

Representation of the losers of the crisis: a comparison of systems and strategies of representation of vulnerable workers

National Report: UK

1. Introduction and overview

In the UK the financial crisis resulted in negative growth for the 3rd and 4th quarters of 2008. The fourth quarter figures for 2008 were released in January 2009, and following their release there was a wave of media coverage reporting the recession. Taking the widely accepted definition of ‘recession’ as being two consecutive quarters of negative economic growth, this marked the first recession since 1991. Official statistics for the UK, used to confirm the recession, are provided by the Office for National Statistics (ONS).

Accounts of the crisis and its impacts from ONS, ‘academic’ authors and other stakeholders agree (e.g. ONS, 2009; Lambert, 2010; Gregg and Wadsworth, 2011a) that the labour market effects were less severe than might have been expected; employment levels held up well in comparison with what had happened in previous recessions. For many accounts of the 2008-09 crisis, the expected effect was what had happened to employment in the recessions of the 1980s and 90s.

This should not underestimate that the crisis did result in large numbers of jobs being lost, but using the historical comparison method, the numbers of jobs lost were lower than expected. Whereas previous recessions had seen levels of employment fall broadly in line with the fall in GDP, throughout the 2008-09 recession GDP decreased by 5.9% with a corresponding 2.7% decrease in employment (Gregg and Wadsworth, 2011a: p12). Gregg and Wadsworth (2011a) note that the UK in contrast with some other countries did not have an agreement to protect jobs through shorter working time. Through this lens the apparent resilience of the UK labour market through the period of crisis becomes more remarkable. Gregg and Wadsworth (2011a:18) conclude that the relative success of the UK labour market through the crisis is attributable to policy makers’ decisions to underwrite the banks, cut interest rates and introduce a fiscal stimulus, to workers accepting lower wage growth and to employers by taking the decision to hold on to important labour, wherever possible. The strategies adopted by these various groups, particularly employers, may have implications for subsequent employment patterns during periods of economic growth.

However the degree to which the management of the UK economy through the crisis can be considered a success is contested. This is evidenced by ongoing debates relating to job quality and job security. Within those broad categories there has been focus on the use of temporary contracts, work intensification, underemployment, involuntary part-time working, zero-hours contracts, pay restraint / austerity, bogus self-employment, unpaid overtime and disaffected workers. There has also been particular attention paid to effects of the crisis on certain categories of worker (by demographic group). Young people, especially through the discussions around NEETs are one of the groups which have received much attention in policy / political debate.

Disentangling the various strands is far from straightforward. At one level there are measurement issues to consider. Even when observing the same unit (i.e. the UK),

categories and definitions may change over time as a result of policy decisions. Outcomes and indicators which are measured may be affected by ‘objective’ labour market features as well as by individual response to them; the idea of individuals adapting preferences in light of real or perceived opportunities in the labour market. Another issue to consider, and one which is probably beyond the scope of the analysis here, is the degree to which the crisis precipitated fundamental shifts in the functioning of the economy or whether the crisis accelerated and increased trends which were already in motion. For example, debates about job quality and job security pre-date the crisis, though it is evident that they have received greater attention through this period.

Similarly when looking at responses to the crisis from trade unions and other representative bodies, many strategies relating to representation and voice were enacted prior to the crisis and were in response to other factors associated with the increasing precariousness throughout the labour market. However, there have been specific responses to the crisis from various bodies, which are considered more fully below.

2. Data on the UK labour market before, during and after the crisis

Various data sources are available to examine the effect of the crisis on the UK labour market. As has been noted, ONS provides official labour market statistics, but as is detailed below, other sources of data exist. Furthermore there are acknowledged weaknesses or limitations with the data sources which are typically used to indicate labour market health, especially with respect to their coverage of traditionally marginalised groups. We may also question the appropriateness of the indicators which are typically used. For example, the unemployment levels may only reveal part of the story, especially in light of debates about bogus self-employment and working time. The primary focus here is not to discuss the methodology of measuring labour market health, though some elaboration is required for contextual purposes.

Although there is perhaps less consensus than previously, unemployment is generally taken to be a lagging indicator of economic performance. The degree to which the indicator lags may be different for different labour market participants. Moreover, when we come to look at certain groups which may have been affected by the crisis, we need to be aware that some groups may have options available to them which other groups do not. In short, younger people may have the option of staying in education and may be more likely to do so if labour market opportunities are thought to be limited. Older people may have the option of leaving the labour market completely. Individuals adapt their preferences according to real and / or perceived labour market constraints and options vary by demographic group.

