

# Making sense of official estimates of Trade Union Membership

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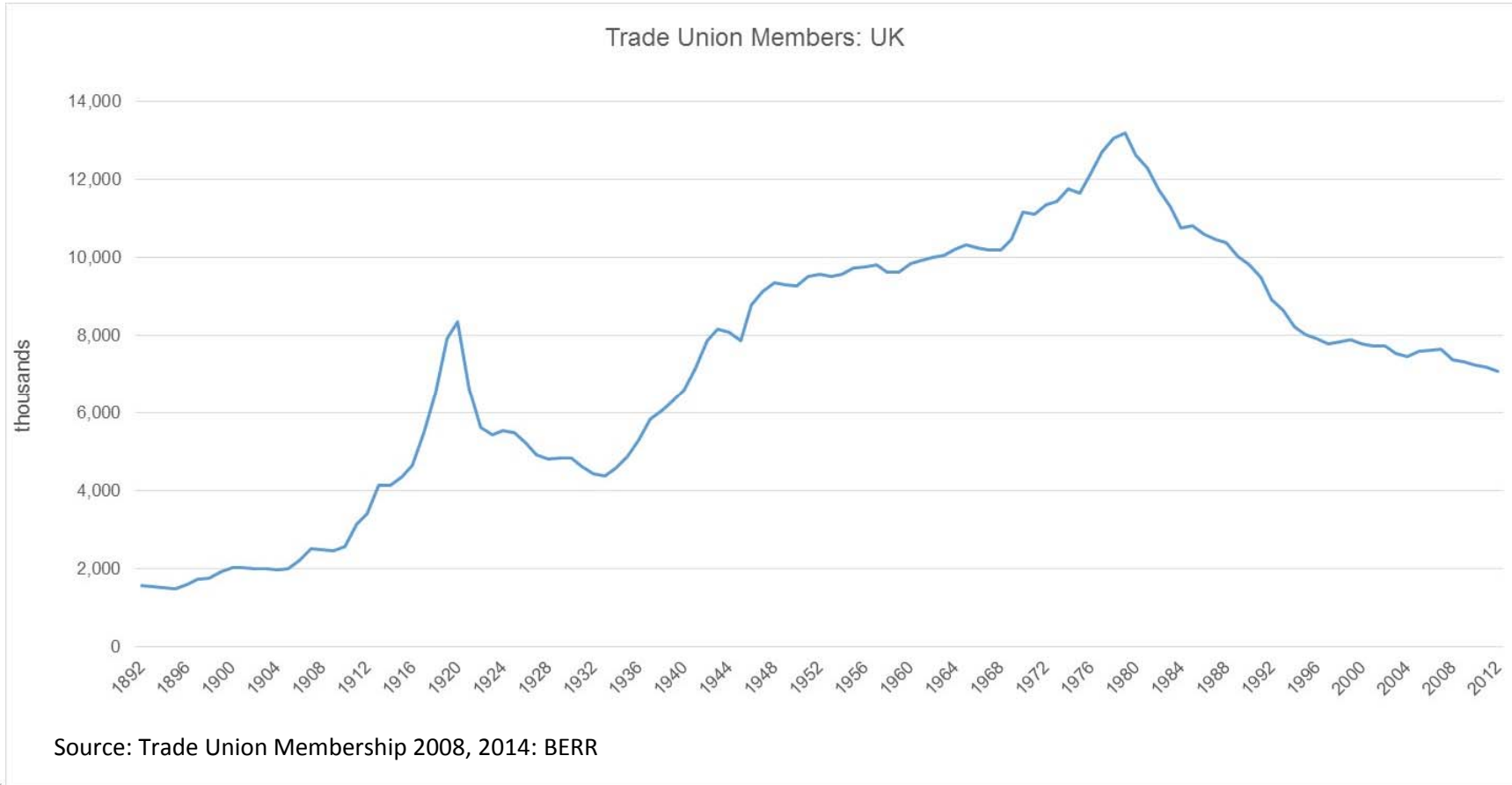
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# Measuring Trade Union Membership: Harder than it may seem?



# Trade Union Membership in the UK



Source: Trade Union Membership 2008, 2014: BERR



## Trade Union Membership and the LFS

- Question on trade union membership was introduced into the LFS in 1989 and has been asked in the fourth quarter (Q4) every year since 1992.
- Questions on trade union presence and recognition were added in 1993, and a question on collective agreements was introduced in 1996.
- The union questions were revised substantially from 1999 affecting the consistency of time-series data for trade union presence and collective agreements.



