

# Labour Disputes Annual Article, 2014

Coverage: **UK**

Date: **16 July 2015**

Geographical Area: **Region**

Theme: **Labour Market**

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## Main points

- The number of working days lost due to labour disputes in 2014 was 788,000 compared with 444,000 in 2013. The 2014 figure is more than the average in both the 2000s and the 1990s, but less than the 1980s when strike action was more common.
- The increase in working days lost in 2014 was mainly attributable to a number of large scale public sector strikes.
- The public administration and defence and education industries once again saw the largest number of working days lost, while the majority of individual strikes occurred in the education industry.
- The region having the most working days lost was the North East.
- Pay was once again the principal cause of labour disputes. This has been the main cause of labour disputes for the last 10 years, with the exception of 2009 and 2010, when the main cause was redundancy.
- The private sector has had more strikes than the public sector in the last 3 years, a change to recent history. However, the public sector has had significantly more working days lost than the private sector in each of these years, a reflection of the large scale strikes that occur in this sector.

## Introduction

This article presents analysis of the 3 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 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 we have identified disputes from press reports.

This article gives information on labour disputes in 2014 as well as giving comparisons with earlier years. It presents year total figures on labour disputes in 2014 and provides a more in-depth analysis of figures than that published as part of the monthly [Labour Market Statistical Bulletin](#).

## Annual changes

A comparison of labour disputes in 2013 and 2014 is shown in Table 1. There are 3 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 themselves. (See technical note for more details on these definitions).

Information on earlier years is available in the table [Labour Disputes Annual Estimates 1891 to 2014 \(34.5 Kb Excel sheet\)](#), which can be found in the reference tables associated with this article.

**Table 1: Number of working days lost (WDL), workers involved and stoppages; United Kingdom; 2013 and 2014**

<b>Working days lost through stoppages:</b>	<b>2013</b>	<b>2014</b>
In progress in year	443,600	788,300
Beginning in year	443,600	761,200
<b>Workers involved in stoppages:</b>		
In progress in year	395,400	733,300
Beginning in year	387,300	698,600
<b>Stoppages:</b>		
In progress in year	114	155
Beginning in year	113	151
<b>Mean number of WDL per stoppage</b>		
In progress in year	3,892	5,086
Beginning in year	3,925	5,041
<b>Median number of WDL per stoppage</b>		
In progress in year	137	171
Beginning in year	154	171

**Table source:** Office for National Statistics

**Table notes:**

- Workers in progress figures also include workers who did not strike initially, but who joined at a later date.

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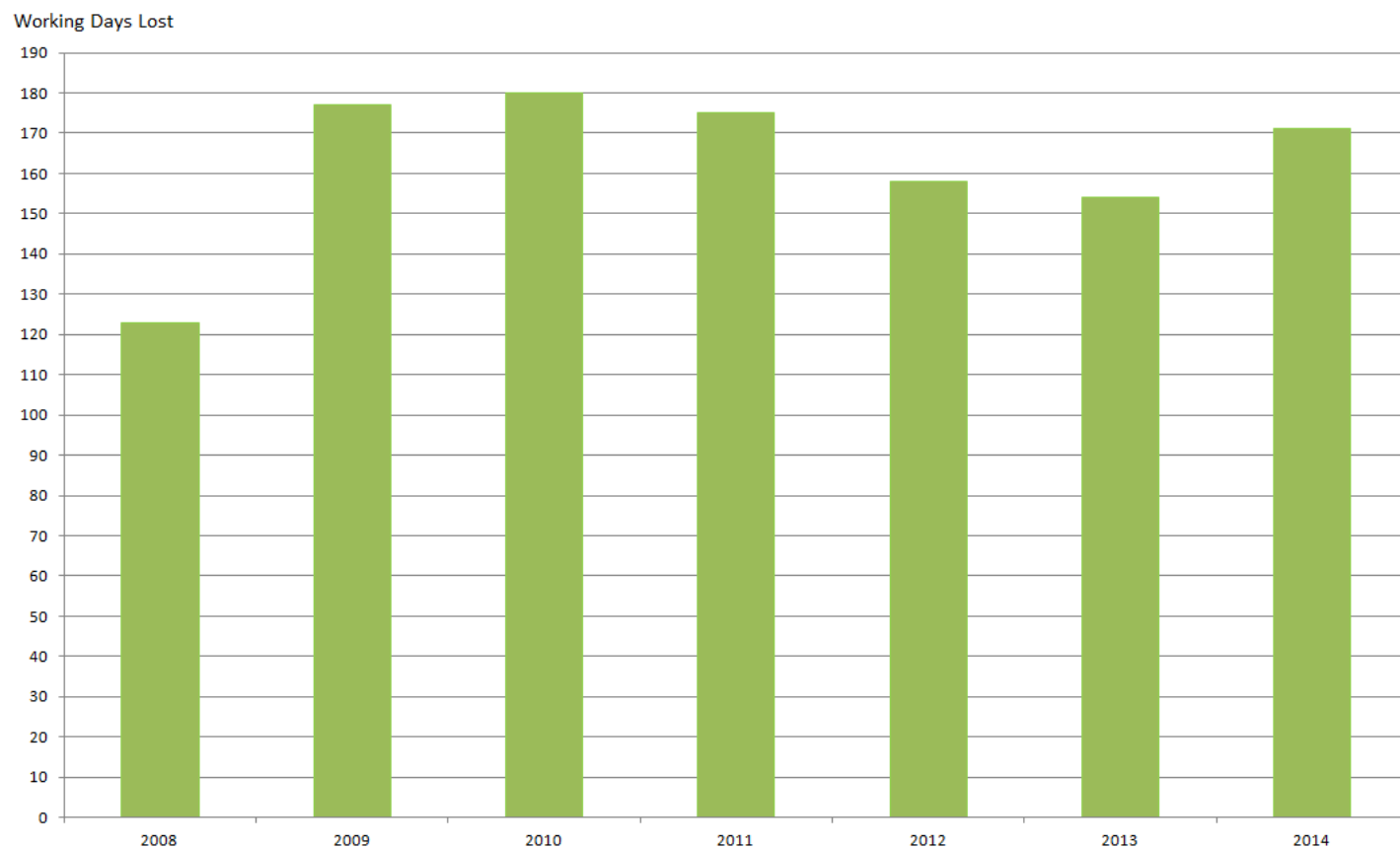
The 2014 working days lost total is not only higher than the total last year, but is higher than the average number lost per year in the 1990s and 2000s. The figure is, however, lower than the 1980s and earlier decades, when industrial action was more common.

The reason that the 2012 and 2013 totals of 249,000 and 444,000 working days lost respectively is significantly lower than the 2014 total (788,000) is largely attributable to a number of large scale public sector strikes in 2014. Despite this, the number of stoppages in 2014 (155) is also higher than in 2013 (114), and slightly higher than the average from the 2000s (144). However it is considerably down on the 1990s when the average annual number of stoppages was 266.

There were 733,000 workers involved in labour disputes during 2014, which is higher than the average number involved per year in the 1990s (201,600) and 2000s (402,100). However, it is lower than the average in the 1980s (1,040,300).

Both the mean and the median number of working days lost per stoppage were higher in 2014 than in 2013. The mean value is generally much higher than the median, since working days lost can be greatly affected by large one off strikes. For example the number of days lost in the large public sector strike in 2011 has significantly increased the mean for this year compared with others. For this reason, the median tends to give a more typical measure of the average number of working days lost per stoppage.

This can be seen in Figure 1 and Figure 2, where the median number of stoppages beginning in a year is more consistent over time than the mean.