As noted the key test for many analysts in relation to the crisis is not the absolute number of jobs which have been lost, but how employment levels have performed against expectations; prior recessions providing the bases for these expectations. Similarly when looking at the unemployment rates of particular labour market groups, it may not be appropriate to compare their trajectories with other groups, but rather to compare with experiences of previous recessions. Goujard et al (2011) make the argument in relation to young people’s labour market experiences of the recession. Young people are always disproportionately affected by recessions, so the question

ought to address whether young people have been affected more seriously than historical precedent would suggest. As figures below suggest young people have been hit hard by the 2008-09 recession, though Goujard et al (2011) draw the conclusion that the effects on young people are broadly in line with what would be expected given the severity and duration of the recession.¹

Unemployment in the UK before, during and after the recession

	2007		2009		2014	
	%	Level				
All unemployed	5.3	1,655	7.6	2,403	6.2	2,027
Male unemployed	5.6	939	8.6	1,459	6.4	1,125
Female unemployed	5.0	716	6.5	944	5.9	901

Source: ONS

Note: Level in thousands (000s)

Note: these are ‘annual data’ i.e. yearly averages – not all data supplied in this format

¹ UK statistical sources presented here draw mainly on ‘official’ figures produced by Office for National Statistics (ONS) via website – including statistical bulletins and articles where some analyses / reporting of the figures is published. ONS are mainly produced from the quarterly Labour Force Survey (LFS) and the Annual Survey of Hours and Earnings (ASHE). In addition to survey data, there are data available which are actual counts of populations. Social security benefit data released by the Department for Work and Pensions give actual counts. Issues which may arise with such data are that the counts may be affected by changes to eligibility for benefits. As many accounts observe recent developments in the welfare state have been characterised by increasingly conditionality (i.e. the obligations which must be fulfilled in order to receive social security benefits) and restrictions on eligibility (i.e. the categories of people for whom the particular benefit applies). There are some limitations which may be encountered with official figures – e.g. small populations, ‘hard to reach’ or invisible groups, or lack of coverage of relevant issues. Data presented here are taken from published sources; we do not therefore use surveys to produce our own estimates. It is expedient to take this approach, though the trade-off is that the data are only be presented here in the categories in which they were originally published. In general there are a large number of different indicators available, which could be included and so this report is necessarily selective, highlighting some of the key statistics which are used routinely to indicate the labour market participation of particular groups. We provide some discussion of the appropriateness of the different indicators which are presented. We also include details from reports by Government departments, Non-Departmental Government bodies, Trade Unions, Charities, Academics which often draw on these official sources of data, though there are occasions where the official data are supplemented by quantitative and / or qualitative data from other sources. Where such reports are referenced, we try to make clear the sources of data on which they are based.

Employment in the UK before, during and after the recession

	2007		2009		2014	
	%	Level				
All employed	72.7	29,378	70.9	29,156	72.9	30,726
Male employed	78.9	15,857	76.0	15,534	77.8	16,355
Female employed	66.6	13,521	65.9	13,622	68.0	14,371

Source: ONS

Note: Level in thousands (000s)

Note: these are 'annual data' i.e. yearly averages – not all data supplied in this format

Inactivity in the UK before, during and after the recession

	2007		2009		2014	
	%	Level				
All inactive	23.2	9,157	23.1	9,271	22.2	9,013
Male inactive	16.3	3,200	16.7	3,311	16.7	3,366
Female inactive	29.9	5,957	29.5	5,960	27.6	5,647

Source: ONS

Note: Level in thousands (000s)

Note: these are 'annual data' i.e. yearly averages – not all data supplied in this format

At the aggregate level, these data show that the crisis led to over 700,000 fewer jobs in 2009 compared with 2007. In terms of numbers employed, women's labour market participation increased slightly between 2007 and 2009, though the proportion of women in employment actually decreased. 2014 levels of employment are 1.3 million higher than for 2007. However, the data also show higher levels of unemployment (both in terms of absolute numbers and rates) comparing 2007 with 2014, though the levels and rates have fallen since 2009. The crisis has commonly been referred to as a 'male recession', in common with many previous periods of negative economic growth. Between 2007 and 2009 levels of male unemployment rose by more than ½ million, compared with an increase of 200,000 for female unemployment.

