

Work and Employment Relations in Kent

Findings from the University of Greenwich/ACAS Kent Employee Relations Survey 2001

Conducted by the University of Greenwich and ACAS South Eastern Area

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PREFACE

By Chris Martin. Assistant Director, ACAS South Eastern Area

This report details the results of a survey of employment practices and policies at workplaces in Kent. The survey was conducted in the summer of 2001 and was carried out by the University of Greenwich Business School with financial support from ACAS South Eastern Area. We are grateful to the other organisations that sponsored the survey – the Government Office of the South East, the South East Region TUC, the Kent Branch of the Institute of Directors and the Engineering Employers Federation South. The idea for a survey of Kent employment relations was initiated by staff at the University of Greenwich Business School in conjunction with Brian Boulton (Assistant Director, ACAS South Eastern Area) and David Ronnie (ACAS Senior Adviser for Kent). We pay particular tribute to Brian Boulton (now retired) for his enthusiastic support for the project from the start.

The picture that emerges from this survey is of a county with a relatively stable business environment in which most workplaces are well established. Given the proximity to the London conurbation and the current strong economic conditions, it was not surprising that recruitment problems were common among our workplaces and demand for labour appears to be strong. A particular feature of our respondent workplaces was the high proportion of female employees. In both the smallest and largest workplaces, females formed the majority of the workforce. This is encouraging but also suggests that the need for more family friendly policies and practices may have a particular resonance in the Kent labour market.

There was also stability in the employment relations climate of our respondent workplaces. Employment relations were generally described as good and attitudes towards employee representation by unions were largely neutral or in favour. The proportion of workplaces employing 25 or more workers with union members present was around 50 per cent, compared to 53 per cent nationally. The level of union recognition was above the national average but this might be explained by the higher proportion of public sector workplaces in our survey. Few workplaces had recently been approached for union recognition and few expected the overall situation to change over the next three years.

Workplaces in Kent do not appear to have found the recent legislative changes in employee rights since 1997 to have been too onerous and most have had to make only minor changes to existing policies and practices. The major areas of concern for the future were the recent legislation on parental leave, changes to maternity rights, stakeholder pensions, the working time regulations and the extension of part-time workers' rights, rather than new collective rights at work. Given the strong presence of females within the Kent labour market, these issues will require particular attention by employers and unions over the next few years. ACAS South Eastern Area has already made plans for a conference on family friendly issues later this year. We hope that Kent employers and union representatives will take advantage of that

event to update their knowledge of the law and learn about how to handle the practical issues involved.

KEY FINDINGS FROM THE SURVEY

- Employment relations in Kent are generally stable, reflecting the fact that most of our respondent workplaces were well established and the local economy buoyant. Sixty per cent of the workplaces reported increases in employment over the last three years with only 13 per cent reporting a decrease. The employment relations climate was generally described as good and attitudes to employee representation by unions were largely neutral or favorable.
- A major concern of the respondent workplaces was competition for labour and skill shortages. The most difficult groups to recruit were craft and skilled workers and professional and technical staff.
- Workplaces in Kent have adapted well to the changes in employment rights introduced since 1997. Most of our respondents have had to make only limited changes to their policies and procedures to accommodate the new legislative requirements. Seventy per cent of respondents said that the new laws required only limited changes and 20 per cent said no changes were necessary.
- The major areas of concern for the future were new laws on parental leave, changes to maternity rights, stakeholder pensions, the working time regulations and the extension of rights for part-time workers.
- Fifty-four per cent of the respondent workplaces recognised a trade union, compared to 45 per cent at national level. This is higher than expected for South East England, where union presence is generally lower. Union recognition is much higher in public sector workplaces in Kent (81%) than in the private sector (29%) or the not-for-profit sector (34%). The presence of union members in workplaces at around 50 per cent was only slightly lower than the national average of 53 per cent of workplaces that have some union members present. Few of our respondent workplaces had been approached recently for union recognition, despite new legislation providing rights to recognition.
- Over the last three years the most common changes at work in our respondent workplaces (in order of importance) were the introduction of new technology, new working practices, new work techniques or procedures, the organisation of work and working time arrangements. Over the next three years the most common changes planned were the introduction of new technology, new working practices, new work techniques or procedures and new pay and grading systems.
- Our respondent workplaces had a majority of females employed. This was particularly the case in the smallest workplaces and the largest. According to the Government's Labour Force Survey (LFS), just over 45 per cent of the Kent workforce are female. This difference between our survey and the LFS is partly explained by the strong representation in our survey of public sector workplaces (where the workforce is majority female).
- The most common source of information about employment relations used

by respondents was ACAS.

ORIGINS OF THE SURVEY

This survey was initiated at the start of the millennium, following several years, nationally, of continuous economic growth. The project was initiated by the University of Greenwich Business School and the ACAS South Eastern Area. The project resulted from a collaboration between a number of interested parties in Kent and the south-east, including the Engineering Employers Federation South (EEF South) and the Institute of Directors (IoD) representing employer interests; the South East Region Trades Union Congress (SERTUC) on behalf of employees, supported by the Advisory Conciliation and Arbitration Service (ACAS) at both national and local level and the Government Office of the South East (GOSE). Funding for the project was provided by ACAS and the University of Greenwich.

The aims of this research project were twofold. The first aim was to investigate employment policies and practices in the County of Kent with a view to providing empirical data for both policy makers and those providing advice to both employers and employees within the County. The second was to provide local employers with an opportunity to express their views on a number of changes in employment law since 1997. It was intended from the start that the survey would identify key areas of concern among employers so that those organisations providing advisory services to local employers, employees and trade unionists could better tailor their services to client needs. It was also intended that employers would be able to use the findings to benchmark their own practices against those of other workplaces in the county.

The election of a Labour government in May 1997 marked some important initiatives in employment law, some – such as the National Minimum Wage - originating from domestic policy and others – for example the Working Time Regulations - resulting from the implementation of European legislation. There were real questions arising about how these factors were affecting employers and what actions they were taking to implement these new responsibilities and rights at work. The last major national survey of employment relations, known as the Workplace Employee Relations Survey (WERS), was completed in 1998 and marked the end of the Conservative years (Cully et al 1999). This survey was designed to track the changes in employment practice resulting from economic, political and social developments since 1997.

