ARTICLE

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Labour disputes in 2009

SUMMARY

In 2009, 455,200 working days were lost in the UK from 98 stoppages of work arising from labour disputes. In 2009 strike action between the public and private sectors were evenly spread, with 49 strikes in each sector.

The article analyses the three main measures of labour disputes; working days lost, stoppages and workers involved - by industry, region, cause, size and duration. The statistics are put into context by considering estimates of working days lost per 1,000 employees and working time lost through strikes as a proportion of time actually worked. This year's article will present data in both a Standard Industrial Classification (SIC) 2003 and 2007 basis, although the majority of the article will be solely SIC 2007.

Data is 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 ONS has been notified of a dispute from press reports. This article presents final figures on labour disputes for 2009 and analyses the figures in more depth than the provisional estimates published as part of monthly Labour Market Statistics Bulletin.

Key messages

In the calendar year 2009:

- there were 455,200 working days lost through labour disputes in 2009
- there were 98 stoppages of work because of labour disputes in 2009. The 2009 figure of 98 compares with 144 stoppages in 2008 and 142 stoppages in 2007
- the majority of working days lost (81 per cent) were in the public sector, while the number of total stoppages (98) was more evenly split (50 per cent in each sector)

- 60 per cent of working days lost were due to redundancy disputes
- this article includes figures based on Standard Industrial Classification (SIC) 2007 for the first time

Annual changes

A comparison of statistics on labour disputes in 2008 and 2009 is shown in **Table 1**. There are three core components to the figures: the number of working days lost through stoppages, the number of workers involved in those stoppages and the number of stoppages.

The 2009 total of 455,200 working days

Table 1

Number of stoppages, workers involved and working days lost in 2008 and 2009

United Kingdom		Number
Working days lost through stoppages	2008	2009
In progress in year ¹	758,900	455,200
Beginning in year	757,500	455,100
Workers involved in stoppages in progress in year²	511,200	208,500
Of which: directly involved	509,500	207,900
indirectly involved	1,700	600
Beginning in year	509,100	208,500
Of which: directly involved	507,400	207,800
indirectly involved	1,700	600
Stoppages		
In progress in year	144	98
Beginning in year	141	97

Notes:

Source: ONS Labour Market Statistics

¹ Stoppages that began in 2008 and continued into 2009 accounted for 100 days lost in 2009.

² Workers in progress figures also include workers who did not strike initially, but who joined at a later date.

Table 2
Number of stoppages and working days lost, 1990–2009

United Kingdom					Number
Year	Working days lost (000s)	Working days lost per 1,000 employees 1	Workers involved (000s)	Stoppages ²	Stoppages involving the loss of 100,000 working days or more
1990	1,903	78	298	630	3
1991	761	32	176	369	1
1992	528	23	148	253	-
1993	649	28	385	211	2
1994	278	12	107	205	-
1995	415	18	174	235	-
1996	1,303	55	364	244	2
1997	235	10	130	216	-
1998	282	11	93	166	-
1999	242	10	141	205	-
2000	499	20	183	212	1
2001	525	20	180	194	1
2002	1,323	51	943	146	2
2003	499	19	151	133	-
2004	905	34	293	130	3
2005	157	6	93	116	-
2006	755	28	713	158	1
2007	1,041	38	745	142	4
2008	759	28	511	144	2
2009	455	17	209	98	1

Notes:

- 1 Based on the (September 2009) estimates of employee jobs.
2 Stoppages in progress during year.

Source: ONS Labour Market Statistics

Figure 1
Working days lost, 1990–2009

Source: ONS Labour Market Statistics

Figure 2
Stoppages in progress, 1990–2009

Source: ONS Labour Market Statistics

lost is lower than the 2008 total of 758,900. The 2009 total is also lower than the average number of working days lost per year in the 1990s (660,000) and considerably lower than the average for both the 1980s (7.2 million) and the 1970s (12.9 million).

The 98 stoppages total in 2009 is considerably lower than the 2008 total of 144. There was just one stoppage beginning in 2008 which continued into 2009. The number of stoppages has fallen sharply since the 1990s when the average annual number was 273.