**Figure 1: Median working days lost (WDL) per stoppage; United Kingdom; 2008 to 2014**

Source: Labour Disputes Statistics - Office for National Statistics

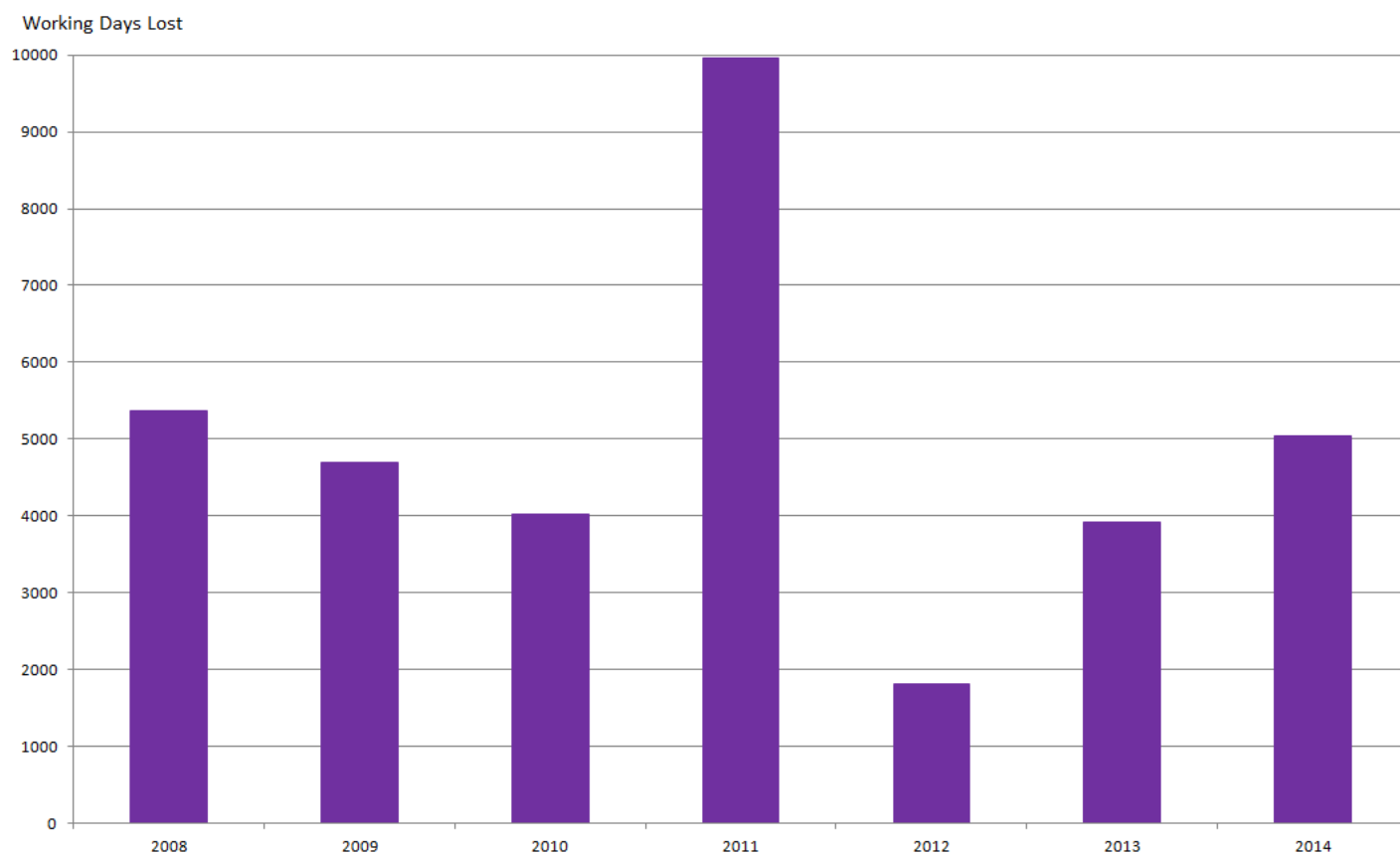
**Notes:**

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**Figure 2: Mean working days lost (WDL) per stoppage; United Kingdom; 2008 to 2014**

Source: Labour Disputes Statistics - Office for National Statistics

**Notes:**

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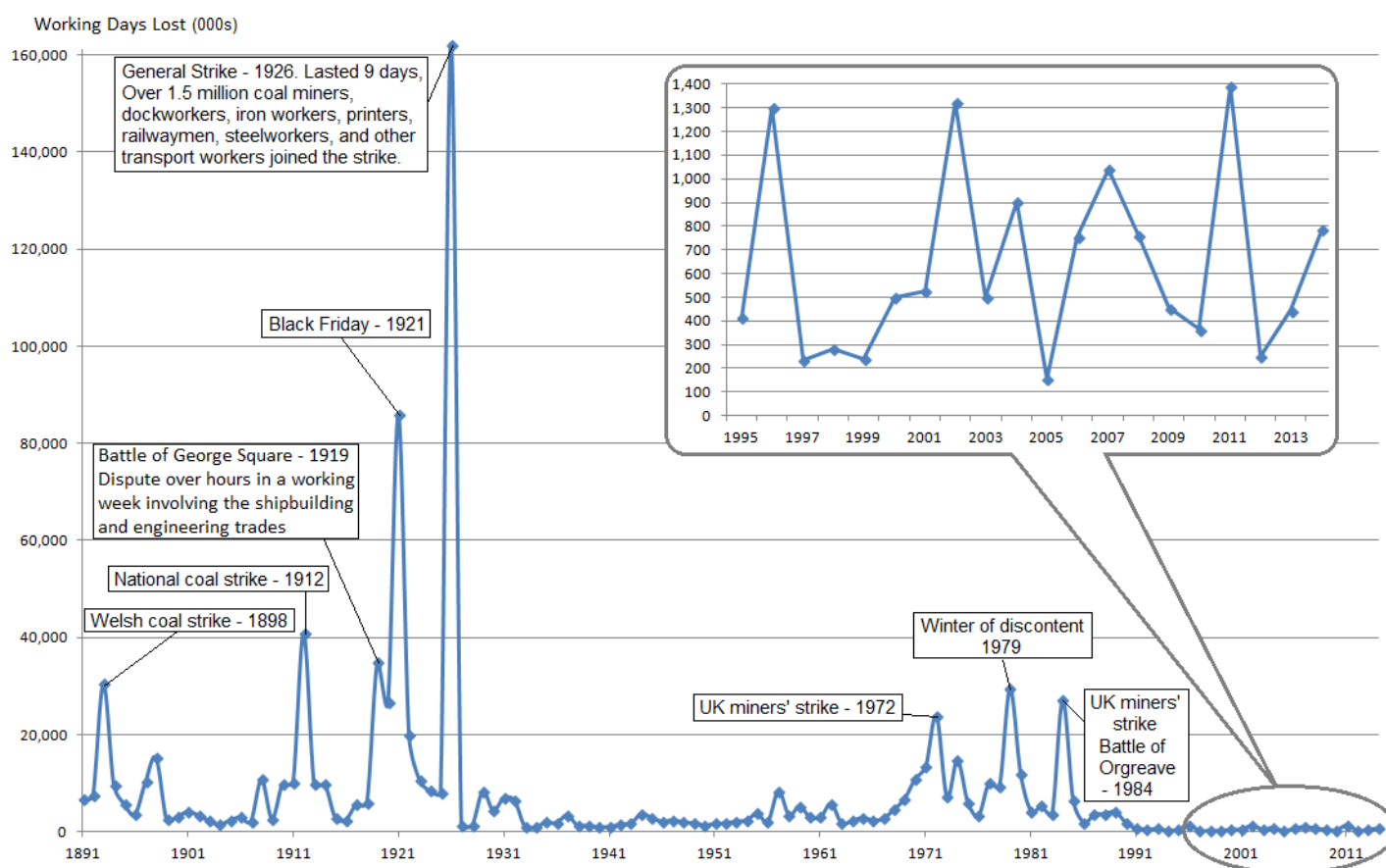
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**Review of 1995 to 2014**

Figure 3 shows a time series of working days lost between 1891 and 2014. It shows that the amount of industrial action has significantly reduced in the last 30 years. This is a stark contrast to the level of action seen when the miners went on strike in the 1970s and 1980s. The 1910s and 1920s saw even greater levels of industrial action culminating in the general strike of 1926.

**Figure 3: Labour Disputes Annual Estimates; United Kingdom; 1891 - 2014**

Source: Labour Disputes Statistics - Office for National Statistics

#### Notes:

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Table 2 presents labour disputes figures for the period 1995 to 2014, while Figures 4 and 5 illustrate working days lost and the number of stoppages respectively. Figures 4 and 5 show that there are a number of spikes in the time series in years when a particularly large strike took place, showing the impact individual strikes can have on the statistics. The high number of days lost in 2011, for example, was due to 2 large public sector strikes, while the 2002 figure was due to one very large stoppage in the transport and storage industry. A longer time series can be found within the reference table (60.5 Kb Excel sheet) in this article.

