

5 Manpower and industrial relations

Manpower trends

5.1. At 25 September 1988 Ulsterbus employed 1,960 people and Citybus 818 people. Table 5.1 shows that in the past five years the workforces have decreased by 5.5 per cent (Ulsterbus) and 4.4 per cent (Citybus). The overall trends thus compare closely, but there are some appreciable variations both within and between the companies in relation to occupational groups.

TABLE 5.1 Manpower analysis by occupational group, 1983 to 1988

Occupational group	Ulsterbus			Citybus		
	Number of employees		Percentage change	Number of employees		Percentage change
	16.10.83	25.9.88	+ or (-)	16.10.83	25.9.88	+ or (-)
Management	35	35	-	6	5	(16.7)
Inspectors	94	86	(8.5)	70	70	-
Clerical/typing	157	152	(3.2)	14	10	(28.6)
Other salaried staff	43	50	16.3	19	19	-
Total (salaried staff)	<u>329</u>	<u>323</u>	<u>(1.8)</u>	<u>109</u>	<u>104</u>	<u>(4.6)</u>
Bus drivers	1,103	1,072	(2.8)	495	476	(3.8)
Shunters/bus cleaners	133	109	(18.0)	64	62	(3.1)
Other operating/ancillary workers	<u>74</u>	<u>43</u>	<u>(41.9)</u>	<u>35</u>	<u>32</u>	<u>(8.6)</u>
Total (operating/ancillary)	<u>1,310</u>	<u>1,224</u>	<u>(6.6)</u>	<u>594</u>	<u>570</u>	<u>(4.0)</u>
Engineering-skilled	333	301	(9.6)	101	85	(15.8)
-semi-skilled	13	14	7.7	12	13	8.3
-unskilled	55	51	(7.3)	19	17	(10.5)
Building workers	5	4	(20.0)	12	8	(33.3)
Apprentices/trainees	<u>17</u>	<u>43</u>	<u>152.9</u>	<u>-</u>	<u>13</u>	<u>+</u>
Total (engineering, etc)	<u>423</u>	<u>413</u>	<u>(2.4)</u>	<u>144</u>	<u>136</u>	<u>(6.3)</u>
Canteen	<u>11</u>	<u>-</u>	<u>-</u>	<u>9</u>	<u>8</u>	<u>(11.1)</u>
Grand total	2,073	1,960	(5.5)	856	818	(4.4)

Source: MMC from Ulsterbus/Citybus information.

5.2. A more detailed current analysis of employees by occupational group is given at Table 5.2. The main variations between the companies relate to the proportions of clerical and typing staff, inspectors and skilled engineering workers.

TABLE 5.2 Manpower analysis comparison of numbers employed by occupational group as percentage of total number of employees as at 25 September 1988

Occupational group	Ulsterbus		Citybus	
	Number of employees	% of workforce	Number of employees	% of workforce
Management	35	1.8	5	0.6
Inspectors	86	4.4	70	8.6
Clerical/typing	152	7.8	10	1.2
Other salaried staff	50	2.6	19	2.3
Total (salaried staff)	<u>323</u>	<u>16.5</u>	<u>104</u>	<u>12.7</u>
Bus drivers	1,072	54.7	476	58.2
Shunters/bus cleaners	109	5.6	62	7.6
Other operating/ancillary workers	43	2.2	32	3.9
Total (operating/ancillary)	<u>1,224</u>	<u>62.4</u>	<u>570</u>	<u>69.7</u>
Engineering-skilled	301	15.5	85	10.4
-semi-skilled	14	0.7	13	1.6
-unskilled	51	2.7	17	2.1
Building workers	4	0.2	8	1.0
Apprentices/trainees	43	2.2	13	1.6
Total (engineering, etc)	<u>413</u>	<u>20.9</u>	<u>136</u>	<u>15.6</u>
Canteen	-	-	8	1.0
Grand total	1,960	100.0	818	100.0

Source: Ulsterbus/Citybus.

Manpower utilisation

5.3. As we explained in Chapter 2, with the exception of the two Chief Engineers the senior management is common to both companies. Similarly many of the administrative support staff work for both companies. All such staff at headquarters are counted under Ulsterbus in Tables 5.1 and 5.2, largely explaining the relatively higher proportions of management and clerical staff in Ulsterbus as compared with Citybus.