There were 208,500 workers involved in labour disputes during 2009; this compares with 509,100 in 2008. The number of workers involved is slightly higher than the average number involved in the 1990s (201,600) but considerably below the average in the 1980s (1,040,300).

Review of 1990 – 2009

Table 2 presents labour dispute figures for the period 1990 to 2009 and Figures 1 and 2 illustrate working days lost and the number of stoppages. The high number of days lost in 1996 was due to one very large stoppage in what was the transport, storage and communication group. This shows the impact that large disputes can have on the statistics. This was also evident

Table 3
Number of stoppages and working days lost by industry, 2009

United Kingdom				Number
Industry group (SIC 2007)	SIC class	Working days lost (000s) ¹	Workers involved (000s) ¹	Stoppages ²
All industries and services³				
Mining and energy (includes air conditioning)	5-9, 35	0.2	0.2	1
Manufacturing	10-33	1.1	0.5	6
Services	36-39 45-99	394.6	192.8	84
Agriculture forestry and fishing	01,02,03	—	—	—
Mining, quarrying and Electricity, gas, air conditioning	5-9, 35	0.2	0.2	1
Manufacturing	10-33	1.1	0.9	6
Sewerage, Waste Management and Remediation Activities and Water Supply	36-39	86.1	2.8	5
Construction	41-43	59.2	14.6	7
Wholesale and retail trade; repair of motor vehicles, personal and household goods and Accommodation and Food Services	45-48, 55-56	—	—	—
Transport, storage, Information and Communication	49-53, 58-63	296.2	183.8	37
Financial and Insurance, Real estate, Professional, Scientific, Technical and Admin Activities	64-82	0.6	0.4	6
Public administration and defence; compulsory social security	84	5.1	1.3	5
Education	85	6.7	4.5	30
Human Health and social work	86-88	—	—	—
Arts Entertainment and Recreation Other community, social and personal service activities, private households with employed persons, extra-territorial organisations and bodies	90-99	—	—	1

Notes:

Source: ONS Labour Market Statistics

- 1 The figures for working days lost and workers have been rounded and consequently the sums of constituent items may not agree precisely with the totals.
 - 2 Some stoppages involved workers in more than one of the above industry groups, but have each been counted as only one stoppage in the totals for all industries and services.
 - 3 Stoppages in progress during year.
- Nil or negligible.

Table 4
Working days lost per 1,000 employees by Industry, 2008 and 2009

United Kingdom				Number
Industry group (SIC 2007)	SIC Class	2008	2009	
All industries and services				
Mining and energy (includes air conditioning)	5-9, 35	0	1	
Manufacturing	10-33	3	0	
Services	36-39, 45-99	34	18	
Agriculture forestry and fishing	01,02,03	0	0	
Mining, quarrying and Electricity, gas, air conditioning	5-9, 35	0	1	
Manufacturing	10-33	3	0	
Sewerage, Waste Management and Remediation Activities and Water Supply	36-39	18	582	
Construction	41-43	2	46	
Wholesale and retail trade; repair of motor vehicles, personal and household goods and Accommodation and Food Services	45-48, 55-56	0	0	
Transport, storage, Information and Communication	49-53, 58-63	11	135	
Financial and Insurance, Real estate, Professional, Scientific, Technical and Admin Activities	64-82	0	0	
Public administration and defence; compulsory social security	84	417	3	
Education	85	42	3	
Human Health and social work	86-88	0	0	
Arts Entertainment and Recreation Other community, social and personal service activities, private households with employed persons, extra-territorial organisations and bodies	90-99	1	0	

Source: ONS Labour Market Statistics

Table 5
Working days lost per 1,000 employees by industry group,¹ 2000–2009

United Kingdom					Number
	Mining and energy	Manufacturing	Services	Construction	All industries and services
SIC2003 – 2000	17	13	20	37	20
2001	141	11	22	8	20
2002	1	6	62	13	51
2003	2	18	20	11	19
2004	29	6	41	0	34
2005	34	5	6	1	6
2006	74	6	32	12	28
2007	–	5	46	2	38
SIC2007 – 2008	0	3	34	2	29
2009	1	0	18	46	17

Notes:

- 1 Based on the latest available (September 2009) estimates of employee jobs.
– Nil or negligible.

