

# Summary Quality Report for Labour Disputes

## 1 Introduction

This report is part of a rolling programme of quality reports being introduced by the Office for National Statistics (ONS). The full programme of work being carried out on [Statistical Quality](#)<sup>1</sup> is available on the National Statistics website.

This report relates to the Labour Disputes Survey, details of which can be found on the [Employment Relations](#)<sup>2</sup> webpage on the National Statistics website. The Labour Disputes Survey collects information on the number of working days lost and workers involved in strike action in the UK on a monthly basis. The statistics cover stoppages of work in the United Kingdom caused by labour disputes between employers and workers directly involved, and other workers (indirectly affected by strike action) in relation to terms and conditions of employment. The inquiry is different to most other business surveys conducted by ONS in that it is conducted on a voluntary basis and is effectively a census 'selected' from a self-defined list each month, the list of all known strikes in the period.

## 2 Summary of Quality

### 2.1 Relevance

*The degree to which the statistical product meets user needs for both coverage and content.*

The Labour Disputes Survey collects data on the number of working days lost, and the number of workers involved in strike action from all UK companies who 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 than 10 workers or lasting less than a day. Disputes are picked up from reports in the mainstream media and newspapers such as The Morning Star and The Socialist Worker; 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 companies, public bodies and trade unions.

	<b>Labour Disputes</b>
What it measures	Number of working days lost to strike action Number of workers involved Number of stoppages
Frequency	Monthly
Sample Size	Variable
Periods available	Annually from 1891, Monthly from 1931
Sample frame	All UK businesses involved in strike action
Sample design	Census from self-defined list
Weighting	Not applicable
Estimation	Not applicable
Imputation	For large UK-wide strikes the numbers of workers and working days lost can be imputed by calculating regional averages of returned data and applying these averages to the company's total employment: eg for a UK-wide strike of local council workers. For smaller strikes, the number of workers involved are taken from newspaper reports and used to calculate working days lost.
Outliers	Not applicable

Data from the Labour Disputes Survey are used by a wide range of users, both internal and external customers. The figures are used by the Department for Business, Enterprise and Regulatory Reform (BERR) to provide ministers with a monthly brief on labour disputes and also by HM Treasury, Welsh Assembly and the Advisory, Conciliation and Arbitration Service (ACAS). Outside government the data attract interest from researchers, local authorities, development corporations, academics and private industry. In accordance with the [International Labour Organisation \(ILO\) "Resolution on Strikes and Lockouts: 1993"](#)<sup>3</sup>, the UK provides the [ILO](#)<sup>4</sup> 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](#)<sup>4</sup> statistical website.

## Key Concepts

### 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-slows.

### 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 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.

## 2.2 Accuracy

*The closeness between an estimated result and the (unknown) 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 firms rarely experience labour disputes stoppages 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 we do collect data if 100 working days are lost due to a single dispute, regardless of the amount of workers involved.

The [Labour Disputes Monthly Provisional Results](#)<sup>5</sup> are published 6 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's unlikely we will miss 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](#)<sup>14</sup>.

## 2.3 Timeliness and Punctuality

*Timeliness refers to the lapse of time between publication and the period to which the data refer. Punctuality refers to the time lag between the actual and planned dates of publication.*

The [National Statistics Release Calendar](#)<sup>6</sup> is available on the National Statistics website and provides twelve months advance notice of releases. Labour Disputes has consistently met the

target publication deadlines. In the unlikely event of a change to the pre-announced release schedule, public attention would be drawn to the change and the reasons for the change explained fully at the same time, as set out in the [Code of Practice for Official Statistics](#)<sup>7</sup>. The time lag between publication and the reference period to which the data refer are as follows.

Monthly results release:	6 weeks after the reference period.
Annual results release:	March, 12 weeks after the reference period.
Annual in-depth analysis:	June, 6 months after the reference period.

## 2.4 Accessibility and Clarity

*Accessibility is the ease with which users are able to access the data, also reflecting the format(s) in which the data are available and the availability of supporting information. Clarity refers to the quality and sufficiency of the metadata, illustrations and accompanying advice.*

The key Labour Disputes monthly outputs are published on the National Statistics website and in the [Labour Market First Release](#)<sup>8</sup>. A further breakdown of the data is also available each month in [Economic & Labour Market Review \(ELMR\)](#)<sup>9</sup>. In addition, [ELMR](#)<sup>9</sup> publishes an in-depth analysis of the previous years Labour Disputes data each June.

The [Labour Market First Release](#)<sup>8</sup> is available in a paper format directly from the press office and [Labour Disputes Time Series Data](#)<sup>10</sup> are available to download free of charge from the National Statistics website.

Further information and analysis can be obtained from the Labour Disputes team by phoning 01633 456721 or emailing [labour.disputes@ons.gov.uk](mailto:labour.disputes@ons.gov.uk)

## 2.5 Comparability

*The degree to which data can be compared over time and domain.*

The Labour Disputes Survey covers all UK industry using the [Standard Industrial Classification \(SIC\)](#)<sup>11</sup>. Data for 1995 – 2002 have been classified according to SIC 92 and data from 2003 have been classified according to SIC 2003. The broad industrial classifications used by the Labour Disputes Survey, however, have meant that this change in classification had minimal impact on the outputs.

We hold 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 Government Office Region from 1996 and by cause (from 1959). We also publish data on a Public/Private split, with data dating back to 1996.

