Employee Desire for Unionisation in Britain and its Implications for Union Organising

Alex Bryson

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Abstract

This paper considers the size of the market for unionisation in Britain and what unions can do to increase employees' desire for membership and representation. It identifies quite high levels of union satisfaction among members, but a sizeable minority of 10-14% of members who are discontented with their union who are most at risk of leaving the union. Successful retention depends upon unions identifying ways in which the union can better represent its members on a diverse set of issues, and ensuring union representation can bring benefits over and above those on offer through non-union collective representation. Over one-third of non-members in unionised workplaces say they would like to join a union if asked, but over half of non-members eligible to join the union at their workplace have never been asked to join. In-fill recruitment will improve where unions convince non-members that they are effective organisations capable of making a difference; where they can convince non-members that it is 'people like you' who join unions; and where they can persuade non-members that membership is value for money. Although non-members in unorganised workplaces are less collectivist in outlook than employees in unionised workplaces, almost half say they would join a union if asked. In the absence of a union, desire for unionisation among non-members in unorganised workplaces turns on their general perceptions of unions in society, their image of unions, and expectations about what a union might do if it existed at their workplace.

# 1.	Introduction

There has been a dramatic and accelerating secular decline in union density in Britain since the early 1980s which, if it continues, threatens the long-term survival of trade unions as we know them (Bryson and Gomez, 2002a; Millward et al., 2000). One reason advanced for this decline is the possibility that employee desire for unionisation has declined. There are no British data over time measuring employees' desire for membership. However, some analysts argue that there has been a move towards individualism and away from the collectivist forms of industrial relations which underpin unionism (Phelps Brown, 1990; Bacon and Storey, 1996). This, in turn, may affect workers' attachment to unionism. Two pieces of evidence indicate such a shift in attitudes has occurred.

First, those on the political 'left' are a shrinking proportion of all employees (Bryson and Gomez, 2002a). Since these workers are more likely than others to be union members (Bryson and Gomez, 2002a) and to desire union membership (Charlwood, 2002), this has contributed to the reduction in union density. Second, most of the decline in union density during the 1990s was due to declining membership within unionised workplaces (Millward *et al.*, 2000). The main reason for this trend cited by managerial respondents to the *Workplace Employee Relations Survey* was "a decline in employee support for their union" (Millward *et al.*, 2000: 92). Around 10 percentage points of the 12–13 percentage point decline in mean union density in unionised workplaces between 1990 and 1998 "can be attributed to a reduced propensity among employees to join trade unions, even when encouraged to do so [by management]" (Millward *et al.* 2000: 149–151).

Another possibility is that employees' desire for union membership is as strong as ever, but the costs of union membership have risen relative to the benefits. Within a consumer choice framework of union joining behaviour, employees may express an abstract desire for unionisation, but they will only purchase membership if the perceived benefits outweigh the perceived costs (Farber and Western, 2002). If, as some have argued (Bryson and Gomez, 2003) the costs of union membership may well have risen relative to the benefits, this would manifest itself in non-members expressing a desire for unionisation – what we might call 'frustrated demand'. Without measures of the demand for union membership over time it is not possible to estimate the extent to which declining membership is accounted for by rising frustrated demand. However, there is clear evidence of a high degree of frustrated demand for unionisation in the late 1990s (Bryson and Gomez, 2002b, Charlwood, 2002).

In the light of this equivocal evidence on the role of employee desire for unions on union decline, this paper considers the size of the market for unionisation in Britain and what unions can do to increase employees' desire for membership and representation. Section Two considers factors which enhance unions' ability to retain existing members employed in unionised workplaces. Section Three turns to the issue of in-fill recruitment of non-members employed in unionised workplaces. Section Four considers what unions can do to organise unorganised workers in non-union workplaces. Section Five summarises the implications of the analysis for union organising.

The analyses presented are descriptive and multivariate analyses of the British Worker Representation and Participation Survey 2001 (BWRPS) and the Workplace Employee Relations Survey 1998 (WERS), both of which are described in the data appendix.

2. Desire for unionisation among members in unionised workplaces

Each year, unions lose between a fifth and a quarter of their members (Bryson and Gomez, 2002a). A reduction in this rate of outflow would help stabilise union density and, if coupled with a higher rate of recruitment, could reverse union decline. The analysis in this section focuses on four questions, the answers to which would help unions identify what they can do to improve membership retention:
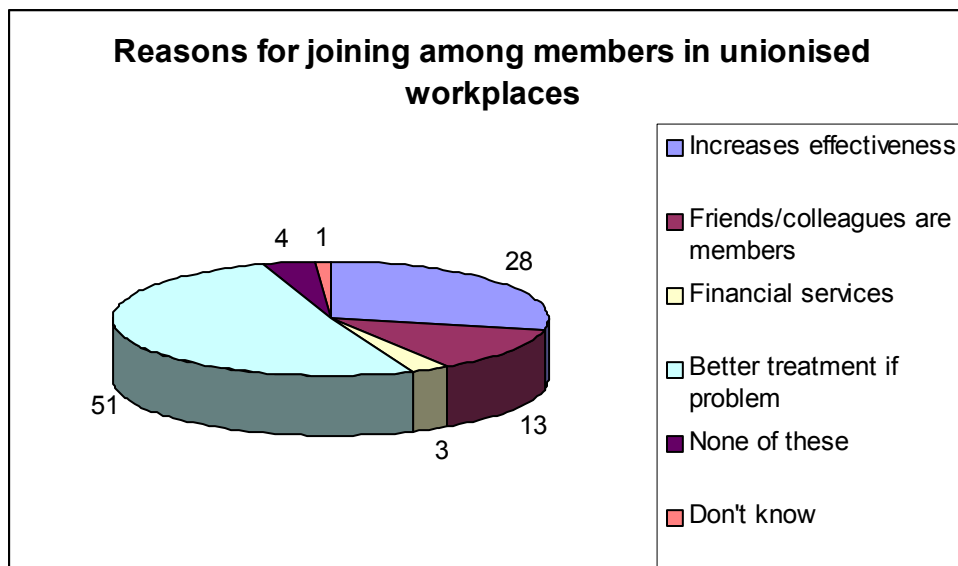
- ➢ Why do members join unions in the first place?
- ➢ Do members think unions are 'value for money' and what can unions do to show they are good value?
- ➢ What sorts of union representation do members want, and how can unions increase members' desire for union representation?
- ➢ Are works councils likely to threaten members' desire for union representation, or do they offer opportunities for better retention?

The section concentrates on those members in unionised workplaces because the vast majority of union members belong to a union present at their workplace. (According to BWRPS 2001, 86% of members belong to an on-site union, while WERS says it is 87%).

Why do members join unions in the first place? If unions know why employees join a union in the first place it can signal what unions might need to do to retain those members. The main reason why employees join unions is because they believe 'you get better treatment if you have a problem at work' (Figure 1). This is cited by roughly half (51%) of members in unionised workplaces and indicates that unions play an important 'insurance policy' role. Just over a quarter (28%) say 'the more people that join a trade union the more effective it is'. This perception makes sense, since unions' bargaining power and their legitimacy as the voice of workers is linked to the proportion of employees they can say are in membership. The perception is borne out by evidence that higher union density is associated with an increased likelihood that employees think unions 'make a difference to what it is like to work here' (Bryson, 2003), and with a higher membership wage premium (Bryson, 2002). The third major reason why employees join is because 'my friends and colleagues were already members'. One of the benefits of membership is the reputation an employee earns in the eyes of her peers (Booth, 1985): there is a sense of community and belonging in joining a union when others at your workplace are already members. In addition, if friends and colleagues are members, they can provide information about the benefits of membership which may not be obvious where you know nobody in membership (Bryson and Gomez, 2003). Very few (3%) cite 'the union offered financial services such as insurance and credit cards'. Four per cent say they joined for other reasons not given in the question, and 1% could not say why they had joined.

The message coming out of these figures is two-fold. First, employees join where they believe they can benefit from the protection of the union. Secondly, the likelihood of joining depends to a large degree on the decisions made by others at the workplace, either because they are influenced by colleagues or because they judge the benefits of membership to be determined, in part, by the representativeness of the union.

Figure 1: Reasons for joining among members in unionised workplaces

Reasons for joining among members in unionised workplaces

- Increases effectiveness
- Friends/colleagues are members
- Financial services
- Better treatment if problem
- None of these
- Don't know

28, 13, 3, 51, 4, 1

Notes:
a. Source: BWRP2 2001.
b. Respondents were asked: 'Some people say there is no point in joining the union at your workplace since you will get most of the benefits without joining and paying membership fees, but which one, if any, of the following possible reasons for joining your union was the most important to you personally when you joined?'

When are unions 'value for money'? Whether unions retain their members will depend, in large part, on whether the union is thought to be 'value for money'. The majority of members (54%) say membership is 'reasonable value' (Figure 2). Just under one-third (29%) say it is 'good value', by 16 per cent say it is 'poor value'.

So, which aspects of union activity and which employee perceptions of unions are associated with the belief that unions are 'good value for money'? Controlling for a range of personal, job and workplace characteristics using the techniques described in the footnote to Figure 3, the independent associations between aspects of union structure and behaviour and 'good value for money' are isolated. Figure 3 shows those effects that were statistically significant. The biggest effect relates to a union 'being open and accountable to its members'. This raises the likelihood that a union is 'good value for money' by 16%. Two other dimensions of union accessibility – the amount of contact with union representatives and identification of the union as the first place the respondent would go for advice on rights at work – are also associated with 'good value for money'. So, unions that are organisationally effective are clearly valued by members. Equally important is unions' ability to deliver. The perceptions that the workplace would be a worse place to work in the absence of the union, and a belief that strong unions are needed to protect working conditions and wages, are both associated with 'good value' unions. More specifically, effectiveness in winning pay increases, promoting equal opportunities, and making work interesting and enjoyable are all associated with 'good value'. (In other models protecting workers against unfair treatment was also significant). Perhaps more surprisingly, value for

money is associated with a preference for a partnership approach to worker representation. Employees were asked:

> 'Which one of the following two statements from organisations representing workers most appeals to you…..(a) we work with management to improve the workplace and working conditions (b) we defend workers against unfair treatment by management?'

Where employees said (a) rather than (b) they were 14% more likely to say the union was 'good value for money'.

It is also worth noting those things that were not associated with perceptions of value for money. These included perceptions of the industrial relations climate and how management and employees got on with one another; whether the respondent had specific problems at work; satisfaction with influence over decisions taken about your job and work life. It seems whether the union is regarded as value for money depends most of all on its own organisational effectiveness and ability to deliver.

Figure 2: Is membership value for money for members in unionised workplaces?
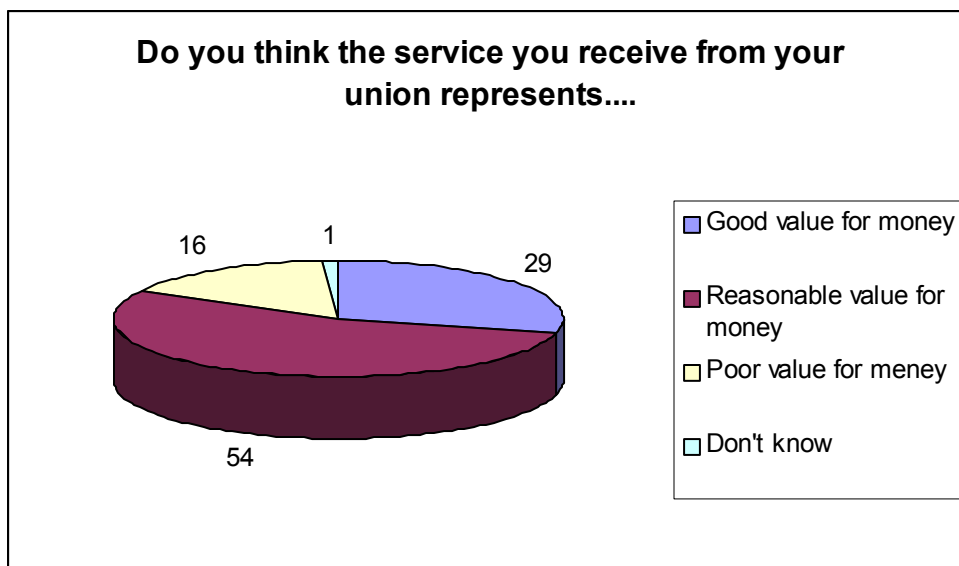
Source: BWRPS 2001

Figure 3: When are unions 'good value for money'?