The Kent Labour Market

Kent is the largest Shire County in England with an area of 352,296 hectares and a population of 1.3 million. There is no single urban centre but several towns of medium size. The county town is Maidstone. A high proportion of Kent residents live in rural areas and the population is spread out over some 370 settlements. In 1998 local government re-organisation led to the establishment of a new unitary authority – Medway Council – covering the northern conurbation surrounding Rochester and Chatham.

The county has a number of distinctive features that make it particularly appropriate for a study of this kind. Although it is in close proximity to London, business prosperity is not evenly spread and parts of Kent have continued to be marked by relatively high levels of unemployment. The ILO unemployment rate for Kent was 4.8 per cent in March 2000. This compares with 3.3 per cent in the South East and 5.3 per cent in the UK as a whole (Office for National Statistics, 2000). On the positive side, the service sector is of growing importance with some large retail developments attracting people into the county. The county has been affected by changing transport and communication networks and the recent links to mainland Europe via the Channel Tunnel have created significant new demands for labour. Conversely though, some of the traditional industries within the county, such as paper manufacture and agriculture, have been in decline.

There are currently around 40,000 businesses in Kent - most of them small and medium sized enterprises (SMEs) - but there are some notable inward investors from the mainland of Europe attracted by the ease of communication and the opportunities presented by business parks and business support networks within the county. Clusters of complementary businesses, research organisations and educational establishments are developing. Distribution, pharmaceutical and automotive companies are strongly represented in the county and it is also attracting new financial services and information technology companies. A number of companies have established call centres in the county.

There are around 540,000 people working in Kent itself but the county is particularly affected by the gravitational pull of London and many Kent residents work outside the county - some of them commuting to Essex or London. Employers sometimes find themselves competing within the greater London labour market and recruitment, retention and skill shortages may be especially problematic for Kent employers. The population in Kent that is defined as 'economically active' - around 680,000 people, including the self-employed (ONS, 2000) - is therefore somewhat larger than the county workforce itself (Kent County Council, undated). Around 45% of those in employment are female. Just over a quarter (173,000) of the 649,000 people who are employed are engaged on a part-time basis.

THE RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The survey questionnaire was initially designed by the University of Greenwich Business School and ACAS staff and then presented to a committee of representatives from the sponsoring organisations. Some of the questions were designed to mirror questions in the national WERS survey, so that comparisons could be made, and some were based on an earlier survey undertaken in the South West ACAS Region by the Universities of Plymouth and the West of England in 1996 (ACAS 1996). In addition new questions were also added to collect particular data. The questionnaire was piloted with a group of Kent personnel managers and further changes made as a result. The survey questionnaire was created using SNAP software so that analysis could be undertaken using the same software.

The survey was carried out during the summer of 2001. The database, provided by Learning and Business Link Kent, included 9,045 establishments with 11 or more employees and we decided to sample roughly half of these. In total 4,400 questionnaires were mailed out to workplaces. Changes over time meant that some of the respondent workplaces had actually diminished in size and so some of the workplaces that responded had fewer than 11 employees at the time of the survey. Data from these very small workplaces was included in our final analysis nonetheless (we indicate where this was not the case). A number of questionnaires were also returned to us undelivered by the Post Office.

Respondents' firms employ about 10 per cent of the Kent workforce. The total number of usable replies to the survey was exactly 800, an 18 per cent response rate. In all a total of 54,572 employees were covered by the survey.

The questionnaire data was then inputted by staff at the University of Greenwich Kings Hill Institute and analysis conducted by staff from the Business School. An executive summary of the findings was mailed to all respondents who requested a copy.

Inevitably with a postal questionnaire of this length, not all respondents answered every question and the number of respondents to individual questions is therefore below the total response rate in some cases. Moreover, not all questions were applicable to all respondents. Nonetheless, we are confident that our data is robust. We show the figure for the number of respondents answering for most of our tabulated data.

THE RESPONDENTS

Our respondents reflected the full range of economic activity in Kent. Of the establishments in our survey, 64 per cent came from the private sector; 29 per cent from the public sector and 7 per cent from not-for-profit organisations. The representation of the public sector in our survey is higher than both the national average and in Kent and this is reflected in our survey. According to the Labour Force Survey (2000), about a quarter of the Kent workforce is

engaged in public administration, education and health. The next largest sectors are distribution, hotels and restaurants (20.3%), manufacturing (14.7%) and banking, finance and insurance (14.5%).

Table 1. Respondents by Standard Industrial Classification

The main industry of this workplace	No of Respondents	% of respondents
Forestry, fishing and agriculture	7	0.9
Energy, water supply and sanitation	5	0.6
Pulp, paper and timber products	5	0.6
Metal goods manufacture and engineering	43	5.4
Food, drink and tobacco manufacture	6	0.8
Textiles, clothing and leather goods	3	0.4
Chemicals and chemical products	7	0.9
Other manufacturing	43	5.4
Construction	60	7.6
Retail and distribution	44	5.5
Hotels and catering	26	3.3
Transport	31	3.9
Print, publishing, post and communications	28	3.5
Banking, finance and private insurance	21	2.6
Research and development, computer and related activity	7	0.9
Other business activity	50	6.3
Public administration, defence and social security	9	1.1
Education	165	20.8
Health & social work	135	17.0
Other service activities	99	12.5

N= 794

We also asked respondents what the primary function (work activity) was in their workplaces. This was intended to distinguish between the industrial sector in which the workplace was located and the actual work activity conducted in the workplace. For example, a workplace may be part of a manufacturing organisation but may be purely an administrative or sales centre for that business, rather than a production site. In terms of the primary function of the workplace, the most common activities of respondents were administration/customer services (24%), education and training activities (22%), production/processing activities (19%) and health and social care (19%).

Table 2. Primary Function of the Workplace

Primary function	Number of workplaces	% of workplaces
Production/processing	153	19%
Distribution	49	6%
Sales	91	12%
Administration/customer services	191	24%
Research and development	16	2%
Education and training	172	22%
Health and social care	149	19%
Other	27	3%
Total	719	100%

N=719

Successive surveys of employee relations have shown that size is a key determinant of the way in which employees are managed (Cully et al, 1999). The smallest workplaces responding to our survey - that is those with fewer than 25 employees - represented almost half of all respondents (48%). Those with 500 or more employees formed just under three per cent of all respondents. The distribution, however, is reversed when we consider the number of employees engaged in these workplaces. Almost 40 per cent of employees worked in establishments employing more than 500 employees, whilst the remaining 60 per cent worked in workplaces with fewer than 500 employees. Only 10 per cent of employees were engaged in workplaces that had fewer than 25 employees. This information is set out in table 3.