UK unemployment rates by age group before, during and after the recession

	2007		2009		2014	
	%	Level	%	Level	%	Level
16-17						
All	26.3	188	29.2	196	35.8	182
Male	29.1	104	31.9	106	39.1	93
Female	23.4	84	26.5	90	33.0	89
18-24						
All	12.5	514	16.3	668	16.8	694
Male	13.7	300	18.8	406	19.0	416
Female	11.1	214	13.5	262	14.3	277
50-64						
All	3.2	232	4.3	328	4.3	356
Male	3.7	149	5.4	227	4.7	208
Female	2.5	83	3.0	100	3.8	148

UK employment rates by age group before, during and after the recession

	2007		2009		2014	
	%	Level	%	Level	%	Level
16-17						
All	33.7	527	30.3	476	21.7	326
Male	31.6	252	28.5	227	18.8	145
Female	36.0	275	32.2	249	24.7	181
18-24						
All	65.0	3,608	60.6	3,439	59.0	3,430
Male	68.3	1,891	62.1	1,756	60.0	1,769
Female	61.8	1,717	59.1	1,682	57.9	1,661
50-64						
All	64.7	7,043	65.3	7,271	68.5	7,987
Male	71.9	3,858	72.6	3,985	74.3	4,256
Female	57.6	3,185	58.2	3,286	63.0	3,731

UK inactivity rates by age group before, during and after the recession

	2007		2009		2014	
	%	Level	%	Level	%	Level
16-17						
All	54.2	848	57.2	898	66.3	997
Male	55.5	443	58.1	463	69.2	533
Female	52.9	405	56.3	435	63.2	464
18-24						
All	25.7	1,425	27.7	1,569	29.1	1,695
Male	20.9	577	23.6	666	25.9	762
Female	30.5	848	31.7	903	32.5	932
50-64						
All	33.2	3,614	31.8	3,539	28.4	3,310
Male	25.3	1,357	23.2	1,276	22.1	1,268
Female	40.9	2,257	40.1	2,263	34.5	2,043

Source: ONS

Data are for the first quarter of each year, not given as yearly averages

Breaking down figures by age groups shows some interesting patterns. For the 50 to 64 age group the effects of recession were much less severe than for the younger age groups. This is shown by the fact that employment rates for this group (in total and for males and females) are higher than for 2007. By contrast employment rates for 16 and 17 year olds and 18 to 24 year olds have not recovered to 2007 levels. For all age groups unemployment rates are higher in 2014 than for 2007. This probably reflects both the lagged nature of unemployment as an indicator and the fact that austerity policies continue to result in job cuts.

Inactivity rates are also used to indicate the general health of the labour market, though they are subject to greater political manipulation than other labour market indicators. Beatty and Fothergill (2005) have argued that the large increases in incapacity benefits seen throughout the 1990s masked the true levels of unemployment. More recently though there have been attempts by both Labour and Conservative governments to reduce the levels of incapacity benefits through tougher checks on eligibility (the work capability assessment) and greater conditionality in the benefits system (i.e. more obligations to seek work as a condition of benefit receipt). However, despite policies to combat inactivity levels, for certain groups the levels have remained remarkably resistant to policy intervention. For men and particularly those with lower skill levels, inactivity rates continued to rise even before the crisis struck (Gregg and Wadsworth, 2011b).

The changing nature of inactivity does not only have implications for that indicator. The ONS unemployment rate is only based on those who are active in the labour market (Clegg, 2012). This means that people who withdraw from the labour market, exercising varying degrees of agency for doing so, will not form the denominator for calculations of unemployment. Moves to include previously inactive people in the calculations will inflate the levels and rates of unemployment, independent of the health of the labour market.

Young People (NEETs) before, during and after the crisis

In the UK there has been particular attention paid to the employment prospects of young people. The NEET (Not in Employment, Education or Training) has been one category which has received particular attention.

NEETs before during and after the crisis

	2007	2009	2014
All	820,000	915,000	778,000
All rate	14.1%	15.5%	13.0%
Male	358,000	413,000	348,000
Male rate	12.3%	14.0%	11.6%
Female	462,000	502,000	430,000
Female rate	15.8%	16.9%	14.4%

Source: ONS

ONS figures indicate that the number of NEETs fell between 2009 and 2014, and that the NEET count as of 2014 is lower than for pre-crisis data for 2007. This may be attributable to a raft of policies introduced since the crisis which have been designed to reduce the NEET population. Apprenticeships, the Youth Contract and the Work Programme all incorporate elements designed address NEET levels, and from 2014 the age to which all young people must continue in education or training was raised to 18 Delebarre (2015)

More recent work (IER and CRESR, 2015) has highlighted that the NEET group presents particular challenges in terms of visibility. This work suggests that official figures tend to underestimate the true count of NEETs and this poses particular problems for service delivery to this group. Interventions to tackle the ‘NEET problem’ are thought to be compromised due to the incomplete knowledge base around this group.