% change in probability that union is 'good value for money'

Category	Value
Union is open and accountable to members	16
Union makes work interesting/enjoyable	14
Union promotes equal opportunities	12
Union wins fair pay increases	10
Wants union to work with management rather than defend workers	14
Strongly agrees union needed to protect employee working conditions	11
Worse place to work if no union	13
Would go to union first for rights advice	11
Frequent contact with union rep	10

Notes:
a. Source: BWRPS 2001
b. Bars show % change in probability that union is viewed as good value for money for a union member with mean characteristics for members in unionised workplaces. All effects in the figure are statistically significant at a confidence level of 95% or above. The mean probability of the union being 'good value' predicted under the model is 16%. N in model = 360. Model fit: $F_{(41,319)} = 2.04$, $p > f = .0004$.
c. Model also control for: gender, age, ethnicity, marital status, qualifications, occupation, full-timer, workplace tenure, establishment size, organisational size, sector, region, managerial attitudes to union, employee satisfaction with influence over decisions affecting job/work, no problems at work, perception of employee relations climate, perception of how well management and employees get on, power of the union, whether elected worker representatives, union understands employer's business, union shares information, union works with management to increase productivity, union protects workers against unfair treatment, perceived power of the union.

When do members want the union to represent them? Simply because you belong to a union does not mean that you want the union to represent you on every issue that comes up at work. Employees may want the issue to be dealt with collectively, but prefer to act with colleagues or a group of fellow workers, rather than through the union. Alternatively, they may wish to deal with the issue on their own. To find out what employees wanted, the BWRPS 2001 asks half the respondents whether they prefer to deal with problems through a group of workers or by themselves, and asks the other half whether they prefer to deal with

problems through a union or by themselves. This was done for the six items presented in Table 1.

Table 1: Desire for collective voice versus 'on your own', by issue

	(1) Union or on own	(2) Colleagues or on own	(1) – (2)
Sexual/racial discrimination	84	77	+7
Negotiating salary	82	83	-1
Negotiating working hours and conditions	79	82	-3
Promotion issues	37	49	-12
Bullying at the workplace	80	72	+8
Training and skill development	36	70	-34

Notes:
a. Source: BWRPS 2001. Base is members in unionised workplaces.
b. Figures show the percentage of members preferring collective to individual voice for each issue. The final column is the percentage point difference between (1) and (2).
c. Column (1) N=193. Column (2) N=203.

Members in unionised workplaces have a high demand for collective voice, with the majority opting for collective voice over individual voice on five of the six issues, the exception being promotion. There is a preference for the collective voice to be union voice when issues relate to discrimination and bullying. Conversely, the preference for collective action with colleagues is greater than the preference for union voice on matters relating to development and promotions. The preference for collective voice in negotiations on pay and other matters is similar whether it involves the union or not. These results are very revealing. They indicate that the preference for union representation is strongest where individuals need protection at work. When it comes to promotion and development issues, even where employees prefer a collective approach, they tend to prefer a non-union collective option. If unions wish to improve membership retention, they need to prove their worth on such matters. It is also a little surprising that, although members valued unions' bargaining role nearly as much as they did their 'insurance' role, it was the concept of bargaining as a group per se – rather than *union* bargaining – which appealed to them.

Table 2 uses the same information presented in Table 1 to produce a summary index of the desire for collective action. The index simply sums the number of times members said they preferred collective voice over acting alone. There are two striking findings. First, members in unionised workplaces opt for collective voice more often when given the choice between acting alone and acting with colleagues than they do when given the choice between acting alone and union representation. Thus, 20% opted for union voice on all six items, but this rose to 32% when collective voice meant with colleagues or a group of fellow workers. (The mean number of items where members wanted collective voice was 3.97 when presented with the union option and 4.30 when presented with the colleagues option.) Secondly, there is a substantial minority of members who appear to want very little union representation: 14% wanted union representation on 0-2 items.

Table 2: Number of issues where members desire collective voice

|	(1) Union or on own	(2) Colleagues or on own	(1) – (2)
None	4	6	-2
1	3	2	+1
2	7	6	+1
3	23	16	+7
4	24	16	+8
5	19	22	-3
6	20	32	-12

Notes:
a. Source: BWRPS 2001. Base is members in unionised workplaces.
b. Figures show the percentage of members preferring collective to individual voice by number of issues. The final column is the percentage point difference between (1) and (2).
c. Column (1) N=193. Column (2) N=203.

The lessons for membership retention are clear: identify ways in which the union can better represent its members on a diverse set of issues, and consider ways in which union representation can bring benefits over and above those on offer through non-union collective representation. Multivariate analyses to identify features of union structure and behaviour that are independently associated with members' desire for union representation identified few significant effects. Unions' organisational effectiveness and ability to deliver were not significant. It may be that union effectiveness itself reduces the perceived need for representation since, where unions are effective, members should have fewer problems to deal with. Consistent with this conjecture is the finding that those who were less satisfied with the amount of say they had over decisions about their job and work were more desirous of union representation. For a member with mean characteristics for the sample, the probability of wanting union representation on five or six of the six issues was 20% higher where they were not satisfied with their say in company decisions compared with a like person who was satisfied. There was one other important union-related factor that had an influence, namely strong agreement with the statement 'strong trade unions are needed to protect the working conditions and wages of employees'. This also raised the likelihood of wanting union representation on 5+ items by 20%. This statement is put to respondents without reference to their own working environment, so it can be taken as a general perception of the need for strong unionism. It may say more about personal allegiance to unionism than anything else, but it could also reflect concerns about the member's own particular workplace that are not picked up by other variables in the analysis. So, these findings reveal two important points which unions can focus on in retention strategies. The first is that unions have the best opportunities to increase desire for the union when employees are dissatisfied about their say at work. Second, they need to identify ways in which they can inculcate the feeling among members that they are indispensable in protecting terms and conditions.

WERS98 also contains indicators of employees' desire for union representation along three dimensions: getting pay increases, making a complaint about working here, and if a manager wanted to discipline the employee. Although the WERS data are older than BWRPS (1998 instead of 2001) the data are much richer, containing information taken from employees and the employer in the same workplace, and the sample size is much larger which helps to identify significant effects.

Figure 4 shows that, if asked 'who do you think would best represent you in dealing with managers here?', union representation is preferred by around three-quarters of members in unionised workplaces when the issue relates to pay increases or disciplinary matters. But, when it comes to making 'a complaint about working here', members are just as likely to want to do this themselves.

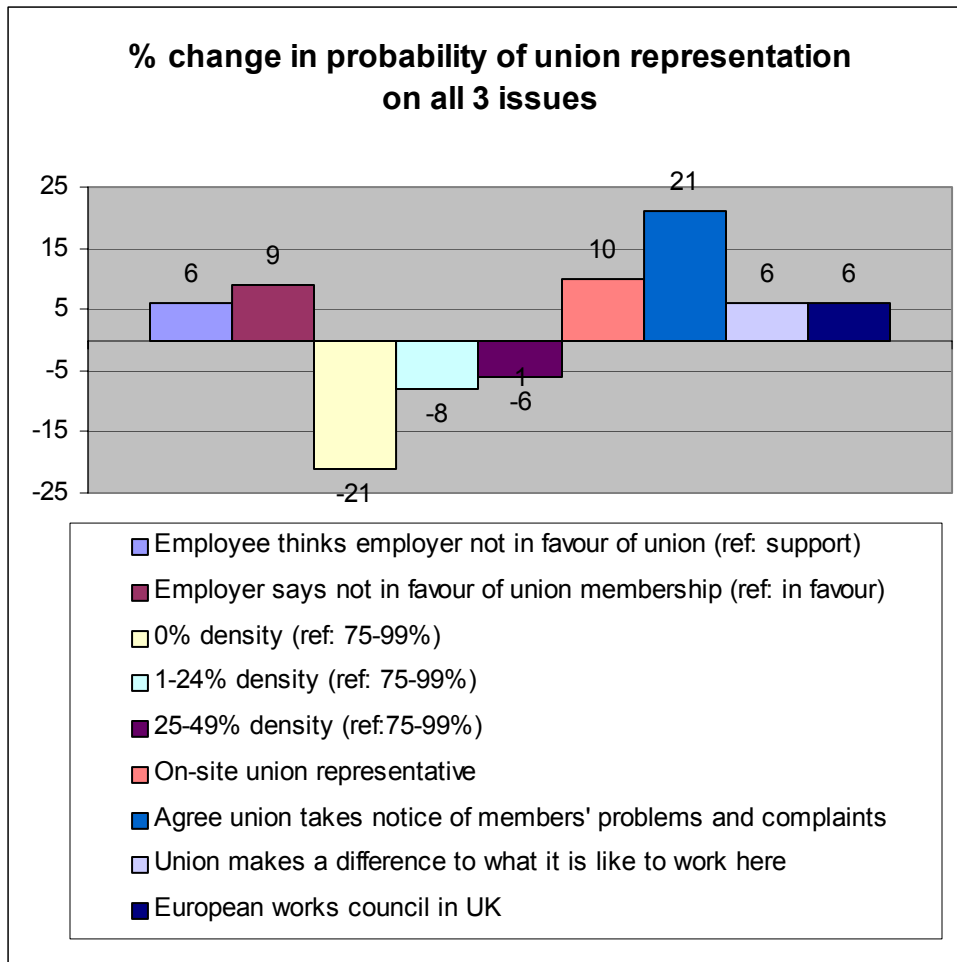**Figure 4: Who would best represent you in dealing with managers?**
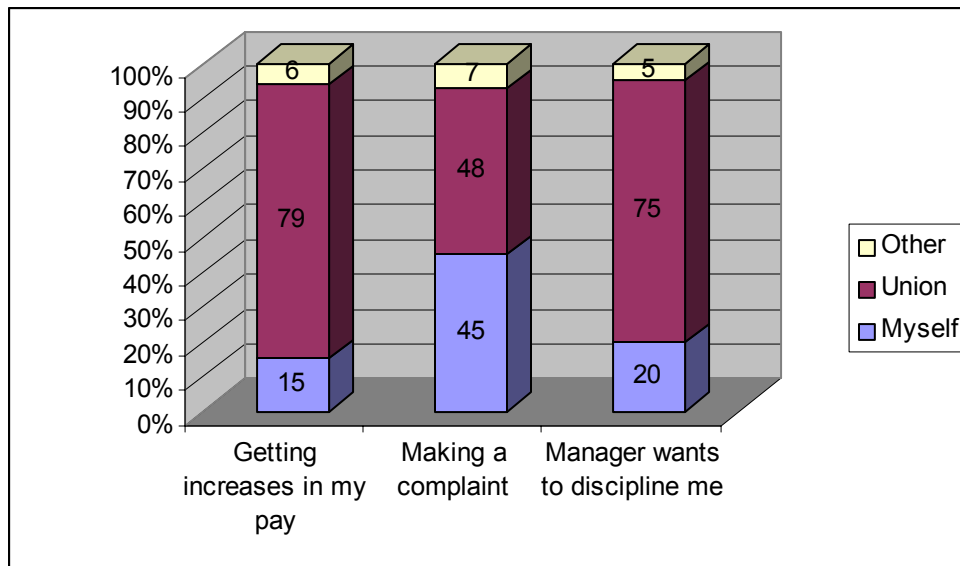
Notes:
a. Source: WERS 1998. Confined to members in workplaces where they say there is a union on-site.
b. Figures are % members who thought they were best represented by themselves, a trade union or someone else on the three dimensions of pay, making a complaint and a manager wishing to discipline. 'Other' category combines 'another employee' and 'somebody else'.

Ten per cent of members in unionised workplaces did not want union representation on any of these three issues; 40% wanted it on all three, with the remaining 50% preferring union representation on one or two of the three items.

So, under what circumstances did members want union representation on all three issues? Significant independent associations from multivariate analyses are presented in Figure 5. In the BWRPS analysis presented above employee perceptions of employer support or opposition for unionisation did not significantly affect the desire for union representation. However, in the WERS analysis employer attitudes to unionisation, and employee perceptions of those attitudes, both influence employees' desire for unionisation. An employee with mean characteristics for members in the sample is 6% more likely to want union representation on all three issues where the employee believes the employer is 'not in favour of trade unions'. Employers' actual stated attitudes to union membership have their own independent effect: where the employer actually says management is opposed to union membership, employees' desire for union representation on all three items is 9% higher. It may be that, where the employer is antagonistic to unions there is a greater need for union representation to make one's voice heard.

Figure 5: Desire for union representation among members

% change in probability of union representation on all 3 issues

Legend:
- Employee thinks employer not in favour of union (ref: support)
- Employer says not in favour of union membership (ref: in favour)
- 0% density (ref: 75-99%)
- 1-24% density (ref: 75-99%)
- 25-49% density (ref:75-99%)
- On-site union representative
- Agree union takes notice of members' problems and complaints
- Union makes a difference to what it is like to work here
- European works council in UK

Bar values: 6, 9, -21, -8, -6, 10, 21, 6, 6

Notes:
a. Source: WERS 1998.
b. Columns are marginal effects from logistic regression models for union members who say there is a union or staff association at their workplace (N=6302). The percentage differences are evaluated for a member with mean sample characteristics Dependent variable is (0,1), employee scoring 1 where preferring union representation on 3 out of 3 items. The marginal effects reported are the percentage change in the probability of scoring 3 holding other factors constant at the mean for the sample. The mean probability of desiring union representation on all 3 items under the model is 40%. All effects reported in the figure are statistically significant at a 95% confidence level or above.
c. Model fit: $F(89,814) = 6.42$, $p>f=0.0000$.
d. Models also control for: gender, age, ethnicity, academic and vocational qualifications, occupation, hours worked, workplace tenure, if permanent contract, gross wages, establishment size, age of workplace, sector, region, single or multi-establishment organisation, SIC, if workplace covered by formal strategic plan, if IiP awarded, if workplace has a formal written policy on equal opportunities or managing diversity, if grievance procedure, if high score on HRM index, if regular meetings with senior management, if team briefings, if quality circles, if non-union representative voice, if union taken seriously by management.