Table 3 Workplace Size

Size of Workplace	% of Workplaces	Employees as % of all employees	Number of respondent workplaces	Employees
<24	48.3	10.2	378	5,586
25-49	26.7	13.1	209	7,145
50-99	12.3	11.5	96	6,294
100-199	7.2	14	56	7,646
200-499	2.8	13	22	7,094
500+	2.7	38.1	21	20,807
Total			782	54,572

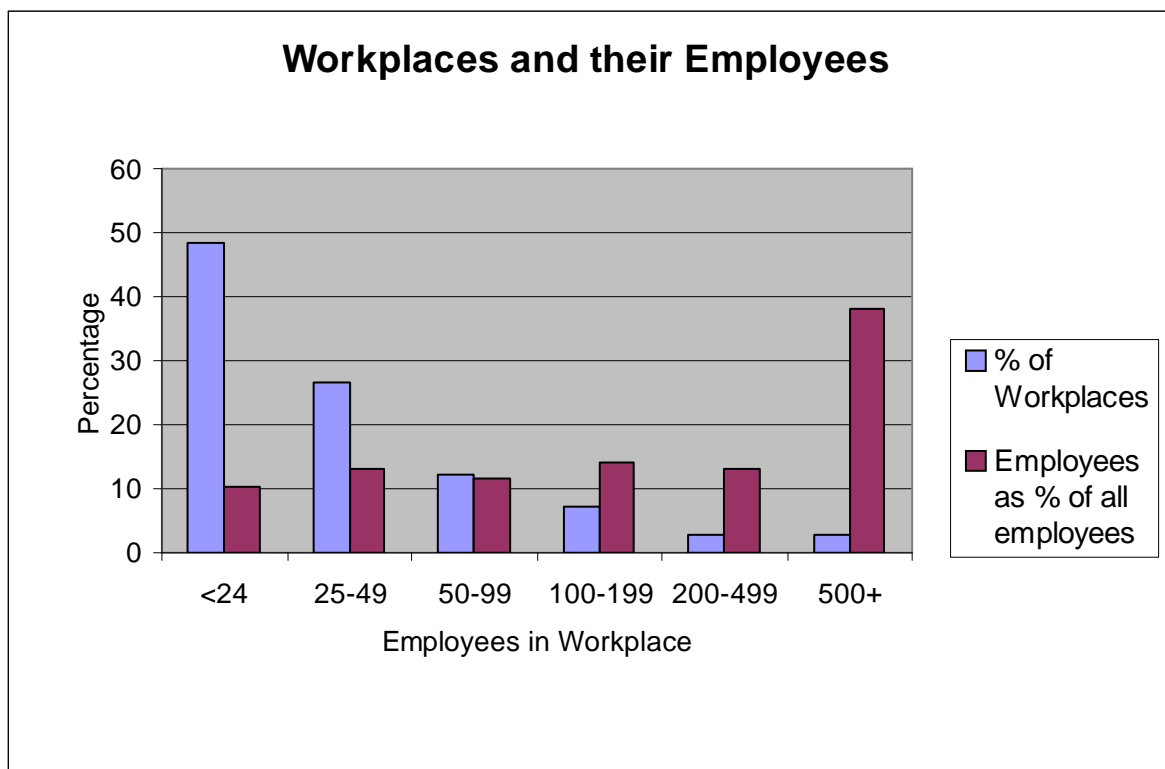
N=782

This wide difference in the size of workplaces means that care is needed in interpreting the data gathered in the survey. The fact that a large number of respondents follow a particular practice does not necessarily mean that this practice is applied to a high number of employees. Where appropriate therefore we identify responses both by the number of respondents and by

workplace size.

Respondents were asked to identify the number of employees at their workplace and they ranged from 2826 to 1. The average number of employees per workplace was 70 and the median number was 25. The most common (modal) figure was 14. The distribution of workplaces and employees by workplace size is set out in Figure 1.

Figure 1. Workplaces and their Employees.



Women represented 56 per cent of the employees covered by the survey. This compares to 45 per cent in the LFS data for Kent (2000). The preponderance of females is partly due to the large number of public sector workplaces in our survey (e.g. schools and health establishments). Overall the ratio of men to women encompassed by workplaces responding to our survey was 0.77. In workplaces with fewer than 100 employees, women outnumbered men. Women also outnumbered men in the largest workplaces (over 500), probably reflecting the fact that the largest workplaces were likely to be public sector.

Table 4: The ratio of men to women

Size of workplace	All	Male	Female	M/F ratio
Up to 24	5555	2504	3051	0.82
25-49	7082	2633	4449	0.59
50-99	6280	2643	3637	0.72
100-199	7298	3662	3636	1.00
200-499	6735	3916	2819	1.38
500+	19058	7390	11668	0.63
Total	52008	22748	29260	0.77

N=776

Around 71 per cent of the employees in this survey worked full-time (i.e. 30 hours a week or more). Part-time working was most common in workplaces employing 25-49 workers (see Table 5 below).

Table 5. Full-and Part-time Composition

Size of workplace	Full-time	Part-time	All employees	% Full-time
24 or less	3729	1552	5281	71
25-49	4328	2460	6788	64
50-99	4318	1814	6132	70
100-199	4893	1982	6875	71
200-499	4675	1374	6049	77
500+	11949	4950	16899	71
Total	33892	14132	48024	71

N = 738

It is also significant whether an establishment is independent or whether it is part of a larger organisation, either within the UK or based elsewhere. Workplaces that are part of a wider enterprise may well reflect distinctive features of that enterprise, regardless of their size or of local influences. The majority of our respondents – 56 per cent - were single independent workplaces not belonging to another organisation. Some 43 per cent were one of a number of different workplaces in the UK belonging to the same organisation and the remaining one per cent represented the sole UK workplace of a foreign organisation. Few of these workplaces were new. Eighty seven per cent had been under current ownership for more than three years; 10 per cent for between one and three years and only 3 per cent were 'new', that is under the same ownership for less than one year. This means that, for the most part, our survey reflects the practices of well established workplaces in Kent.

PERSONNEL AND HR

Over half of our respondents (57%) said that there was a designated personnel manager responsible for the workplace. Our question was not the same as that asked in WERS 1998 and so direct comparison is not feasible. We know, however, that larger workplaces are more likely to employ a personnel specialist and the presence of a designated personnel manager increased with workplace size as we show in table 6. Larger establishments were also more likely to establish procedures to address personnel and employee relations issues.

