Quality and Methodology Information

General Details
Title of output: Labour Disputes Survey
Designation: National Statistics
Geographic Coverage: United Kingdom
Date of last SQR or QMI1: March 2009
Contact details: labour.disputes@ons.gov.uk

Executive Summary
The Labour Disputes Survey collects data on the number of stoppages, working days lost, and the number of workers involved in strike action from UK businesses that have been involved in strike action. However, lack of press coverage generally means that small disputes are not always included.

The survey tries to record all strike action that has taken place except for those disputes involving fewer that 10 workers or lasting less than half a day. However, ONS does collect data if 100 working days are lost due to a single dispute, regardless of the number of workers involved. Disputes are picked up from reports in the mainstream media and newspapers such as The Morning Star and The Socialist Worker as well as news feed websites like NewsNow. News and union websites are also a primary source of information. Where possible, the data are collected directly from the employer involved in the dispute. There are also centralised returns from large businesses, public bodies and trade unions.

This document contains the following sections:
• Output quality
• About the output
• How the output is created
• Validation and quality assurance
• Concepts and definitions
• Other information, relating to quality trade-offs and user needs, and
• Sources for further information or advice.

Output Quality
This document provides a range of information that describes the quality of the output and details any points that should be noted when using the output.
ONS has developed Guidelines for Measuring Statistical Quality1; these are based upon the six European Statistical System (ESS) quality dimensions. This document addresses the quality dimensions and important quality characteristics, which are:
• Relevance
• Timeliness and Punctuality
• Comparability
• Coherence
• Accuracy
• Output Quality Trade-Offs

More information is provided about these quality dimensions in the sections below.

About the Output

1 Quality and Methodology Information' (QMI) replaced 'Summary Quality Reports' (SQR) from 04/11
Relevance
The degree to which the statistical outputs meet users’ needs.

Data from the Labour Disputes Survey are used by a wide range of internal and external customers. The figures are used by the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills (BIS) to provide ministers with a monthly brief on labour disputes. Other users in Government include: HM Treasury, Welsh Assembly Government, the Department for Education and the Advisory, Conciliation and Arbitration Service (ACAS). Outside government, the data attract interest from researchers, local authorities, development corporations, academics and other users within private industry. In accordance with the International Labour Organisation (ILO) “Resolution on Strikes and Lockouts: 1993”\(^2\), the UK provides the ILO with data covering working days lost, number of workers involved and the number of stoppages by industry for each calendar year. This information is then published on the ILO statistical website.

Timeliness and Punctuality
Timeliness refers to the lapse of time between publication and the period to which the estimates refer. Punctuality refers to the gap between planned and actual publication dates.

The survey releases data on a monthly and annual basis. The data are published in the timeliest manner possible and it would not be possible to publish any sooner because of the time needed for companies to compile the information. The time lag between the publication and the reference period to which the data refer is as follows:

- Monthly results release: six weeks after the reference period.
- Annual results release: March, twelve weeks after the reference period.
- Annual in-depth analysis: June, six months after the reference period.

For more details on related releases, the UK National Statistics Publication Hub\(^3\) is available online and provides 12 months advanced notice of release dates. If there are any changes to the pre-announced release schedule, public attention will be drawn to the change and the reasons for the change will be explained fully at the same time, as set out in the Code of Practice for Official Statistics\(^4\).

How the Output is Created

The survey tries to record all strike action which has taken place within United Kingdom, except for those involving fewer than 10 workers or lasting less than a day. However ONS collects data if 100 working days are lost due to a single dispute, regardless of the number of workers involved. It should be noted that in measuring ‘stoppages’ the statistics exclude disputes that do not result in a stoppage of work. These include:

- **Work-to-rule** - where a Union organises action short of a strike. A work-to-rule means that workers are asked to only work standard hours and not to do anything that is not written in their contracts. This rules out the possibility of overtime and working through core lunch hours.

- **Go-Slows** – where workers stage industrial action by slowing down production, this could then have a knock-on effect on the business’ productivity.

Disputes are picked up from reports in news and trade union websites. There are also centralised returns from large businesses, public bodies and some trade unions. Where possible, the data are collected directly from the employer involved in the dispute. The survey uses various ways of collecting data; however the majority of the data are collected via email questionnaires. Data are also collected via telephone and in the cases of some nationwide strikes, a printed questionnaire is sent out.

As the information is usually given by the organisation involved in the action the data are always considered to be accurate. Press reports and previous returns, where applicable, are checked for validation purposes. For large UK-wide strikes such as local council workers, the numbers of workers and working days lost can be imputed by calculating regional averages of returned data and applying these averages to the business’ total employment. For smaller strikes, the number of workers involved is taken from newspaper reports and used to calculate working days lost.

The survey is voluntary and is run as a census and therefore the number of questionnaires despatched in a monthly cycle is totally dependent on how many cases of industrial action there are in that month. To give an example, in the last ten years the lowest number of questionnaires dispatched would have been six and the highest would have been in the hundreds. However, the latter would have been for nationwide action, although this would be counted as one strike. The response rates for the survey, like the numbers surveyed, vary month on month. The average response rate for the years 2010 and 2011 is thirty percent when using the regular
email form, however for a recent industrial action in the education industry ONS used a paper questionnaire and obtained a response rate of seventy-five percent.

Information on who accesses the data on a monthly or annual basis is not available. However ONS is aware that estimates are used widely across Government. The outputs also attract regular interest from media outlets and the monthly estimates can regularly be found in the press. Amongst other regular users are: researchers, local authorities, development corporations, academics and private industry.

Validation and Quality Assurance

Accuracy
The degree of closeness between an estimate and the true value.