**Table 2: Number of working days lost and stoppages; United Kingdom; 1995-2014**

Year	Working days lost (000s)	Working days lost per 1,000 employees <sup>2</sup>	Workers involved (000s)	Stoppages <sup>3</sup>	Stoppages involving the loss of 100,000 working days or more
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	37	745	142	4
2008	759	27	511	144	2
2009	455	17	209	98	1
2010	365	13	133	92	1
2011	1,390	51	1,530	149	3
2012	249	9	237	131	1
2013	444	16	395	114	2
2014	788	27	733	155	2

**Table source:** Office for National Statistics

**Table notes:**

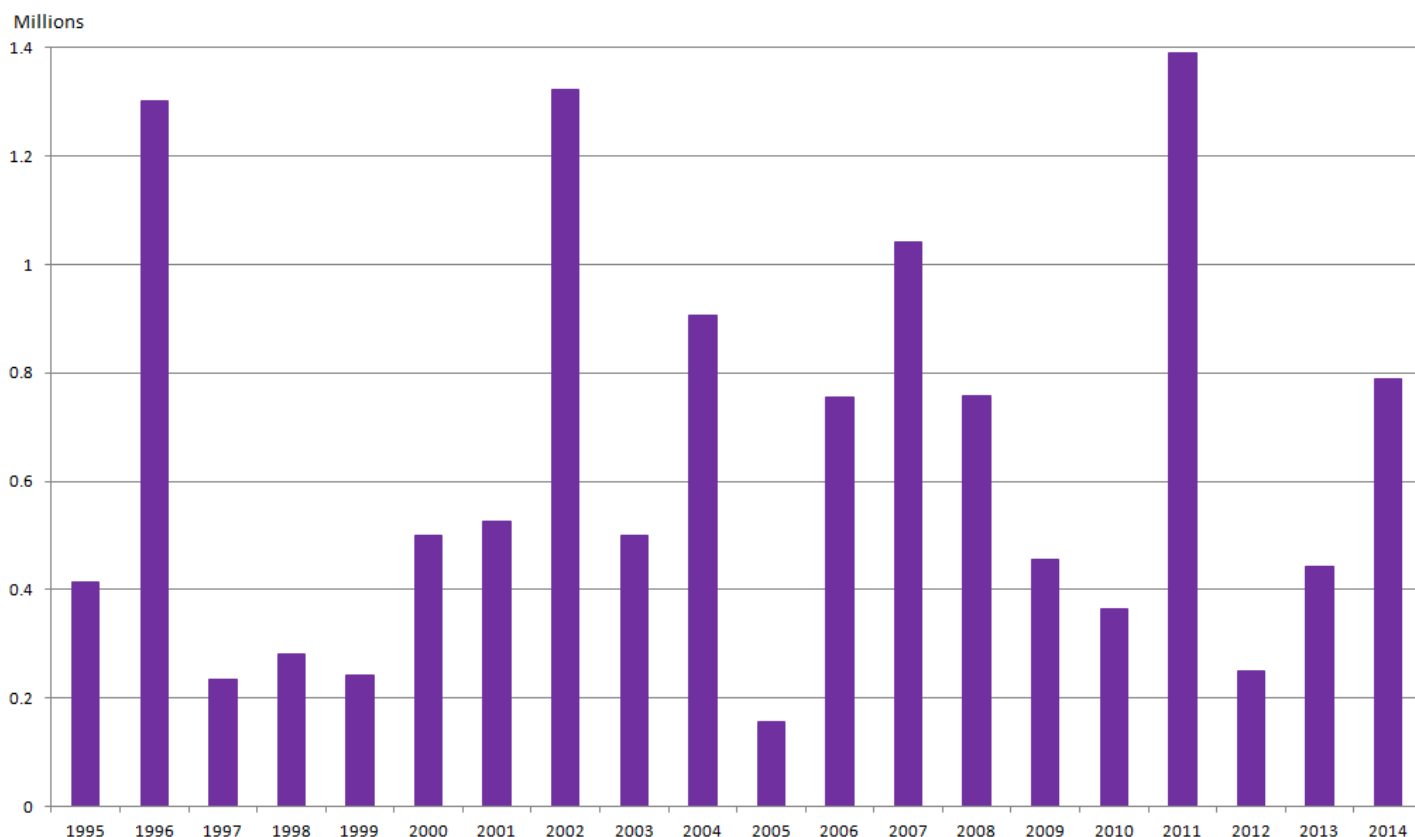
1. Cells containing a hyphen (-) represent zero.

2. Based on the September 2014 estimates of employee jobs from Workforce Jobs (ONS)
3. Stoppages in progress during year

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**Figure 4: Working days lost (WDL), United Kingdom, 1995 to 2014 (millions)**



Source: Labour Disputes Statistics - Office for National Statistics

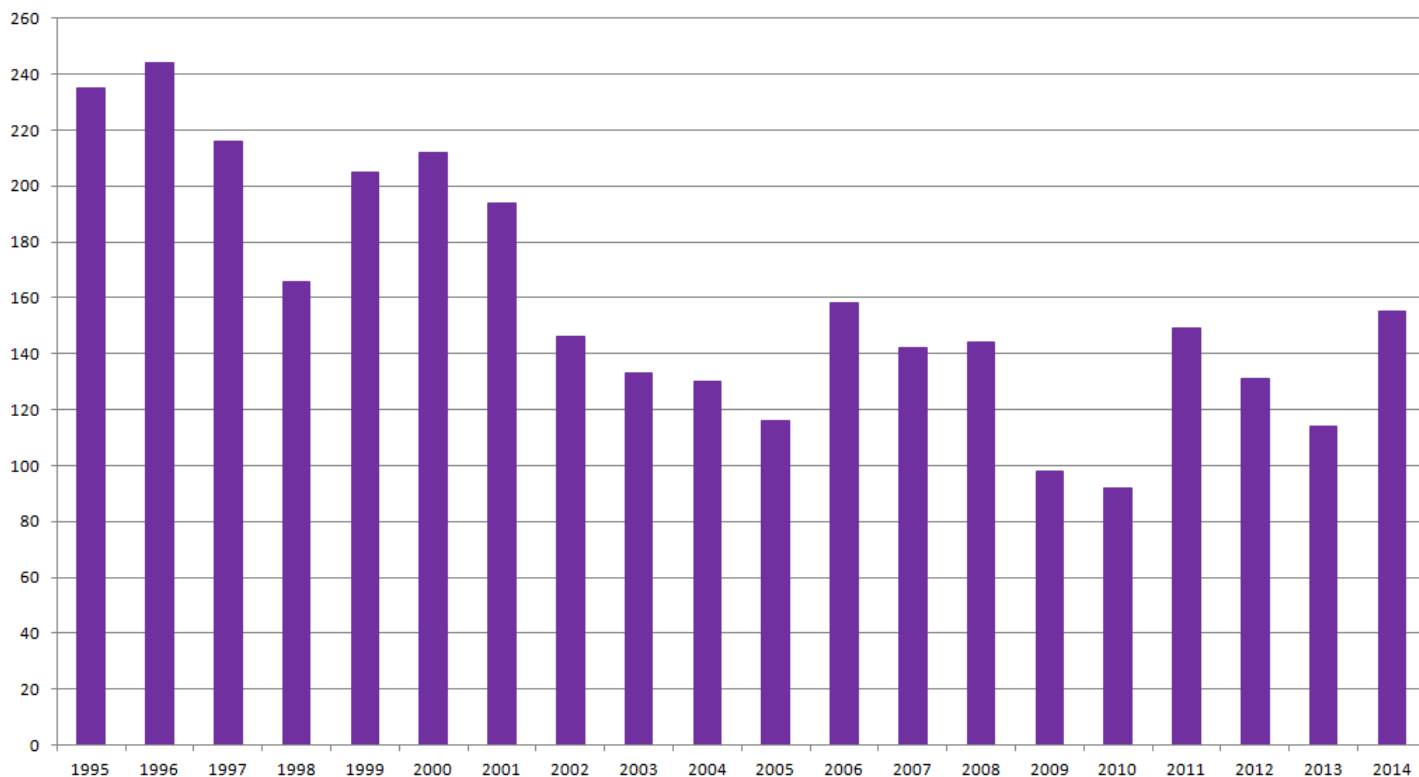
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**Figure 5: Stoppages, United Kingdom, 1995 to 2014**

Source: Labour Disputes Statistics - Office for National Statistics

#### Notes:

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Figure 5 shows that there has been a significant decline in the number of strikes since 1995 compared with the previous years. Though volatile, the number of working days lost has remained broadly the same over this period. This shows that although the number of stoppages appears to be falling, large scale stoppages are becoming more common.