Source: ONS Labour Market Statistics

Figure 3
Working days lost per 1,000 employees by sectors, 2000–2009¹

Note:

Source: ONS Labour Market Statistics

- 1 Figures for 2008 and 2009 are based on the new SIC 2007 classification with previous years on a SIC 2003 basis. However comparisons can still be made as changes at such a high level are minimal.

in both 2002 and 2007 when disputes in public administration accounted for a high percentage of the total days lost over the both years.

Both Figure 1 and Figure 2 show a substantial decline in strike activity in the 1990s. Figure 2 in particular shows that the number of strikes has been on a downward trend over the last 20 years.

The second column of Table 2 shows working days lost per 1,000 employees for each year from 1990 to 2009. This is the standard method used to convert 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. Since the number of employee jobs has not changed as dramatically over the last 20 years, the rates for the UK as a whole show the same pattern of general decline. Occasional peaks can be seen on the working days lost series due to the reasons mentioned earlier. The 455,200 working days lost in 2009 is equivalent to 17 working days lost per 1,000 employees.

An alternative way of putting strike statistics into a wider context is to consider working time lost through strikes as a proportion of time actually worked. In 2009 an estimated 41,100 million hours were worked in the UK. Comparing this to 3.6 million hours lost through strikes shows that approximately one in every 11,600 potential working days were lost through strikes in 2009. The equivalent figure for 2008 was one in every 7,200.

Industrial analyses

Historically, certain industries have been more prone to strike than others and breaking the strike statistics down into separate industries can reveal some interesting patterns and shifts over time. However, it should be noted that comparisons between industries can also be affected by the methodology that is used for compiling the figures. For example, because small stoppages are excluded from the figures, it is more likely that industry groups with large firms will have disputes included in the statistics.

Table 3 shows labour dispute statistics for 2009 broken down into 12 industrial groups (classified according to the Standard Industrial Classification 2007). Table 4 shows working days lost per 1,000 employees in 2008 and 2009 for the same industries. Although there has been a change from SIC 2003 to SIC 2007 this year the impact on the data is not significant as the article uses high level groupings. The major changes are the streamlined manufacturing section, which is now grouped into one instead of the previous split of 14 sub sections.

65 per cent of the working days lost in 2009 were a result of 37 stoppages in transport, storage, information and communication, while 19 per cent of the days lost were from 5 stoppages in waste management and a further 13 per cent from 7 stoppages in construction. There were also 30 stoppages in finance and administration, which resulted in 6,700 working days being lost. The decline in the UK manufacturing industry is again evident with another record low of 1,100 days lost compared to 6,900 in 2008.

Table 4 presents the strike rates for 2008 and 2009. The rate for the service sector has fallen significantly in 2009. The strike rate in the mining and energy sector remained stable while the strike rate for manufacturing has fallen to zero for the first time, again a record low.

Table 5 shows strike rates over time for the mining and energy industries, manufacturing and services sectors. Due to the decline of the UK manufacturing industry, the service sector continues to be considerably higher than manufacturing. The mining and energy rate, which can be erratic, has levelled out in 2009. It is worth noting that, due to the changes in SIC for both 2008 and 2009 both water and waste collection are now included in

Table 6

Stoppages in progress by Government Office Region and industry group, 2009^{1,2,3}