The [ILOs Resolution on Strikes and Lockouts: 1993](#)<sup>3</sup> has provided the framework for the methodology used by the UK. The UK do 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](#)<sup>12</sup>, conducted by ONS in 2005, recommended this methodology be continued.

## 2.6 Coherence

*The degree to which data that are derived from different sources or methods, but which refer to the same phenomenon, are similar.*

There is no other official source of labour disputes statistics in the UK. The UK methodology was compared with sixteen other countries for the [Triennial Mini Review](#)<sup>12</sup>. 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. The table below provides a summary of these findings.

## Summary of comparisons with other countries

Country	Collection			Publication			Legal Requirement	Minimum threshold	Excludes some economic activities
	Monthly	Quarterly	Annually	Monthly	Quarterly	Annually			
Australia		✓	✓		✓	✓		✓	
Austria			✓			✓			
Belgium	✓		✓	✓		✓			✓
Canada	✓		✓	✓		✓		✓	
Denmark		✓	✓			✓		✓	
Finland	✓			✓	✓	✓		✓	
France	✓		✓	✓		✓		✓	✓
Germany	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Italy	✓		✓	✓		✓			
Netherlands	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓			
New Zealand	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	
Portugal	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓		✓
Spain	✓		✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓
Sweden	✓		✓			✓		✓	
UK	✓			✓		✓		✓	
USA	✓		✓	✓		✓		✓	

## 3 Summary of Methods Used to Compile the Output

### Coverage

All UK companies that have been involved in strike action. The survey tries to record all strike action which has taken place, except for those involving fewer than ten workers or lasting less than a day. However we do collect data if 100 working days are lost due to a single dispute, regardless of the amount 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-rules** - 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 company's productivity.

### Sample

Census of a self-defined list each month.

### Method

Disputes are picked up from reports in news and trade union websites. There are also centralised returns from large companies, public bodies and some trade unions.

### Statistical Disclosure

Data are published in such a way that individual strikes cannot be identified. The Code of Practice for Official Statistics, and specifically Principle 5: Confidentiality, set out practices for how we protect data from being disclosed. The Principle includes a guarantee to survey respondents to "ensure that official statistics do not reveal the identity of an individual or organisation, or any private information relating to them". More information can be found on the ONS [Statistical Disclosure Control Methodology](#)<sup>13</sup> page.

## 4 References

	<b>Title of Reference</b>	<b>Website Location</b>
1	Statistical Quality Programme	<a href="http://www.statistics.gov.uk/about/data/methodology/quality/default.asp">http://www.statistics.gov.uk/about/data/methodology/quality/default.asp</a>
2	Employment Relations Labour Disputes Survey	<a href="http://www.statistics.gov.uk/CCI/nscl.asp?ID=6625">http://www.statistics.gov.uk/CCI/nscl.asp?ID=6625</a>
3	ILO Resolution on Strikes and Lockouts 1993	<a href="http://www.ilo.org/public/english/bureau/stat/download/res/strikes.pdf">http://www.ilo.org/public/english/bureau/stat/download/res/strikes.pdf</a>
4	International Labour Organisation (ILO)	<a href="http://www.ilo.org/">http://www.ilo.org/</a>
5	Labour Disputes Monthly Provisional Results	<a href="http://www.statistics.gov.uk/STATBASE/tsdataset.asp?vlnk=538">http://www.statistics.gov.uk/STATBASE/tsdataset.asp?vlnk=538</a>
6	National Statistics Release Calendar	<a href="http://www.statistics.gov.uk/ReleaseCalendar/currentreleases.asp">http://www.statistics.gov.uk/ReleaseCalendar/currentreleases.asp</a>
7	Code of Practice for Official Statistics	<a href="http://www.statisticsauthority.gov.uk/assessment/code-of-practice/index.html">http://www.statisticsauthority.gov.uk/assessment/code-of-practice/index.html</a>
8	Labour Market First Release	<a href="http://www.statistics.gov.uk/StatBase/Product.asp?vlnk=1944">http://www.statistics.gov.uk/StatBase/Product.asp?vlnk=1944</a>
9	Economic & Labour Market Review (ELMR)	<a href="http://www.statistics.gov.uk/elmr/">http://www.statistics.gov.uk/elmr/</a>
10	Labour Disputes Time Series Data	<a href="http://www.statistics.gov.uk/downloads/theme_labour/LMS_FR_HS/WebTable20.xls">http://www.statistics.gov.uk/downloads/theme_labour/LMS_FR_HS/WebTable20.xls</a>
11	Standard Industrial Classification (SIC)	<a href="http://www.statistics.gov.uk/statbase/Product.asp?vlnk=14012">http://www.statistics.gov.uk/statbase/Product.asp?vlnk=14012</a>
12	Triennial Mini Review of the Labour Disputes Survey	<a href="http://www.statistics.gov.uk/statbase/Product.asp?vlnk=14276">http://www.statistics.gov.uk/statbase/Product.asp?vlnk=14276</a>
13	Statistical Disclosure Control Methodology	<a href="http://www.statistics.gov.uk/about/data/methodology/general_methodology/sdc.asp">http://www.statistics.gov.uk/about/data/methodology/general_methodology/sdc.asp</a>
14	National Statistics Protocol on Revisions	<a href="http://www.ons.gov.uk/about-statistics/ns-standard/cop/protocols/revisions.pdf">http://www.ons.gov.uk/about-statistics/ns-standard/cop/protocols/revisions.pdf</a>

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