## Measures of Interest

- The Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy (BEIS) is responsible for publishing official statistics on trade union membership. Estimates focus on 3 key measures:
- Union density: The percentage of those in employment who are a trade union member.
- Union presence: Whether or not a trade union or staff association is present within a workplace.
- Union coverage: Whether the pay and conditions of employees are agreed in negotiations between the employer and a trade union.



# Survey Questions

Membership	Presence	Coverage
<b>Labour Force Survey</b>		
1) Are you a member of a trade union or staff association? <b>Ask All</b>	2) Are any of the people at your place of work members of a trade union or staff association? <b>If No to 1)</b>	3) Are your pay and conditions of employment directly affected by agreements between your employer and any trade union(s) or staff association(s)? <b>Ask All</b>
<b>Skills and Employment Survey</b>		
3) Are you a member of a trade union or staff association? <b>Ask All</b>	1) At your place of work, are there unions or staff associations? <b>Ask All</b>	2) Is any union or staff association recognised by management for negotiating pay and/or conditions of employment? <b>If Yes to 1)</b>
<b>BHPS/Understanding Society</b>		
2) Are you a member of this trade union/association? <b>If Yes to 1)</b>		1) Is there a trade union, or a similar body such as a staff association, recognised by your management for negotiating pay or conditions for the people doing your sort of job in your workplace? <b>Ask All</b>
<b>Workplace Employment Relations Survey</b>		
Are you a member of a trade union or staff association? <b>Ask Employees</b>	How many employees at this workplace are members of a trade union or independent staff association - whether recognised by management or not? <b>Ask Managers</b>	Are any trade unions or staff associations recognised by management for negotiating pay and conditions for any sections of the workforce here? <b>Ask Managers</b>

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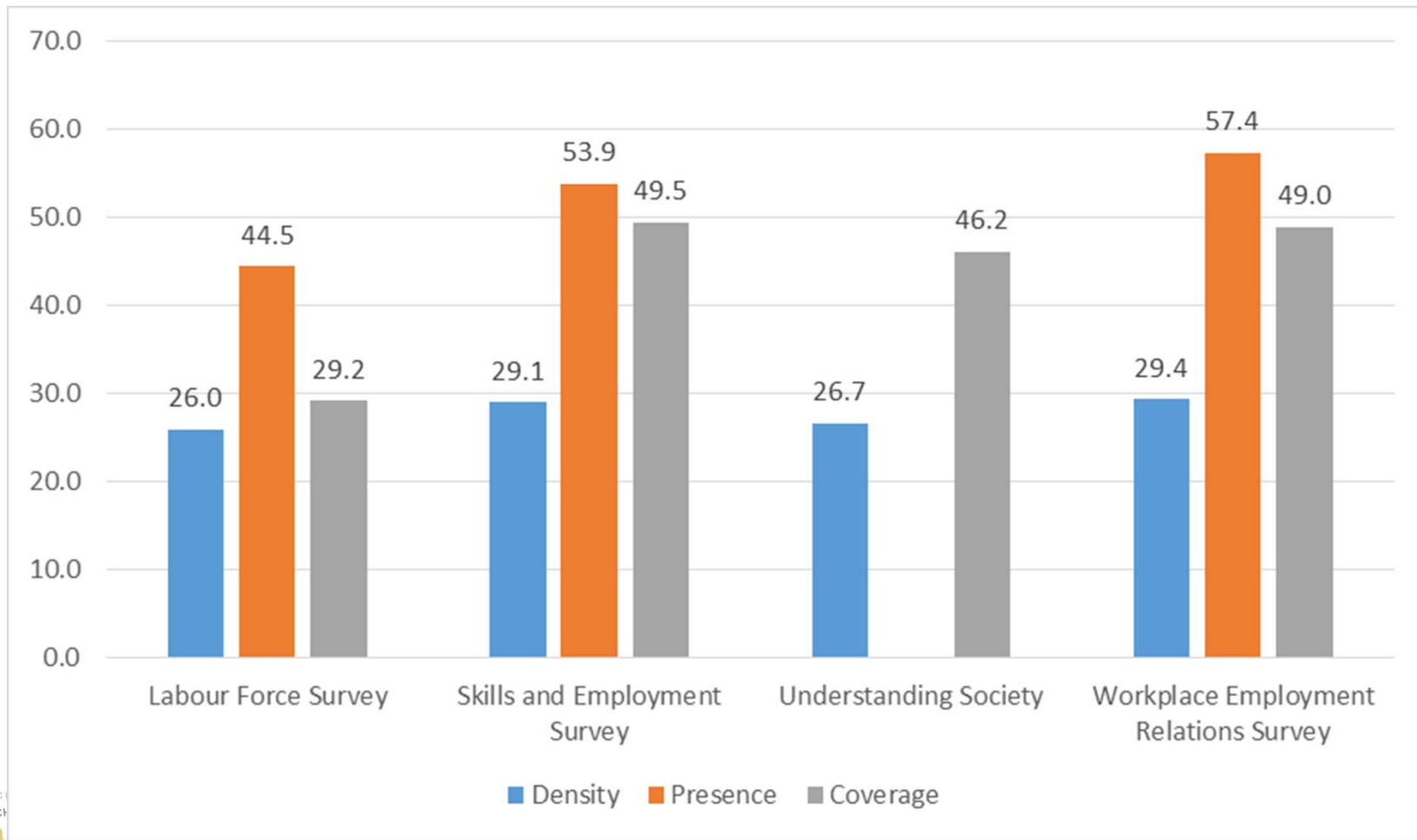