United Kingdom													Number
	Yorkshire												
	North East	North West	and the Humber	East Midlands	West Midlands	South West	East of England	London	South East	Wales	Scotland	Northern Ireland	United Kingdom
Days lost per 1,000 employees ⁴ – all industries and service													
2005	7	7	4	3	11	1	4	11	1	2	7	15	6
2006	51	43	23	18	15	8	8	10	5	51	49	30	28
2007	45	44	34	19	28	27	34	44	26	41	40	45	39
2008	54	38	24	17	22	12	7	13	7	48	60	4	28
2009	13	12	61	7	6	10	10	33	7	12	12	3	17
2009 by industry group (SIC 2007)													
Working days lost (000s)													
Agriculture, forestry and fishing	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–
Mining, quarrying, electricity, gas, Steam and Air conditioning	0.2	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	0.2
Manufacturing	0.1	0.5	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	0.3	0.2	–	1.1
Construction	7.6	8.9	23.2	2.7	–	0.6	1.3	–	1.0	5.9	5.3	0.1	59.2
Transport, storage, information and communication	5.5	26.7	18.7	10.1	13.9	19.1	22.0	125.9	22.5	7.3	21.3	2.2	296.2
Public administration and defence	–	–	2.7	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	1.5	–	5.1
Education	0.1	0.1	1.3	0.2	0.1	–	0.1	3.6	0.2	–	0.2	–	6.7
Health and social work	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–
Other Services	–	0.3	84.2	–	–	1.1	–	0.2	0.5	–	0.4	–	86.8
All industries and services	13.5	36.5	130.1	13.0	14.0	20.8	23.4	129.6	24.3	13.5	28.9	2.3	455.2
Workers involved (000s)													
Agriculture, forestry and fishing	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–
Mining, quarrying, electricity, gas, Steam and Air conditioning	0.2	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	0.2
Manufacturing	0.1	0.3	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	0.3	0.2	–	0.9
Construction	1.8	3.8	3.9	0.6	–	0.6	0.6	–	0.4	1.8	2.0	0.1	14.6
Transport, storage, information and communication	6.1	19.9	14.9	10.1	12.1	15.4	16.0	43.8	22.6	7.1	12.9	2.4	183.8
Public administration and defence	–	–	0.5	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	0.1	–	1.3
Education	–	0.1	1.0	0.2	0.1	–	0.1	2.3	0.3	–	0.1	–	4.5
Health and social work	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–
Other Services	–	0.2	2.2	–	–	0.3	–	0.1	0.3	–	0.1	–	3.2
All industries and services	8.1	24.3	22.5	10.9	12.3	16.2	16.6	46.2	23.6	9.3	15.4	2.5	208.5
Stoppages													
Agriculture, forestry and fishing	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–
Mining, quarrying, electricity, gas, Steam and Air conditioning	1	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	1
Manufacturing	1	2	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	1	2	–	6
Construction	3	3	4	2	–	2	2	–	2	2	2	1	7
Transport, storage, information and communication	1	6	6	5	2	1	3	13	2	2	4	1	37
Public administration and defence	–	–	1	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	2	1	5
Education	1	2	6	1	3	–	1	14	4	1	1	–	30
Health and social work	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–
Other Services	–	1	2	–	1	1	–	2	2	–	2	–	12
All industries and services	7	14	19	8	6	4	6	29	10	6	13	3	98

Notes:

Source: ONS Labour Market Statistics

- The figures for working days lost and workers involved have been rounded and consequently the sum of the constituent items may not agree precisely with the totals.
- Figures for widespread stoppages which cannot be disaggregated down to Government Office Regional level are included in the UK total but excluded from the regional figures in the table above. This accounts for 5,300 days lost in 2009.
- When a stoppage has been identified as covering more than one broad industry group, the actual number of working days lost and workers involved will be allocated to the specific broad industry group, however, the stoppage will be included.
- Based on the latest (September 2009) estimate of employee jobs.
 - Nil or negligible

services, this was previously in mining and energy, so comparisons should be made with caution. It is also worth noting however, that the employment in both mining and manufacturing has dropped dramatically over the last decade. For

the first time construction is included in this table, with a back series also present. This sector dominates the figures in 2009 due to nationwide strikes throughout the year. **Figure 3** shows the strike rates for the manufacturing and services sectors

separately for the period between 2000 and 2009. This chart depicts that the service has a larger strike rate per 1,000 employees when compared to the manufacturing industry. In each of the last ten years the strike rate in the service sector has been

Map 1
Working days lost per 1,000 employees in 2009; all industries and services

United Kingdom

Source: ONS Labour Market Statistics

Table 7

Working days lost, workers involved and stoppages in progress by main cause and broad industry group, 2009