The second factor determining employees' desire for union representation is the unions' strength, as indicated by union density. There are no significant differences across employees in workplaces with density of 50% or more but, when density falls below this
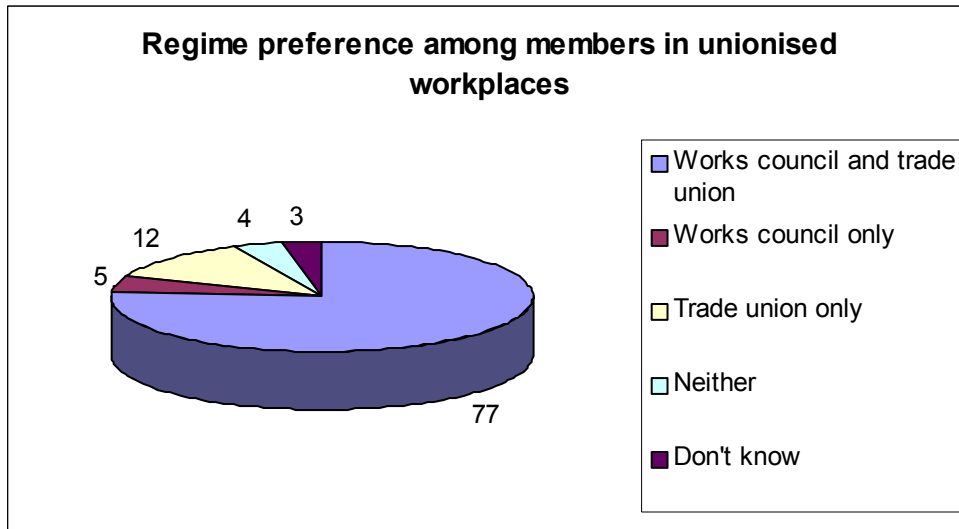
level, the desire for union representation falls. The presence of an on-site union representative is another indicator of organisational strength on the ground: it increases the desire for representation on all three issues by 10%. Two of the three evaluations of union effectiveness which WERS respondents are asked to make also influence desire for union representation. Where the union is perceived as responsive to members' problems and complaints desire for representation rises by 21%. Where the union is thought to 'make a difference to what it is like to work here' desire for representation rises by 6%.

These results are taken from a model controlling for a number of factors described in the notes to Figure 5. They include a range of potential substitutes for union representation, notably direct forms of two-way communication between management and employees, non-union representative voice mechanisms (such as joint consultative committees which exclude unions) and human resource management practices. None of these prove significant. The only one that is significant is the presence of a European Works Council operating in the UK. However, rather than being a substitute for unionisation, their presence increases the desire for union representation by 6%. This may be for one of two opposing reasons. Either disillusionment with the works council makes union representation more attractive, or else the operation of the works council creates a conducive environment for various forms of collective voice including union voice.

Are works councils likely to threaten members' desire for union representation?: Implementation of the EC Directive on informing and consulting employees, which comes into effect in March 2005, may result in the more widespread use of works councils in Britain (DTI, 2002). The last paragraph began to answer the question of whether works councils are likely to threaten members' desire for union representation by showing the presence of a works council actually increased members' desire for union representation, which might indicate that works councils offer opportunities for unions to improve membership retention. The BWRPS enables us to tackle this issue in more detail. Figure 6 shows that, when asked what sort of voice regime would be best, 89% of members in unionised workplaces said it would include a union. Three-quarters (77%) preferred a union and a works council, with only 5% saying 'works council on its own'. This is further evidence that, as far as members in unionised workplaces are concerned, works councils are not a serious substitute for union representation.

Perhaps more worrying from a union perspective is the fact that 12% of members in unionised workplaces had no positive desire for a union presence (the 5% saying works council only, plus 4% saying 'neither' and 3% who were 'don't knows'). This is broadly in line with the 10% of WERS members in unionised workplaces who didn't want union representation on any of the three issues raised (see above). Although neither of the data sets contains information on the likelihood of quitting a union, it is plausible that these employees are among those most likely to quit because they are least convinced about the net benefits of unionisation. This is confirmed in multivariate analysis identifying factors associated with being one of the 12% of members with no positive desire for union presence in BWRPS. Members were 3% less likely to want a union present where they did not think a union was needed to protect employees' terms and conditions, or where they thought the workplace would not be a worse place to work if there was no union.

Figure 6: Regime preference among members in unionised workplaces

Regime preference among members in unionised workplaces

- Works council and trade union
- Works council only
- Trade union only
- Neither
- Don't know

12
5
4
3
77

Notes:

a. Source: BWRPS 2001. Base is members in unionised workplaces. N=396
b. Figures show percentages responding to the question: 'All in all, do you think your workplace would be better with…works council and trade union, works council on its own, trade union on its own, neither?'

## 3. Desire for unionisation among non-members in unionised workplaces

This section switches to the desire for unionisation among non-members in unionised workplaces to see what potential there is for 'in-fill' recruitment where unions already have a presence.

The introduction cited evidence indicating that declining density within unionised workplaces is due in large part to a loss of appetite for unionisation among employees. However, another reason for difficulties in maintaining membership rates is the inadequacy of union organisation on the ground. According to BWRPS 2001, over half (56%) of non-members eligible to join the union at their workplace say they had never been asked to join the union. This is certainly a missed opportunity, since the amount of unmet desire for union membership among non-members in unionised workplaces is high. Ten per cent say they would be 'very likely' to join if asked, with another 26% saying they would be 'quite likely' to join (Figure 7).

To help unions identify what they can do to improve in-fill recruitment, the analysis focuses on four issues:

➤ Why do non-members choose not to join their workplace union?
➤ What factors are associated with the likelihood of joining the union?
➤ What sort of demand for union representation is there among non-members, and how can unions increase non-members' desire for union representation?
➤ Do non-union forms of worker representation appeal to non-members more than unionisation?

Figure 7: Likelihood of non-member joining on-site union

Likelihood of non-member joining union if asked

■	Very likely
■	Quite likely
□	Not very likely
□	Not at all likely
■	Don't know
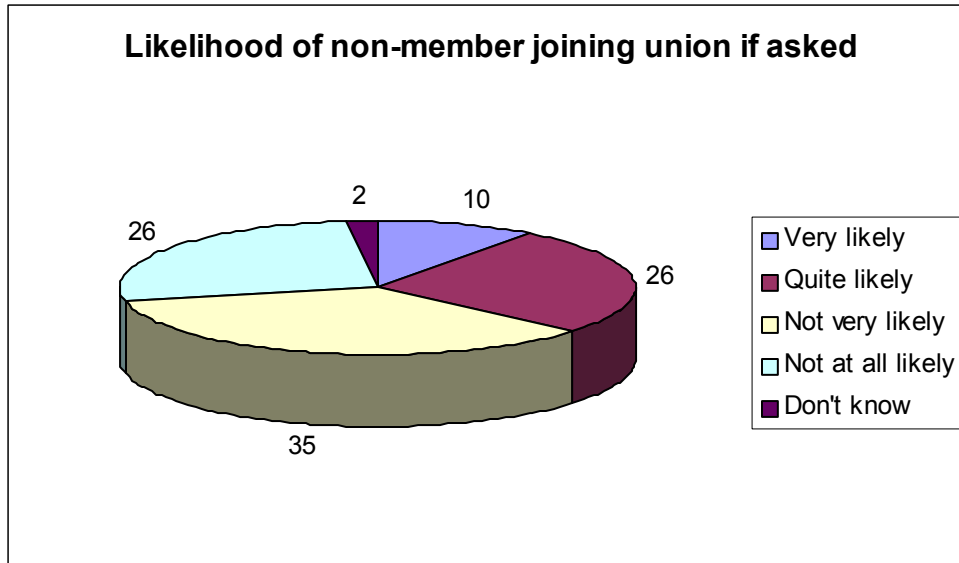
Notes:
a.   Source: BWRPS 2001. Base is non-members in unionised workplaces. N=239
b.   Figures show percentages responding to the question: 'If someone from the union at your workplace asked you to join, how likely is it that you would do so?'

Why do non-members choose not to join their workplace union? The BWRPS 2001 is one of the few British surveys ever to ask non-members why they have not joined their workplace union. It asks non-members to rank how important four factors were in their decision on a four-point scale from 'very important' to 'not at all important'. The results are summarised in Figure 8. In interpreting the results, two things ought to be borne in mind. First, as noted above, because many had never been asked to join, they may not have been presented with a conscious decision to make. Secondly, there may be many reasons for not joining other than the four offered in the questionnaire. In the event, over two-thirds of non-members (69%) cite at least one of the reasons as either 'quite important' or 'very important'. So, the question does a reasonable job in capturing non-members' reasons for not joining. However, 10% of non-members say all four reasons were 'not at all important' so that, for a small minority, the question is not getting at their reasons for not joining.

The figure indicates that perceived union ineffectiveness is the most important factor in not joining, with 38% of non-members saying the perception that the 'union doesn't achieve anything' was an important factor in their decision not to join. However, even where there were benefits to membership, around one-third (35%) of non-members were prepared to 'free-ride': they felt they did not need to pay for membership since they got the benefits anyway. One way to overcome this problem would be for unions to focus on producing benefits that only go to members. If this is possible, the third of non-members who are free-riding would have to decide whether to pay for the benefits they say they get for nothing.

Figure 8: Factors in non-members' decisions not to join their workplace union

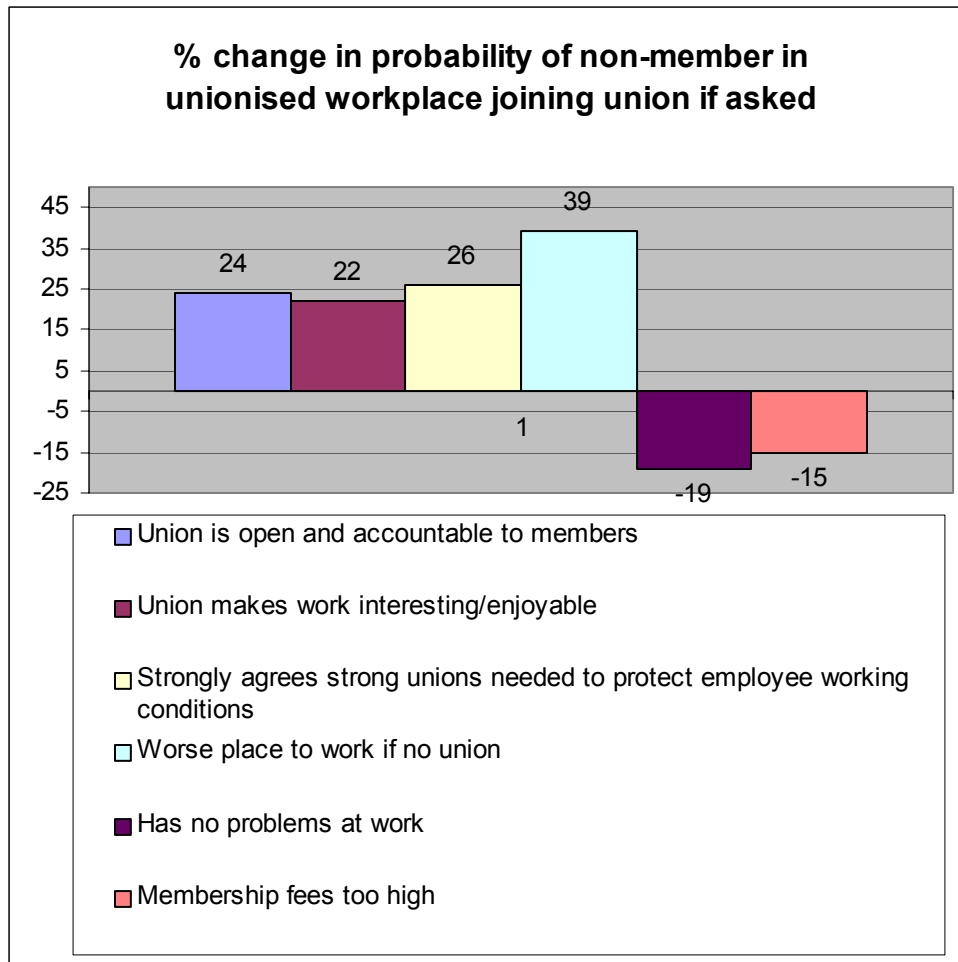**Factors in non-members' decisions not to join union**
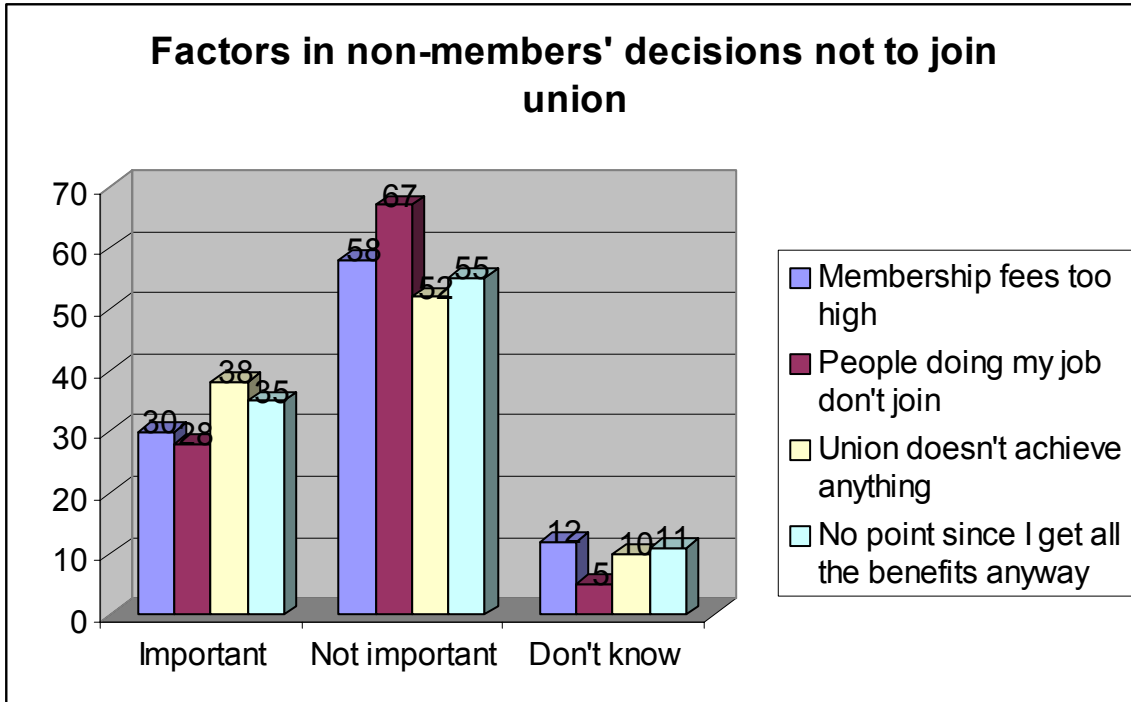
Notes:

a. Source: BWRPS 2001. Base is non-members in workplaces with a union that the respondent could join. N=239

b. Figures show percentages responding to the question: 'How important were the following factors in your decision not to join the union at your workplace?' The figure collapses 'very important' and 'quite important' pre-codes into 'important' and 'not very important and 'not at all important' into 'not important'.

As well as focusing on the benefits of membership, the figure indicates the need for unions to consider the fees they levy. A substantial minority (30%) are deterred from joining by a membership fee that they regard as too high.

Some were swayed more by broader social considerations than they were by a cost-benefit calculus since, just as members are often influenced to join by friends or colleagues who are members, so non-members are influenced by what their peers do. Even though there is a union on-site that the respondent says 'people doing my sort of job can join', over one-quarter (28%) of non-members say they haven't joined because 'people doing my job don't join trade unions'. This response was most common among Senior Managers, 41% of whom said it was 'very important' in their decision not to join.

What factors are associated with the likelihood of joining the union? As shown in Figure 7, 36% of non-members in unionised workplaces said they were either 'very' or 'quite' likely to join their workplace union if asked. Figure 9 shows which factors of relevance to unions are independently associated with non-members' likelihood of joining.

Figure 9: Desire for union membership among non-members in unionised workplaces

% change in probability of non-member in unionised workplace joining union if asked

Legend:
- Union is open and accountable to members
- Union makes work interesting/enjoyable
- Strongly agrees strong unions needed to protect employee working conditions
- Worse place to work if no union
- Has no problems at work
- Membership fees too high

Bar values: 24, 22, 26, 39, -19, -15 (with a value of 1 noted)

a. Source: BWRPS 2001
b. Bars show % change in probability that non-members in unionised workplaces say they are 'very' or 'quite' likely to join the union at their workplace if asked. The percentage differences are evaluated for a person with mean sample characteristics. Effects of need for strong unions, worse place to work if no union, and no problems at work are statistically significant at a confidence level of 95%. Other effects are significant at a 90% confidence level. The mean probability of joining the union predicted under the model is 23%. N in model = 210. $F_{(38, 172)}=1.42$, $p>f=.0696$.
c. Models also control for: gender, age, ethnicity, marital status, qualifications, occupation, full-timer, workplace tenure, establishment size, organisational size, sector, region, managerial attitudes to union, employee satisfaction with influence over decisions affecting job/work, perception of employee relations climate, perception of how well management and employees get on, would go to union first for advice on workers' rights, whether elected worker representatives, contact with union representative, wants union to work with management rather than defend workers, union wins fair pay increases, union protects workers against unfair treatment, loyalty to organisation. Other models tested variables such as strongly disagrees that unions are old fashioned or have no future in modern Britain, agree 'people doing my job don't join', agree 'union doesn't achieve anything', agree 'no point in joining since I get all the benefits anyway', union understands employer's business, union shares information, union works with management to increase productivity, union promotes equal opportunities, perceived power of the union. None of these proved significant and, because the small number of cases required a parsimonious model, they were dropped from the model presented here.

By far the most important factor influencing non-members' decision to join their workplace union is the perception of its overall effectiveness. Where non-members agree that the workplace would be a worse place to work if there was no union, they are 39% more likely to join than those who think otherwise. A more general perception that strong unions are needed to protect employee working conditions is also strongly associated with an increased likelihood of non-members joining. But non-members' perceptions of unions' internal workings are also important: non-members are more likely to want to join a union when they think the union is open and accountable to its members. Unions' efforts at in-fill recruitment will be more successful where non-members feel they suffer from one or more problems at work (unfair wages, unfair treatment, bullying or discrimination). Where non-members feel they have no such problems their likelihood of joining the union drops by 19%. Even if unions are good at 'delivering' and organisationally effective, non-members want to see value for money if they are to join. Thirty per cent of non-members cite membership fees being too high as an important reason for not joining. This effect proves to be the only one of the four reasons for not joining identified in the survey (see Figure 8 and text above) which has a significant, independent effect on the likelihood of joining.

In other model specifications, the other factor deterring non-members in unionised workplaces from joining the union is loyalty to their employer, perhaps indicating that, despite moves towards social partnership by many unions, some non-members feel allegiance to a union is incompatible with being a good employee.

Controlling for other factors, never-members were no less likely than ex-members to say they would like to join a union. This is encouraging from a union perspective since it suggests that there is nothing inherently difficult about recruiting never-members once the union has tackled the issues discussed above.

When do non-members want union representation? As noted above, many non-members are happy to 'free-ride', benefiting from union representation without having to pay for it. But just how extensive is desire for union representation among non-members in unionised workplaces? The BWRPS 2001 asks non-members the same questions on desire for collective voice as those asked of members reported in Section Two. Comparing between members and non-members in unionised workplaces highlights three points. First, comparing Table 3 and Table 1, non-members are less 'collectivist' than members: with only one exception, non-members are more likely than members to prefer to deal with problems on their own rather than with colleagues or through the union. The exception is bullying where the percentage of non-members choosing colleagues over 'on my own' was virtually identical to that for members (71% as opposed to 72%). The second point to emerge is that, in contrast to members, non-members consistently prefer collective action to be with colleagues rather than with the union, irrespective of the issue. This is indicated by the percentage differential in the final column of Table 3. The most dramatic difference between members and non-members is in the desire for union representation in bargaining over pay and conditions. Only half of non-members prefer union representation to bargaining on their own behalf, compared with four-fifths of members. It is true that non-members' preference for the collective option is lower than members' when faced with a choice between working in concert with colleagues and on one's own behalf, but the difference is nowhere near as great as that when the collective voice option is presented as a union option. This indicates that one of the chief reasons why non-members in unionised workplaces do not join the union is that they do not value the negotiating role performed by the union.

Table 3: Desire for collective voice versus 'on your own', by issue

	(1) Union or on own	(2) Colleagues or on own	(1) – (2)
Sexual/racial discrimination	67	73	-6
Negotiating salary	49	66	-17
Negotiating working hours and conditions	50	68	-18
Promotion issues	26	40	-14
Bullying at the workplace	55	71	-16
Training and skill development	30	64	-34

Notes:
a. Source: BWRPS 2001. Base is non-members in unionised workplaces.
b. Figures show the percentage of non-members preferring collective to individual voice for each issue. The final column is the percentage point difference between (1) and (2).
c. Column (1) N=126. Column (2) N=113.

The third point to emerge is illustrated in Table 4. This shows that one-quarter of non-members in unionised workplaces want union representation on none of the six items, whereas only 2% reject the collective option in all six cases when the option is worded in terms of help from colleagues. This indicates that there are a minority of non-members who will be wholly unresponsive to unions' recruitment efforts, despite the presence of a union at the workplace. On the other hand, around four-in-ten non-members wanted union representation on four or more items, indicating strong demand for unionisation among a large minority of non-members.

Table 4: Number of issues where non-members desire collective voice

|	(1) Union or on own	(2) Colleagues or on own	(1) – (2)
None	24	2	+22
1	10	5	+5
2	10	14	-4
3	17	26	-9
4	14	18	-4
5	9	11	-2
6	16	24	-8

Notes:
a. Source: BWRPS 2001. Base is non-members in unionised workplaces.
b. Figures show the percentage of non-members preferring collective to individual voice by number of issues. The final column is the percentage point difference between (1) and (2).
c. Column (1) N=126. Column (2) N=113.

Multivariate analyses to identify features of union structure and behaviour associated with non-members' desire for union representation indicate that, in general, non-members' desire is not associated with perceptions of the union's organisational effectiveness or ability to deliver. The exception is the presence of an elected union representative, which is positively associated with a desire for union representation. However, the general feeling

that strong unions are needed to protect employees' working conditions is associated with a greater desire for union representation. Non-members are also more desirous of union representation where they are dissatisfied with their say in matters affecting their job and where they view the climate of industrial relations to be good.
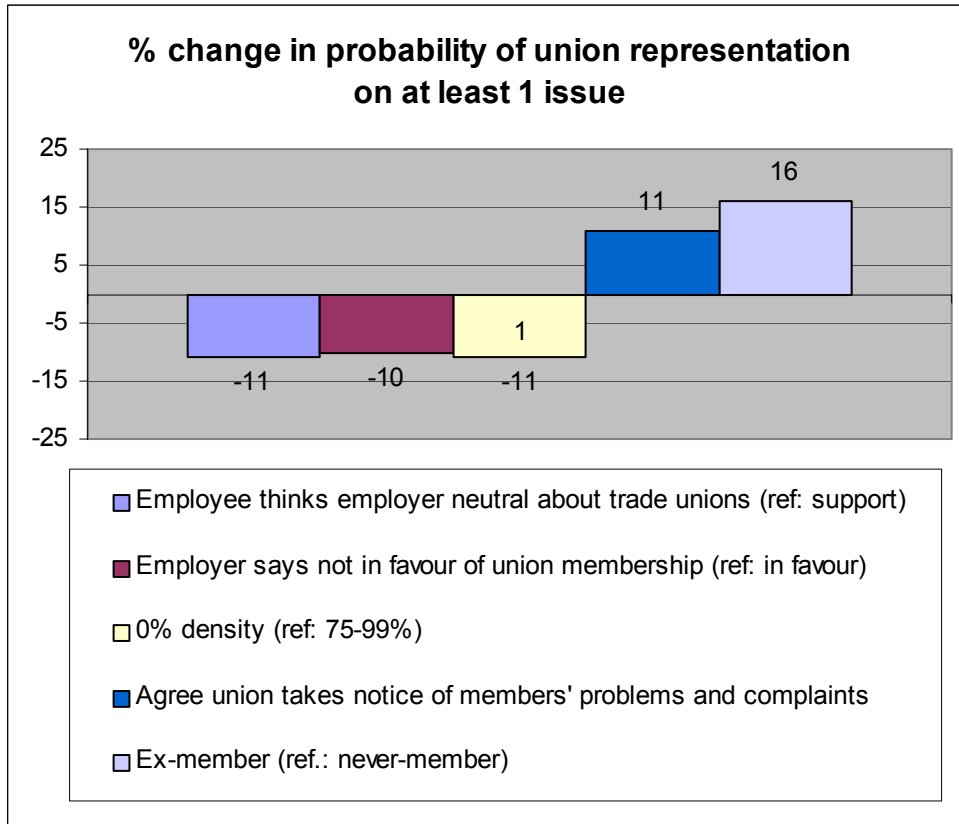
The WERS98 data, described and analysed for members in Section Two, show only a minority of non-members in unionised workplaces want union representation on any of the three issues the survey covers. Sixty-one per cent of non-members did not want any representation by the union at their workplace, one-third (32%) wanted union representation on one or two issues, and only 8% wanted union representation on all three issues. Desire for union representation is strongest for pay, but even here only one-third of non-members prefer union representation (Figure 10), compared with four-fifths of members. The biggest gap in desire for union representation across members and non-members is over the issue of being disciplined by management: whereas three-quarters of members wanted union representation on this matter, only one-fifth of non-members wanted union representation. These findings suggest that, if there is a 'representation gap' which unions can fill, it is only for a minority of non-members in unionised workplaces.