Table 6. Is there a designated personnel manager responsible for this workplace?

Size of Workplace	No of responses	Yes	No
24 or less	328	52%	48%
25-49	188	53%	47%
50-99	89	63%	37%
100-199	54	72%	28%
200-499	22	86%	14%
500 or more	19	95%	5%
Total	700	57%	43%

N=700

Public sector workplaces were marginally more likely to have someone designated to deal with personnel than were private sector or not for profit workplaces.

The personnel specialist was most likely to be positioned as a manager (32%) or senior manager (33%), with a lower number (21%) having Board level responsibilities. Some 14 per cent, however, were classified as having only administrative responsibility. Where a designated personnel department existed in the workplace, most employed just one person (56% of workplaces), followed by 2-5 staff (34%).

POLICIES AND PROCEDURES

The existence of a written personnel or training strategy is related to workplace size, with the smallest workplaces (up to 24 employees) least likely to indicate that there was a personnel or training strategy in place (54% and 57% respectively) and the largest workplaces (500+) most likely to indicate that they have such strategies (90% and 95%). The picture, however, was less clear-cut for medium-sized establishments. Workplaces with between 100 and 499 employees were marginally less likely than those employing between 50 and 99 employees to report the existence of a personnel or training strategy. Perhaps, surprisingly, respondents were more likely to have a training strategy than a personnel strategy. Some 65 per cent

of respondents said that there was a personnel strategy in place and 67 per cent said that there was a training strategy.

Table 7. Is there written Personnel or Training strategy for this workplace?

Employees	% with Personnel strategy (n=686)	With Training strategy (n=682)
<24	55%	57%
25-49	69%	71%
50-99	78%	80%
100-199	75%	79%
200-499	64%	77%
500+	90%	95%

N=686

Key personnel policies and procedures were widely established. Unsurprisingly, the most common procedures are concerned with discipline and grievance, followed by equal opportunities and absence.

Respondents in the public sector were slightly more likely to have formalised procedures for handling employment relations issues than were those in the private sector, although private sector workplaces were more likely to have a workplace disputes procedure. Other policies mentioned were health and safety, smoking, alcohol and drugs, conduct and confidentiality, violence and aggression at work, capability, workplace stress, redeployment and redundancy, maternity and parental leave, and money laundering.

Only 30 per cent of respondents indicated that they were members of an employers' association. Establishments based in the public sector were more likely (36% of respondents) than those in the private sector (29%) or those in the private not-for-profit sector (21%) to report that they were members of an employers' association.

RECRUITMENT AND TRAINING

Sixty per cent of respondents (475 out of 790) reported an increase in the number of jobs over the last three years, with only 13 per cent (103) reporting a decrease. Just over a quarter (212) said that there had been no change.

The number of vacancies reflects workplace size with most respondents having 10 or fewer vacancies over the previous 12 months. Table 8 below shows the level of vacancies according to the size of workplace.

Table 8: How many vacancies have you had at this workplace over the last 12 months? Percentage of workplaces with vacancies by size of workplace.

No of Employees in workplace	1-24	25-49	50-99	100-199	200-499	500+	All
10 or fewer vacancies	98%	90%	82%	33%	9%	5%	84%
11-24 vacancies	2%	6%	14%	39%	27%	5%	8%
25-49 vacancies	0%	4%	4%	16%	27%	11%	4%
50-99 vacancies	-	-	-	10%	32%	32%	2%
100-199 vacancies	-	-	-	2%	-	32%	1%
200-499 vacancies	-	-	-	-	-	11%	0%
500+ vacancies	-	-	-	-	5%	5%	-

N=741

Attracting staff with the right skills mix was a difficult task for employers over the 12 months preceding our survey. We asked whether there was no difficulty, a little difficulty, whether it was very difficult or virtually impossible to recruit particular categories of staff. Answers were weighted using an index and are shown in table 9 below (100 = virtually impossible to recruit, 66 = v.difficult, 33 = a little difficult, 0 = no difficulty). The most problematic areas for recruiters were craft and skilled workers and professional and technical staff. Overall there were fewer problems in recruiting unskilled staff and employees for clerical and sales positions. The public sector seemed to have had more recruitment difficulty than the private sector with unskilled workers but for all other groups the private sector reported more difficulty than the public as shown in the index figures below (see Table 9).

Table 9: Difficulty in recruiting

Figures are index figures with 100 indicating impossible to recruit.

	Manag't	Prof. & Technical	Clerical & sales etc	Craft & skilled	Operative & assembly	Unskilled
All	36	50	26	52	37	32
Private	39	49	28	55	39	31
Public	30	48	21	46	26	34

We asked respondents which types of recruitment methods were used. The most popular recruitment method was external advertising - consistently

ranked first for all types of employee. The importance of the internal labour market was borne out by the continued use of internal recruitment, which ranked second, followed by 'word of mouth' recruitment or use of the 'grapevine'. Unsurprisingly there were variations in methods used for different occupational groups so that internal recruitment was more important for managerial, professional and technical positions and for recruitment of clerical sales and administrative staff. Not surprisingly, given its monopoly employer status for many public sector professionals, the public sector was more likely to use internal recruitment methods than the private sector. Word of mouth recruitment was more significant for manual work - for craft and skilled employees, for operative and assembly and for unskilled work. The preferences are shown in Table 10 below.

Use of employment agencies was more common for professional and technical staff and clerical, sales and administrative staff. Use of employment consultants (e.g. head-hunters) and the internet was, not surprisingly, most common for higher level staff. There was little use of assessment centres and again this was more common at higher levels but, surprisingly, nine establishments used these for unskilled workers. Other methods used were 'open days', recruitment direct from training establishments, staff introductions, trade union vacancy lists and the careers service. A surprisingly large number of respondents said that they used shop window adverts as a means of advertising job vacancies.

Table 10: In recruiting the following types of employee which methods do you use (please tick all applicable categories)?

Method	Man- agemt	Prof. & Techn	Clerical sales & admin.	Craft & skilled	Operative & assembly	Unski lled	Average
Internal advertising (i.e. from existing workforce)	23%	18%	18%	14%	16%	15%	16%
External advertising e.g. newspapers	29%	30%	30%	30%	25%	26%	25%
Employment agencies	13%	16%	16%	12%	11%	8%	14%
Employ't consultants e.g. head-hunters	6%	3%	2%	1%	1%	1%	3%
Govermm't job centres	6%	7%	13%	16%	20%	24%	15%
Assess't centres	2%	1%	1%	1%	1%	1%	1%
Internet/ website	9%	11%	5%	4%	4%	3%	7%
Word of mouth or 'grapevine'	13%	14%	15%	21%	21%	21%	18%

Other	1%	0%	1%	1%	1%	2%	1%
	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%

N= 420

Over four-fifths of respondents had an induction programme for new employees.