United Kingdom										Number
	Wage disputes		Total Wage Disputes	Duration and pattern of hours worked	Redun- dancy questions	Other causes				All causes
	Wage rates and earnings levels	Extra wage and fringe benefits				Trade union matters	Working conditions and supervision	Staffing and work allocation	Dismissal and other disciplinary- measures	
Working days lost (000s) ¹										
Agriculture, forestry and fishing	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Mining, quarrying, electricity, gas, Steam and Air conditioning	—	—	—	—	0.2	—	—	—	—	0.2
Manufacturing	0.7	0.3	1.0	—	0.1	—	—	—	—	1.1
Construction	39.6	—	39.6	—	0.5	0.2	—	18.9	—	59.2
Transport, storage, information and Communication	19.2	—	19.2	1.5	270.4	2.1	0.1	0.1	3.0	296.4
Public administration and defence	1.5	—	1.5	—	2.7	—	0.9	—	—	5.1
Education	2.4	—	2.4	1.4	1.4	—	0.3	1.1	0.1	6.7
Other services	86.7	—	86.7	—	—	—	—	—	0.1	86.8
All industries and services	150.1	0.3	150.4	2.9	275.2	2.2	1.3	20.1	3.1	455.2
Workers involved (000s) ¹										
Agriculture, forestry and fishing	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Mining, quarrying, electricity, gas, Steam and Air conditioning	—	—	—	—	0.2	—	—	—	—	0.2
Manufacturing	0.5	0.3	0.8	—	0.1	—	—	—	—	0.9
Construction	7.3	—	7.3	—	0.3	0.1	—	6.9	—	14.6
Transport, storage, information and Communication	5.8	—	5.8	0.4	173.9	0.8	0.1	0.2	2.7	183.9
Public administration and defence	0.1	—	0.1	—	0.5	—	0.7	—	—	1.3
Education	1.7	—	1.7	0.5	1.2	—	0.3	0.8	0.1	4.6
Other services	3.1	—	3.1	—	—	—	—	—	0.1	3.2
All industries and services	18.5	0.3	18.8	0.9	176.1	0.9	1.1	7.9	2.9	208.5
Stoppages ²										
Agriculture, forestry and fishing	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Mining, quarrying, electricity, gas, Steam and Air conditioning	—	—	—	—	1	—	—	—	—	1
Manufacturing	4	1	5	—	1	—	—	—	—	6
Construction	4	—	4	—	1	1	—	1	—	7
Transport, storage, information and Communication	21	—	21	3	7	1	1	2	2	37
Public administration and defence	2	—	2	—	1	—	2	—	—	5
Education	9	—	9	4	6	—	4	6	1	30
Other services	11	—	11	—	—	—	—	—	1	12
All industries and services	51	1	52	7	17	2	7	9	4	98

Notes:

Source: ONS Labour Market Statistics

- The figures for working days lost and workers involved have been rounded and consequently the sum of the constituent items may not agree with the totals.
 - The number of stoppages for the industry groups shown may not sum to the total for all industries and services as some stoppages which affect more than one broad industry group have been counted once only in the total for all industries and services.
- Nil or negligible

Table 8

Working days lost by main cause in all industries and services, 1999–2009

United Kingdom										Thousands
Year	Wage disputes		Total	Duration and pattern of hours worked	Redun- dancy questions	Other Causes				All causes
	Wage rates and earnings levels	Extra wage and fringe benefits				Trade union matters	Working conditions and supervision	Staffing and work allocation	Dismissal and other disciplinary	
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	0	0	759
2009	150	0	150	3	275	2	1	20	3	455

Notes:

Source: ONS Labour Market Statistics

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

Figure 4
Working days lost by principal cause of dispute, 2009

United Kingdom
Per cent

Source: ONS Labour Market Statistics

Figure 5
Working days lost by principal cause of dispute, 2000–2009

United Kingdom
Per cent

Source: ONS Labour Market Statistics

higher than that of the manufacturing sector – generally because of large strikes in the public administration and transport sectors.

Regional analyses

Table 6 shows regional strike rates at the Government office region level between 2005 and 2009, with a further breakdown of the figures for 2009 by industry (SIC07). The rates for 2009 are also illustrated in **Map 1**. 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. Having noted this point, the region with the highest number of working days lost per thousand employee jobs in 2009 was the Yorkshire and the Humber with 61. As was the case last year, 9 of the 12 regions saw a decrease in their strike rates compared to 2008. Last years highest Scotland showed the sharpest fall from 60 in 2008 to 12 in 2009. The North East, North West, East Midlands and Wales also showed significant decreases in 2009.