Figure 10: Who would best represent you in dealing with managers?
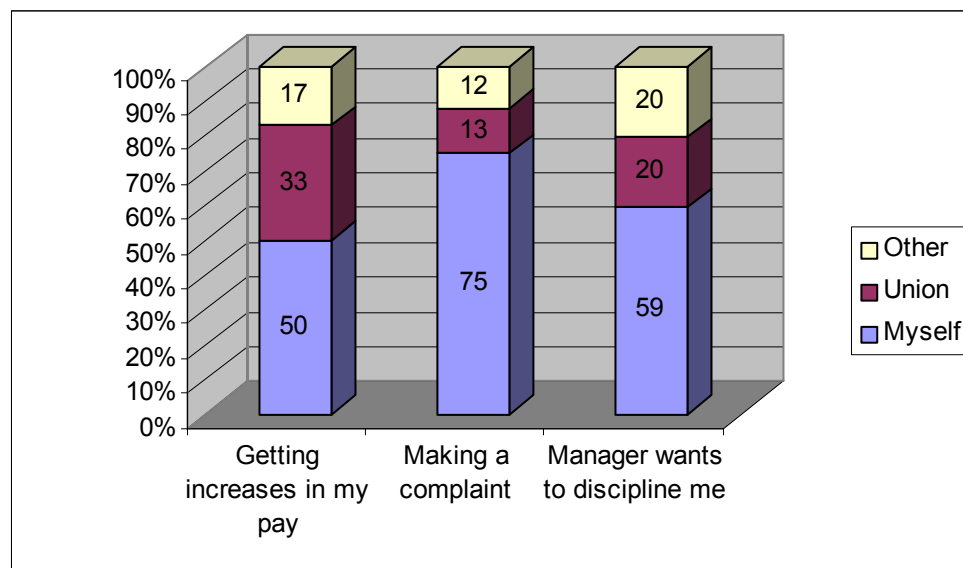
a.   Source: WERS 1998. Confined to non-members in workplaces where they say there is a union on-site.

b.   Figures are % non-members who thought they were best represented by themselves, a trade union or someone else on the three dimensions of pay, making a complaint and a manager wishing to discipline. 'Other' category combines 'another employee' and 'somebody else'.

Figure 11: Desire for union representation among non-members in unionised workplaces, WERS98

% change in probability of union representation on at least 1 issue

- Employee thinks employer neutral about trade unions (ref: support)
- Employer says not in favour of union membership (ref: in favour)
- 0% density (ref: 75-99%)
- Agree union takes notice of members' problems and complaints
- Ex-member (ref.: never-member)

Notes:

a. Source: WERS 1998.

b. Columns are marginal effects from logistic regression models for non-members who say there is a union or staff association at their workplace (N=3143). The percentage differences are evaluated for a non-member with mean sample characteristics. Dependent variable is (0,1), employee scoring 1 where preferring union representation on at least one out of 3 items. The marginal effects reported are the percentage change in the probability of scoring at least 1 holding other factors constant at the mean for the sample. The mean probability of desiring union representation on at least 1 item under the model is 36%. The effects of union density and employer's stated atttitude to unions are statistically significant at a 90% confidence level. The other effects are significant at a 95% confidence level.

c. Model fit: $F_{(90, 856)} = 3.82$. $p > f = 0.0000$.

d. Models also control for: gender, age, ethnicity, academic and vocational qualifications, occupation, hours worked, workplace tenure, if permanent contract, gross wages, establishment size, age of workplace, sector, region, single or multi-establishment organisation, SIC, if workplace covered by formal strategic plan, if IiP awarded, if workplace has a formal written policy on equal opportunities or managing diversity, if grievance procedure, if high score on HRM index, if regular meetings with senior management, if team briefings, if quality circles, if European works council in UK, if non-union representative voice, union makes a difference to what it is like to work here, if union taken seriously by management, on-site union representative.

The WERS analysis of non-members' desire for union representation in unionised workplaces differs in three respects from the BWRPS analysis. First, perceptions of employers' attitudes to unions are not associated with desire for union representation in the

BWRPS analysis. However, WERS indicates that non-members' desire for union representation in unionised workplaces is influenced by their perceptions of the employer's attitude to unions, and the actual, stated employer attitude to unions. In contrast to members, whose desire for union representation rises with employer opposition to unions, non-members' desire for representation by a union actually falls by 10% relative to a situation in which the employer is supportive (Figure 11). In addition, employees' perception that the employer is lukewarm about unions, rather than supportive, is independently associated with an 11% reduction in the probability of wanting union representation. Thus, according to WERS, associations between employer attitudes to unions and employees' desire for union representation differ systematically across members and non-members.

The second way in which the two analyses differ is in the role played by unions' organisational effectiveness. This is of little consequence in the BWRPS analysis, but in WERS the perception that the union takes notice of members' problems and complaints raises the probability of desire for union representation by 11%.

Third, desire for representation does not differ significantly across ex-members and 'never-members' in the BWRPS analysis. In WERS, on the other hand, ex-members are more likely to want union representation than never-members, and the effect is large (raising the probability of desire for union representation by 16%). Thus, seen from a WERS perspective, the rise of never-membership is particularly ominous for unions wishing to reach out to those who have never purchased membership.

Comparing Figure 11 with Figure 5, WERS indicates that factors associated with desire for union representation differ quite markedly across members and non-members in unionised workplaces. Apart from the impact of employer attitudes to unions, noted above, it is apparent that members' desire for union representation is more contingent on union strength, as proxied by union density and the presence of an on-site union representative. Although non-members' desire for unionisation falls where unions are very weak unions (those with a density of zero, according to the employer), it does not rise with union strength as in the case of members. Whereas members' desire for union representation rises with the presence of a works council, this does not happen for non-members. Interestingly, as in the case of members, none of the non-union avenues of two-way communication in the model significantly influence non-members' desire for union representation, indicating that they are not substitutes for unionisation.

Are works councils likely to influence non-members' desire for union representation? Although the WERS analysis above indicates works councils have little influence on the desire for union representation among non-members in unionised workplaces, BWRPS suggests a clear preference for works councils over unions (Figure 12). Although half of non-members prefer a regime based on unions and works councils, a 'works council only' regime was twice as popular as a 'union only' regime (19% versus 8%). Perhaps more striking is the finding that one-fifth (21%) of non-members in unionised workplaces wanted neither a union nor a works council, a further indication of the limits of collective representation in unionised workplaces.

Figure 12: Regime preference among non-members in unionised workplaces

Regime preference among non-members in unionised workplaces

- Works council and trade union — 49
- Works council only — 19
- Trade union only — 8
- Neither — 21
- Don't know — 4
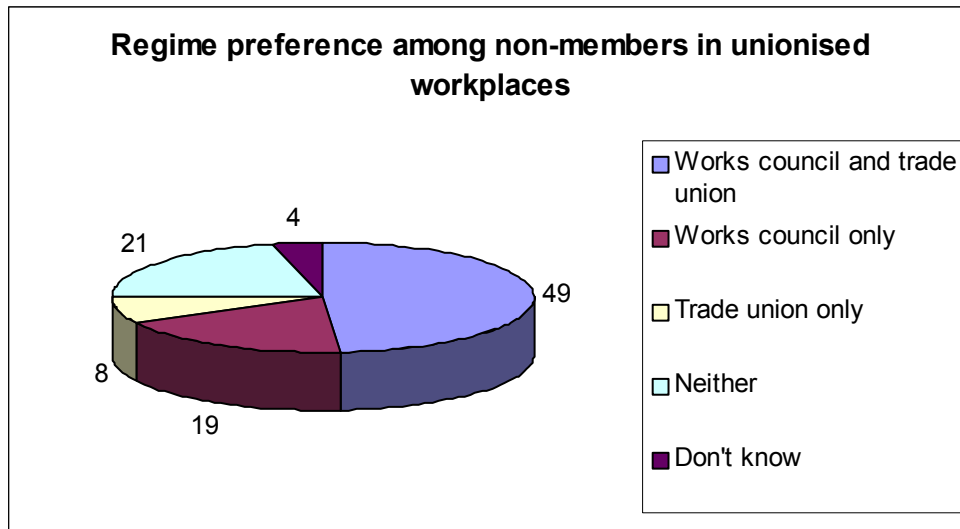
Notes:
a. Source: BWRPS 2001. Base is non-members in unionised workplaces. N=229
b. Figures show percentages responding to the question: 'All in all, do you think your workplace would be better with…works council and trade union, works council on its own, trade union on its own, neither?'

4. Desire for unionisation among non-members in non-unionised workplaces
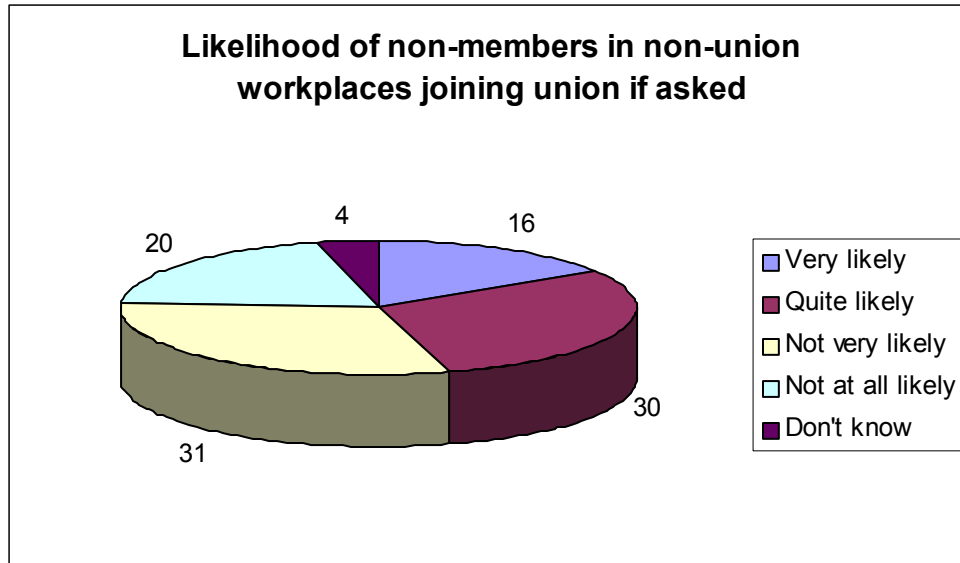
An increasing proportion of workplaces are non-union, due in large part to the difficulties unions have had in organising new workplaces (Millward et al., 2000). The absence of workplace-level unionisation affects individual employees' decisions to join a union because the cost of organising an unorganised workplace to become a member is higher than the cost of becoming a member in an already organised workplace (Farber and Western, 2002). At the same time, the benefits of membership may be less obvious since members need a union that is recognised by the employer to negotiate better terms and conditions. This may explain why union membership rates in non-unionised workplaces have remained very low – at around one-in-twenty employees – over the last two decades (Bryson and Gomez, 2002a). However, because the percentage of all employees working in non-unionised workplaces has risen from around a third to a half over that time (Bryson and Gomez, 2002a), unions need to develop organising strategies in these workplaces if they are to arrest the decline in union density.

This section is devoted to the desire for unionisation among non-members in non-unionised workplaces and explores the conditions in unorganised workplaces that are most conducive to unionisation.

The likelihood of non-members organising an unorganised workplace: With the potential costs of organising higher and the potential benefits more difficult to discern, one might expect the desire for union membership to be lower among non-members in unorganised workplaces than it is among non-members in organised workplaces. But this appears not to be the case according to the BWRPS 2001. Sixteen per cent of non-members say it is 'very likely' they would join if a union was set up, and a further 30% say it is 'quite likely' (Figure 13). These figures compare with 10% and 26% respectively for non-members in unionised

workplaces, so the demand for membership is 10 percentage points higher among non-members where there is no union (or 6 percentage points on the stricter criterion of being 'very likely' to join).

