number 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 has 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 and are published in Tables 6.29 and 6.30 of the online tables 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 ten 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', that is, 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 into which category a particular stoppage falls. 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 who 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 underestimate the number of workers involved in a dispute. However, the estimate of the number of working days lost is unaffected by this consideration.