

TUC

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Union Health and Safety Reps Survey

2020 / 2021



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Section 1: Introduction

The survey

This is the 13th biennial TUC survey of safety representatives. The report is used by the TUC to understand the changing experience of safety representatives at work and to help provide more support. We also use the survey to inform public policy debates. The TUC wants union safety representatives and safety committees to discuss and use the report to help with their ongoing work.

The responses provide much information about the profile of safety representatives, the work they do to improve safety and the help (or otherwise) they get in this from employers and enforcement agencies.

The first part of the questionnaire used for 2020/21 was very similar to that used in the 2018 and earlier surveys, and the first five sections of this report are based on that. However, the survey itself was conducted under very different conditions from previous biennial safety rep surveys: in other words, during the Covid-19 pandemic. Some the differences reported since the 2018 survey have to be understood in this context.

In addition to the usual questions, the questionnaire had an additional set of questions specifically related to the pandemic. Therefore, this report includes three additional sections (sections six, seven and eight) which are specifically about workplace health and safety during the pandemic.

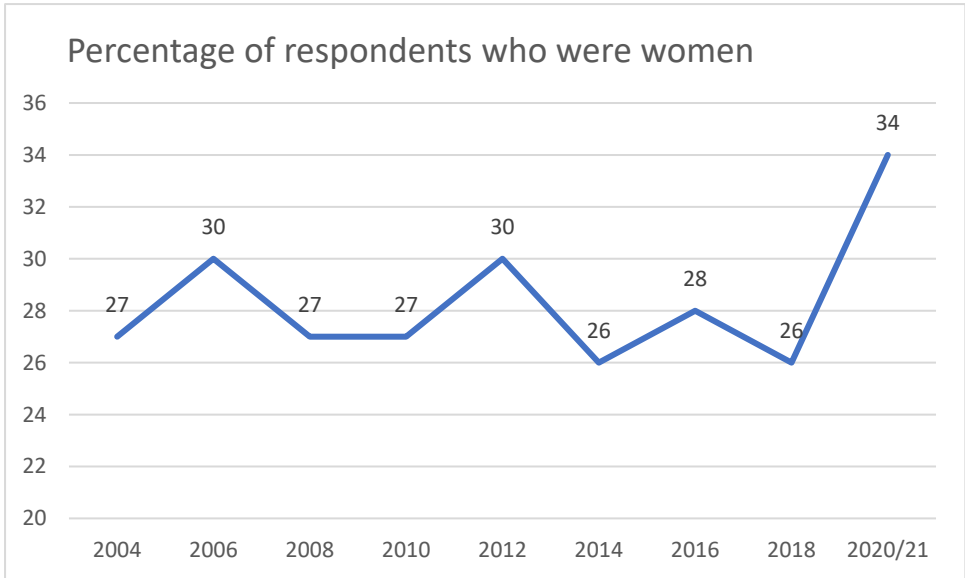
One change to the survey methodology in 2020/21 compared with previous years is that it was an online-only survey, whereas in previous years hard copies of the questionnaire were also distributed. In the 2018 survey, this method was taken up by just 9 per cent of participants, and this figure had been decreasing for several years.

One of the big changes in survey outcome this year has been in the number of survey participants. A total of 2,138 safety representatives responded to the online questionnaire in the period November 2020 to January 2021. This was almost twice as many as in the 2018 survey, when 1,073 responded.

Profile of safety representatives and their workplaces

The profile of respondents to the 2020 survey would seem to be more diverse than previously in terms of their personal characteristics, with higher proportions of women, disabled and Black and Minority Ethnic safety reps participating. However, this diversity did not include an increase in the proportion of young people responding.

One third (33.8 per cent) of the safety representatives responding were women – a substantially higher proportion than in 2018, when the figure was 26 per cent and more than in previous biennial safety rep surveys (see chart).



Nineteen per cent considered themselves to be disabled compared with just 11 per cent two years ago.