The second column of Table 2 shows working days lost per 1,000 employees for each year from 1995 to 2014. This converts working days lost into a strike rate, taking into account the size of the labour force. This also enables comparisons to be made across industries and regions that differ in size, as well as adjusting for employment changes in industries and regions over time. The level of employee jobs has generally risen over time, and the level of working days lost has recently shown an increase. However, the strike rate in the last 10 years is generally lower than in previous decades. This rise in employment explains strike rates that differ between years when there are no discernible changes in working days lost. The 788,000 working days lost in 2014 is equivalent to 27 working days lost per 1,000 employees, which is higher than the average over the last 20 years (24).

An alternative way of looking at labour disputes statistics is to consider working time lost through labour disputes as a proportion of time actually worked. In 2014 an estimated 51,200 million hours were worked in the UK. Comparing this with the 5.8 million hours lost through labour disputes shows that approximately 1 in every 8,800 hours were lost through strikes in 2014. The equivalent figure for 2013 was 1 in every 15,200.

## Industrial analyses

Historically, certain industries have been more prone to strike action than others, and breaking the labour disputes 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 very small stoppages are excluded from the figures (see technical note for more details), it is more likely that industry groups with large firms will have disputes included in the statistics. In addition to this, caution must be exercised while carrying out time series analysis due to changes in industrial classifications over time.

Table 3 shows labour disputes statistics for 2014 broken down into 12 industrial groups (classified according to the Standard Industrial Classification 2007). Education is the second largest sector in terms of number of working days lost, while the public administration and defence sector has risen to the largest, accounting for just under 50% of the working days lost in 2014. However, this industrial group only accounted for 12% of all strikes (19), indicating that the number of workers taking part in these strikes is, on average, greater than other industrial groups. The education sector showed 313,000 working days lost in 2014, accounting for a further 40% of the working days lost. The strike rates for all industries are generally very low with the exception of public administration and defence (294) and education (119). The industry group with the largest number of stoppages is transport, storage, information and communication (34).

**Table 3: Number of working days lost (WDL) and stoppages by industry; United Kingdom; 2014**

Industry group (SIC 2007)	SIC class	Working days lost (000s)	Working days lost per 1,000 employees	Workers involved (000s)	Stoppages <sup>2</sup>
<b>All industries and services</b>		<b>788.3</b>	<b>27</b>	<b>733.3</b>	<b>155</b>
Agriculture forestry and fishing	01,02,03	-	-	-	-
Mining, quarrying and Electricity, gas, air conditioning	5-9, 35	1.2	7	0.4	1
Manufacturing	10-33	7.6	3	2.4	12
Sewerage, Waste Management and Remediation Activities and Water Supply	36-39	0.4	2	0.1	4
Construction	41-43	2.8	2	2.2	6
Wholesale and retail trade; repair of motor vehicles,					

<b>Industry group (SIC 2007)</b>	<b>SIC class</b>	<b>Working days lost (000s)</b>	<b>Working days lost per 1,000 employees</b>	<b>Workers involved (000s)</b>	<b>Stoppages <sup>2</sup></b>
personal and household goods and Accommodation and Food Services	45-48, 55-56	4.6	1	1.1	4
Transport, storage, Information and Communication	49-53, 58-63	24.9	10	14.6	34
Financial and Insurance, Real estate, Professional, Scientific, Technical and Admin Activities	64-82	6.5	1	2.0	20
Public administration and defence; compulsory social security	84	390.3	294	341.1	19
Education	85	312.8	119	337.4	30
Human Health and social work	86-88	36.3	9	31.2	18

Industry group (SIC 2007)	SIC class	Working days lost (000s)	Working days lost per 1,000 employees	Workers involved (000s)	Stoppages <sup>2</sup>
Arts Entertainment and Recreation Other community, social and personal service activities, private households with employed persons, extra-territorial organisations and bodies	90-99	0.8	1	0.9	9

\*Stoppages in progress during year

**Table source:** Office for National Statistics

**Table notes:**

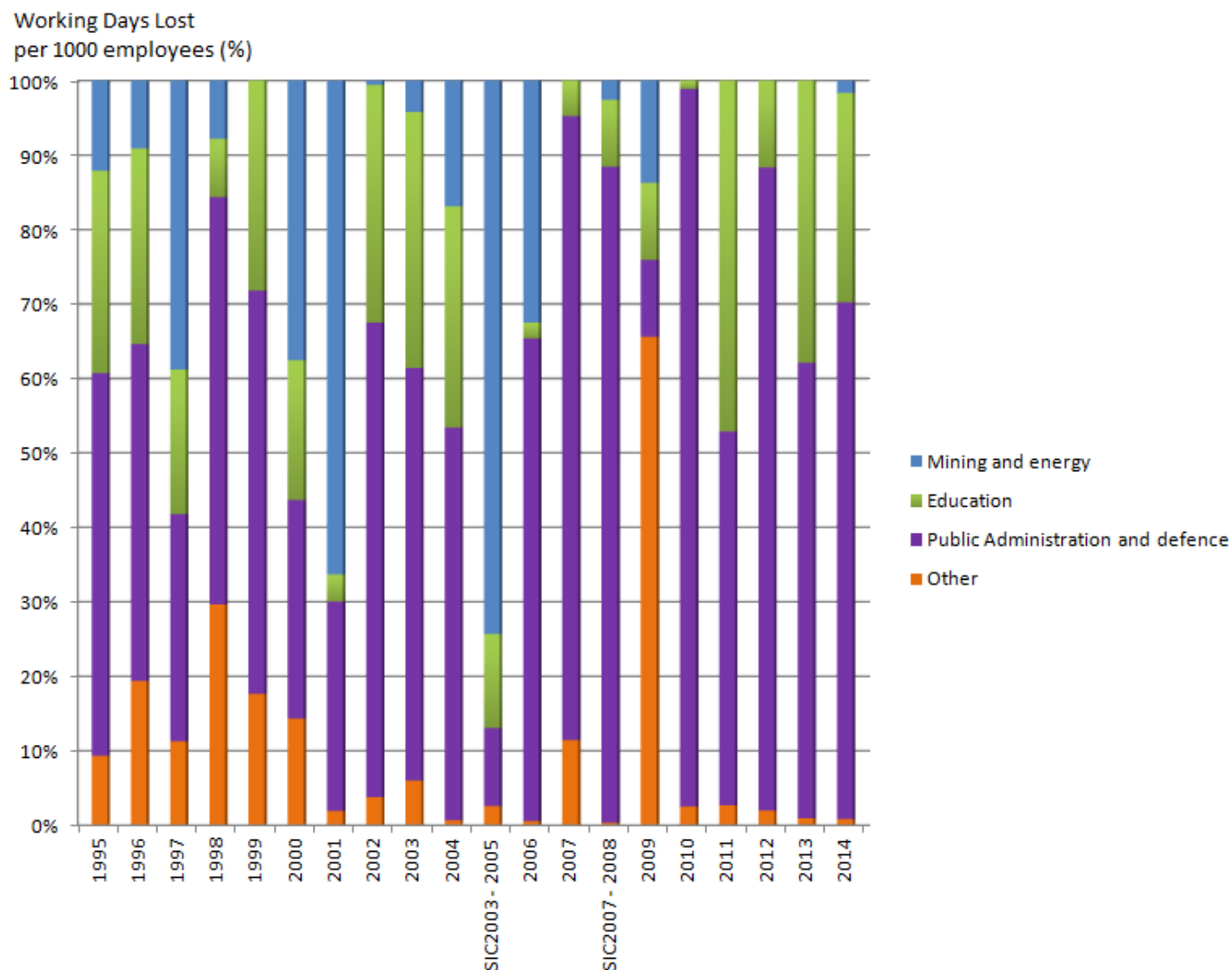
1. The figures for working days lost and workers have been rounded and consequently the sums of constituent items may not agree precisely with the totals.
2. Some stoppages involved workers in more than one of the above industry groups, but have each been counted as only one stoppage in the totals for all industries and services.
3. Cells containing a hyphen (-) represent a zero or less than 50.

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Figure 6 shows working days lost per 1,000 employees for four industrial groupings over a 20-year period. The industry group with the largest strike rate is public administration and defence. This is mainly because disputes in this group tend to be large. Education has also seen a large strike rate since 1995. This industry group has a large number of labour disputes, but disputes are usually small.