The Labour Disputes Survey, on a voluntary basis, requests the minimum amount of detail to produce the analyses required by users. The overwhelming majority of businesses rarely experience a labour disputes stoppage and consequently do not have formal mechanisms for recording the data. Information is not available on the completeness of coverage so consequently, it is not known what proportion of all stoppages is included in the statistics. Data are not collected for those disputes involving fewer than 10 workers or lasting less than a day. However ONS collects data if 100 working days are lost due to a single dispute, regardless of the amount of workers involved.

Based on the comments received in the last Labour Disputes Triennial Review the users of the data confirmed that the Labour Disputes information meets their needs. Users were happy with the level of data produced on a monthly basis so long as a more detailed breakdown was given annually. The public and private split, introduced on the back of a recommendation from the review, has also helped users gain a greater understanding of the data.

The Labour Disputes Monthly Provisional Results are published six weeks after the reference period and the previous period’s data are revised if necessary. A further (final) revision is also conducted when the annual results are published in March if additional data have been made available. Revisions are generally very small as it is unlikely ONS misses any major strike activity throughout the year, as large strikes are generally well publicised. All revisions are conducted in line with the National Statistics Protocol on Revisions.

Comparability and Coherence

Comparability is the degree to which data can be compared over time and domain e.g. geographic level. Coherence is the degree to which data that are derived from different sources or methods, but refer to the same topic, are similar.

The Labour Disputes Survey covers all UK industry using the Standard Industrial Classification (SIC). Data for 1995 – 2002 have been classified according to SIC 92, data from 2003 -2008 have been classified according to SIC 03 and from 2009 data have been classified according to SIC 07. The broad industrial classifications used by the Labour Disputes Survey, however, have meant that this change in classification had minimal impact on the outputs.

ONS holds UK data on labour disputes going back as far as 1891. Analysis can be provided on various combinations eg, by industry groups, by Standard Statistical Region from 1958 – 1995, by region from 1996 and by cause (from 1959). ONS also publishes estimates on a Public/Private split, with data dating back to 1996.

The ILO’s Resolution on Strikes and Lockouts: 1993 has provided the framework for the methodology used by the UK. The UK does not satisfy the resolution in all respects, largely because of the practical difficulties in collecting some of the detail (eg, the basis on which the dispute was settled). Nevertheless, the key recommendations of the resolution are followed.

The Triennial Mini Review of the Labour Disputes Survey, conducted by ONS in 2009, recommended this methodology be continued.

There is no other official source of labour disputes statistics in the UK. The UK methodology was compared with 15 other countries for the 2005 version of the Triennial Mini Review. The survey of other countries’ practices shows that the UK’s procedures are typical. Most other countries’ surveys are voluntary and most are conducted in a similar way to the UK. A summary of comparisons with other countries is available from the table below.
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**Concepts and Definitions**
Concepts and definitions describe the legislation governing the output, and a description of the classifications used in the output.

**Stoppages**
The statistics cover stoppages of work in progress in the UK during a calendar year caused by labour disputes between employers and workers, or between workers and other workers, connected with terms and conditions of employment. These include ‘lock-outs’ by employers whereby organisations close their sites and will not allow workers to participate in their normal working day, and ‘unlawful’ or ‘unofficial’ strikes. The statistics exclude disputes that do not result in a stoppage of work, for example work-to-rules and go-slow.

**Working Days Lost**
Working days lost is 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 regular practice.

**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. 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.

**Other Information**

**Output Quality Trade-Offs**
Trade-offs are the extent to which different dimensions of quality are balanced against each other.

Data published on a monthly basis are provisional and are open to revisions either the following month or year end. The survey publishes data as timely as possible, but more reliable estimates may be available the next month or year end when the data are final.

**Sources for Further Information or Advice**

**Accessibility and Clarity**
Accessibility is the ease with which users are able to access the data, also reflecting the format in which the data are available and the availability of supporting information. Clarity refers to the quality and sufficiency of the release details, illustrations and accompanying advice.
ONS's recommended format for accessible content is a combination of HTML web pages for narrative, charts and graphs, with data being provided in usable formats such as CSV and Excel. The ONS website also offers users the option to download the narrative in PDF format. In some instances other software may be used, or may be available on request. For further information please refer to the contact details at the beginning of this document.

For information regarding conditions of access to data, please refer to the links below:

- Terms and conditions (for data on the website) [http://www.ons.gov.uk/ons/site-information/information/terms-and-conditions/index.html](http://www.ons.gov.uk/ons/site-information/information/terms-and-conditions/index.html)
- Copyright and reuse of published data: [http://www.ons.gov.uk/ons/site-information/information/creative-commons-license/index.html](http://www.ons.gov.uk/ons/site-information/information/creative-commons-license/index.html)
- Access to microdata via the Virtual Microdata Laboratory: [http://www.ons.gov.uk/ons/about-ons/who-we-are/services/vml/index.html](http://www.ons.gov.uk/ons/about-ons/who-we-are/services/vml/index.html)
- Accessibility: [http://www.ons.gov.uk/ons/site-information/information/accessibility/index.html](http://www.ons.gov.uk/ons/site-information/information/accessibility/index.html)

**Useful Links**

Eurostat Website on Labour Disputes  

Eurostat Data Explorer – Labour Disputes  

International Labour Organisation (ILO)  

**References**

**Title of Reference Website Location**

1 Guidelines for Measuring Statistical Quality  

2 ILO Resolution on Strikes and Lockouts 1993  

3 UK National Statistics Publication Hub  

4 Code of Practice for Official Statistics  

5 Labour Disputes Monthly Provisional Results  

6 National Statistics Protocol on Revisions  

7 Standard Industrial Classification (SIC)  

8 Triennial Mini Review of the Labour Disputes Survey  