



**Research on
'Young Workers and Trade Union Membership'**

STUC Research Team

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The Changing Face of the Scottish Workforce¹

Over the past two decades, there has been a radical change in Scotland's industrial base and in patterns and types of employment. These changes have taken place together with the attacks on trade union organisation, which occurred throughout the eighties and most of the nineties. Trade unions in Scotland have already moved to meet many of the challenges presented by these changes, but it is generally acknowledged that more needs to be done to ensure that a new generation of trade unionists emerge to build a stronger and even more effective movement in the decades to come.

Young Workers in Scotland...

There are just over 3.14m people of working age in Scotland. Forty nine percent are female.

There are nearly 570,000 16-24 year olds in Scotland – representing 11% of the Scottish population

Economic activity...

Three quarters of those of working age in Scotland are economically active.

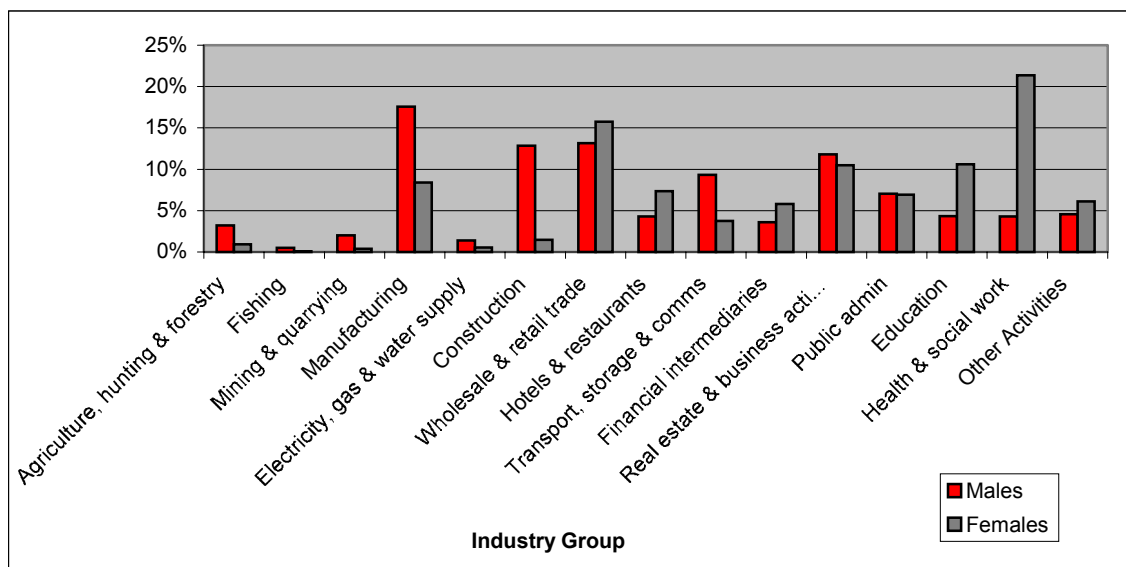
Around 65% of the economically active people in Scotland work full-time, whilst a further 21% are employed part-time. Over 414,000 of working age people in Scotland work part-time. 87% of these workers are women.

Forty-three percent of 16-24 year olds are full-time or part-time² employees whilst 34% are students. Almost 80% of students also work part-time.

Where are young workers employed...

The top three sectors in which Scottish males are employed are manufacturing, construction and retail. Traditionally, manufacturing and construction have been well-unionised and contribute to the historically higher unionisation rates of men. On the other hand, women are less likely to be employed in these sectors. Five times more women than men are employed in the health and social work sector – this is the top sector for female workers. Slightly more women than men are employed in the retail sector and twice as many females than men work in education.

Figure 1: Proportion Employed by Industry by Gender



Source: Census 2001 data

Twenty percent of young people in Scotland are employed in the retail sector and the hotel and restaurant sector employs a significant proportion of young workers (9.5%). Public administration, education and health sectors are the least likely attractive sectors for young people, with 5.5%, 4% and 8% of young workers respectively employed in these sectors.

The Membership Challenge

The changing face of work and workers has had a profound impact upon trade union density in Scotland.