Ninety-one per cent described themselves as White (“White British”, “White European” or “Other white background”) compared with 94 per cent saying they were from a white background in 2018. Just under three per cent (2.8 per cent) described themselves as one of the following: “Asian British”, “Indian”, “Pakistani”, “Bangladeshi”, “Chinese” or “Other Asian background”. And 2.6 per cent said they were either “Black British”, “Black African”, “African Caribbean” or of “other Black background”.

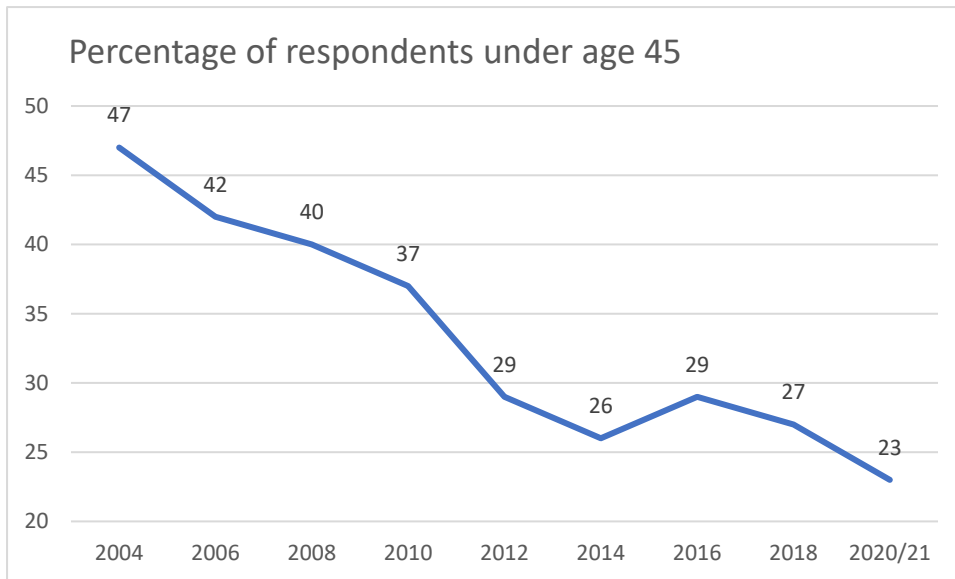
The ethnicity breakdown of respondents suggests a slight increase in diversity than in previous surveys - the proportion who are white has hovered around between 93 per cent and 95 per cent since 2010. (Before 2010 the categories were substantially changed so the data is not comparable.)

A lower proportion of respondents were aged 45 or under than was the case in 2018: 23 per cent compared with 27 per cent, with a substantially higher proportion over age 60 (Table A).

Table A: Age profile of respondents

Age group	2020	2018
16–35	8%	10%
36–45	15%	17%
46–60	61%	62%
60+	16%	11%

The ageing of the ranks of union safety representatives can be seen by the declining proportion of respondents to previous biennial safety rep surveys who were under age 45 (see chart).



There were substantial changes compared with 2018 in the profile of respondents in terms of their employment situation, which may be partly related to the context of the pandemic.

For example, there was a big difference in terms of the economic sector that participants are employed in, with the gap between the public and private sector proportions widening sharply since 2018.

In 2020, 67 per cent of respondents worked for employers located in the public sector. This compares with 58 per cent in 2018. Meanwhile the private sector accounted for just 29 per cent of respondents, compared with 45 per cent in 2018. In the current year, 2 per cent of respondents worked in the not-for-profit/voluntary sector, while in 2018 it was 3 per cent.

Another big change was the pattern of industries in which respondents are employed. In 2020, the industry providing the largest proportion of respondents – at 17 per cent – was education, which only accounted for 7 per cent in 2018. On the other hand, the largest group last time was transport and communications, which accounted for 38 per cent of respondents, whereas in 2020 only 16 per cent came from that industrial sector.

As there was only one respondent from the hotels sector, it has not been included in some of the cross-sectional analyses in this report.