Off-the-job training was reported to be widespread although there was a wide difference in the scale of provision within workplaces. In many cases off-the-job training is targeted at only a minority of the overall workforce. In 43 per cent of respondent workplaces more than half of the workforce had received off-the-job training in the previous 12 months. Conversely though, 55 per cent of respondent workplaces provided off-the-job training for less than 50 per cent of the workforce and almost one quarter of respondent establishments made such provision for less than 10 per cent of the workforce as we show in table 11 below. Nine per cent (70) of workplaces did not indicate that they provided any off-the-job training for their employees.

Table 11: What proportion of the workforce at this workplace has had formal off the job training in the last 12 months?

% of Workforce receiving off-the-job training	Number of respondents	Percentage of respondents
Less than 10%	171	23%
10 to less than 20%	89	12%
20 to less than 30%	82	11%
30 to less than 40%	40	5%
40 to less than 50%	32	4%
50 to less than 60%	67	9%
60 to less than 70%	31	4%
70 to less than 80%	41	6%
80 to less than 90%	53	7%
90 to less than 100%	41	6%
100%	83	11%

N=730

Of respondents reporting such training, almost two thirds (65%) reported that it lasted for less than two days. A further 27 per cent indicated that off-the-job training lasted for between two and five days. Only 9 per cent of workplaces said that training lasted for more than five days. It is interesting to note that, apart from courses lasting two days or less, the private sector appears to be more generous in the length of training offered than the public sector. Almost six in ten establishments had financially supported at least one employee to attend a course in further or higher education over the previous 12 months.

Access to training opportunities is particularly important for young workers, for whom new statutory entitlements are in place. Most establishments (77%) said that this did not apply in their workplace (that is, there were no young workers aged 16-17). Only 169 workplaces indicated that they had 16-17 year

olds in post. Of these establishments with 16-17 year old workers, 36 per cent reported that all of their young workers had taken up their statutory right to training and 22 per cent reported that some had taken up this right. The remaining 42 per cent had had no young workers take up this right.

PERFORMANCE MANAGEMENT

Respondents were asked which methods they used to make employees aware of their job responsibilities and whether these methods were very important, important, not very important or not used. Responses were weighted to produce an index number where 100 would represent a universal 'very important' response and 0 a universal 'very unimportant' response. The results are shown in table 12 below. What emerges is a group of methods which, taken together, are particularly relevant for performance management in making employees aware of their job responsibilities. These are: supervision, induction and initial training, standard operating procedures, job descriptions and on-going training. Less significant overall are individual or team objectives and targets; competency standards; and job and staff manuals.

Table 12: How important is each of the following in making employees aware of their job responsibilities?

Job Responsibility	Index of importance
Induction & initial training	82
Supervision	81
Standard operating procedures	81
Job description	80
On-going training	77
Individual objectives	67
Team objectives	66
Competency standards	66
Staff handbook/manual	63

N=769

Some 73 per cent of establishments had a formal system of appraisal (defined as an annual meeting with a supervisor or manager to discuss performance and career development needs). Of those that did, only 38 per cent linked the results of this appraisal to the individual employee's pay increase. The appraisal is most likely to be linked to pay in production/processing jobs and least likely in health and social care.

We asked whether establishments had achieved any quality standards. Out of 614 establishments which answered this question, 146 - almost one quarter - had achieved Investors in People Status, with another 11% (65) working towards it. It is interesting to note that one third of respondents to this question had not considered the possibility of Investors in People. Only eight per cent of respondents had actually rejected the possibility of IIP, whilst just under a quarter said that the matter was under consideration by management.

Achievement of IIP was much higher in the public sector than the private (43% compared to 14%). Only 121 workplaces had achieved ISO9000. The responses to questions concerned with quality standards are set out in table 13 below.

Table 13: What is the status of the following in your workplace?

Quality Standard	Achieved	Working Towards	Under consideration by Management	Rejected by Manag't	Not considered
Investors in People	146	65	144	50	209
ISO9000	121	33	81	57	215
Other quality standard	65	31	22	8	152

N=614

CONSULTATION AND COMMUNICATION

Fewer than half of the workplaces that we surveyed has established formal mechanisms for consultation and communication. Typically these were the larger workplaces where more complex structures require more elaborate methods for communication and involvement (see Table 14). Public sector and private not-for-profit workplaces were more likely to have both formal briefing systems and joint consultative committees than private sector workplaces, irrespective of size of workplace. Six in ten establishments said that they had a formal briefing for at least some employees.

Table 14. Consultation and communication systems

	All	Less than 24	25-49	50-99	100-199	200-499	500+
Do you have a formal briefing system for any employees at this workplace?							
Yes	439 (60%)	167 (50%)	131 (66%)	64 (69%)	41 (75%)	17 (77%)	19 (90%)
No	278 (38%)	165 (49%)	65 (33%)	27 (29%)	14 (25%)	5 (23%)	2 (10%)
Do you have any joint committees of managers and employees which are primarily concerned with information and consultation, rather than negotiation?							
Yes	309 (43%)	96 (28%)	98 (49%)	55 (59%)	27 (49%)	15 (68%)	18 (86%)
No	408 (56%)	239 (71%)	95 (48%)	37 (40%)	28 (51%)	7 (32%)	2 (10%)

Formal briefing systems for employees were most likely to be found in education and training and health and social care.

Table 15: Do you have a formal briefing system for any of your employees at this workplace?

Primary Function	N=	Yes	No
Production/process	149	68 (44%)	81 (53%)
Distribution	48	19 (39%)	29 (59%)
Sales	91	45 (49%)	46 (51%)
Admin/ Customer services	186	105 (56%)	81 (43%)
R&D	15	6 (40%)	9 (60%)
Education and training	169	144 (85%)	25 (15%)
Health and social care	147	96 (64%)	51 (34%)
Other	27	17 (63%)	10 (37%)
Total	772	472 (60%)	300 (38%)

Joint committees of managers and employees, primarily concerned with information and consultation, were in place in 43 per cent of respondent workplaces. These were more commonly used for consultation than for information only. Joint committees for information and consultation were more likely to be present for Research and Development, Sales and Production/Process staff than for other functions (see Table 17).