# Survey Responses

<i>Employees</i>	LFS	SES	USOC	WERS
<b>Membership/Presence</b>				
1. Member	25.7	28.9	26.0	29.2
2. Non Member - Presence	18.3	24.7	19.0	27.8
3. Non Member - No Presence	39.7	42.7	52.4	42.4
4. Non Member - Home Worker	5.4			
5. Non Member – Presence DK	9.7	3.2		
6. Membership Not Reported	1.3	0.6	2.5	0.6
Total	100	100	100	100
<b>Coverage</b>				
<i>Whether agreements between trade union and employer affect pay and conditions?</i>				
7. Yes	26.0			
8. No	63.0			
9. No Answer	11.0			
Total	100			
<i>Is any union or staff association recognised by management for negotiating pay and/or conditions of employment?</i>				
7. Yes		43.4	45.1	49.0
8. No		44.2	52.4	51.0
9. No Answer		12.4	2.5	
Total		100	100	100



# Comparisons of Union Membership



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LFS, SES, USOC – 2012;  
WERS - 2011





# Trade Union Membership: Is it who you ask or how you ask them?



## Two Causes for Concern

- Approximately a third of responses to the LFS are provided via a proxy respondent.
  - Concerns about quality of data provided by proxy respondents is not new
  - Effects on estimates of trade union membership have recently been considered by BIS – but not on presence/coverage
- Trade union membership may be regarded by many as a sensitive and personal issue, reflected in legislation that protects workers and the classification of union membership as sensitive in the DPA
  - respondents may under-report sensitive issues
  - Such biases can vary depending upon the mode through which a survey is conducted