Labour market status of disabled people before, during and after the crisis

Various changes in reporting conventions for employment statistics of disabled people mean that it is not possible to provide comparable data for 2007, 2009 and 2014. Data from 2010 onwards are not comparable with earlier data due to changes in the survey questions which was found to have influenced reporting behaviour. Further changes were made in 2013, which were a consequence of the reporting requirements of the 2010 Equality Act. The employment conditions of disabled is therefore undergoing a still unassessed rapid change, which calls for more in-depth research.

UK Unemployment rates (16+) by ethnic group before, during and after the recession

	2007		2009		2014	
All						
White	4.9		6.6		6	
Mixed	13		14.5		13.7	
Indian	7.7		8.3		6.4	
Pakistani	12.5		13.8		16.6	
Bangladeshi	16.9		14.6		15.4	
Chinese	9.7		6.4		8.4	
Black/African	13.1		15.6		17.8	
Other	11.3		8.9		10.3	
Male	2007		2009		2014	
White	5.3		7.4		6.5	
Mixed	16.3		16.8		14	
Indian	6.4		9.8		5.2	
Pakistani	11		11.1		13.9	
Bangladeshi	12		14		11.6	
Chinese	12.9		6.2		4.3	
Black/African	14.7		16.9		18.5	
Other	10.7		9.1		9	
Female	2007		2009		2014	
White	4.5		5.6		5.5	
Mixed	10		12		13.4	
Indian	9.3		6.3		7.9	
Pakistani	16.1		19.8		22.6	
Bangladeshi	26.7		16.1		25.9	
Chinese	7		6.5		11.9	
Black/African	11.5		14.4		17.1	
Other	12.2		8.6		11.9	

Data are not seasonally adjusted

Employment levels of non UK citizens before, during and after the crisis

	Total EU nationals	Total non-EU nationals
Jan-Mar 2007	931	1,105
Jan-Mar 2009	1,134	1,249
Jan-Mar 2014	1,629	1,163

Quantitative data of effect of crisis on use types of employment contract

One of the most prominent debates in the UK labour market has been the use of so-called zero-hours contract. Such contracts do not guarantee a set amount of hours of work per week.

Use of zero hours contracts before, during and after the crisis (not seasonally adjusted)

	In employment on a zero hours contract	Percentage of people in employment on a zero hours contract
2007	166	0.6
2009	189	0.7
2014	697	2.3

Not seasonally adjusted

October to December each year

Types of employment before during and after the recession

	Jan-Mar 2007	Jan-Mar 2009	Jan-Mar 2014
Total (All)	29,194	29,366	30,534
Employees	25,169	25,335	25,715
Self employed	3,821	3,844	4,572
Unpaid family workers	103	87	126
Government supported training & employment programmes ²	100	101	122

Types of male employment before during and after the recession

	Jan-Mar 2007	Jan-Mar 2009	Jan-Mar 2014
Total	15,758	15,739	16,279
Employees	12,885	12,876	13,008
Self employed	2,775	2,773	3,139
Unpaid family workers	43	32	58
Government supported training & employment programmes ²	56	58	74

Full and part-time work before during and after the crisis

	Jan-Mar 2007	Jan-Mar 2009	Jan-Mar 2014
Total people working full-time	21,756	21,768	22,281
Total people working part-time	7,438	7,598	8,253
Employees working full-time	18,782	18,794	18,926
Employees working part-time	6,387	6,540	6,788
Self-employed people working full-time	2,908	2,918	3,269
Self-employed people working part-time	914	926	1,303
Total workers with second jobs	1,074	1,161	1,176

Reasons for temporary work – could not find a permanent job

All

	Total	Total as % of all employees	Could not find permanent job	% that could not find permanent job
Jan-Mar 2007	1,534	6.1	405	26.4
Jan-Mar 2009	1,428	5.6	426	29.8
Jan-Mar 2014	1,655	6.4	593	35.9

Male

	Total	Total as % of all employees	Could not find permanent job	% that could not find permanent job
Jan-Mar 2007	713	5.5	215	30.1
Jan-Mar 2009	664	5.2	232	35.0
Jan-Mar 2014	783	6.0	303	38.7

Female

	Total	Total as % of all employees	Could not find permanent job	% that could not find permanent job
Jan-Mar 2007	821	6.7	190	23.1
Jan-Mar 2009	764	6.1	193	25.3
Jan-Mar 2014	872	6.9	291	33.3