5.4. Two other factors also contribute to the higher proportion of clerical staff in Ulsterbus. First, the widely dispersed nature of the operations of Ulsterbus with four areas and 19 depots requires some clerical support at each location, particularly as there is a direct interface with the public for such things as timetable enquiries, ticket sales, private hire bookings and so on. In contrast the operations of Citybus are confined to Belfast and based on only three depots with no direct interface with the public. Second, Citybus has for many years used inspectors to undertake some depot duties, performed in Ulsterbus by clerical staff, thus resulting in a higher proportion of inspectors than in Ulsterbus.

5.5. The larger proportion of inspectors in Citybus is also explained by the large number of inspectors required in Belfast city centre to monitor services, deal with passenger enquiries (posted timetables having been vandalised) and to assist in emergency situations.

5.6. The largest single group of employees in both companies is the drivers, accounting for some 56 per cent of the total combined workforce. Citybus has a higher ratio of drivers at 1.5 per bus compared with 1.1 in Ulsterbus. The need for more drivers per bus in Citybus is explained both by the more intensive nature of services throughout the day and by the longer operating day than is generally the case in Ulsterbus. From Monday to Friday Citybus services operate for some 19 hours a day with a morning and evening peak. For most of the day between the peaks services are maintained at over 60 per cent of the morning peak level. In most Ulsterbus depots the operating day is no more than 16 hours and while all have morning and evening peaks the level of service between the peaks is much lower, some 10 to 20 per cent of morning peak level.

5.7. Because of these differences in operating pattern between the companies Ulsterbus is able to make extensive use of split shift working. Thus in many cases one Ulsterbus driver can cover a full

day's service requirements including morning and evening peaks, taking a break in the middle. The opportunity for such a working arrangement is more restricted in Citybus.

5.8. In any bus undertaking the number of drivers needed is basically determined by the requirements of the service timetable (see Chapter 8). The minimum number of drivers is set by the peak vehicle requirement; that is the time when the largest number of vehicles are in service the Monday to Friday morning peak in both companies. Thereafter the number of additional drivers needed is influenced by the length of the operating day, the level of service throughout the day, the provision of services seven days a week, the need for extra cover for holidays and sickness (set at 10 per cent in both companies) and all subject to the constraints imposed on working patterns by statute and by management/trades union agreements.

5.9. There are two sets of regulations covering drivers' hours, one relating to local services (route length under 50 km) and the other to long-distance services (route length over 50 km). The latter have no relevance to Citybus and only very limited relevance to Ulsterbus stage carriage services. For local service drivers the most important items are:

- (a) maximum spell: 6 hours or 9 hours with aggregate layover of 45 minutes, or 8 hours with aggregate layover of 40 minutes;
- (b) maximum driving hours: 11 hours; and
- (c) daily rest period (between successive duties): 10 hours, but may be 8 hours if followed by 12 hours on the next day.

5.10. Items (a) and (b) above are superseded by the trade union agreement which has the following main provisions for Ulsterbus drivers:

- (a) guaranteed week: 39 hours (any 5 of 7 days);
- (b) guaranteed day: 7 hours 48 minutes;
- (c) maximum working week: 42.5 hours actual work (less on spreadover duties);
- (d) spreadover duties: supplementary payment payable after 9 hours 30 minutes. No maximum is set, but spreadovers are considered to be uneconomic and generally unacceptable over 12.5 to 13 hours; and
- (e) maximum spell of duty (see paragraph 5.9(a)): 5.5 hours without book-off period or a minimum paid meal break of 20 minutes.

Other provisions relate to booking on and off and various time allowances.

5.11. As we explain in Chapter 8, the task of the scheduler in preparing timetables and drivers' duty rosters is to meet service requirements using the minimum number of vehicles and drivers. At the same time he must seek to schedule the most effective use of drivers' paid time subject to the constraints outlined above.

5.12. The 1987/88 annual summary of schedule statistics for Ulsterbus shows a peak vehicle requirement of 761 buses and 984 full-time drivers' duties, a ratio of 1.3 drivers per vehicle. For Citybus the equivalent figures are 244 buses and 463 drivers' duties, giving a ratio of 1.9 drivers per vehicle. These figures exclude a limited number of Grade II (driver/ cleaner) employees, minibus drivers and coach drivers, together with the vehicles they drive, and spare drivers who may be available to cover illness, holidays and so on.