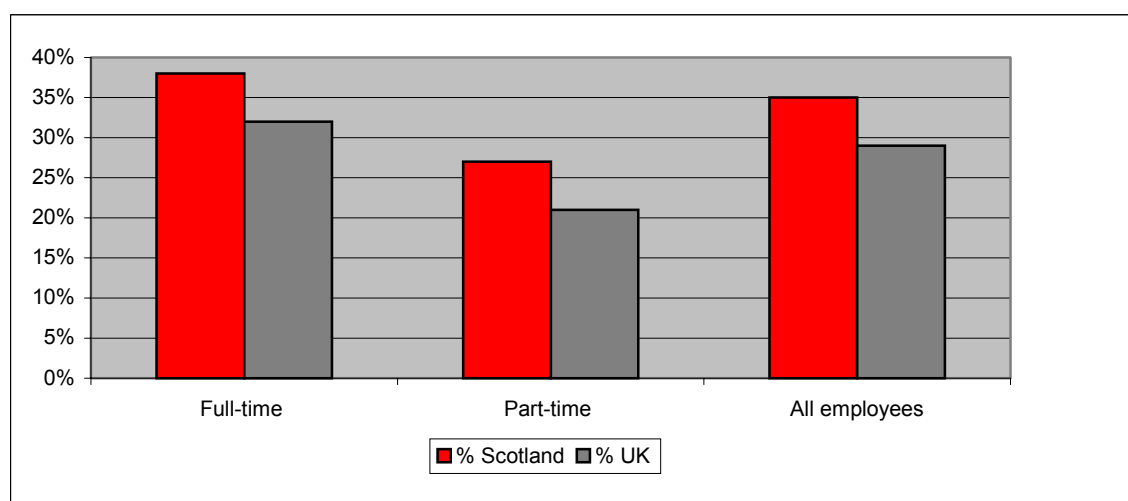
According to 2004 Labour Force Survey estimates on union density, 37% of Scottish workers are union members whereas more than half of all employees were in membership in 1981.

The steepest fall in membership has been among full time workers where membership is just 39%. There is a much smaller drop in the number of part-time employees who are union members (from 26% to 24%), however the significant rise in part-time employment in Scotland makes the effect of this low rate of unionisation much more profound in overall terms.

The current rate of trade union membership in Scotland relies increasingly on the public sector. 66% of public sector workers are union members in Scotland compared to just 21% in the private sector³.

Density figures for Scotland show that membership remains significantly higher than the UK average. Scottish membership is comparable with the North of England and a little lower than in Wales.

Figure 2: Union Density in UK and Scotland



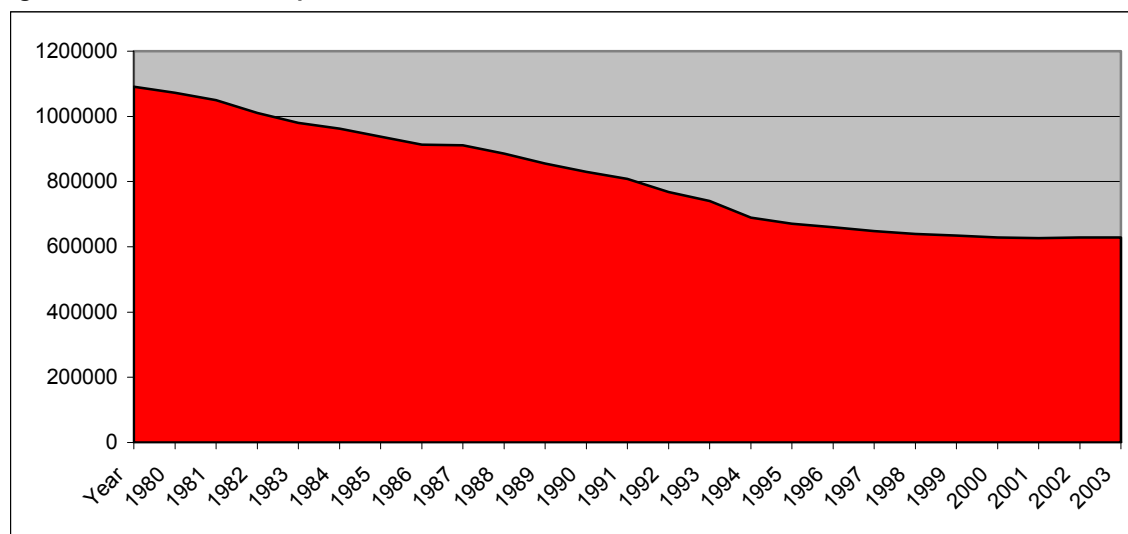
Source: LFS Trade union membership figures, March 2004

Between 1980 and the millennium, STUC affiliated trade union fell from almost 1.1 million to less than 630,000, as illustrated below in figure 3. This represents an average reduction of over 2% year on year, with the largest losses being incurred between 1989 and 1994⁴. This massive reduction reflects and broadly follows the pattern for the fall in trade union membership in the United Kingdom for that period.