Reasons for part-time working – could not find full-time job before, during and after the crisis

All

	Total ⁴	Could not find full-time job	% that could not find full-time job
Jan-Mar 2007	7,300	660	9.0
Jan-Mar 2009	7,466	875	11.7
Jan-Mar 2014	8,092	1,419	17.5

Male

	Total ⁴	Could not find full-time job	% that could not find full-time job
Jan-Mar 2007	1,664	274	16.5
Jan-Mar 2009	1,781	394	22.1
Jan-Mar 2014	2,114	642	30.4

Female

	Total ⁴	Could not find full-time job	% that could not find full-time job
Jan-Mar 2007	5,636	386	6.9
Jan-Mar 2009	5,685	481	8.5
Jan-Mar 2014	5,979	776	13.0

As can be seen, total employment for 2014 is higher than for 2007. There has been growth in the number of employees, though self-employment has risen much more rapidly. Groups such as the TUC have raised questions about whether the rise in self-employment actually reflects proactive individual choice for self-employment or is a result of limited opportunities to access employee positions. Various employment support programmes whether delivered directly or indirectly by Government agencies (nationally or locally) or delivered by other groups such as charities contain routes in to self-employment.

The tables above indicate a rapid increase in the number of jobs offered as zero hours contracts. The rise in such contracts has been highlighted by groups representing workers as of particular concern. On the other hand, employers groups have emphasised the flexible nature of the contracts is of benefit to the workers which take these positions. The controversial exclusivity clauses, which were part of some ZHC arrangements and banned workers from taking other employment, were banned in 2015.

In addition to the data on the rise of ZHCs which many criticise for the lack of secure income which they can provide, the data also indicate increases in both temporary and part-time work. As estimates indicate the proportion of people working these types of

contract due to lack of other opportunities has increased steadily since 2007. In 2014, more than 3 in 10 males working part-time were doing so because they were unable to find full-time work. Estimates for the proportions of people working on temporary contracts because they were unable to find full-time work are higher still for 2014, more than one in three workers on such contracts stated that they would have preferred permanent work.

Earnings before, during and after the crisis

Wage data and hours worked are also published by ONS through their Annual Survey of Hours and Earnings (ASHE). Wage data are reported in a variety of ways – for example hourly pay, weekly pay. Some data are presented including overtime and some excluding overtime. All data are broken down by sex and whether employment is full-time or part-time. There are no estimates in ASHE of wage rates by ethnicity, though there are estimates of wage rates by age group and by industry. The following data show gross hourly rates (see appendix for gross hourly wage trends by age).

3. Representation of different types of workers (by demographics and by types of employment contract in existing labour organisations)

Unionisation data for the categories of worker most affected by the crisis

Representation of categories of workers is in part due to self-selection; unions may be recognised at workplaces but workers choose not to join. Figures on unionisation are therefore a product of availability of representative structure and individual choice. It is sometimes difficult to distinguish from available data the extent to which the issue is lack of representation at the workplace or choices made by individual workers. However, data on union recognition (WERS and ONS) point to the types of workplaces where trade unions are and are not recognised. The overall context for representation is that collective representation of workers has declined substantially since around 1980, especially in the private sector (Brown et al. 2008). Latest ONS estimates show 14.2% of employees in the private sector, compared with 54.3% in the public sector are trade union members (BIS, 2015). Structural shifts in the economy – decline in traditionally highly unionised sectors coupled with growth in sectors which have low levels of unionisation give distinct patterns of access to representation. As discussed below, organising has become a much higher priority for trade unions, though the strategies adopted have not addressed to any great degree the structural imbalances.

Trade Union Membership as a proportion of *employees*, by age group and gender (not seasonally adjusted)

2007	All	Male	Female
Age 16-19	(3.8%)	(4.7%)	(3.1%)
Age 20-24	(13.0%)	(11.8%)	(14.2%)
Age 55-59	(38.6%)	(39.5%)	(37.7%)
Age 60-64	(30.1%)	(31.0%)	(28.7%)

2009	All	Male	Female
Age 16-19	(4.1%),	(5.4%)	(3.1%)
Age 20-24	(11.7%),	(12.2%)	(11.2%)
Age 55-59	(38.9%),	(37.2%)	(40.5%)
Age 60-64	(30.3%),	(30.7%)	(29.6%)

2014	All	Male	Female
Age 16-19	(2.9%),	(3.4%)	(2.4%)
Age 20-24	(11.0%),	(10.4%)	(11.6%)
Age 55-59	(35.1%),	(33.4%)	(36.8%)
Age 60-64	(29.8%),	(28.7%)	(31.0%)

Source: BIS/ ONS

The trade union data show a consistent pattern of lower representation of younger employees. By contrast there is much less of an effect by gender. The patterns observed may reflect the types of jobs and sector which younger people are employed in, or it could reflect an age effect or a cohort effect. The main story of the data of union representation throughout the period of crisis is that levels of trade union members have remained fairly stable, though proportions have fluctuated with the changes in employment levels.