Figure 13: Likelihood of non-members in non-union workplaces joining a union

Likelihood of non-members in non-union workplaces joining union if asked

Legend:
- Very likely
- Quite likely
- Not very likely
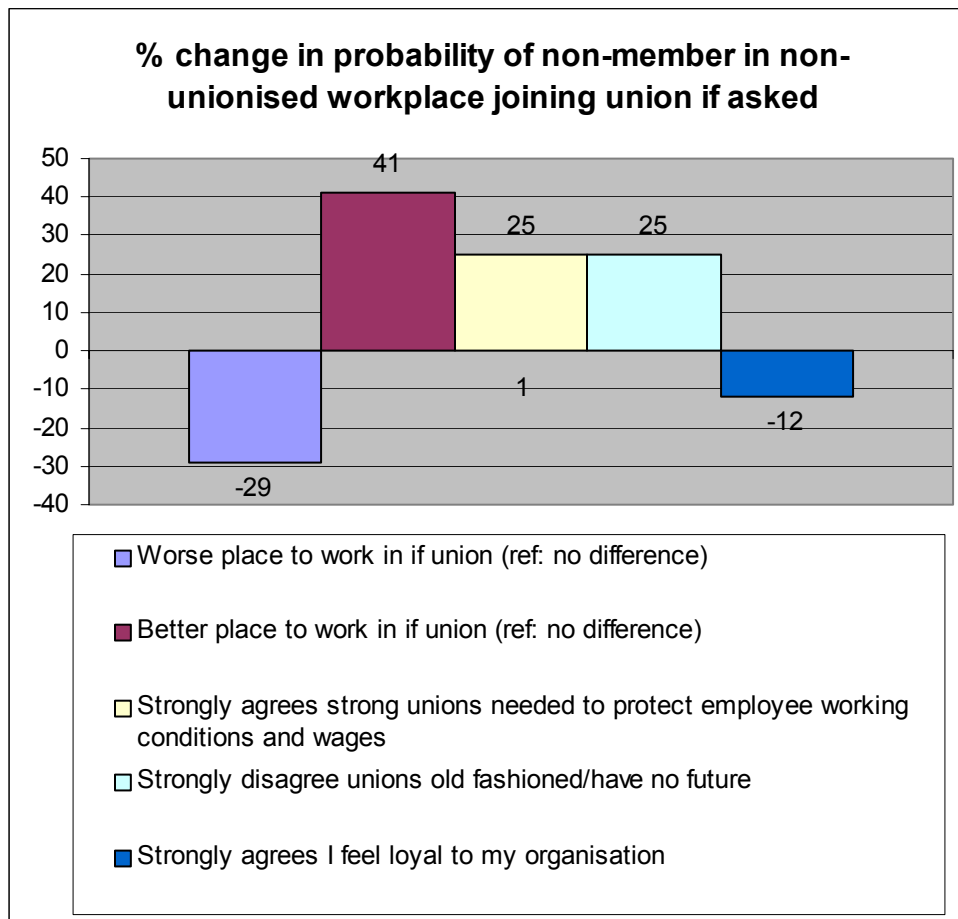- Not at all likely
- Don't know

Values: 16, 30, 31, 20, 4

Notes:

a. Source: BWRPS 2001. Base is non-members in non-unionised workplaces. N=620

b. Figures show percentages responding to the question: 'If a group of workers at your workplace formed a union and asked you to join, how likely is it that you would join that union?'

At face value, this comparison indicates that the demand for union membership is higher among non-members in the absence of a union than it is among non-members where there is a union present. However, one should bear two facts in mind when interpreting the finding. First, the question posed in BWRPS (see footnote b. to Figure 13) partly discounts the costs of newly organising a workplace since non-members are asked to envisage a scenario in which a group of workers at their workplace have already formed a union and asked the individual to join. Second, non-members may reconsider their decision once a union is in place either because they are prepared to 'free-ride', or because they do not regard the fee as value for money. In any event, the level of unmet demand for union membership in non-unionised workplaces is large, and offers unions real organising opportunities.

What factors are associated with the likelihood of joining the union? As shown in Figure 13, 46% of non-members in non-unionised workplaces said they were either 'very' or 'quite' likely to join a union if asked to join by a group of workers setting a union up. Figure 14 shows which factors are independently associated with non-members' likelihood of joining. The analysis is identical to that presented for non-members in unionised workplaces but, because there is no on-site union, perceptions of unions' organisational effectiveness and ability to deliver are absent.

Figure 14: Desire for union membership among non-members in non-unionised workplaces

% change in probability of non-member in non-unionised workplace joining union if asked

Legend:
- ■ Worse place to work in if union (ref: no difference)
- ■ Better place to work in if union (ref: no difference)
- □ Strongly agrees strong unions needed to protect employee working conditions and wages
- □ Strongly disagree unions old fashioned/have no future
- ■ Strongly agrees I feel loyal to my organisation

a. Source: BWRPS 2001
b. Bars show % change in probability that non-members in non-unionised workplaces say they would be 'very' or 'quite' likely to join a union at their workplace if asked. The percentage differences are evaluated for a person with mean sample characteristics. All effects are statistically significant at a confidence level of 95% or above. The mean probability of joining the union predicted under the model is 46%. N in model = 539.
c. Model fit: $F_{(33, 506)} = 3.48$. $p > f = 0.0000$.
d. Models also control for: gender, age, ethnicity, marital status, qualifications, occupation, full-timer, workplace tenure, establishment size, organisational size, sector, region, managerial attitudes to union, employee satisfaction with influence over decisions affecting job/work, perception of employee relations climate, perception of how well management and employees get on, would go to union first for advice on workers' rights, wants union to work with management rather than defend workers, never a union member.

Non-members are instrumentalist in their attitudes to union organising: the probability of joining a newly organised union is strongly associated with perceptions of whether the union would make the workplace a better or worse place to work in. Where it is thought a union would make things 'a lot' or 'a little' better, the probability of joining a union rose by 41% for a non-member with mean characteristics for the sample, relative to a person who thought it would make no difference. Conversely, the probability drops by 29%

where the non-member thinks a union would make things worse. More general perceptions of unions as organisations also matter. So, where non-members strongly agree that employees need strong unions to protect their working conditions and wages, the probability of joining a union is 25% greater. The image of unions also matters: where unions are viewed as forward-looking and part of the future of modern Britain, the probability of joining is 25% higher than would otherwise be the case. Greater loyalty to one's employer significantly reduces non-members' desire for union membership. This implies that union organising is perceived as disloyal to the employer by some, a clear indication of the importance of relations with one's employer, even though perceptions of management's attitudes to unions are not a significant factor in themselves.

One way in which non-members in unorganised workplaces gain information about the implications of unionisation is through previous union membership. In other models similar to the one reported in Figure 14 ex-members had a significantly higher likelihood of joining a newly formed union than never-members, increasing the probability of being 'very likely' to join by 5% and the probability of being 'quite likely' to join by 7%. These models also indicate that perceptions of a good employee relations climate in a non-unionised environment significantly reduce the desire for union membership.[1]

This analysis indicates that, although they may have no direct experience of unions operating at their workplace, non-members' preparedness to join a union is strongly associated with their perceptions of whether a union might improve things, their relevance in protecting workers and in society more generally, and the perception that there may be a zero-sum game in terms of loyalty to a union, on the one hand, and loyalty to the employer on the other. To succeed in organising unorganised workplaces unions must identify the basis on which employees make these judgements and persuade them, through information and other means, that unions would make things better.

When do non-members want union representation? In the absence of a union, how much demand is there among non-members for collective voice on workplace issues? The BWRPS 2001 provides the answer by questioning employees about how they would like to deal with six issues at work. The questions are identical to those asked of employees in unionised workplaces (reported in Sections 2 and 3 for members and non-members respectively).

Table 5 shows that, on all issues except promotion, a majority of non-members prefer collective voice to dealing with an issue on their own, but this is only true where the collective option presented is 'the help of colleagues or a group of fellow workers'. Union representation is much less popular than the help of colleagues on all six issues, as indicated by the final column of the table. Only on one issue (discrimination) do half of non-members wish for union representation.

Comparing Table 5 with Table 3, non-members in non-unionised workplaces are much less inclined to choose the union option than non-members in unionised workplaces – on all six issues – indicting the importance of union presence in employees' ability to formulate a positive desire for union representation. However, non-members in unionised and non-unionised workplaces rank the six issues identically according to their preferences for union representation. Discrimination and bullying issues come top, and promotion and

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[1]The results in this paragraph come from an ordered probit which uses the full ordered information in the dependent variable (very, quite, not very and not at all likely), rather than simply distinguishing between the 'very' and 'quite' likely on the one hand and the 'not very'/'not at all' likely on the other.

development issues come bottom. This suggests unions might make recruitment gains by focusing on improving their perceived relevance in dealing with issues of advancement at the workplace.

Table 5: Desire for collective voice versus 'on your own', by issue

	(1) Union or on own	(2) Colleagues or on own	(1) – (2)
Sexual/racial discrimination	51	64	-13
Negotiating salary	31	50	-19
Negotiating working hours and conditions	33	63	-30
Promotion issues	20	43	-23
Bullying at the workplace	39	66	-27
Training and skill development	24	64	-40

Notes:

a. Source: BWRPS 2001. Base is non-members in non-unionised workplaces.
b. Figures show the percentage of non-members preferring collective to individual voice for each issue. The final column is the percentage point difference between (1) and (2).
c. Column (1) N=323. Column (2) N=295.

The last point to emerge from Table 5 is that, although their desire for union representation may be lower than for members and non-members in unionised workplaces, a sizeable minority of unorganised workers express a desire for union representation on all six issues. This point emerges again in Table 6 which shows the number of issues where unorganised workers desire collective representation. Although almost four-in-ten (38%) have no desire for union representation whatsoever, one-quarter (24%) would like union representation on at least four of the six issues. More than double this percentage (52%) would like some sort of collective voice with colleagues on four or more issues. Thus, although desire for union representation is lower among non-members in non-unionised workplaces than it is for employees in unionised workplaces, the demand is very strong for a minority of non-members in unorganised workplaces, and could be still higher if unions could capitalise on the more widespread support for collective representation.

Table 6: Number of issues where non-members desire collective voice

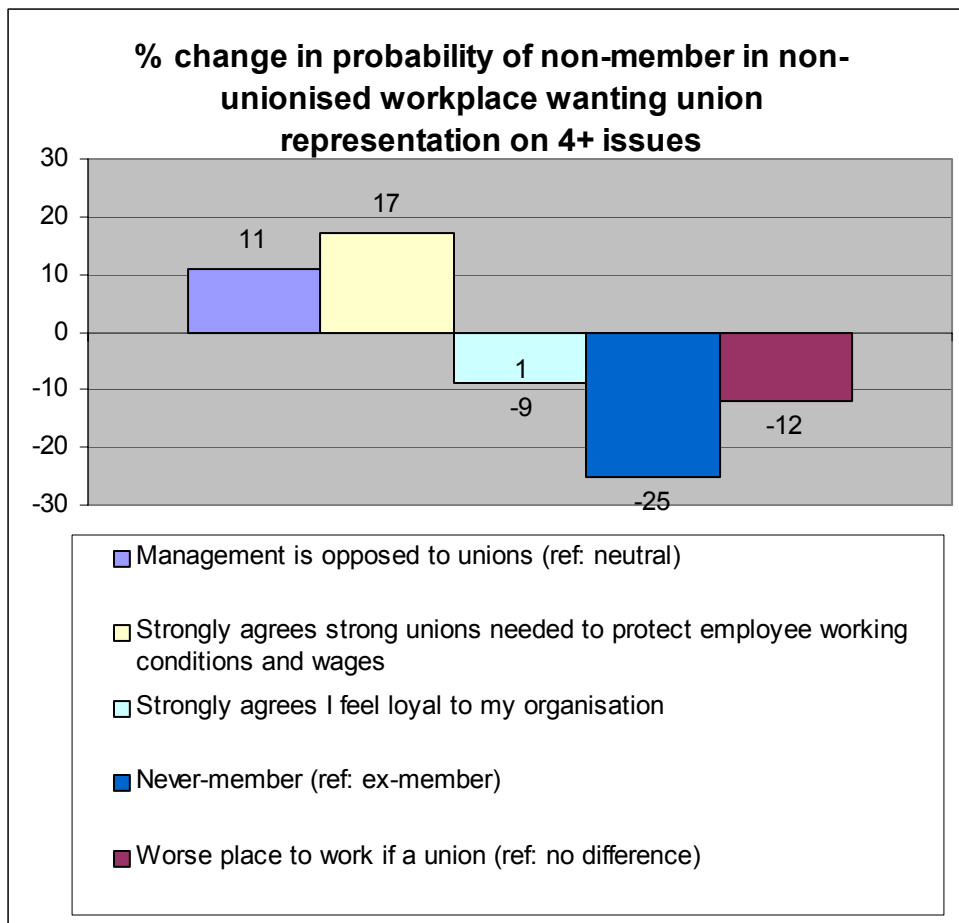|	(1) Union or on own	(2) Colleagues or on own	(1) – (2)
None	38	12	+26
1	10	8	+2
2	15	10	+5
3	13	19	-6
4	9	17	-8
5	6	12	-6
6	9	23	-14

Notes:

a. Source: BWRPS 2001. Base is non-members in non-unionised workplaces.
b. Figures show the percentage of non-members preferring collective to individual voice by number of issues. The final column is the percentage point difference between (1) and (2).