5.13. Having determined the number of drivers required the schedulers, in preparing duty rosters, then seek to secure the most effective use of the available man-hours. In this context the object is to have as high a proportion as possible of on-bus or running time and the least amount of idle or waste time. Table 5.3 summarises the scheduling efficiency of Ulsterbus and changes between 1983/84 and 1987/88.

TABLE 5.3 **Ulsterbus scheduling efficiency-drivers-1983/84 to 1987/88**

	1983/84	1987/88	Percentage change + or (-)
Duties	1,042	984	(5.6)
Duties per bus	1.34	1.29	(3.7)
Running time (%)	66.60	68.70	3.2
Allowances (%)	11.60	11.30	(2.6)
Layover (%)	7.50	7.00	(6.7)
Payable hours as % of actual hours	117.43	116.76	(0.6)
Other duties* (%)	5.00	4.50	(10.0)
Waste (%)	9.30	8.80	(5.4)
Weekly miles per duty	467	494	5.8

Source: MMC from Ulsterbus annual summary of schedule statistics.

*Includes cleaning, working to instructions and travelling as a passenger.

5.14. The difference between actual hours and payable hours reflects the premium paid in respect of overtime, weekend working and spreadover (split shifts). This has remained fairly constant over the five years. Both the average percentage running time and the average weekly mileage per duty have increased modestly with corresponding reductions in other factors. A similar analysis of current schedules for Citybus drivers showed that average running time was 74.34 per cent and waste only 1.55 per cent.

5.15. Engineering employees concerned with the maintenance and repair of the vehicle fleet account for 19.5 per cent of the total workforce of the two companies. Their role and productivity performance is considered in detail in Chapter 7.

Part-time drivers

5.16. Despite the scale of twice-daily school transport operations, which might appear to be well-suited to part-time employment, there are no part-time drivers on regular shifts in Ulsterbus or Citybus. There are, however, cleaners who undertake some driving duties. The companies have recently made some efforts to recruit part-time drivers for casual, irregular use, eg private hire, but with limited success to date; they believe that the physical hazards deriving both from terrorism and from vandalism and the low earnings may have deterred potential recruits from applying for advertised part-time driving vacancies. Their own past experience and that of an Education and Library Board also indicate that there are numerous problems associated with the employment of part-time drivers and they did not consider it to be a viable proposition for regular shifts. The unions concerned told us they did not consider the employment of part-time drivers would be more efficient than the present use of full-time drivers. The principle of part-time drivers has, however, been reactivated in a recent agreement with the trades unions in respect of stage carriage minibuses.

Overtime working

5.17. Authority for overtime working is vested in Area Managers and functional department heads and it is monitored at Depot and Area Manager level. There is no written policy on overtime working, and there are no central statistics to record or monitor overtime levels or trends except by reference to annual earnings. Management told us that higher levels of overtime were originally permitted in Citybus to improve earnings in order to assist in recruitment. Much overtime arises from the earning of supplementary revenue (eg private hire and tours) using off-peak availability of resources primarily allocated for bus services.

Manpower planning

5.18. There are no formal arrangements for manpower planning (eg as part of a budgetary process). Area Managers and functional department heads are responsible for deciding the manpower numbers needed to do the job, which they calculate on a year-on-year basis; they relate current numbers employed to expected changes in workload, and revise manning levels accordingly.

5.19. Under the companies' policy of decentralised management the Personnel Department has no role in manpower planning, other than providing relevant statistics, eg of numbers employed and labour turnover.

5.20. Work study techniques are used in Citybus to establish work standards in the operation of the engineering maintenance bonus scheme. These standards provide an analytical basis on which management could assess manpower needs for this occupational group.

5.21. The number of buses and routes, in conjunction with the service schedules, provides a basis for determining manpower requirements for bus drivers. This can be influenced significantly, however, by the proportion of total man-hours that is effective working time (ie actual driving time plus necessary ancillary work) and the allowance for holidays and sickness (see paragraphs 5.8 to 5.12).