Table 17: Do you have any joint committees of management and employees which are primarily concerned with information and consultation rather than negotiation?

Primary Function	Yes	No
Education and training	118 (69%)	48 (28%)
Health and social care	65 (44%)	83 (56%)
Distribution	21 (43%)	28 (57%)
Admin/customer services	72 (38%)	116 (61%)
Other	10 (37%)	17 (63%)
Sales	45 (35%)	46 (65%)
Production/process	53 (35%)	98 (64%)
R&D	4 (27%)	11 (73%)

Total	338 (43%)	436 (56%)
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Consultative committees were also most commonly to be found on training and development, health and safety, changes to working practices, welfare and staff facilities and production and quality of service issues (see Table 18). Committees were more likely to provide 'information only' in relation to financial information.

Table18: Which of the following items are considered under these arrangements and for what purpose? Figures in brackets indicate rank order.

NB Respondents could choose more than one item.

Item	N=	Consultation	Information
Training and development	386	289 (1)	97 (8)
Health and safety	412	280 (2)	132 (5)
Changes to working practices	364	279 (3)	85 (10)
Welfare & staff facilities	355	258 (4)	97 (9)
Production/quality of service	363	255 (5)	108 (7)
Future business plans	360	211 (6)	149 (4)
Equal opportunities	316	196 (7)	120 (6)
Pay and conditions	336	179 (8)	157 (2)
Employment e.g. turnover	309	157 (9)	152 (3)
Financial e.g. budgets	334	149(10)	185 (1)
Other	21	12(11)	9 (11)

We also asked respondents how employee representatives were appointed to these committees. Responses are shown in table 19. Respondents ticked all relevant methods. The most common method was through volunteers, followed by management appointments. Only in a minority of cases (around one fifth of respondents) were representatives elected by the workforce. In a small minority of cases - 8.5 per cent of respondents who had such arrangements - representatives were elected or chosen by trade unions or staff associations.

Table 19: How are employee representatives appointed to joint committees under these arrangements (Please tick all appropriate)?

How are employee representatives appointed?	Number	Percentage
Appointed by managers	147	38
Chosen by Unions or Staff Associations	45	11
Elected by the workforce	129	33
Volunteers	164	42
Other	45	11

N=392

A further sixty-one (9%) respondents told us that they were planning to introduce new forms of employee consultation or employee involvement over the coming 12 months.

Almost four in ten respondents said that they had conducted staff attitude/opinion surveys over the last 12 months and 27 per cent said that they had one planned for the future. Larger workplaces were more likely to have conducted a staff attitude/opinion survey or be planning one than smaller workplaces (see Table 16).

Table 16. Staff attitude/opinion surveys.

	All	Less than 24	25-49	50-99	100-199	200-499	500+
Have you conducted any staff attitude/opinion surveys over the last 12 months?							
Yes	263 (36%)	101 (30%)	78 (40%)	41 (45%)	20 (36%)	10 (45%)	13 (62%)
No	458 (63%)	236 (70%)	117 (60%)	50 (55%)	35 (64%)	12 (55%)	8 (38%)
Do you have a staff attitude/opinion survey planned for the future?							
Yes	195 (27%)	80 (24%)	44 (23%)	33 (36%)	18 (33%)	8 (36%)	12 (57%)
No	505 (70%)	253 (75%)	141 (72%)	55 (60%)	34 (62%)	14 (64%)	8 (38%)

EMPLOYEE REPRESENTATION

Around two thirds of all our respondents had no trade union members at their workplace. In order to compare our data with that given in the national WERS 1998 (Cully et al 1999:87), however, we excluded all workplaces employing fewer than 25 workers and the don't knows. On this basis, 50.4 per cent of respondent workplaces in Kent had some trade union members in their workplace, compared to 53 per cent in WERS 1998. The percentage of respondents with trade union members at the workplace tends to increase with establishment size. The figures are shown in table 20 below.

Unsurprisingly, trade union members were more likely to be found in the public sector (76% of workplaces) than in the private sector (11%) or not-for-profit-establishments (37%).

Table 20: Do you have any trade union members at this workplace?

No of Employees	Yes – TU members present %	No – TU members not present %
25-49	39%	53%
50-99	54%	40%
100-199	45%	45%
200-499	59%	18%

500+	67%	29%
All	50%	50%

N=723

Some 45 per cent of respondents said that trade unions were recognised for their workplace. Again, in order to compare with WERS 1998, we excluded those workplaces employing fewer than 25 workers. This gave us a figure of 54.8 per cent, higher than the 1998 WERS figure of 45 per cent (Cully et al 1999:92). It is surprisingly high, however, given the fact that union recognition tends to be lower in South East England than elsewhere (Hicks 2000:334). Across all our respondents, trade union recognition differed significantly according to sector, with 29 per cent of private sector, 81 per cent of public sector and 34 per cent of private not-for-profit respondents recognising a trade union. The higher than average representation of public sector workplaces in our survey may explain the rather higher levels of union membership and union recognition in our survey compared to the national WERS figures.

According to WERS 1998, 'in workplaces without any union members, the vast majority of managers are either opposed to, or at best, neutral to union membership' (Cully et al 1999:89). On the other hand, WERS 1998 indicates that, in workplaces with union members, 54 per cent of managers are in favour of union membership (Cully et al 1998:90). Over 60 per cent of our respondents (474 out of 766) described their attitude to trade union membership in their establishment as neutral. This includes workplaces of all sizes, both those workplaces with trade union members present and those without. Around a fifth of our workplaces were in favour of union membership and 14 per cent were not in favour. Public sector respondents were significantly more likely to describe themselves as in favour of trade union membership (64% of public sector were in favour of trade unions) than were private (6% of the private sector were in favour) or private not-for-profit establishments (22% in favour). Private sector and private not-for-profit employers were far more likely to express themselves as neutral on this subject than the public sector.

The level of trade union recognition appeared unlikely to change significantly in the coming 12 months despite the provisions of the 1999 Employment Relations Act which provides statutory support for trade union recognition where the union commands the support of the majority of the workforce. Only a small minority of respondent workplaces said that they had been approached by a trade union or by trades unions seeking recognition within the recent past. Of the 79 workplaces that had been approached by a trade union seeking recognition, only 22 workplaces had been approached in the last year and 57 had been approached over a year ago. We asked respondents whether they were likely to recognise a trade union in the future. Just less than one per cent of establishments which do not currently recognise a trade union (four out of 415 establishments which do not already recognise) said that they would expect to do so during the coming year. A further 30 (that is just over 7% of workplaces who do not already recognise),

however, said that they were likely to do so over the next one to three years. Over two thirds of this group were in the private sector.