Multivariate analyses identifying independent associations between non-members' attitudes to unions and their desire for union representation on four or more issues broadly reflect the factors that are associated with their desire to join a union reported on earlier (Figure 15). So, desire for union representation is higher where non-members think a union may 'deliver', where there is a general belief that strong unions protect worker conditions, and where the employee does not feel a great deal of loyalty to the employer. Two other factors emerge strongly.   First, where non-members think management is opposed to unions, this increases the desire for union representation. This suggests employees feel a greater need for union involvement where the employer is known to be 'difficult', and points to the value of unions targeting their organising efforts on 'bad' employers where worker discontent is known to be high. Second, past experience of union membership predisposes non-members to join again.

Figure 15: Desire for union representation on 4+ issues among non-members in non-unionised workplaces

% change in probability of non-member in non-unionised workplace wanting union representation on 4+ issues

Legend:
- Management is opposed to unions (ref: neutral)
- Strongly agrees strong unions needed to protect employee working conditions and wages
- Strongly agrees I feel loyal to my organisation
- Never-member (ref: ex-member)
- Worse place to work if a union (ref: no difference)

a.   Source: BWRPS 2001
b.   Bars show % change in probability that non-members in non-unionised workplaces say they want union representation on 4+ issues. The percentage differences are evaluated for a person with mean sample characteristics. All effects are statistically significant at a confidence level of 95% or above. The mean

probability of wanting union representation on 4+ issues predicted under the model is 18%. N in model = 281.

c. Model fit: F(33,248) = 2.73, p>f = 0.0000.

d. Model is an ordered probit, with the dependent variable distinguishing between desire for zero union representation, desire for union representation on 1-3 issues and desire for union representation on 4-6 issues. Controls are: gender, age, ethnicity, marital status, qualifications, occupation, full-timer, workplace tenure, establishment size, organisational size, sector, region, employee satisfaction with influence over decisions affecting job/work, perception of employee relations climate, perception of how well management and employees get on, would go to union first for advice on workers' rights, wants union to work with management rather than defend workers, perceptions of union as modern, no problems at work.

The picture is somewhat bleaker if we turn to the WERS98 data on desire for union representation among non-members in non-unionised workplaces. The survey only asks about representation on 3 issues (getting pay increases, making a complaint, and over disciplinary matters) rather than 6 as in BWRPS. Four-fifths (79%) of non-members in non-unionised workplaces did not want any representation by a union, 14% wanted representation on 1 or 2 issues, and only 7% wanted it on all three issues. As in the case of non-members in unionised workplaces, desire was greatest on the issue of pay (Figure 16), but even on this issue only 16% wanted union representation, compared with two-thirds (65%) who preferred representing themselves.

Figure 16: Desire for union representation among non-members in non-unionised workplaces
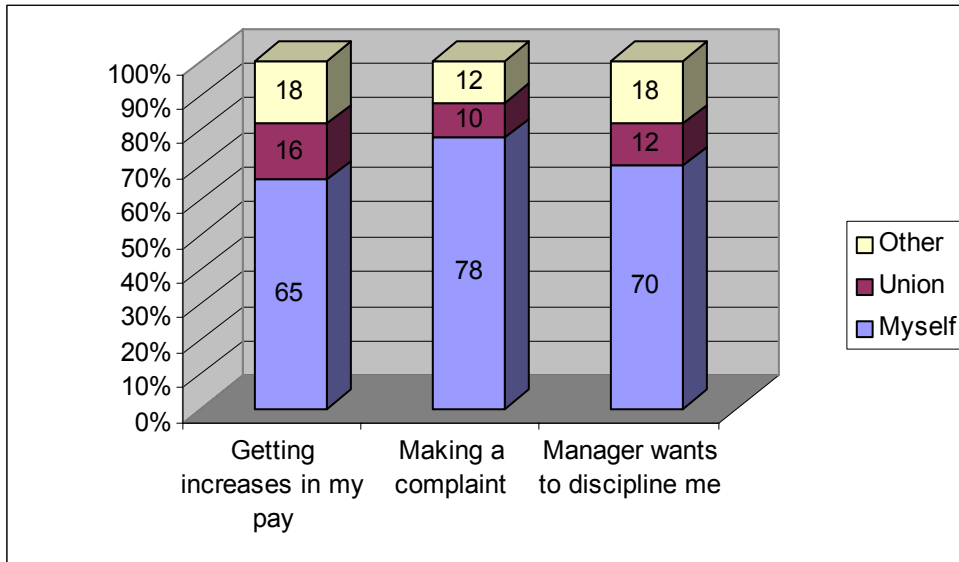
a. Source: WERS 1998. Confined to non-members in workplaces where they say there is no union on-site.

b. Figures are % non-members who thought they were best represented by themselves, a trade union or someone else on the three dimensions of pay, making a complaint and a manager wishing to discipline. 'Other' category combines 'another employee' and 'somebody else'.

Multivariate analyses identifying factors that are independently associated with non-members in non-unionised workplaces wanting union representation on one or more issues are presented in Figure 17. There are five notable findings.

First, employers' professed attitudes towards unions have no effect but, where employees perceive management to be diffident about unionisation (neutral, as opposed to being 'in favour'), this reduces the desire for union representation by 8%. This runs counter to the finding from BWRPS, reported above, where the desire for union representation rises in the presence of perceived managerial opposition to unionisation. However, it is in keeping with the WERS results on desire for representation among non-members in unionised workplaces (reported in Figure 11).

Second, even in workplaces where the non-member says there is no union, non-members' desire for union representation rises where, according to the managerial respondent, union density in the workplace is higher. Relative to a non-member in a workplace with density around zero, a similar member in a non-unionised workplace with density of 10% or more has a 6% higher probability of wanting union representation. This finding suggests that, if a union is successful in organising a small proportion of workers in a non-unionised workplace, desire for unionisation will grow among the remaining non-members as density rises.

Third, membership of a union in the past raises desire for representation by 15% - an effect similar in magnitude to that for non-members in unionised workplaces.

Fourth, extensive use of human resource management practices (HRM) has a modest effect in reducing the desire for union representation – by around 4%. This effect was not apparent for members and non-members in unionised workplaces. Perhaps where unions are in place they have some influence over the way HRM practices are implemented and are developed, so that they do not operate to the detriment of the union. Where the union has no established, formal role, on the other hand, HRM practices may limit the opportunities for union organising. That said, although the effect is statistically significant, it is not large. Furthermore, other methods of two-way communication (briefing groups, problem-solving groups and regular meetings with senior management) had no effect on desire for union representation. Nor did non-union forms of representation in non-unionised workplaces.

Finally, formal procedures in the workplace relating to grievance resolution and equal opportunities were positively associated with the desire for union representation, suggesting that formal procedures offer unions an opportunity for representation which is not evident in less regulated environments.

Figure 17: Desire for union representation among non-members in non-unionised workplaces
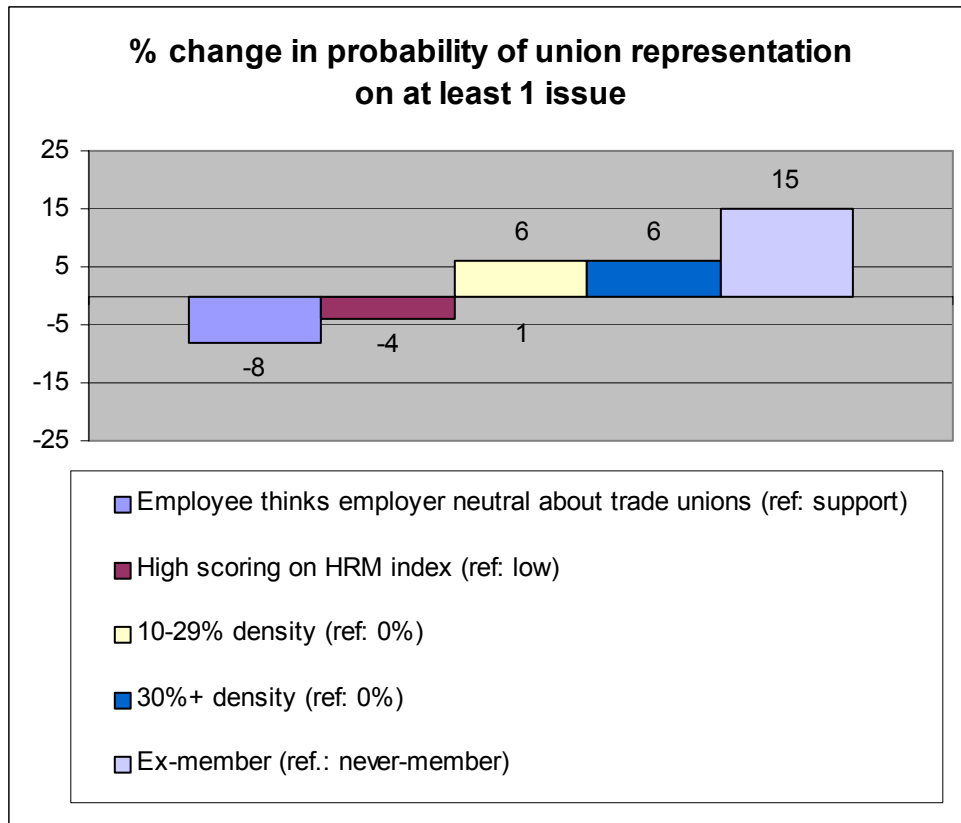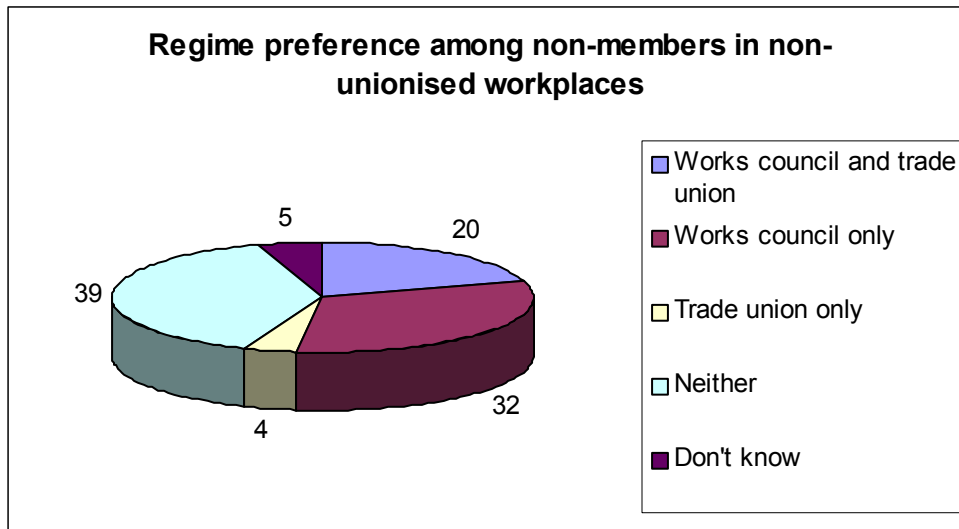

Notes:
a. Source: WERS 1998.
b. Columns are marginal effects from logistic regression models for non-members who say there is no union or staff association at their workplace (N=6933). The percentage differences are evaluated for a non-member with mean sample characteristics. Dependent variable is (0,1), employee scoring 1 where preferring union representation on at least one out of 3 items. The marginal effects reported are the percentage change in the probability of scoring at least 1 holding other factors constant at the mean for the sample. The mean probability of desiring union representation on at least 1 item under the model is 17%. The effect of union density of 20%+ is statistically significant at a 90% confidence level. The other effects are significant at a 95% confidence level or above.
c. Model fit: $P(84,937) = 6.28$, $p > f = 0.0000$.
d. Models also control for: gender, age, ethnicity, academic and vocational qualifications, occupation, hours worked, workplace tenure, if permanent contract, gross wages, establishment size, age of workplace, sector, region, single or multi-establishment organisation, SIC, if workplace covered by formal strategic plan, if IiP awarded, if workplace has a formal written policy on equal opportunities or managing diversity, if grievance procedure, if regular meetings with senior management, if team briefings, if quality circles, if European works council in UK, if non-union representative voice. For comparability with the BWRPS model, loyalty to the employing organisation and satisfaction with control over one's job were added to the model. Both were negatively associated with desire for union representation but they did not affect the remainder of the model.
e. The HRM index is based on a count of human resource management practices similar to that outlined by Pfeffer (1995) which he argues produce a sustainable competitive advantage through the effective management of people. These dimensions are: selectivity in recruiting; employment security; incentive pay; employee ownership; information sharing; participation and empowerment; self-managed teams; training and skill development; cross-utilisation and cross-training; symbolic egalitarianism; promotion from within.