5.22. Manpower requirements for all other occupational groups are based on the subjective assessment by line managers of the numbers they think are necessary to do the work.

Pay and allowances

5.23. Table 5.4 shows the movement in basic rates of pay for the main occupational groups between 1983 to 1988, and Table 5.5 the trends in average earnings (ie including overtime, attendance allowance, spreadover payments, premium rates for weekend working and incentive bonuses).

TABLE 5.4 Basic rates of pay and allowances for main occupational groups, 1983 to 1988

Occupational group	<i>As at 4 April 1983</i>			<i>As at 4 April 1988</i>			<i>% increase 1983/88</i>
	<i>Basic rate</i>	<i>Attendance allowance</i>	<i>Basic weekly pay</i>	<i>Basic rate</i>	<i>Attendance allowance</i>	<i>Basic weekly pay</i>	
<i>£ per week</i>							
Ulsterbus and Citybus							
Inspectors	133.04	7.80	140.84	167.12	9.35	176.47	25.3
ClerksGrade I*	86.73	5.25	91.98	108.87	6.30	115.17	25.2
ClerksGrade II*	106.27	6.30	112.57	133.39	7.60	140.99	25.2
ClerksGrade III	119.75	7.80	127.55	150.33	9.35	159.68	25.2
ClerksGrade IV	138.50	7.80	146.30	173.77	9.35	183.12	25.2
<i>Operating staff</i>							
Drivers (stage carriage services)	108.00	7.87	115.87	138.00	8.50	146.50	26.4
Shunters	92.45	7.87	100.32	116.98	9.20	126.18	25.8
Bus cleaners	81.65	7.87	89.52	103.41	9.20	112.61	25.8
Ulsterbus							
<i>Maintenance</i>							
Skilled	97.20	7.80	105.00	128.00	9.00	137.00	30.5
Semi-skilled	83.65	7.80	91.45	110.17	9.00	119.17	30.3
Unskilled	79.65	7.80	87.45	104.98	9.00	113.98	30.3
Citybus							
<i>Maintenance</i>							
Skilled**	94.60	7.80	102.40	As for Ulsterbus			33.8
Semi-skilled**	81.40	7.80	89.20	As for Ulsterbus			33.6
Unskilled**	77.45	7.80	85.25	As for Ulsterbus			33.7

Source: MMC from Ulsterbus/Citybus information.

*At maxima of salary scales.

**Brought into line with Ulsterbus rates with effect from 4 April 1988.

TABLE 5.5 Average earnings by occupational group in Ulsterbus and Citybus, 1983/84 to 1987/88

Occupational group	Average earnings £ per annum					% increase 1984-88
	1983/84	1984/85	1985/86	1986/87	1987/88	
<i>Ulsterbus</i>						
Drivers	7,838	8,448	8,689	8,612	9,619	22.7
Chargehands	8,702	9,032	9,310	9,974	10,323	18.6
Skilled	6,899	7,480	7,802	8,179	8,660	25.5
Semi-skilled	6,018	6,357	6,962	7,220	7,544	25.4
Unskilled	5,931	6,451	6,647	6,852	7,175	21.0
Inspectors	8,644	9,450	9,697	10,346	10,766	24.5
Clerical	5,897	6,450	6,703	7,703	7,640	29.6
Others	5,511	5,941	6,069	6,610	7,085	28.6
Depot Managers	11,158	11,601	12,101	12,849	13,132	17.7
Foremen	8,884	9,287	9,796	10,193	10,656	19.9
<i>Citybus</i>						
Drivers	7,954	8,820	9,096	9,116	10,426	31.1
Chargehands	6,898	7,138	7,336	7,128	7,066	2.4
Skilled	6,714	7,186	7,382	7,786	8,279	23.3
Semi-skilled	5,568	5,882	6,059	6,352	6,713	20.6
Inspectors	9,798	10,504	10,719	11,169	11,900	21.5
Clerical	6,533	7,026	7,118	7,556	8,502	30.1
Others	6,695	7,243	7,403	7,558	8,569	28.0
Depot Managers	11,422	12,005	12,343	13,135	12,875	12.7
Foremen	8,354	9,075	9,452	10,017	10,793	29.2

Source: Ulsterbus/Citybus.