Causes of disputes

Table 7 shows stoppages in 2009 by principle cause and industry group and **Table 8** provides a time series of working days lost by cause. **Figure 4** illustrates the number of working days lost in 2009

Table 9
Stoppages in progress by duration¹ in working days, 2009

United Kingdom

	Working days lost (000s) ^{2,3,4}	Proportion of all working days lost (%)	Workers involved (000s) ³	Proportion of all workers (%)	Stoppages in progress	Proportion of all stoppages (%)
Days¹						
1	6.0	1.3	6.5	3.1	48	49.0
2	8.1	1.8	5.7	2.7	19	19.4
3	8.4	1.8	3.2	1.5	9	9.2
4	2.8	0.6	1.0	0.5	4	4.1
5	4.7	1.0	1.0	0.5	6	6.1
6-10	27.8	6.1	8.1	3.9	5	5.1
11-15	43.4	9.5	7.4	3.5	3	3.1
16-20	1.0	0.2	0.1	0.0	1	1.0
21-30	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0	0.0
31-50	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0	0.0
Over 50	352.9	77.5	175.5	84.2	3	3.1
All stoppages	455.2	100	208.5	100	98	100

Notes:

- The statistics cover the number of days that strike action took place, not the number of days the parties involved in the dispute were actually in disagreement.
 - Classification by size is based on the full duration of stoppages, but the figure for days lost include only those days lost in 2009.
 - The figures for working days lost and workers involved have been rounded and consequently the sum of the constituent items may not agree precisely with the totals.
 - The working days lost figures are in general less than the product of the duration of each stoppage and the number of workers involved, because some workers would not have been involved throughout the dispute - see technical note.
- Nil or negligible

Source: ONS Labour Market Statistics

Figure 6
Stoppages in progress by duration in working days, 2009

United Kingdom
Per cent

Source: ONS Labour Market Statistics

Figure 7
Proportions of stoppages in progress and working days lost by size of dispute, 2009

United Kingdom
Per cent

Source: ONS Labour Market Statistics

by principle cause of dispute. In 2009, 60 per cent of working days lost were due to disputes over possible redundancy, although redundancy only accounted for only 13 per cent of all stoppages. The majority of strikes were again over pay – accounting for 52 per cent of strikes. It should be noted that disputes over pay also include stoppages over feared or alleged reductions

in earnings as well as disputes over pay increases.

Figure 5 shows the distribution of working days lost by cause in each year from 2000 to 2009 for four causes; pay, redundancy, staffing and work allocation and other. This shows the percentage of days lost due to disputes over redundancy increased dramatically in 2009. The figures

are often dominated by one or two very large strikes which will, in turn, dominate all of the detailed analyses and can make comparisons over time difficult. Looking back over a ten year period it's clear to see that pay often dominates the days lost within the UK.

Disputes by duration

Statistics on duration cover the number of days that strike action took place, not the number of days the parties involved in the dispute were actually in disagreement. **Table 9** shows the duration of the stoppages in progress in 2009 and this information is also displayed in **Figure 6**. Some 49 per cent of stoppages lasted just one day, involved just 6,500 workers and accounted for just 1 per cent of the total working days lost. At the other extreme, 3 stoppage lasted over 50 days, involved a total of 175,5000 workers and accounted for 78 per cent of the total working days lost.

Disputes by size

Table 10 shows disputes in 2009 by size and **Figure 7** illustrates that a large proportion of days lost result from large stoppages, but very few stoppages are large. The chart shows that 77 per cent of working days lost in 2009 resulted from stoppages where more than 50,000 days were lost in total, but only 2 per cent of stoppages were that large. There were only 3 stoppages with more than 5,000 but less than 50,000 working days lost, these stoppages accounted for only 3 per cent of all stoppages. The highest proportion of stoppages was within the 'under 250 days' category, accounting for 59 per cent of all stoppages, although this category recorded one of the lowest

Table 10
Stoppages in progress by size of dispute, 2009

United Kingdom

	Working days lost (000s) ¹	Proportion of all working days lost (%)	Workers involved (000s) ¹	Proportion of all workers (%)	Stoppages in progress	Proportion of all stoppages (%)
Working days lost in each dispute						
Under 250 days	5.6	1.2	4.9	2.4	58	59.2
250 and under 500	4.2	0.9	2.8	1.3	13	13.3
500 and under 1,000	5.3	1.2	2.7	1.3	8	8.2
1,000 and under 5,000	24.9	5.5	8.0	3.8	14	14.3
5,000 and under 25,000	24.6	5.4	7.7	3.7	2	2.0
25,000 and under 50,000	39.1	8.6	7.0	3.4	1	1.0
50,000 days and over	351.5	77.2	175.4	84.1	2	2.0
All stoppages	455.2	100	208.5	100	98	100

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.