**Figure 6: Working days lost (WDL) per 1,000 Employees by Sector, United Kingdom, 1995 to 2014**



Source: Labour Disputes Statistics - Office for National Statistics

**Notes:**

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**Regional analyses**

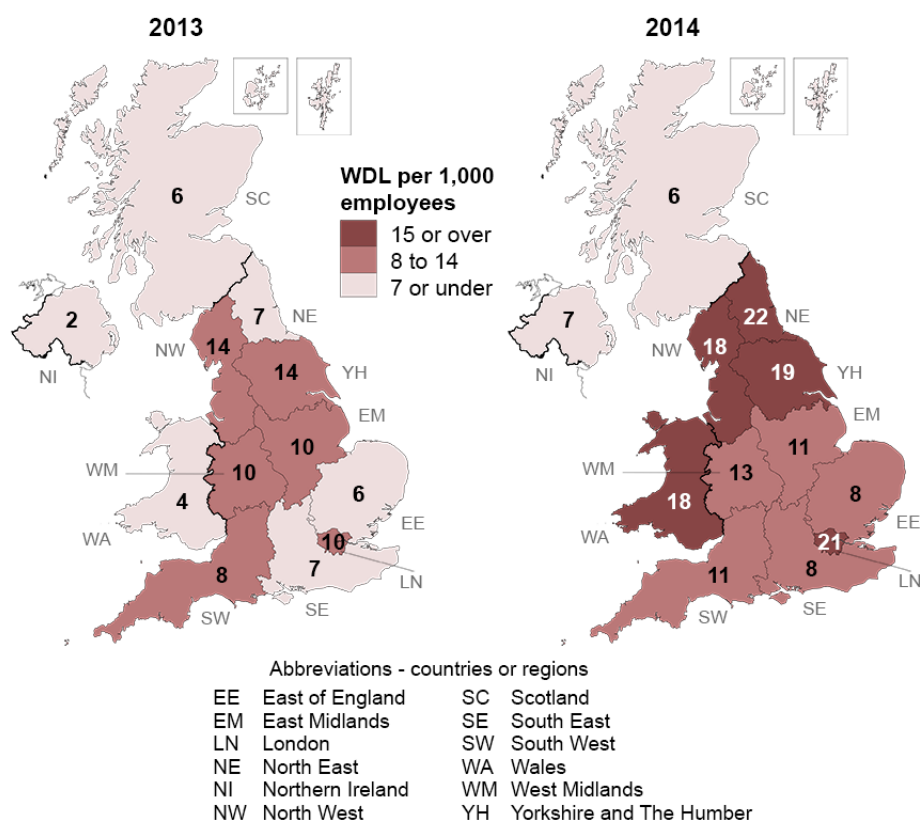
[Table 4: Working days lost \(WDL\), workers involved and stoppages in progress by region and industry group, United Kingdom, 2014 \(34.5 Kb Excel sheet\)](#) shows regional strike rates between 2007 and 2014, with a further breakdown of the figures for 2014 by industrial grouping. When interpreting these figures, it is important to bear in mind that the industrial composition of

employment in a region is a major influencing factor on the scale of labour disputes it experiences. The regions with the highest strike rate in 2014 were the North East (22) and London (21). All of the regions showed an increase compared with 2013. Since 2007, the North East, Yorkshire and The Humber, London and Wales have generally shown the highest levels of industrial action. The East of England, South East and Northern Ireland have shown some of the lowest.

Each region has seen a similar proportion of working days lost in each industry, with the majority in public administration and defence. However, this year the public administration and defence sector has had a smaller proportion of strikes compared with other industrial groupings, again reflecting the large disputes that have occurred in this sector.

Figure 7 compares working days lost per 1,000 employees between 2013 and 2014. It is clear from this that most regions showed an increase in strike action over this period. The north of England, Wales and London had the largest strike rate in 2014.

**Figure 7: Working days lost (WDL) per 1,000 employees; United Kingdom, 2013-2014**



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Source: Labour Disputes Statistics - Office for National Statistics

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## Causes of disputes

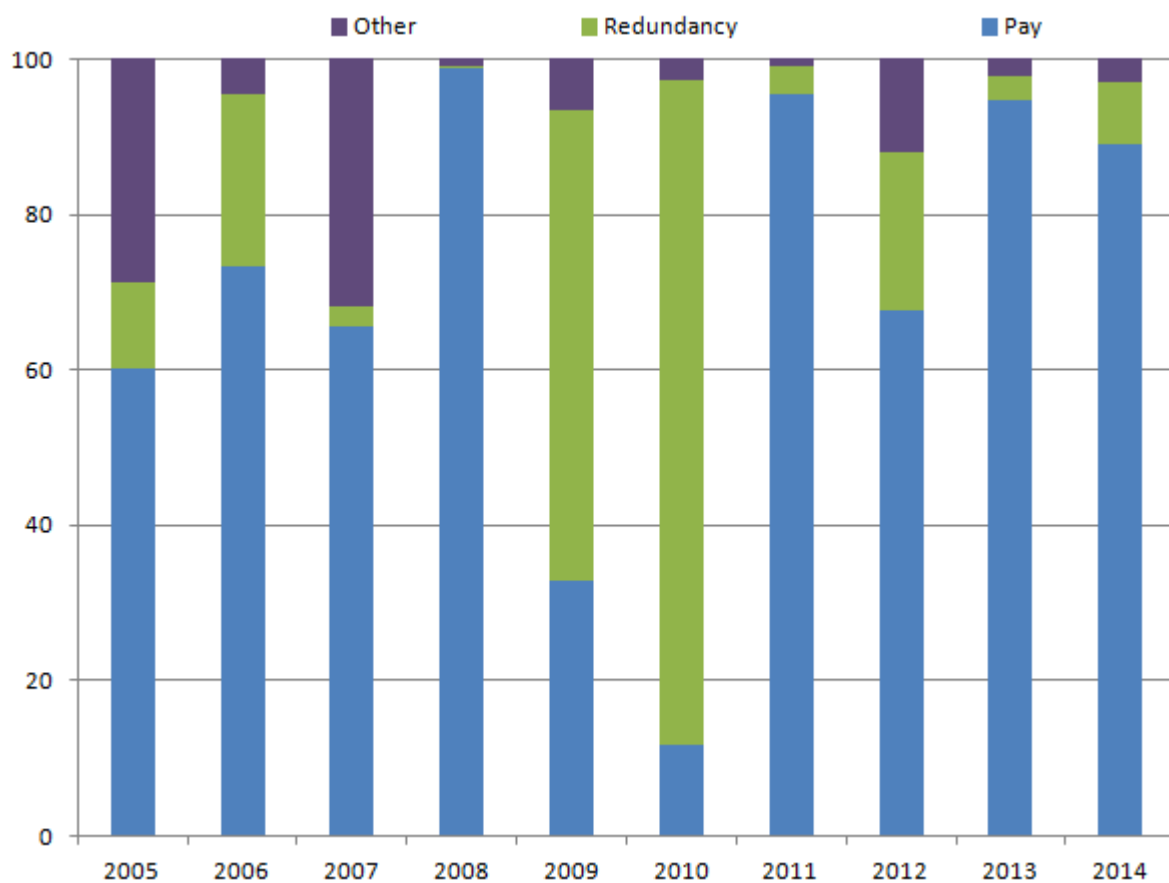
[Table 5: Working days lost, workers involved and stoppages in progress by main cause and industry group, United Kingdom, 2014 \(32 Kb Excel sheet\)](#); shows stoppages in 2014 by principal cause and industry grouping. In 2014, 89% of working days lost were due to disputes over pay, accounting for 57% of all stoppages. The biggest contributors to this were public administration and defence and education.

It should be noted that disputes over pay also include stoppages over feared or alleged reductions in earnings as well as disputes over the size of pay increases. Disputes over pension provisions are also classified as disputes over pay.

Figure 8 and Table 6 give information on working days lost by cause of dispute by year. The figures are often dominated by 1 or 2 very large strikes, which can make comparisons over time difficult. Looking back over a 20 year period it is clear to see that pay often dominates the days lost within the UK, with only 2 years not having pay as the major cause of working days lost. For both 2009 and 2010, redundancy resulted in the highest number of working days lost, after which pay again became the dominant cause.