Table B: Industry profile of respondents

	2020	2018
Education	17%	7%
Other services	17%	17%
Transport and communications	16%	38%
Local government	12%	6%
Health services	11%	13%
Central government	8%	4%
Manufacturing	7%	6%
Distribution	6%	na*
Energy and water	2%	4%

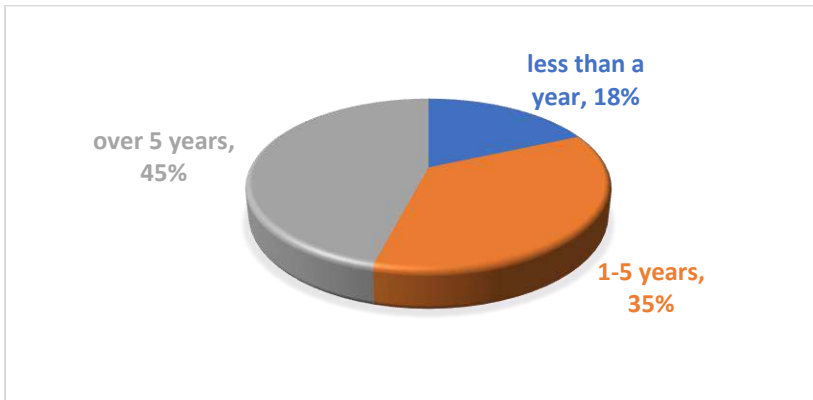
Banking, insurance and finance	2%	0%
Leisure services	1%	1%
Construction	1%	1%
Agriculture and fishing	0%	0%
Hotels and restaurants	0%	na*
Voluntary sector	0%	0%

*Distribution, hotels and restaurants were one category in 2018 and accounted for 3 per cent of respondents

There has been less change in the size of workplaces represented in the survey, although a slightly smaller proportion of respondents come from the largest workplaces. Twenty-eight per cent work in workplaces with 1,000 or more workers compared with 31 per cent in 2018. Almost the same proportion came from workplaces of fewer than 100 employees (28 per cent compared with 29 per cent in 2018).

Eighteen per cent of respondents said they had been a safety rep for less than a year – slightly more than the 16 per cent who said this in 2018. Forty-five per cent had been in the role for over five years and 35 per cent for one to five years.

Time respondent has been a safety rep



Sixty-nine per cent of respondents were also union reps or stewards – far more than two years ago when just 43 per cent said this. One possible factor in this change is that possibly more union reps/stewards were involved in health and safety issues during the pandemic – and therefore contributing to the vastly increased number of participants in the survey.