Trade Union Membership as a proportion of employees by major occupation group and gender

All employees

	2007	2009	2014
Managers and Senior Officials	17.4	16.5	14.1
Professional occupations	47.0	44.8	43.7
Associate Prof and technical	41.5	40.3	23.4
Administrative and Secretarial	22.8	22.6	20.2
Skilled Trades Occupations	24.7	22.3	19.0
Personal Service Occupations	30.4	30.9	27.3
Sales and Customer Service	12.2	13.2	15.1
Process, Plant and Machine	29.9	30.9	26.9
Elementary Occupations	20.4	19.2	15.9

Male employees

	2007	2009	2014
Managers and Senior Officials	15.9	15.0	12.3
Professional occupations	37.2	33.6	29.8

Associate Prof and technical	35.6	33.6	29.8
Administrative and Secretarial	28.1	27.6	22.6
Skilled Trades Occupations	25.5	22.7	19.0
Personal Service Occupations	33.9	30.9	25.7
Sales and Customer Service	9.1	11.7	14.8
Process, Plant and Machine	31.0	32.3	28.2
Elementary Occupations	22.8	22.4	18.3

Female employees

	2007	2009	2014
Managers and Senior Officials	20.1	19.1	17.4
Professional occupations	58.9	58.1	57.1
Associate Prof and technical	46.6	46.0	22.1
Administrative and Secretarial	21.4	21.2	19.4
Skilled Trades Occupations	16.6	17.9	18.7
Personal Service Occupations	29.7	30.9	27.7
Sales and Customer Service	13.7	13.8	15.3
Process, Plant and Machine	22.7	21.1	17.1
Elementary Occupations	17.4	15.5	13.3

Source BIS /ONS

Note: Columns 2007 and 2009 based on Standard Occupational Classification (SOC) 2000, Column 2014 based on SOC 2010

The data on representation by occupational classification show that throughout the crisis, larger proportions of the more professional occupational categories have been trade union members. For major groups 8 and 9 (Process, Plant and Machine and Elementary Occupations) there appears to be some decline in the proportion of employees who are trade union members. Without data on absolute numbers it is difficult to say what is causing this apparent decline.

Information on coverage by, and representation in, I&C bodies

In addition to representation through trade unions, UK workers may be represented at the workplace level (or at higher levels within larger organisations) through joint consultative committees (JCCs) – i.e. committees comprising employee and management representatives. Evidence tends to support the idea that such bodies are not alternatives to union representation, but complements (Adam et al, 2014). In short, employers tend to engage the workforce using multiple methods of communication or they tend not to engage the workforce.

WERS data shows that throughout the crisis the percentage of workplaces covered by JCCs has remained stable. In 2004 9% of workplaces had a workplace level JCC compared with 8% in 2011, covering respectively 38 and 37% of employment (van Wanrooy et al, 2013:62). The differences between the percentage of workplaces and the percentage of employment covered by these arrangements indicate that these bodies are more common in larger (unionised) workplaces.

Presence in elective functions

The latest WERS data show that the vast majority of on-site union representatives are white (98%), male (57%), and tend to be older. 55% are aged 50+ and 37% are in the 40-49 age bracket. 63% of these representatives worked in the public sector (Charlwood and Angrave, 2014:19). The same research also looked at characteristics of on-site non-union representatives. These representatives are largely drawn from private service sector workplaces (81%). The age profiles of these representatives are not dissimilar to that of union representatives. However, the gender breakdown is different; 57% of these representatives are female (Charlwood and Angrave, 2014:20). Similar information on the categories of representatives on JCCs has not been published.

Representation in the political sphere

Voter turnout can be measured using the British Election Study (BES) data, which go back to 1964. These data are based on survey analysis and are subject to some sampling error. Dar (2013) using the BES data notes that even in the context of falling total participation rates, the decline has been especially steep in the 18-24 age group. The 2010 election showed an increase in the participation rate for this age group – up from 38.2% (in 2005) to 51.8%. However this age group still had the lowest participation rate of all the age group categories.