Source: ONS Labour Market Statistics

Figure 8a
Working days lost public/private split, 2000–2009

Source: ONS Labour Market Statistics

Figure 8b
Stoppages public/private split, 2000–2009

Source: ONS Labour Market Statistics

Figure 9
Ballots resulting in strike action 2005–2009

Source: Electoral Reform Services

Table 11
Number of stoppages and working days lost, public/private breakdown, 2000–2009

United Kingdom									Number
Year	Working days lost (000s)		Stoppages ¹		Strike rate		LFS		Total
	Private	Public	Private	Public	Private	Public	Private	Public	
2000	136	363	99	113	7	69	20370	5288	25658
2001	128	397	83	111	6	74	20609	5378	25987
2002	200	1,123	85	61	10	205	20600	5485	26085
2003	130	369	87	46	6	65	20505	5641	26146
2004	163	742	62	68	8	129	20587	5756	26343
2005	59	99	56	60	3	17	20758	5850	26608
2006	98	656	71	87	5	111	20916	5899	26815
2007	39	1,002	52	90	2	173	21320	5785	27105
2008	48	711	69	75	2	124	23741	5750	29491
2009	88	368	49	49	4	60	22786	6121	28907

Notes:

1 Stoppages in progress during year.

Source: ONS Labour Market Statistics

working days lost percentage of just over one per cent.

Disputes by public/private sector

Figures 8a and 8b illustrate the breakdown of working days lost and the number of stoppages between the public and private sectors respectively. The figures are also shown in Table 11. The number of working days lost in the public sector fell again from 711,000 in 2008 to 367,600 in 2009. The proportion of working days lost from the public sector is continuing to fall; from 94 per cent in 2008 to 81 per cent in 2009. This year's percentage brings the public sectors figures more in line with the last ten years after a two year peak, with the 2007 percentage of 96 per cent being a high since data was recorded in 1996.

In the private sector 87,600 days were lost in 49 stoppages which accounts for only 19 per cent of all days lost in 2009. This compares to 47,800 days lost in 2008 from 69 stoppages which accounted for 6 per cent of all days lost.

The number of stoppages in the public and private sectors has levelled this year; with 50 per cent split across both sectors. Generally, the breakdowns of stoppages between the public and private sectors have been fairly consistent. Although in 2007 the public sector dominated the strike statistics to a greater extent than the private sector.

Trade union ballots

Annual trade union ballot data for the period 2005 – 2009 are presented in Tables 12a and 12b. The number of ballots¹ calling for strike action has fallen to a new low in 2009 at 561 while the number of ballots has also fallen in line with this.

The number of ballots calling for action 'short of a strike' in 2009 also dropped

Table 12a
Trade union ballots: strike action, 2005–2009

United Kingdom					Number
Year	Total ballots	Ballots calling for 'strike action'	Ballots voting FOR strike action	Ballots voting AGAINST strike action	Split result
2005	815	775	663	109	9
2006	1341	1290	1094	140	57
2007	767	713	697	64	12
2008	834	786	658	123	13
2009	579	561	458	93	10

Source: Electoral Reform Services

Table 12b
Trade union ballots: action short of a strike, 2005–2009

United Kingdom					Number
Year	Total Number of ballots	Ballots calling for 'action short of a strike'	Ballots voting FOR action short of a strike	Ballots voting AGAINST action short of a strike	Split result
2005	815	606	562	35	7
2006	1341	579	541	27	9
2007	767	583	555	19	9
2008	834	598	559	30	9
2009	579	435	407	21	7

Source: Electoral Reform Services

significantly, at 435 (75 per cent of total ballots) compared to 598 in 2008. The proportion of those ballots resulting in a 'yes' vote has also shown a decrease this year.