5.24. All employees who are on time rates also qualify for an attendance allowance (see Table 5.4). The attendance allowance, which was introduced in January 1979, is forfeited in full if the employee fails to complete his/her normal week's work for any reason whatsoever and management believe it to be an effective measure against casual or unwarranted absence or lateness. Engineering workshop employees in both companies (see Chapter 7) also participate in incentive bonus schemes. The apparent substantial rise in drivers' average earnings in 1987/88 (see Table 5.5) is attributed to the depression of earnings in 1986/87 due to industrial action.

Other personnel matters

Recruitment and selection

5.25. There is close liaison between line managers and the Personnel Department in the recruitment and selection process, including a detailed and exhaustive check-list issued by the Personnel Department to managers for use as an aide-mémoire in interviewing candidates.

5.26. Labour turnover is relatively low and the recruitment of suitable full-time employees has not posed any general problems.

5.27. Unlike the remainder of the United Kingdom, employers in Northern Ireland are required to conform to a code of practice relating to discrimination on the grounds of religious belief or political opinion (Religious Equality of Opportunity in Employment: Guide to Effective Practice, published by the Department of Economic Development in September 1987). It is too early to assess the impact of its provisions. At the outset it meant a considerable effort on the part of the companies to establish the information necessary for evaluation and future monitoring purposes. It is seen as an additional factor to be taken into account in relation to recruitment and selection, and also in employment policies generally (eg promotion, training), and to that extent is likely to entail some increase in costs, if only marginal, but no specific difficulties are envisaged at present. It has always been the companies' policy, for example, that sectarian considerations should not influence route schedules or work organisation generally.

Training

5.28. The companies undertake most employee training, including bus driver training, on an in-house basis. They also participate in youth training programmes. There are detailed training programmes, and results show over 98 per cent success in bus drivers passing their PSV tests, more than half of them at the first attempt and all but a very few of the remainder at their second attempt. There are also training programmes for inspectors and potential Depot Managers.

Performance appraisal

5.29. There are no formal arrangements or criteria for appraising the performance of individuals at any level in either company (see paragraph 3.20).

Discipline

5.30. All the collective bargaining agreements between the companies and trades unions include virtually identical disciplinary procedures. The operation of the procedures is the responsibility of line managers, who institute proceedings largely on the basis of precedent. The procedures include a right of appeal to a higher level of management, and a further right of appeal to the companies' Managing Director. However, the unions have suggested that too many cases have had to be settled by industrial tribunals.

Sick absence

5.31. The sick absence statistics were computerised in 1987, and no earlier data are readily available. Table 5.6 gives the paid sickness absence levels for broad categories of employees for the past year.

TABLE 5.6 Analysis of sick absence, 9 November 1987 to 6 November 1988

<i>Occupational category</i>	<i>Average number of staff (approx)</i>	<i>Number of days paid sick absence</i>	<i>Number of days paid sick absence per employee</i>
<i>Ulsterbus</i>			
Traffic	1,453	17,009	11.7
Engineering	407	3,280	8.1
<i>Citybus</i>			
Traffic	688	8,321	12.1
Engineering	137	1,899	13.9

Source: Ulsterbus/Citybus.

5.32. No information is available centrally on unpaid sick absence. As the first day of sick absence is always unpaid, and in some circumstances the first three days are unpaid, the statistics in Table 5.6 understate the true absence levels to some extent. The companies told us that the original and prime purpose of computerising the headquarters record was to audit and reconcile the costs and payments of the sick pay scheme.

Communication

5.33. The companies have recently issued their first two reports to employees on corporate performance and told us that they envisaged issuing three or four such reports each year. The only other formal channel of communication is through the joint consultative machinery. There is no company newsheet or other regular published information series. The companies felt they were not sufficiently large to support the costs of a regular in-house magazine or newsheet. It was also felt that problems could be exacerbated during pay negotiations if information was communicated by this means.

Personnel function

5.34. The Personnel Department is mainly concerned with the servicing and operation of the collective agreements, the provision of training, organising and assisting in the recruitment and selection processes, and a limited range of manpower statistics. It has no role in such matters as manpower planning, the determination of manning levels or the monitoring of overtime levels.