**Figure 8: Working days lost (WDL) by principal cause of dispute; United Kingdom; 2005 to 2014 (%)**



Source: Labour Disputes Statistics - Office for National Statistics

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**Table 6: Working days lost (WDL) by principal cause in all industries and services; United Kingdom; 1995-2014**

Year	Wage disputes		Total Duration	Other Causes			(Thousands)			
	Wage rates and earnings levels	Extra wage and fringe benefits		Redundancy and questions of pattern of hours worked	Trade union matters	Working conditions and supervision	Staffing and work allocation	Dismissal and other disciplinary	All causes	
1995	119	83	202	30	72	3	1	88	18	415
1996	1028	34	1063	52	39	6	91	35	18	1303
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	1039	137	1176	3	14	5	110	10	7	1323
2003	280	140	420	63	5	0	2	7	2	499
2004	759	3	762	19	107	11	0	5	1	905
2005	87	8	94	7	17	6	9	22	2	157
2006	77	475	552	4	167	2	16	5	9	755
2007	676	9	684	316	25	5	1	3	6	1041
2008	748	2	750	5	1	1	1	-	-	759
2009	150	-	150	3	275	2	1	20	3	455
2010	20	23	43	6	312	-	1	3	-	365
2011	1322	5	1327	1	48	-	12	-	1	1390
2012	157	12	168	7	50	1	20	1	1	249
2013	417	2	419	-	14	-	9	-	1	444
2014	695	7	703	9	62	1	9	5	-	788

**Table source:** Office for National Statistics

**Table notes:**

- \* Based on the latest available (September 2014) estimates of employee jobs from Workforce Jobs (ONS)
- 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 regional level are included in the UK total but excluded from the regional figures in the table above. This accounts for days lost in 2014.

4. Cells containing a hyphen (-) represent a zero or less than 500.

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## Disputes by duration

Labour disputes 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 7 and Figure 9 show the duration of the stoppages in progress in 2014. These show that a large number of stoppages (47%) lasted for only 1 day. These accounted for 92% of workers involved and 609,000 working days lost (77%). Although more than half of the stoppages of work in 2014 lasted for more than 1 day, these account for just under a quarter of days lost. This suggests that the larger disputes tend to last for a single day only, while the strikes that last for more than one day tend to be smaller in terms of the number of workers involved.

**Table 7: Working days lost (WDL), workers involved and stoppages in progress by duration; United Kingdom; 2014**

Days	Working days lost (000s)	Proportion of all working days lost (%)	Workers involved (000s)	Proportion of all workers (%)	Stoppages in progress	Proportion of all stoppages (%)
1	609.4	77.3	672.8	91.7	72	46.5
2	24.8	3.1	13.8	1.9	27	17.4
3	54.2	6.9	17.9	2.4	24	15.5
4	39.1	5.0	8.7	1.2	9	5.8
5	39.8	5.0	17.2	2.3	9	5.8
6-10	16.3	2.1	1.9	0.3	10	6.5
11-15	1.6	0.2	0.3	-	2	1.3
16-20	3.2	0.4	0.8	0.1	2	1.3
21-30	-	-	-	-	-	-
31-50	-	-	-	-	-	-
Over 50	-	-	-	-	-	-
<b>All stoppages</b>	<b>788.3</b>		<b>733.3</b>		<b>155</b>	

**Table source:** Office for National Statistics

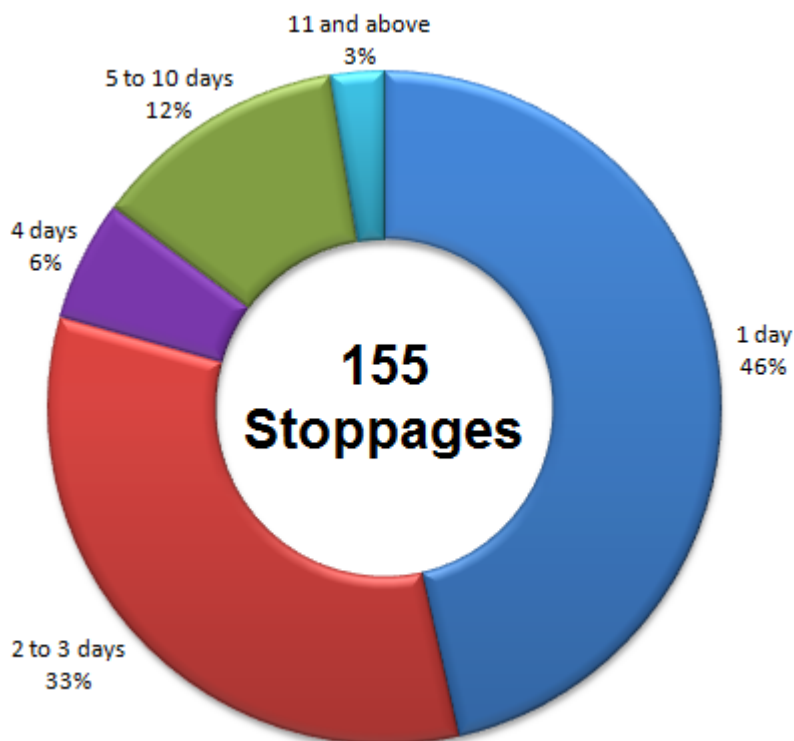
**Table notes:**

1. 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.
2. Classification by size is based on the full duration of stoppages, but the figure for days lost include only those days lost in 2014.
3. 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.
4. 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.
5. Cells containing a hyphen (-) represent a zero

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**Figure 9: Stoppages in progress by duration of dispute, United Kingdom, 2014 (%)**



Source: Labour Disputes Statistics - Office for National Statistics

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## Disputes by size

Table 8 shows disputes in 2014 by size and Figure 10 illustrates that a large proportion of days lost result from larger stoppages, with very few stoppages actually being large. The data also shows that 92% of working days lost in 2014 resulted from stoppages where more than 5,000 days were lost in total, but only 10% of stoppages were that large. The highest proportion of stoppages was within the "under 250 days" category, accounting for 56% of all stoppages, although this category accounted for just less than 1% of working days lost. Table 8 shows the impact that large strikes can have on the figures.

**Table 8: Stoppages in progress by size of dispute; United Kingdom; 2014**

Working days lost in each dispute	Working days lost (000s)	Proportion of all working days lost (%)	Workers involved (000s)	Proportion of all workers (%)	Stoppages in progress	Proportion of all stoppages (%)
Under 250 days	7.3	0.9	5.7	0.8	87	56.1
250 and under 500	5.5	0.7	2.4	0.3	18	11.6
500 and under 1,000	11.0	1.4	5.2	0.7	16	10.3
1,000 and under 5,000	40.2	5.1	18.8	2.6	19	12.3
5,000 and under 25,000	49.1	6.2	36.5	5.0	7	4.5
25,000 and under 50,000	114.9	14.6	34.5	4.7	4	2.6
50,000 days and over	560.2	71.1	630.3	86.0	4	2.6
<b>All stoppages</b>	<b>788.3</b>		<b>733.3</b>		<b>155</b>	

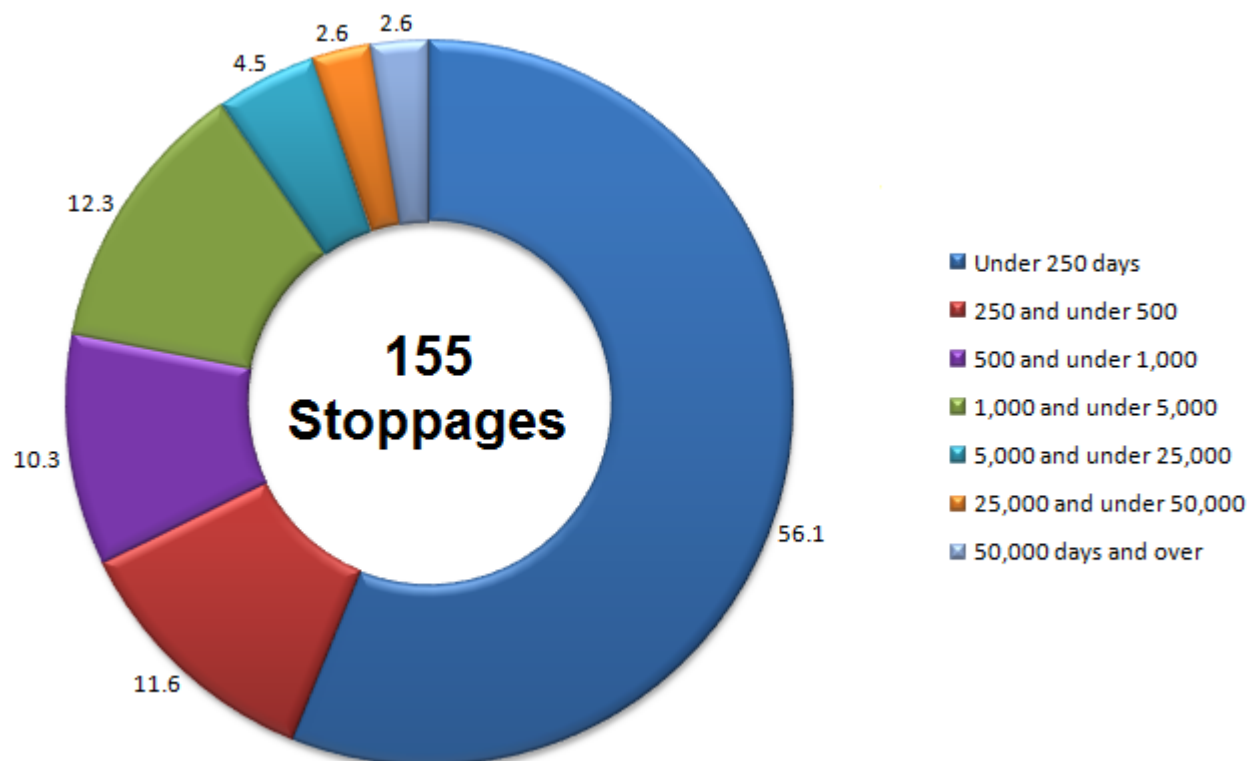
**Table source:** Office for National Statistics