Just over two thirds of workplaces were aware that trade unions now have statutory recognition rights in workplaces with 21 or more employees but around 30 per cent of respondents were not aware of this right. Of those with workplaces employing 25 or more people, 14 per cent had made plans to deal with any approaches for trade union recognition.

There was a slight indication that trade union membership was more likely to have increased than to have diminished, in the public sector more than in the private, but overall the evidence of change was very slim. The great majority of respondents with trade union members said that there had been no change in membership over the last 12 months. Some 34 workplaces reported that membership had increased and 15 reported that it had declined. Over the longer period of the previous three years, 29 said that membership had increased and 23 said it had declined.

Insofar as there was any change in management relationships with trade unions, respondents said that there was a slight indication of improvement, rather than of deterioration. Asked whether management's relationship with unions had improved, stayed the same or deteriorated, 202 respondents said that relations were unchanged; 47 respondents said that they had improved and nine said that they had deteriorated.

The most common number of unions recognised in an establishment was one union, followed by 3 to 5 unions. Two workplaces recognised 11 or more unions.

Where trade unions are recognised, this is most commonly for the purposes of handling individual grievances, health and safety and redundancy consultation. Only 94 establishments (24% of those recognising a trade union) recognised a union for collective bargaining purposes. This probably implies that collective bargaining is not conducted at the level of the workplace, rather than the fact that employees are not covered by collective bargaining at all. It does not imply that collective bargaining does not take place at a higher level, as would be the case with workplaces that bargain at enterprise or national level. The figures on methods of pay determination in the next section of this report indicate that a number of establishments have their pay determined externally (i.e. through enterprise, industry or national level bargaining). Where collective bargaining is undertaken, this is normally through one single negotiating group.

In terms of management/employee relations, the great majority of respondents reported that relations were good or very good (64%). Ninety-six establishments said that relations were satisfactory (13%) and 14 (2%) said that relations were poor or very poor. The responses to this question are shown in Table 21.

Table 21: How would you rate management/employee relations generally at this workplace?

Rating	Number	Percentage
Very good	288	40.8
Good	309	43.8
Satisfactory	95	13.5
Poor	12	1.7
Very poor	2	0.3

N=706

PAY AND CONDITIONS

We asked respondents how pay was determined for the largest group of employees in the workplace. The most common method of pay determination was management discretion (47%), followed by pay review body (18%), and negotiation with individual employees (16%). Only 44 workplaces (6%) reported that they negotiated directly with trade unions about pay but 103 (13%) said that they followed external pay fixing machinery (i.e. industry or company-wide pay negotiations with unions).

Half of the respondent establishments had a formal grading system and of those that did, 221 respondents (i.e. 60% of those with a grading scheme) said that it was based upon a job evaluation scheme.

Respondents were asked to identify the basis on which the largest group of employees obtained a pay increase, other than by promotion. Respondents were asked to tick all relevant items since improvements to pay commonly involve reference to more than one set of criteria. The major method identified by which employees obtain pay increases (other than by promotion) was through the annual wage increase, followed by increases based on individual performance/productivity. The next most common methods were, in rank order, through demonstrated competencies and the acquisition of new skills. Pay increases based on service (increments) provided improvements to pay in 179 establishments and 49 had age related pay (i.e. for younger workers). Table 22 below shows the results.

Table 22. On what basis does the largest group of employees in this workplace obtain pay increases other than by promotion?

NB Respondents could choose more than one method

Method of Determining Pay Increase	Rank	No	%
Annual wage increase	1	525	67
Individual performance/productivity	2	336	43
Demonstrated competencies	3	244	31
Acquisition of new skills	4	233	30

Acquisition of qualifications etc	5	199	25
Length of service	6	179	23
Age	7	49	6
Other	8	46	6

N=781

We also asked about the basis on which employees were paid, with particular reference to the main occupational group.

The responses indicated a continuing status divide in terms of the basis of payment of employees, with the annual salary applying most commonly to management, professional and technical and clerical, sales and administrative staff. However, 127 establishments paid unskilled workers salaries. Hourly rates of pay, by contrast, were most common for unskilled workers but surprisingly 59 establishments said that managers were also paid by the hour. Weekly wages were most common for unskilled workers, craft and skilled workers, operative and assembly workers and clerical, sales and administrative staff. Payment by output or productivity alone (e.g. piecework or commission) was rare. Table 23 below summarises the results.

Table 23: On what basis are employees paid at this workplace?

	Manag't	Prof & technical	Clerical sales & admin	Craft & Skilled	Operative & assembly	Unskilled
N=	760	518	690	435	274	564
Hourly rate	59	54	137	197	141	331
Weekly wage	48	26	53	64	45	92
Annual salary	627	421	478	157	76	127
By output or productivity alone	8	10	7	10	5	7
Other	18	7	15	7	7	8

Respondents were asked about the use made of variable pay schemes and were asked to tick all boxes that applied in terms of variable payment arrangements. The results are set out in Table 24 below, showing rank order of those that used this type of arrangement. It is worth noting, however, that the response to this question indicated that the majority of firms did not have any of these types of arrangements in place.

Cash bonuses were the most widespread form of variable pay, closely followed by profit related pay, which was used especially for senior staff. Other forms of variable pay, such as employee share ownership schemes, profit sharing and performance related bonuses were generally rare.

Table 24: Do employees in any of the following groups in this workplace receive payments or dividends from any of the following variable pay schemes? Numbered in Rank Order.

	<i>Overall</i>	<i>Management</i>	<i>Prof & tech</i>	<i>Clerical sales & admin</i>	<i>Craft & Skilled</i>	<i>Op've & ass'bly</i>	<i>Un-skilled</i>
N=	464	323	196	250	166	129	181
Other cash bonus	1(joint)	2	1	2	1	1	1
Profit related pay or bonus	1(joint)	1	2	1	2	2	2
Profit sharing scheme	3	4	3	6	3	3	3
Individual or group performance related pay schemes	4	5	4(joint)	3	4	5	4
Employee share ownership	5	3	4(joint)	4	5	4	5

WORKPLACE FLEXIBILITY

In reviewing employers' approaches to the question of workplace flexibility, we asked particularly about the use of external contractors, the use of temporary and agency staff and employees on fixed term contracts.