The five-year time series for trade union ballots is illustrated **Figure 9**. It can be seen that the trend for ballots voting for strike action closely follows the trends for the number of ballots calling for strike action and the total number of ballots. Nevertheless, there is still a notable difference in the number of ballots calling for strike action and those resulting in a 'yes' vote.

Notes

1. As the majority of ballots include options for both 'strike action' and 'action short of strike action,' the total number of ballots does not equal the total of these options added together.

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TECHNICAL NOTE

Labour disputes methodology**Coverage**

Information regarding labour disputes within the UK is collected by ONS 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 been notified of a dispute from press reports. Up until September 1996, this information was collected by the Employment Service local office network on behalf of ONS. ONS publishes figures on labour disputes each month. They appear in the *Labour Market Statistics first release table 20* and are published in *Tables 6.29 and 6.30* in the Labour Market Data section of *Economic and Labour Market Review*.

Definition of stoppages

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

The statistics exclude disputes that do not result in a stoppage of work, for example *work-to-rules* and *go-slows*; this is because their effects are not quantifiable to any degree of certainty. Stoppages involving *fewer than 10 workers or lasting less than one day* are also excluded unless the total number of working days lost in the dispute is 100 or more.

Stoppages over issues not directly linked to *terms and conditions* between workers and employers are omitted, although in most years this is not significant. For example, in 1986 one stoppage was considered to be political (a protest in the coal industry against the visit of an MP) and it was excluded from the figures. The total working days lost amounted to less than 1,000. The next known dispute to be excluded was in 1991. This involved a boycott by self-employed market traders who, after increased rent and changes to the market rules, kept their stalls closed for about 20 weeks.

The statistics include 'lock-outs', 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 which category a particular stoppage falls into. It was for similar reasons that a distinction between 'official' and 'unofficial' disputes was no longer made after 1981.

Working days lost

Working days lost are defined as the number of days not worked by people involved in a dispute at their place of work. In measuring the number of working days lost, account is taken only of the time lost in the *basic working week*. Overtime work is excluded, as is weekend working where it is not a regular practice. Where an establishment is open every day, and runs two or more shifts, the statistics will record the number of working days lost for each shift. In recording the number of days lost, allowance is made for public and known annual holidays, such as factory fortnights, occurring within the strike's duration. No allowance is made for absence from work for such reasons as sickness and unauthorised leave.

Where strikes last less than the basic working day, the hours lost are converted to full-day equivalents. Similarly, days lost by part-time workers are converted to full-day equivalents. The number of working days lost in a stoppage reflects the actual number of workers involved at each point in the stoppage. This is generally less than the total derived by multiplying the duration of the stoppage by the total number of workers involved at any time during the stoppage, because some workers would not have been involved throughout.

In disputes where employers dismiss their employees and subsequently reinstate them, the working days lost figure includes those days lost by workers during the period of dismissal.

For disputes where employers dismiss their employees and replace them with another workforce the statistics cannot assume that working days lost by the sacked workers continue indefinitely. In such cases the statistics measure the number of days lost in terms of the size of the replacement workforce. For example, where an employer initially recruits 100 workers and wishes to build up to 300, the number of working days lost on day one will be 200 and will then progressively reduce on subsequent days, eventually to zero when the new workforce reaches the target of 300.

Number of stoppages

There are difficulties in ensuring complete recording of stoppages, in particular for short disputes lasting only a day or so, or involving only a few workers. Because of this recording difficulty and the cut-off applied, the number of working days lost is considered to be a better indicator of the impact of labour disputes than the number of recorded stoppages.

Workers involved

The figures for workers involved are for workers both *directly and indirectly involved* at the establishment where the dispute occurred. Workers indirectly involved are those who are not themselves parties to the dispute but are laid off because of the dispute. However, the statistics exclude workers at *other* sites who are indirectly affected (because of a shortage of material from a supplier who is in dispute, for example). This is partially because of the difficulty in deciding to what extent a particular firm's production problems are due to the effects of a strike elsewhere or some other cause. Workers involved in more than one stoppage during the year are counted in the statistics for each stoppage in which they take part. Part-time workers are counted as whole units.

The statistics try to record the number of workers 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.