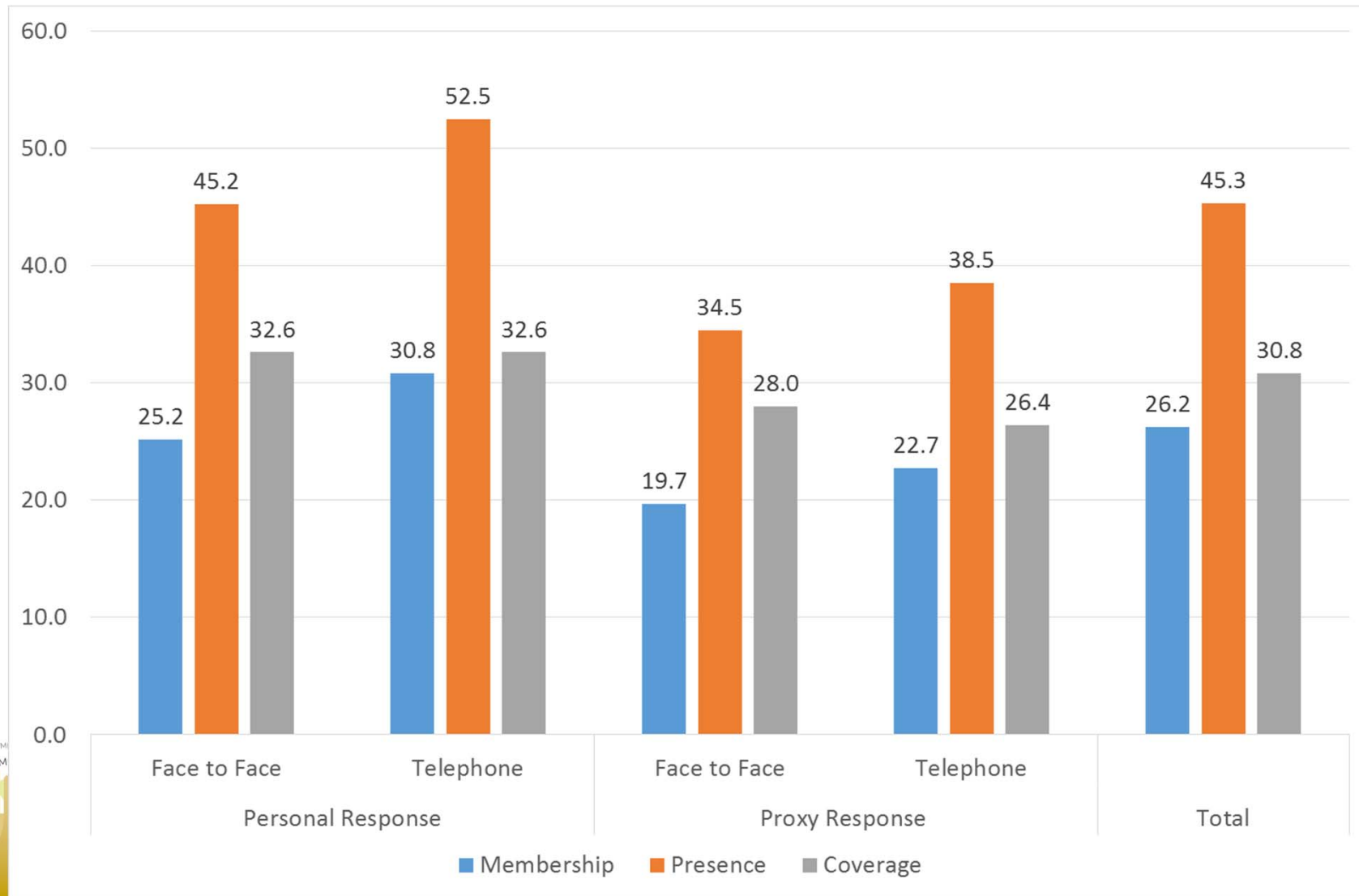


## LFS Response Mode by Wave (Quarter 4, 2006-2014, GB)

	Wave 1	Wave 2	Wave 3	Wave 4	Wave 5	Total
Personal Response - f2f	60.1	15.8	12.6	11.7	10.9	24.2
Personal Response - telephone	4.0	50.3	53.7	55.7	57.4	42.1
Proxy Response - f2f	34.4	9.0	7.6	6.6	6.4	13.9
Proxy Response - telephone	1.4	24.9	26.2	26.1	25.3	19.8
All Proxy	35.8	33.9	33.8	32.7	31.7	33.7
All Telephone	5.4	75.2	79.8	81.8	82.7	61.9
Sample	76,589	66,892	61,096	57,513	57,156	319,246



# Trade Union Membership by Response Type



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## Some Multivariate Estimates

- Compared to a personal response, proxy response reduces the likelihood of union membership by 11% and union presence by 30%
- Compared to interviews conducted by telephone, face to face interviews reduce the likelihood of union membership by 13% and union presence by 16%
- Compared to face to face interviews *with the target respondent*, telephone interviews increases the likelihood of union membership by 15% and union presence by 20%.



## Conclusions

- Given the straightforward nature of questions, estimates of trade union density derived from different surveys are very similar
- The low rates of trade union presence derived from the LFS could relate to a variety of factors.
  - proxy response – more of an effect on presence than membership
  - the inappropriate treatment of home workers and those who did not provide a valid response within estimates of union presence are based;
- LFS measures of trade union coverage also deviate significantly from those based on other sources
  - respondents are asked if they ‘directly affected’ by agreements between employers and trade unions(s)’. Other surveys ask whether or not unions and staff associations are ‘recognised’ by management.
- The mode through which an interview is conducted appears to be just as important as the more commonly cited issue of proxy response.