The fall in membership density is generally accepted to have a number of key causes: the expansion in new, non-unionised, sectors of the economy; the

growth of atypical forms of employment such as part-time and contract work and the changes in state policy towards trade unions, to name a few.

Figure 3: STUC Membership Levels



Source: STUC membership figures

However, the change in Scotland's industrial profile cannot conceal the fact that even in traditional "union industries" there has been a significant decline in membership. Changes of management culture and workplace size within the private manufacturing sector are a key contributor to the decrease in union recognition and membership. In 1990, establishments which were more than 10 years old (i.e. created in the 1970s or earlier) had a 59% likelihood of trade union recognition. Younger firms, created sometime in the 1980s had only a 34% likelihood to recognise a union. In the past decade this gap has widened further, with older establishments being twice as likely to have a recognition deal⁵.

The trend of changing membership patterns within sectors as well as across sectors is evidenced in an analysis of Labour Force surveys for the UK between 1990 and 2000⁶:

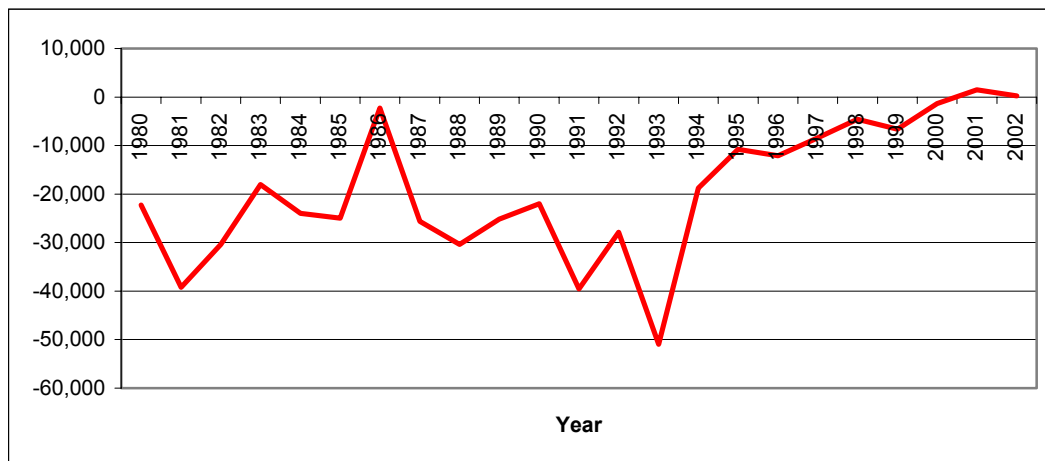
- Trade union density in manual trades fell from 43% to 28% while it only fell from 35% to 31% in the non-manual sector;
- Whilst trade union membership in the service sector did show a fall (from 37% to 31%), since 1997 density in this sector has been greater than in the production sector, where membership fell from 43% in 1990 to 28% by the millennium;
- Membership amongst full time workers fell from 43% to 33% while part time workers' membership stayed steady, but low, on 22%;
- Whereas male trade union membership fell from 43% to 30%, female membership was much more steady showing a fall from 32% to 29%.

Halting membership decline...

Over the past two years the STUC has reported a modest real increase in affiliated membership. Though the increase is small enough to fall within margins of statistical error, the upward trend is confirmed by a somewhat larger rise evident in Labour Force Survey figures for union density in Scotland announced in March 2004. This reflects the fact that the overall working population has fallen in Scotland in the recent period.

This rise confirms a trend (figure 4) which indicates that the trade union movement in Scotland has been increasingly effective in the recruitment of new members over the past few years.