4. New forms of representation and protest during the crisis

This section examines how representation for workers has changed through the period of crisis. Representation of the more general category of ‘vulnerable workers’ has been a concern for trade unions for some time. For example, the TUC established the Commission on Vulnerable Employment in 2007 to investigate treatment of workers and to uncover the worst cases of exploitation. Part of the motivation for this work was informed by a recognition of the changing demographics of the labour force and that certain groups (e.g. migrant workers) might be more susceptible to exploitation (TUC, 2008).

This concern predates the crisis and is linked to other labour market changes in terms of both the sorts of the employment sectors experiencing growth and the categories of workers who were participating in the different sectors of the labour market. The theme of longer-term labour market change as an instigator of new trade union strategies is a theme which runs through a range of work examining themes relating to union organising and renewal (e.g. Wright, 2013).

Simms (2010) notes that while organising within the trade union movement was afforded much higher priority after the TUC founded its organising academy in 1998 the organising has largely been in 'core' sectors which has done little to alleviate structural imbalances in representation. Linking workplace learning and organising through the government-funded Union Learning Fund, which began in 1998, created opportunities for Union Learning Representatives (ULRs). Wood and Moore (2007) suggest that there is some evidence that these ULRs are attracting underrepresented groups (women, BME workers, younger workers and migrant workers) to both membership and activism.

The representation of temporary workers by trade unions has traditionally been characterised by a range of responses including opposition, acceptance and positive engagement (Heery, 2004), though the unions' approaches are of course heavily shaped by their own position and strength as a labour market actor. Arguably union approaches to temporary workers have moved more towards positive engagement as union power has been eroded. The Agency Worker Regulations (2010) also stimulated renewed interest in this category of workers. Forde and Slater (2014) use case studies to show how unions have tried to achieve equal treatment for temporary workers, from 'day one'.

Growing numbers of migrant workers entering the UK in the early part of the 21st century, rather than the crisis itself, was a primary motivation for unions to try to engage with migrant workers. There are examples of trade union literature on strategies to engage and organise such groups (e.g. USDAW, 2008) and academic studies of organising strategies among migrant workers (Holgate, 2005; Aziz, 2015; Fitzgerald and Hardy, 2010; Anderson, Clark and Parutis, 2007, Alberti et al 2013, Tapia and Turner, 2013).

Trade unions have a relatively long-standing commitment to engaging with and campaigning for better treatment for ethnic minority workers. In 1985 the TUC established its Race Relations Committee and has an annual Black workers' conference which was first established in 1988. Similarly the TUC organises a yearly conference for young workers.

Perhaps the more interesting consequence of the demographic changes is that trade union organising has embraced a community aspect alongside the more traditional industry-based approach. These sorts of strategies happened around the time of the crisis, though attributing cause and effect is problematic.

Unite's community based membership scheme, announced in 2011, to give channels of representation to those traditionally not represented through the union movement, marks a shift in the organising strategies of UK trade unions (Holgate, 2013).

Wright (2013) argues that the community initiatives have been relatively successful, though suggests that the governance structures of the trade union movement need to change to reflect this new membership.

Although the changes to union strategy throughout the crisis, the more visible forms of opposition to the crisis, and to the Government's austerity strategy were public protests which occurred during 2010 and 2011. Saunders et al (2015) examines the protests – Fund our future, March for the alternative and the occupy movement. Fund our future demonstration took place in central London in November 2010. Organised by the National Union of Students (NUS) and the University and College Union (UCU), the march was aimed at opposing the proposed increases in student tuition fees and to fight cuts carried out in the name of austerity. The TUC March for the alternative took place in March 2011 and was organised in opposition to the Government's spending cuts. Both the Fund our Future (FoF) and the March for the alternative protests were organised (at least in part) by well-established actors in the UK labour movement. The occupy protest, by contrast, was more spontaneous and organised by key individuals. Saunders et al (2015) note that these groups tended to comprise highly educated members of society. Those at the TUC demonstration (mean age = 50 years) were significantly older than those for Occupy (mean = 44), themselves significantly older than those at FoF (mean=30) (Saunders et al, 2015:183). This study does not give information on all labour market categories of interest, though perhaps there is significance that migrant workers, temporary workers and ethnic minorities are not mentioned. The figures for age may suggest that the very youngest labour market participants are not highly represented among these groups.