We also asked about schemes intended to provide various forms of temporal flexibility (see Table 25 below). Around six in ten of the establishments in our survey had some activities or services carried out by independent contractors. The most common activities or services contracted out were (in rank order) cleaning, building maintenance, training, payroll administration and security.

A large number of respondents used atypical types of employment – fixed term contracts, temporary workers and temporary agency workers. Fixed term contracts were most common for professional and technical staff and for clerical sales and administrative positions. They were least common for operative and assembly work.

Table 25: How many of the following types of employee are employed at this workplace?

	Total	Up to 24	25-49	50-99	100-199	200-499	500+
Fixed term contract	5214 (100%)	1788 (34%)	1497 (29%)	963 (18%)	766 (15%)	200 (4%)	- -
Temp workers	3446 (100%)	606 (18%)	236 (7%)	285 (8%)	413 (12%)	422 (12%)	1484 (43%)
Temp agency workers	1169 (100%)	419 (36%)	220 (19%)	50 (4%)	200 (17%)	280 (24%)	- -

There had been an increase in the use of temporary agency workers, across all occupational groupings.

The most common responses in terms of the use of non-standard working time arrangements for non-managerial employees were shift working (185 establishments); school term time only working (166); flexitime (147); and regular working in excess of 48 hours (113).

WORKPLACE CHANGE

The survey asked about the changes made at the workplace. The most common was the introduction of new technology. Over the previous three years the most common workplace changes had been the introduction of new technology, the introduction of new working practices and changes in work techniques or procedures. Over the next three years, the most common changes envisaged were the introduction of new technology, new working practices, changes in work techniques or procedures and changes in pay and grading systems. Table 26 shows the results.

Table 26: Which of the following changes have been introduced over the last 3 years or is management planning to implement over the next three years? (answers in rank order). NB Respondents could choose more than one change.

	Has been introduced over the last 3 years?		Planning to introduce over the next 3 years?	
	Rank	N=	Rank	N=
Introduction of new technology	1	481	1	114
New working practice	2	352	2	67
Work techniques or procedures	3	308	3/4	61
Organisation of work	4	270	6	52
Working time arrangements	5	198	7	47
Pay/grading systems	6	182	3/4	61
Involvement of employees in the business	7	138	5	60

Use of sub-contractors	8	119	8	24
Other	9	6	9	3

We also asked respondents whether they had checked their employment practices to comply with a number of new statutory rights given to employees since 1997. The majority of employers indicated that they had done so across many areas. The most commonly checked were the national minimum wage, rights to minimum holiday entitlement, stakeholder pensions, changes to maternity rights, limits on working hours and entitlement to work breaks. The least commonly checked were employee rights to European Works Councils (not surprisingly as this applies only to multi-national organisations); minimum rights for employees on short term contracts; time off for training for young people; and trade union recognition rights.

In terms of the impact of these new rights at work, the great majority of employers (70%) said that these new laws had required limited changes in existing practices. Around a fifth said that no changes had been required but eight per cent major said major changes were required. There were no significant differences between sectors in responses to this question.

We asked which new rights would have the most significant impact from a management perspective over the next three years (see Table 26). The responses suggested that some of the 'family friendly' policies require more detailed attention from managers - and are more important at the level of the workplace - than are the collective rights, for example on trade union recognition or rights for workers to be accompanied. In terms of the impact on the workplace from a management perspective, the most commonly identified changes were parental leave, maternity rights and stakeholder pensions.

Table 27: Which three of these new rights will have the most significant impact from a management perspective over the next three years?

<i>New Right</i>	<i>N=</i>	<i>Rank</i>
Parental leave	342	1
Changes to maternity rights	263	2
Stakeholder pensions	223	3
Limits on working hours	182	4
Extension of many rights to part-time workers	165	5
National minimum wage	154	6
Rights to minimum paid holiday entitlement	106	7
Use of personal data held on computers	99	8
Protection for employees raising genuine concerns about crimes, health & safety etc	77	9
Changes to entitlement to unfair dismissal	67	10
Trade union recognition	50	11
European works councils	43	12
Minimum requirements for those employees placed on short term contracts	41	13
Entitlement to work breaks	38	14
Criminal offence for employers to harass employees	33	15
New rights for worker to be accompanied at disciplinary/ grievance	26	16

hearings		
Time off for training for young people aged 16-17	9	17

Public/private sector differences are again interesting. The public sector was most concerned with the use of personal data held on computers and the minimum requirements for employees placed on short-term contracts. The private sector, on the other hand, tended to focus on the legal requirements surrounding the minimum wage, hours of work and holidays. In terms of what areas are going to have significant impact over the next three years, not surprisingly, the private and not-for-profit sectors are four times as likely as the public sector to see stakeholder pensions as being important. Indeed, for both these groups of organisations, it is the most important issue. The public sector, on the contrary, views the pending changes to maternity rights as being probably the most significant issue.

We also asked respondents which organisations they had used for advice or help on employee relations matters over the last five years. We asked them to indicate all of those organisations used. As Table 28 shows, the most commonly cited organisation was ACAS, followed by employers' organisations and trade associations.

Table 28. Which (if any) of the following organisations have you used for advice/help on employment relations matters in the last 5 years?

NB Respondents could choose more than one organisation.

Organisation	Rank	N=
ACAS	1	244
Other	2	160
Employers/trade associations	3	152
Commercial employment advice services	4	125
Management consultants	5	108
Chamber of commerce	6	77
Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development	7	64
Citizens Advice Bureau	8	62
Trade union specialists	9	53
Local CBI	10	14

It is interesting to note, however that a private sector workplace was twice, and a not-for-profit workplace nearly three times, as likely to use ACAS as a public sector workplace. Public sector workplaces on the other hand were virtually the only users of trade union specialists.

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THE WORK AND EMPLOYMENT RESEARCH UNIT (WERU) is a university designated research unit established to conduct research and consultancy. It has two professors and two readers attached and its staff have carried out research for a wide range of clients, including the Department for Education and Skills; the Department of Health; the Low Pay Commission; the Trades Union Congress; the Office for Manpower Economics; the Construction Industry Training Board and Skills for the Millennium. Its work was commended in the recent Research Assessment Exercise (RAE). The unit has recently won funding from the ESRC for a two year research project on employment rights and unorganised workers. Further information about the Unit and its research capabilities are available from Professor Janet Druker (email J.M.Druker@greenwich.ac.uk), telephone 020 8331 9905.