Figure 4: STUC Membership Trends (annual year on year fall in % membership)



Source: STUC membership figures

The halting of the membership decline both in Scotland and the UK and the general increase in collective bargaining agreements since 2000 strongly supports the view that the relaxation of anti-trade union legislation in the 1999 Employment Relations Act is a key factor in improving recruitment and representation within the trade union movement. In the four years prior to the Employment Relations Act 1999, recognition deal in the UK totalled 354, whereas in the subsequent four years new deals reached 1101⁷. Recognition deals in Scotland between 1999 and 2002 number 247 representing 13% of UK recognition deals⁸.

There is little or no evidence to suggest that current union members are any less positive about the general role played by trade unions than they were in earlier years⁹ but it seems that the perception of unions' importance or relevance from those not in membership may be lower. The number of employees who have never been a member of a union or staff association rose from 28% to 48% between 1983 and 2001. Never having been in a union has become a common life event for a cohort of workers born between the mid 1960s and the mid 1970s¹⁰.

Recruiting a New Generation of Trade Union Members and Activists

Young people and trade unions

The starkest challenge facing the Scottish trade unions today is the recruitment of young people.

Young workers can be the lifeblood of the trade union movement in Scotland. Yet at present only 5% of workers aged 16 to 20 are members of a trade union growing to just 11% for 16-24 years olds¹¹. 14% of full-time employees of this age are members whilst only 5% of young people who work part-time belong to a trade union¹². Consequently, union membership is ageing at a faster rate than the labour force as a whole.

Young peoples' attitudes to trade unions...

One of the reasons often offered as to why young workers do not become members is that these workers have negative attitudes towards trade unions. However, as the table below shows there is little ideological opposition to trade unionism among young people¹³.

Table 1: Attitudes of employees towards trade unions by age

Views of unions in general	Up to 29 years (%)	30 and over (%)
Trade unions are old-fashioned	18	17
Trade unions have no future in modern Britain	70	70
Strong trade unions are needed to protect the working conditions and wages of employees	63	47

Source: adapted from Freeman and Diamond (2003)¹⁴

Whilst there is an apparent contradiction between the view that trade unions are both necessary and not old fashioned and the view that they "have no future" in modern Britain, there would appear to be a recognition that unions *might* become less relevant rather than that they *should* be less relevant. Equally it is clear that young people do not equate pessimism over the future of unions with any failure to modernise.

There is also evidence that the general attitude to unions of today's young people is no less positive than that of earlier generations. Indeed there is significantly greater support for the notion that "strong unions are needed to protect workers"¹⁵.

Of course a significant proportion of young people in this age group have yet to enter employment and it may be the case that it is only on entering the labour market that the roles and benefits of trade unions become clear.¹⁶ This assumption is supported by the information in Table 2.

Table 2: Attitudes of young persons towards unions

Question	Response
How much, if anything, do you know about trade unions?	
A great deal	1%
A fair amount	12%
Not very much	44%
Nothing at all	42%
From what you know or have heard, how favourable or unfavourable would you feel towards trade unions?	
Very/mainly favourable	37%
Mixed/don't know	54%
Very/mainly unfavourable	9%

Source: Adapted from Freeman and Diamond (2003)¹⁷

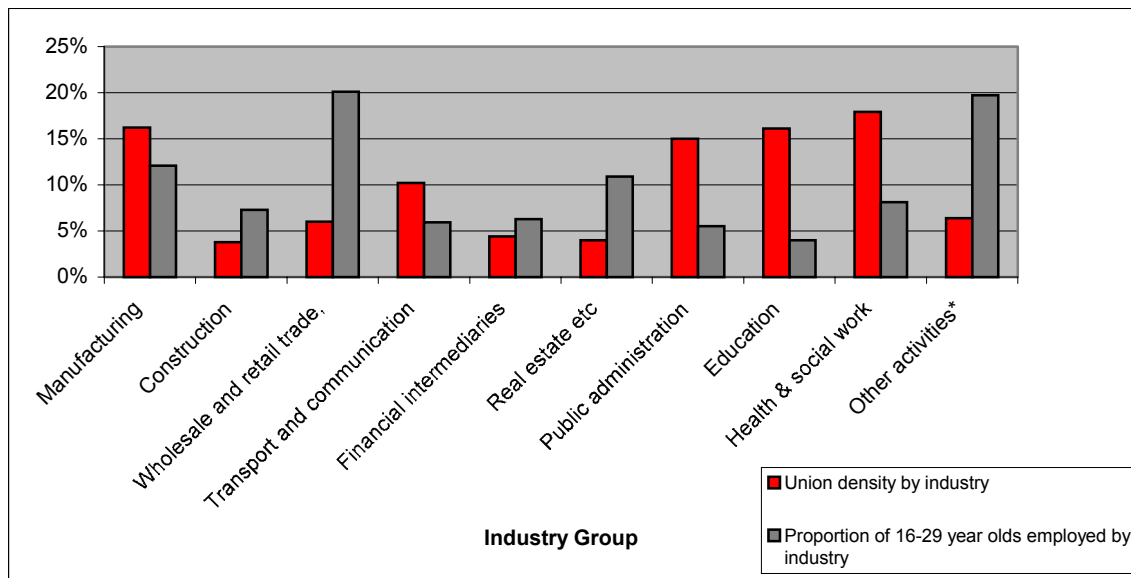
Experience of unions upon entering employment determines workers' attitudes to unions, rather than the age of the worker. Attitudes to society, work and the economy are in a formative stage during late teens and early twenties meaning views about unions are emergent during youth and will be influenced by age and experiences in the labour market¹⁸.