5. A brief conclusion and thoughts on areas to investigate further

The recession of 2008-2009 had a clear and obvious effect on the labour market, as shown by the increases in unemployment and corresponding decreases in employment. However, as noted the effects on employment numbers and unemployment rates were less than expected, using previous recessions as a guide. However, the apparent 'success' in weathering the recession may mask an increased trend towards more precarious employment. Some data on use of 'atypical' employment contracts through the period certainly does suggest that the recession may have accelerated the use by employers of these more flexible and insecure work arrangements. Part of the story for the recovery will therefore need to examine the degree to which the use of such contracts has become embedded or how far these can be seen to be expedients to deal with the specific problems of the crisis.

It is certainly the case that the crisis resulted in a great deal of media attention and the response of the Government to the crisis, through its austerity programme generated a great degree of public opposition. Despite this opposition the Government's plans were largely unaffected by the protests and the austerity programme continues. Trade unions were already taking steps to engage more widely and experimenting with different forms of organising and this continued through the period of crisis. The prominence of these different models of organising, their importance and their relationship to the crisis is an area which could be explored in greater depth via follow up interviews with key trade union organisers.

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Appendix - Pay data

	2007				2009				2014			
	Median	% change	Mean	% change	Median	% change	Mean	% change	Median	% change	Mean	%change
All employees	10.23	3.2	13.38	3.1	11.02	3.7	14.39	3.2	11.61	0.2	15.11	-0.1
16-17b	4.93	2.5	5.03	3.6	5.10	0.8	5.66	6.2	5.03	0.6	5.61	4.9
18-21	6.25	4.1	7.03	5.5	6.50	2.8	7.36	2.3	6.92	2.9	7.68	0.8
22-29	9.28	3.2	10.75	3.0	9.77	2.6	11.37	2.4	9.90	0.8	11.66	0.7
30-39	11.88	3.0	14.50	3.2	12.82	3.3	15.44	2.8	13.29	-0.3	15.95	-0.4
40-49	11.57	2.0	15.10	2.8	12.55	4.3	16.23	2.5	13.27	0.7	17.11	0.8
50-59	10.75	3.9	14.22	3.4	11.61	3.2	15.46	3.8	12.50	0.1	16.39	-0.3
60+	8.91	4.7	12.10	2.5	9.67	3.2	13.24	4.5	10.73	0.6	14.49	-0.6

	2007				2009				2014			
	Median	% change	Mean	% change	Median	% change	Mean	% change	Median	% change	Mean	% change
All male employees	11.58	2.8	14.67	2.7	12.49	3.4	15.77	2.8	12.92	-0.3	16.38	-0.8
16-17b	4.89	2.8	4.97	4.3	5.09	1.6	5.84	7.2	5.05	1.0	5.51	1.2
18-21	6.38	4.1	7.23	5.0	6.65	2.3	7.58	2.1	7.07	2.9	7.92	0.5
22-29	9.58	3.0	11.05	2.8	10.12	2.6	11.61	2.0	10.19	1.0	11.93	0.7
30-39	12.99	2.4	15.43	2.7	14.00	3.2	16.40	2.4	14.02	-1.0	16.59	-1.3
40-49	13.76	2.3	17.06	2.2	14.82	3.3	18.30	1.7	15.33	-0.1	18.94	-0.2
50-59	12.76	4.0	16.02	3.4	13.80	2.6	17.45	3.7	14.77	0.0	18.50	-0.6
60+	10.00	5.2	13.08	1.8	10.73	2.6	14.34	4.7	12.14	1.2	15.86	-0.9

	2007				2009				2014			
	Median	% change	Mean	% change	Median	% change	Mean	% change	Median	% change	Mean	% change
All female employees	8.98	3.4	11.64	3.6	9.68	4.1	12.60	4.3	10.37	0.5	13.48	0.9
16-17b	4.96	2.4	5.11	3.1	5.15	0.7	5.44	4.9	5.03	0.6	5.71	9.7
18-21	6.14	4.6	6.80	6.1	6.43	3.5	7.11	2.7	6.77	2.4	7.42	1.0
22-29	8.95	3.0	10.41	2.9	9.40	2.2	11.09	2.8	9.58	0.7	11.34	0.6
30-39	10.56	3.9	13.11	3.5	11.48	4.3	14.06	3.8	12.40	0.6	15.05	0.9
40-49	9.48	1.8	12.43	3.1	10.38	5.3	13.49	4.4	11.30	1.3	14.74	2.3
50-59	9.09	3.4	11.96	3.9	9.88	3.5	13.07	4.8	10.72	-0.5	13.91	0.3
60+	7.77	4.0	10.20	4.8	8.50	3.6	11.21	4.7	9.59	1.5	12.28	0.8