**Table notes:**

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

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**Figure 10: Stoppages in progress by size of dispute, United Kingdom, 2014**

Source: Labour Disputes Statistics - Office for National Statistics

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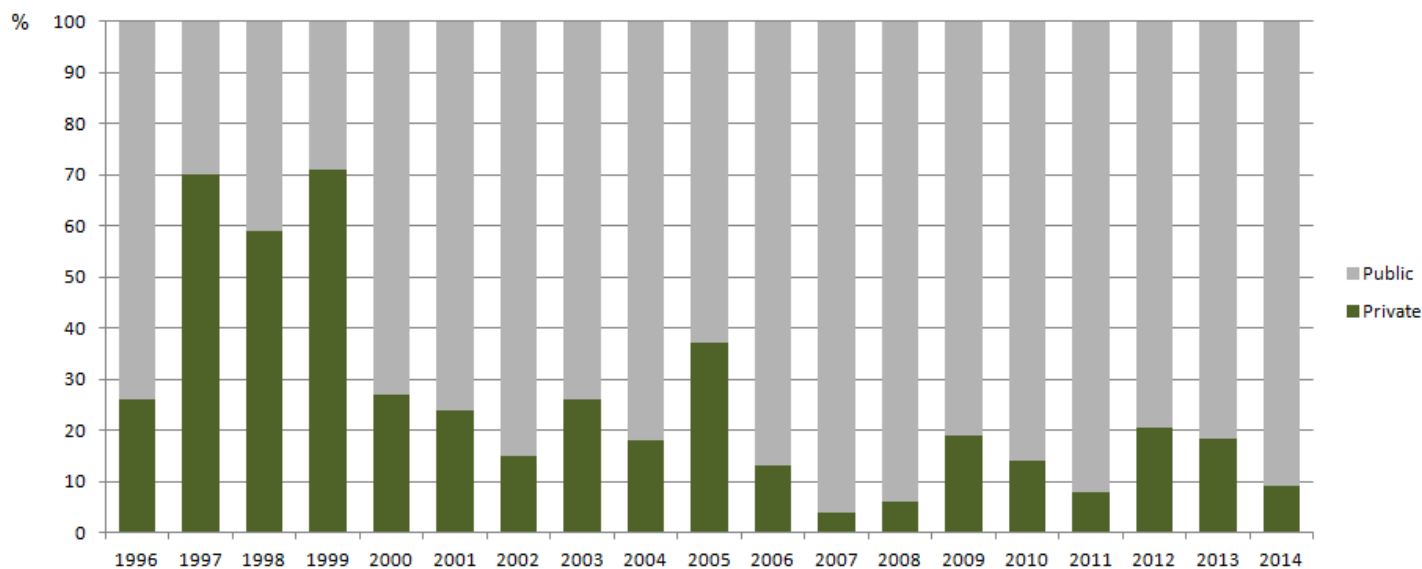
**Disputes by public and private sector**

Figures 11a and 11b illustrate the breakdown of working days lost and the number of stoppages between the public and private sectors. The figures are also shown in Table 9. The number of working days lost in the public sector increased from 363,000 in 2013 to 716,000 in 2014. This increase in strike activity is also shown by the rise in the strike rate in the public sector from 64 working days lost per 1000 employees in 2013 to 133 in 2014.

In the private sector 72,000 days were lost over 87 stoppages, which accounts for 9% of all days lost in 2014. Figure 11b shows that over the last 3 years the private sector has seen a larger number of stoppages than the public sector in a change to recent history. However, the proportion of stoppages

is split fairly evenly between the public and private sectors in 2014, with 56% of stoppages in the private sector and 44% in the public sector. The proportion of working days lost in the public sector is significantly larger, however, at 91%. This reflects the large strikes that occurred in the public sector in 2014, and continues the trend seen in recent years.

**Figure 11a: Working Days Lost (WDL) by Public/Private Split; United Kingdom; 1996 to 2014 (%)**

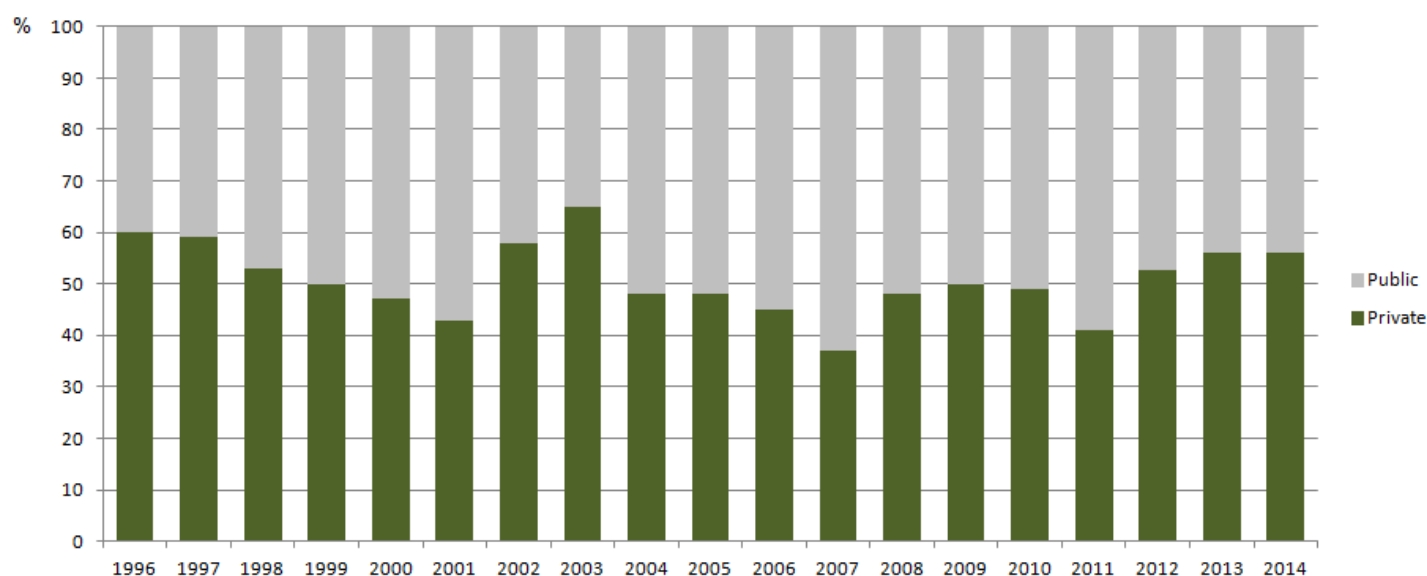


Source: Labour Disputes Statistics - Office for National Statistics

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**Figure 11b: Stoppages public and private sector split, United Kingdom, 1996 to 2014, per cent**



Source: Labour Disputes Statistics - Office for National Statistics

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**Table 9: Number of working days lost (WDL) and stoppages; Public/Private split; United Kingdom; 2005-2014**

Year	Working days lost (000s)		Stoppages <sup>1</sup>		Working days lost per 1000 employees <sup>2</sup>	
	Public	Private	Public	Private	Public	Private
2005	99	59	60	56	16	3
2006	656	98	87	71	108	4
2007	1,002	39	90	52	166	2
2008	711	48	75	69	117	2
2009	368	88	49	49	58	4
2010	313	52	47	45	50	2
2011	1,276	113	89	63	210	5
2012	198	51	63	70	34	2
2013	363	81	50	64	64	3
2014	716	72	68	87	133	3

**Table source:** Office for National Statistics**Table notes:**

1. Stoppages in progress during year
2. Based on the September 2014 estimates of employee jobs from Workforce Jobs (ONS)

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**Trade union ballots**

Annual trade union ballot data for the period 2002 – 2014 are presented in Tables 10 and 11. The number of ballots [1] has risen to 650 this year to. This compares with 484 in 2013.