Young peoples' exposure to trade unions...

Therefore, exposure to unions in the workplace can be expected to impact on young worker's unionism levels. To a significant extent, lower membership among young people is a product of the types of jobs in which they are employed¹⁹. Young workers tend to have a different industrial distribution from older workers, disproportionately represented in those sectors of the economy which are not well unionised²⁰. Evidence also suggests that even when working in the same sector as older workers, young people are more likely to be employed in less unionised enterprises²¹. The non-availability of trade unions in the workplace is the major reason why union membership is low among young people. A greater proportion of young workers work in workplaces where there are only a few union members²².

Comparisons of the industries in which 16-29 year olds in Scotland are employed with union membership by industry confirms this.

Figure 5: Proportion of Union Membership by Industry vs. Proportion of 16-29 yr olds by Industry Employed



Source: Census 2001 and "Trade union membership: an analysis of data from the autumn 2001 LFS", ONS Labour Market Trends, July 2002

*Other activities includes agriculture, mining, electricity and hotels and restaurants industries

Twenty percent of young people in Scotland are employed in the retail sector whilst 19% are employed in 'other activities', a category dominated by hotel and restaurant sector. It can also be seen that public administration, education and health sectors are those least likely to employ young people, with 5.5%, 4% and 8% of young workers respectively. Comparing this with proportion of union membership by industry validates the notion that young people do not tend to be employed in well-unionised sectors of the economy.

In contrast with the sectors in which young people are employed, public administration, education, health and manufacturing are the most unionised sectors in the economy. This reflects the fact that working in the public sector as opposed to the private sector increases likelihood of union membership²³.

Research has shown that 60% of young non-members work in workplaces with no union presence. Similarly, the most cited reason for these young workers not joining a trade union is 'my employer does not allow or recognise unions' indicating that the most important predictor of union membership is recognition in the workplace. In the same survey, 16.5% of non-unionised young people reported that joining a union might damage their career prospects – confirming that workplace and employer attitudes have an impact on the unionisation levels of these workers²⁴.

Even when in organised workplaces, young workers are still less likely than older workers to be union members. This may in part be due to union representatives failing to interact and sign up young workers effectively²⁵. In a survey conducted in 1990, 40% of non-unionised young workers stated that they were not union members because they had not been asked²⁶. In 2002,

a comparable study showed that one-third of non-members employed in unionised workplaces had not been asked to join²⁷.

Further surveys have shown that 37% of non-members under age 30 in unionised workplaces were not asked to join compared to 15% of those aged 30 and over²⁸. This is compounded further as 28% of young non-members also cite "never got round to joining" and "not interested enough" as reason for not belonging to a union²⁹. This highlights the importance of union representatives approaching young workers on entry into the labour market to explain the benefits of becoming a trade union member.

Other influences on the recruitment of young workers...

Young workers have more labour market mobility than older workers and as a consequence are likely to change jobs more frequently. This encourages young people to 'exit' rather than use the 'voice' approach offered through trade union membership if dissatisfied at work³⁰. Given this more frequent job changing among young workers, any benefits they perceive to gain from membership will be limited to the relatively short period over which they remain with their current employer³¹.