In addition the score includes an indicator that the workplace has a formal strategic plan, strategic planning being a key component on HRM according to some commentators (Storey, 1992), and widespread appraisal system. Those workplaces with 8 or more of the 13 identified practices are labelled as 'high' HRM users. For more information on the meaning of each dimension and its derivation see Bryson (2001).

Are works councils likely to influence non-members' desire for union representation? Asked whether they think their workplace would be better with a works council, a trade union, both or neither, only one-quarter (24%) of non-members in non-unionised workplaces say they would prefer a regime with union involvement, and only 4% say they would want a union-only regime (Figure 18). In contrast, half (52%) envisage a regime with works council involvement. It is striking that two-fifths (39%) are content with no collective representation whatsoever. These figures indicate a much lower level of support for unionisation and collective voice per se among non-members in non-unionised workplaces compared with non-members in unionised workplaces (see Figure 12).

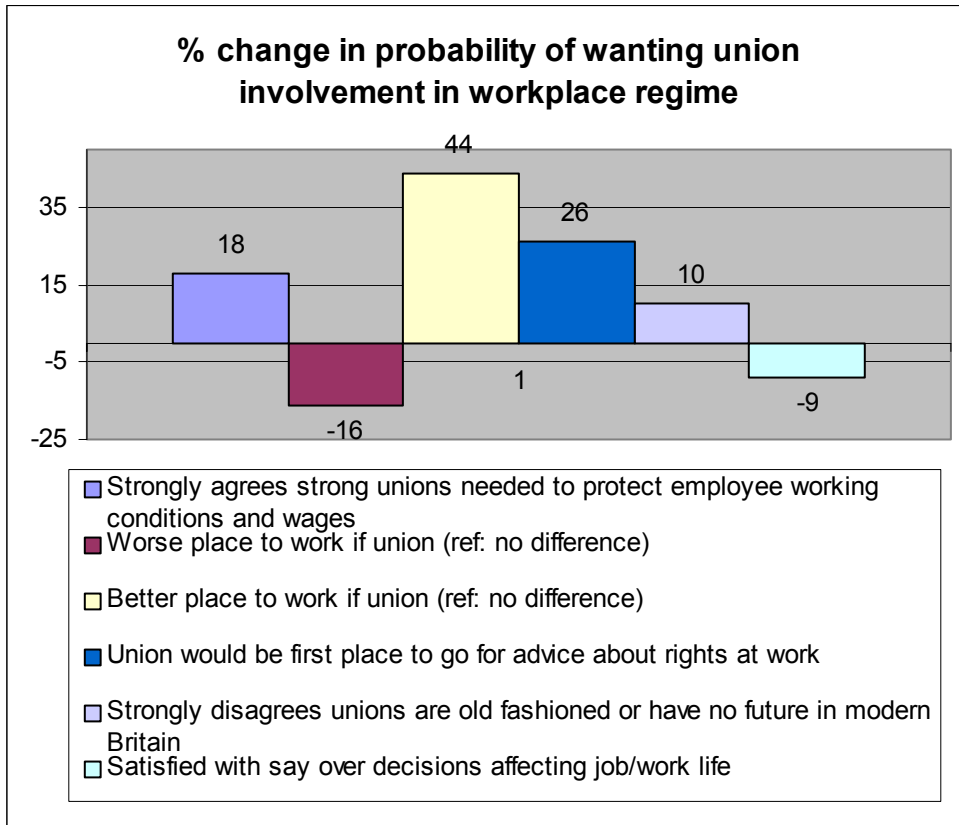**Figure 18: Regime preference among non-members in non-unionised workplaces**

Notes:
a. Source: BWRPS 2001. Base is non-members in non-unionised workplaces. N=590
b. Figures show percentages responding to the question: 'All in all, do you think your workplace would be better with…works council and trade union, works council on its own, trade union on its own, neither?'

Figure 19 identifies factors distinguishing the one-quarter of non-members who would like union involvement in the workplace regime. Not surprisingly, expectations regarding the likely impact of a union are crucial, as are beliefs that a strong union is needed for employee protection, and a belief that unions are not outmoded institutions. Where they value unions' advice on rights matters, employees much prefer union involvement. Where they are satisfied with the influence they have over decisions affecting their work, on the other hand, they are less likely to be interested in a union playing a role.

Figure 19: Regime preference among non-members in non-unionised workplaces

% change in probability of wanting union involvement in workplace regime

Legend:
- Strongly agrees strong unions needed to protect employee working conditions and wages
- Worse place to work if union (ref: no difference)
- Better place to work if union (ref: no difference)
- Union would be first place to go for advice about rights at work
- Strongly disagrees unions are old fashioned or have no future in modern Britain
- Satisfied with say over decisions affecting job/work life

a. Source: BWRPS 2001
b. Bars show % change in probability that non-members in non-unionised workplaces say they want union involved in workplace regime. The percentage differences are evaluated for a person with mean sample characteristics. The effects of union making things worse, satisfaction with influence and unions as old fashioned are statistically significant at a confidence level of 90%. The other effects are significant at a 95% confidence level or above. The mean probability of wanting union involvement is predicted under the model as 16%. N in model = 522.
c. Model fit: $F(34, 488) = 3.28$, $p>f = 0.0000$.
d. Controls are: gender, age, ethnicity, marital status, qualifications, occupation, full-timer, workplace tenure, establishment size, organisational size, sector, region, perception of employee relations climate, perception of how well management and employees get on, wants union to work with management rather than defend workers, no problems at work, loyal to organisation, never-member status, effective joint consultative committee or works council representing employees.

5. Implications for union organising

What lessons might unions draw from this chapter when considering issues of membership retention, in-fill recruitment and the organising of non-union workplaces?

Unions do have a retention problem. This is apparent from the rate of ex-membership (Bryson and Gomez, 2002a). In the data presented in the first part of this paper, a sizeable minority of members seem discontented with their union: 16% view the union as 'poor value for money'; 12% had no positive desire for a union presence at their

workplace; 14% of members in BWRPS wanted union representation on only 0-2 of the 6 items mentioned; and 10% of WERS members wanted union representation on none of the 3 items mentioned in that survey. This 10-14% of members are most at risk of leaving the union. What can unions do to retain them? First, they must identify ways in which unions can better represent members on a diverse set of issues, and consider ways in which union representation can bring benefits over and above those on offer through non-union collective representation. This means moving beyond unions' traditional comparative advantage as an 'insurance policy' and in improving terms and conditions, engaging in a wider set of issues pertinent to employee development and advancement at the workplace. Second, members prize union accountability, accessibility and responsiveness to members' needs – something termed 'organisational effectiveness' in this paper and the accompanying paper on union effectiveness (Bryson, 2003). Retention would benefit from improvements in these areas. Third, unions must improve perceptions of membership as value for money. This may involve better communication of the benefits accruing to membership and/or a reappraisal of the fees they levy from members. Fourth, they must be able to pick up and capitalise on signals of job dissatisfaction since these increase desire for union involvement. Fifth, members want unions to operate in partnership with the employer, but from a position of strength, and in a way that will bring tangible benefits to employees. This requires unions to engage constructively with employers while maintaining their distinctive role in representing workers. Sixth, unions should use existing members to extol the virtues of membership to non-members, capitalising on the fact that many join because friends and colleagues have joined, or because they believe that higher membership means more effective unions. Finally, members prefer a combination of works councils and unions, rather than unions alone, so the future of unions will involve co-existence. Fortunately for unions, works councils are not substitutes for union voice: they actually increase members' desire for union representation. So unions should be considering how best to take advantage of this complementarity.

Turning to the issue of in-fill recruitment, over half of non-members eligible to join the union at their workplace say they have never been asked to join the union. This is a missed opportunity, since over one-third of non-members in unionised workplaces say they are likely to join if asked. Around one-quarter of non-members in unionised workplaces will be wholly unresponsive to union recruitment drives, since they say they are 'very unlikely' to join, with a similar percentage saying they do not want union representation on any of the six items covered by BWRPS. So the first task for unions is to ensure unions in unionised workplaces approach non-members to explain the benefits of membership. If unions face big resource constraints in undertaking this exercise, they should devise means of identifying the four-in-ten non-members most likely to join, and the one-quarter least likely to join so as to target their efforts.

Non-members are less 'collectivist' than their union member colleagues and, where they want collective representation, they have a clear preference for non-union representation. Thus, greater effort is needed to convert any desire for collective representation into a desire for union representation. There are three problems unions must address to improve in-fill recruitment rates. First, as in the case of some sections of union membership, they must convince non-members that unions are effective organisations capable of making a real difference. Second, they must convince non-members that it is people like them who become members. This means overcoming non-members' concerns that 'people doing my job don't join' and the worry that membership is incompatible with loyalty to the employer. Third, having convinced non-members of the benefits of

membership, and assured them that membership is for workers like them, they must persuade non-members to pay the membership fee. This is partly a question of fee levels, but unions must also overcome 'free-riding' by identifying means by which they can deliver benefits to their members to the exclusion of non-members. One way to do this is to time the approach to non-members to coincide with a moment when they have a problem at work, since this is when they are most amenable to union representation.

Although four-in-ten non-members in unorganised workplaces have no desire for union representation on any of the six items in BWRPS, a surprisingly high percentage (46%) of non-members in non-union workplaces say they would join a union if asked. Even if, when faced with a real rather than a hypothetical choice, the figure is closer to the 16% who say they would be 'very likely' to join, this offers unions real organising opportunities.

In the absence of a union, desire for unionisation among non-members in unorganised workplaces turns on issues such as their general perceptions of unions in society, their image of unions, and expectations about what a union might do if it existed at their workplace. So, to succeed in organising unorganised workplaces unions must identify the basis on which employees make these judgements and, through information and other means, seek to persuade them of the value of unionisation. Five practical points emerge from the analysis. First, unions should initially target ex-members, since they have a greater desire for union representation than never-members. Second, non-members are more amenable to unionisation if they feel their relationship with the employer will not be compromised, indicating the value of approaches through the employer as well as direct to employees. (However, BWRPS suggests that support for membership rises with employer opposition to the union, which might indicate value in targeting 'bad' employers.) Third, unions should identify what they can offer which is not provided by HRM practices since these are associated with a reduced desire for unionisation in non-union workplaces. Fourth, although they do not appear to be direct substitutes for unionisation, works councils are far more popular than unions amongst unorganised workers. So unions should consider ways of working alongside these non-union forms of collective representation as a means of increasing desire for union representation. Finally, the desire for union representation rises with union density, suggesting increasing returns to gaining a foothold in an unorganised workplace.

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Data Appendix

The Workplace Employee Relations Survey 1998

The Workplace Employee Relations Survey 1998 (WERS98) is a nationally representative survey of workplaces with 10 or more employees covering all sectors of the economy except agriculture.[2] With weighting to account for complex survey design, survey results can be generalised with confidence to the population of workplaces in Britain employing 10 or more employees.

The analyses use two elements of the survey. The first is the management interview, conducted face-to-face with the most senior workplace manager responsible for employee relations.   This was supplemented by a pre-interview self-completion questionnaire providing workforce data that might have involved interrogating records. Interviews were conducted in 2191 workplaces with a response rate of 80 per cent. The second element we use is the survey of employees within workplaces where a management interview was obtained. Self-completion questionnaires were distributed to a simple random sample of 25 employees (or all employees in workplaces with 10-24) in the 1880 cases where management permitted it.[3]   Of the 44,283 questionnaires distributed, 28,237 (64 per cent) usable ones were returned.[4]

British Worker Representation and Participation Survey (BWRPS) 2001

The *British Worker Representation and Participation Survey* was a collaboration between the Trade Union Congress and the Centre for Economic Performance at the London School of Economics. It was conducted as part of the monthly BMRB Access Omnibus survey. Due to the number of questions involved and the specialist subject matter the BWRPS was allocated nearly the whole omnibus survey to itself. Interviews were conducted using face-to-face computer assisted personal interviewing (CAPI) techniques. The fieldwork was conducted in two waves. Wave 1 was from June 14th to 20th. Wave 2 was from July 5th to 11th .   In total, some 3614 interviews were conducted as part of the Omnibus survey. Of these 1,355 people were eligible to take part in the BWRPS. The weighting schema used in this analysis ensures that demographic profiles match those for all employees in Great Britain aged 15 or over.

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[2] For a comprehensive technical account of the survey see Airey *et al.* (1999) and for the initial analysis of the survey see Cully *et al.* (1999). The survey data sets are available from The Data Archive, University of Essex.
[3] The probability of worker selection is the product of the probability of the workplace being selected and the probability of an employee being selected from within that workplace. Cully *et al.* (1999: 306) note the advantages of this approach.
[4] The weighting scheme used in this paper compensates for sample non-response bias which was detected in the employee survey (Airie *et al.*, 1999: 91-92).