Industrial relations

Collective bargaining

5.35. The companies have collective bargaining agreements covering all employee groups except senior management; a list of the agreements is given at Appendix 5.1. The agreements cover trades union recognition and membership, pay and conditions of employment, negotiating and consultative arrangements, and disciplinary, grievance and disputes procedures. Each agreement includes a 'closed shop' provision requiring employees to be members of an appropriate trade union while employed within scope of that agreement.

Industrial disputes

5.36. In the past five years there have been 13 disputes involving a stoppage of work or other industrial action; two of the disputes have affected both companies, a further six have involved only some employees in Ulsterbus, and the remaining five only some employees in Citybus. Eight of the stoppages of work have been unofficial (ie they were not formally called or approved by the union(s) concerned) and five were unconstitutional (ie industrial action was taken in breach of the mutually agreed disputes procedures in the agreements).

Joint consultation

5.37. There are Joint Consultative Committees for the main groups of employees which meet at regular intervals. The business of the committees is a mixture of consultation and negotiation covering a wide range of substantive and procedural issues as well as matters of general interest to the employees.

5.38. The unions told us, however, that unnecessary disputes had arisen in the past as a result of inadequate consultation. This situation had improved to some extent with the changes in senior management. Requests by the union representatives to meet with the Board had in the past always been refused but they felt that they should be given the opportunity of such a meeting from time to time to discuss important issues. Management's view was that the existing machinery provided the

opportunity to consult and negotiate on a very full range of issues. We were told by management that arrangements would be made for union representatives to meet the Board informally.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Manpower utilisation

5.39. We found that the companies' manpower resources were efficiently deployed. We have referred in paragraph 2.68 to the efficient, low-cost, lean organisation of the companies which is reflected in the number of managerial, supervisory and clerical staff employed (see Table 5.2). Drivers, who represent the largest group of employees (56 per cent of the total combined workforce), are well utilised with very low levels of non-productive time (see Table 5.3). Engineering employees, representing 19.5 per cent of the total combined workforce, also achieve good levels of productivity (see Chapter 7).

Manpower planning

5.40. Over the past five years the workforce in Ulsterbus and Citybus has decreased by an average of approximately 1 per cent per annum. Despite the lack of any formal manpower planning or budgeting, we were broadly satisfied with this achievement in the context of the companies' particular operating conditions. However, we recommend that the Board should receive an annual report on manpower productivity and future manpower plans and budgets.

Sick absence

5.41. Recorded sick absence levels do not appear to be excessive, given the nature of the work and the particular operating conditions in Northern Ireland, but the statistics understate the true absence levels to an unknown extent because they relate only to paid sick absence. Also they have not been presented in time series. For these reasons they are not adequate for monitoring sick absence trends and patterns. Management have told us that they now intend to produce this information. We recommend that management should revise the presentation of statistics to include all sick absence, paid and unpaid, in time series to facilitate the early identification of adverse trends.

Communication

5.42. The companies have recognised a need to improve communications with their employees by introducing an employee report which they intend to issue three or four times a year. We recommend that this medium should be used to improve further the flow of information from management and to encourage employee involvement.

Personnel function

5.43. We believe it would be in the companies' best interests to make more and better use of their Personnel Department. In particular we recommend that the department should review the presentation of manpower statistics, including those relating to overtime working, sick absence and pay/earnings, and that it should have an enhanced role, for example in industrial relations matters, personnel policy development and employee counselling and welfare.

Industrial relations

5.44. Industrial relations in the companies are generally good. However, there are a large number of procedural and substantive agreements and we recommend that they should be rationalised by combining common elements.

5.45. The 'closed shop' provisions of the current company trade union agreements are of undoubted benefit to the unions in that employees automatically become and remain union members. The companies have recognised considerable benefits for them in their special operating conditions. We recognise, however, that circumstances may change in the future.

5.46. The unions expressed some dissatisfaction with the quality of joint consultation. To a considerable extent this related to experiences before the recent changes in senior management and it is perhaps early days for the new team. Nevertheless we recommend that the Managing Director should meet the union representatives and invite them to set out their complaints and suggestions for improving the joint consultation process.

5.47. If the companies and the unions consider it appropriate, the advice and assistance of the Labour Relations Agency in Belfast might be enlisted in the implementation of some of our recommendations and suggestions.