A further influence on unionisation rates of the young workers is whether a family member, particularly the father, is or has been a trade union member. Young people with unionised fathers are twice as likely to become union members than those with non-unionised fathers and this rises to three times higher for those whose fathers are union activists. Those young people who state that their parents are active in the trade union movement or have positive attitudes to unions are more likely to have favourable attitudes to unions themselves and more likely to express an intention to unionise³². This indicates that socialisation within the family plays a role in encouraging union membership. This could mean that with fewer people coming from union families, it will be potentially more difficult to engage with young workers³³.

Much encouragement can be derived from these findings. Young people are not less positive about unions and are likely to join when and if they approached within an unionised workplace.

However, given the greater chance of young people gaining employment in non-unionised workplaces, a comprehensive strategy for recruiting them to trade unions cannot rely solely on a workplace strategy. Scottish trade unions and the STUC must also focus their message on schools, colleges and universities. Equally, strategies for unionising less well organised sectors must be high on the agenda of any campaign to recruit young people to trade unions today.

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- ¹ All from Census 2001, General Registrar for Scotland unless otherwise stated
- ² Full-time and part-time employee figure does not include full-time students who work part time
- ³ "Trade union membership: estimates from the Autumn 2003 Labour Force Survey", *Labour Market Trends*, March 2004
- ⁴ STUC membership reports 1980-2004
- ⁵ Machin, S (2000), "Union Decline in Britain", *British Journal of Industrial Relations*, 38:4, pp631-645
- ⁶ Labour Force Surveys, 1990-2004
- ⁷ TUC (2004), "Focus on recognition - trade union trends survey 04/01"
- ⁸ Gall, G (2004), "Union Management Partnership Agreements, Productivity and the Scottish Economy", *Scottish Economic Policy Network*
- ⁹ British Attitudes Surveys (various years)
- ¹⁰ Bryson, A and Gomez (2003), "Why Have Workers Stopped Joining Unions", Policy Studies Institute
- ¹¹ Healy, J and Engel, N (2003), "Learning to Organise", *TUC Discussion Pamphlet*
- ¹² "Trade union membership: estimates from the Autumn 2003 Labour Force Survey", *Labour Market Trends*, March 2004
- ¹³ Waddington, J and Kerr, A (2002), "Unions fit for young workers?", *Industrial Relations Journal*, 33:4, pp298-315
- ¹⁴ Freeman, R and Diamond, W (2003), "Young workers and trade unions" in: H. Gospel and S. Wood (eds), *Representing Worker: Union recognition and membership in Britain*, pp92-118, London, Routledge
- ¹⁵ Same as reference 14
- ¹⁶ Same as reference 14
- ¹⁷ Same as reference 14
- ¹⁸ Lowe, G.S and Rastin, S (2000), "Organising the Next Generation: Influences on Young Workers' Willingness to Join Unions in Canada", *British Journal of Industrial Relations*, 38:2, June, pp203-222
- ¹⁹ Payne, J (1989), "Trade Union Membership and Activism Among Young People in Great Britain", *British Journal of Industrial Relations*, 27:1, March, pp111-132
- ²⁰ Same as reference 19
- ²¹ Same as reference 14
- ²² Cregan, C and Johnston, S (1990), "An Industrial Relations Approach to the Free Rider Problem: Young People and Trade Union Membership in the UK", *British Journal of Industrial Relations*, 28:1, March, pp84-104
- ²³ Same as reference 13
- ²⁴ Same as reference 13
- ²⁵ Same as reference 14
- ²⁶ Cregan, C and Johnston, S (1990), "An Industrial Relations Approach to the Free Rider Problem: Young People and Trade Union Membership in the UK", *British Journal of Industrial Relations*, 28:1, March, pp84-104
- ²⁷ Same as reference 13
- ²⁸ Same as reference 14
- ²⁹ Same as reference 13
- ³⁰ Blanden, J and Machin, S (2003), "Cross-Generation Correlations of Union Status for Young People in Britain", *British Journal of Industrial Relations*, 41:3, September, pp391-415; Lowe, G.S and Rastin, S (2000), "Organising the Next Generation: Influences on Young Workers' Willingness to Join Unions in Canada", *British Journal of Industrial Relations*, 38:2, June, pp203-222
- ³¹ Blanden, J and Machin, S (2003), "Cross-Generation Correlations of Union Status for Young People in Britain", *British Journal of Industrial Relations*, 41:3, September, pp391-415
- ³² Same as reference 31
- ³³ Same as reference 14