**Table 10: Trade union ballots (strike action), United Kingdom, 2002 to 2014**

Year	Total ballots	Ballots calling for 'strike action'	Ballots voting FOR strike action	Ballots voting AGAINST strike action	Split result
2002	806	738	613	113	12
2003	899	825	684	125	16
2004	952	901	746	142	13
2005	815	781	663	109	9
2006	1341	1291	1094	140	57
2007	767	713	637	64	12
2008	834	794	658	123	13
2009	579	561	458	93	10
2010	579	555	487	61	7
2011	994	964	904	51	9
2012	601	585	487	89	8
2013	484	469	417	48	4
2014	650	628	550	68	10

**Table notes:**

1. Source: Electoral Reform Services

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**Table 11: Trade union ballots (action short of a strike), United Kingdom, 2002 to 2014**

Year	Total 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
2002	806	537	519	16	2
2003	899	638	601	31	6
2004	952	759	709	41	9
2005	815	604	562	35	7
2006	1341	577	541	27	9
2007	767	583	555	19	9
2008	834	598	559	30	9
2009	579	435	407	21	7
2010	579	411	399	5	7
2011	994	388	375	8	5
2012	601	366	349	15	2
2013	484	318	279	33	6
2014	650	368	329	36	3

**Table notes:**

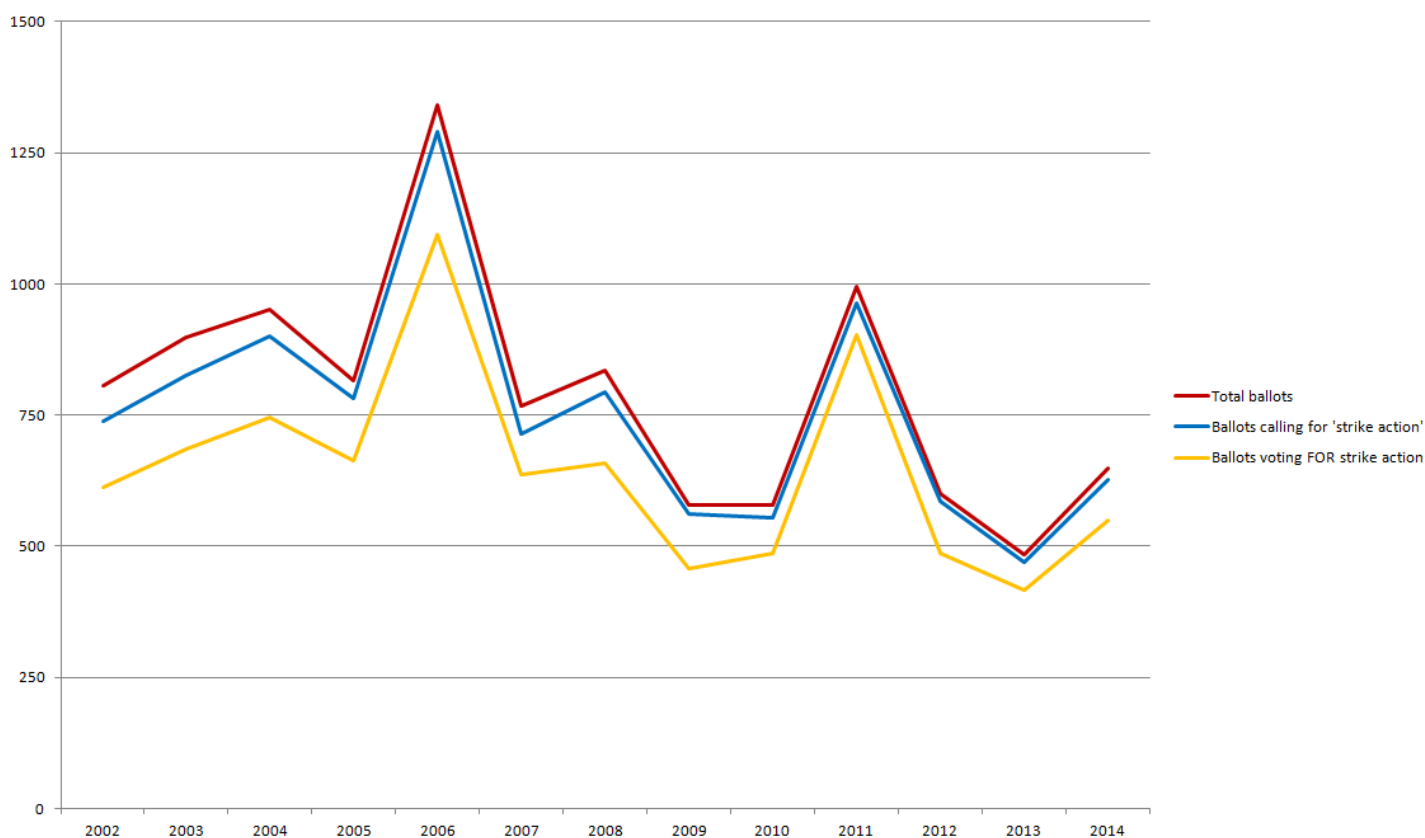
1. Source: Electoral Reform Services

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The number of ballots calling for "action short of a strike" in 2014 shows an increase on the previous year to 368. Proportionately this figure is lower than in previous years (57% of all ballots in 2014 compared with 66% in 2013). The proportion of those ballots resulting in a "yes" vote has remained stable and in line with the ballots calling for strike action.

The time series for trade union ballots is illustrated in Figure 12. This chart shows that a high percentage of ballots calling for strike action do result in "yes" votes, with 88% in 2014 and an average of 86% over the past 10 years.

**Figure 12: Ballots resulting in strike action; United Kingdom; 2002 - 2014**

Source: Labour Disputes Statistics - Office for National Statistics

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### Background notes

1. Note that data produced in this article may differ to articles from previous years due to revised figures.
2. Details of the policy governing the release of new data are available by visiting [www.statisticsauthority.gov.uk/assessment/code-of-practice/index.html](http://www.statisticsauthority.gov.uk/assessment/code-of-practice/index.html) or from the Media Relations Office email: [media.relations@ons.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:media.relations@ons.gsi.gov.uk)

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This document is also available on our website at [www.ons.gov.uk](http://www.ons.gov.uk).

## Appendices

### Technical Note

- Further quality and methodological information regarding the survey can be found in the [quality and methodology information for labour disputes survey](#)

### Coverage

We collect information regarding labour disputes within the UK from a variety of sources. Certain major industries and public bodies provide regular centralised returns but more often the information is collected directly from the employer or trade union involved after ONS have identified disputes from press reports. We publish figures on labour disputes each month. They appear in the Labour Market statistical bulletin and other publications, guidance and methodological documents are available on the Labour Disputes topic page on our website.

### Definition of stoppages

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

The statistics exclude disputes that do not result in a stoppage of work, for example work-to-rules and go-slows; this is because their effects are not quantifiable to any degree of certainty. Stoppages involving fewer than 10 workers or lasting less than 1 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", that is, 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 in 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 as a result of their involvement 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.

Figures given for working days lost per 1,000 employees use employee jobs for September of each year taken from ONS's most recent estimate of Workforce Jobs. It should be noted that, since it is not possible to split the working days lost for all strikes by region, this may decrease the strike rates given for some regions. However, this issue is not thought to have a disproportionate effect on any individual region, or impact any other strike rates given in the article.

## 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

ONS aims try to record the number of workers that are involved at any time in the stoppage. For example, consider a three-day strike where there were 200 workers involved on the first day; 300 on the second day, of whom 100 were involved for the first time; and 200 on the third day, of whom 50 were involved for the first time. The total number of workers involved in the dispute is 350 - the sum of all those involved on the first day, and those joining for the first time on subsequent days.

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

### **Ballot data**

Although the Electoral Reform Service (ERS) conduct the majority of industrial action ballots for Trade Unions in the UK, other organisations also conduct ballots. In addition to this, ballots with less than 50 union members do not have to appoint a scrutineer.