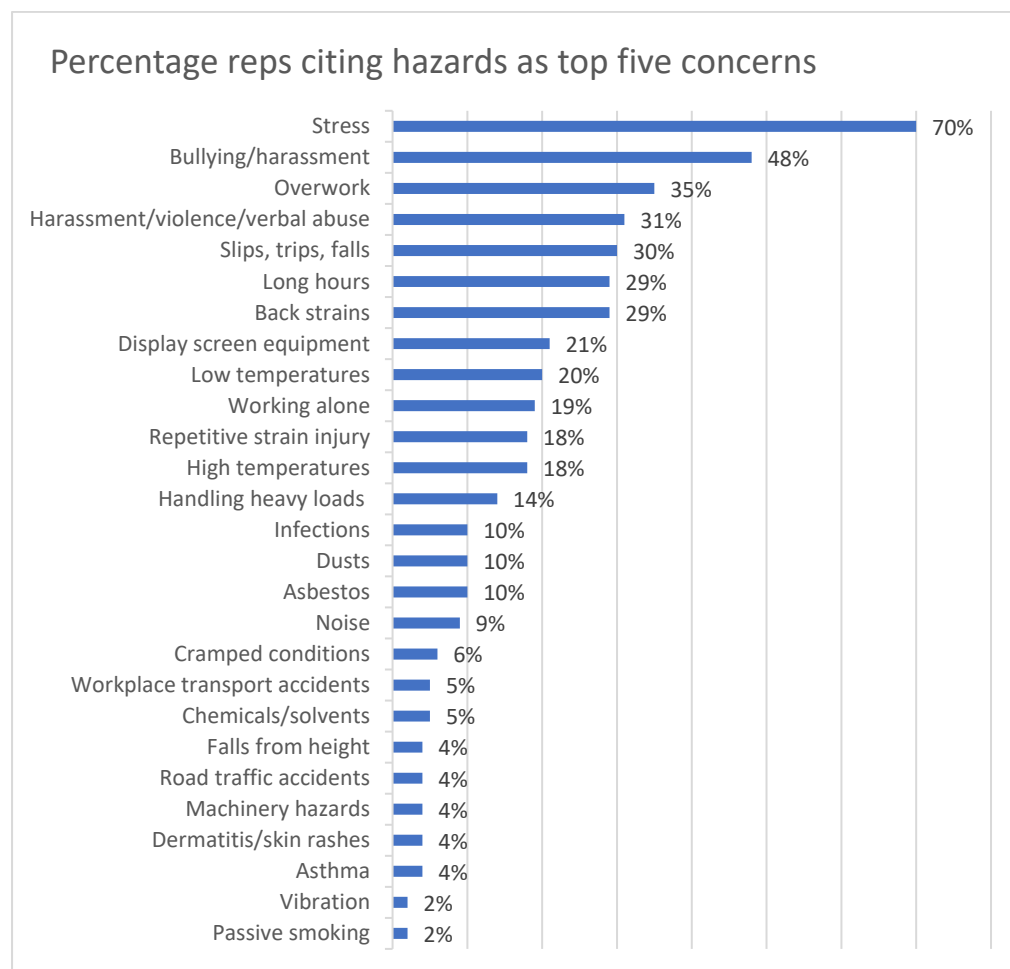
Safety representatives responded from all regions/countries of the UK. The largest groups of respondents came from Scotland (15 per cent), the North West (13 per cent), Yorkshire and the Humber (11 per cent) and London (10 per cent).

Ninety-eight per cent of safety representatives had access to the internet at home (94 per cent in 2018) and 85 per cent do so at work, as in 2018.

Section 2: Hazards at work

Main hazards (excluding Covid-19)

Safety representatives were asked to identify the main hazards of concern to workers at their workplace *excluding Covid*, and to identify the top five of their concerns in order of importance. All those mentioned as being in respondents' top five were aggregated to provide a table of "top-five hazards" across all survey respondents (see chart).



This shows that of all the hazards listed, stress is the most widespread concern, cited by 70 per cent of safety reps. The other most commonly cited main hazards of concern were "bullying/harassment", "overwork", "harassment, violence and abuse" and "slips, trips, falls".

Back strains and long hours of work were in sixth and seventh place, respectively, cited as a top-five concern by almost one in three safety representatives. And one in five say there are serious concerns about display screen equipment and low temperatures.

Table 1: Proportion of safety reps citing hazard in their top five

	2020/21	2018	2016	2014
Stress	70%	69%	70%	67%
Bullying/harassment*	48%	45%	48%	46%
Overwork	35%	36%	40%	36%
Harassment, violence, verbal abuse*	31%	23%	24%	19%
Slips, trips, falls**	30%	31%	28%	32%
Back strains	29%	32%	32%	33%
Long hours	29%	29%	30%	26%
Display screen equipment	21%	18%	21%	22%
Low temperatures	20%	14%	12%	11%
Working alone	19%	25%	18%	19%
High temperatures	18%	14%	16%	17%
Repetitive strain injury	18%	23%	26%	27%
Handling heavy loads	14%	14%	13%	19%
Asbestos	10%	9%	10%	10%
Dusts	10%	10%	9%	10%
Infections	10%	5%	5%	5%
Noise	9%	11%	11%	9%
Cramped conditions	6%	7%	6%	7%
Chemicals	5%	5%	6%	9%
Workplace transport accidents	5%	8%	5%	6%
Asthma	4%	2%	1%	2%
Dermatitis/skin conditions	4%	4%	3%	4%
Machinery hazards	4%	5%	5%	6%
Road traffic accidents	4%	10%	7%	8%
Falls from height***	4%	7%	6%	8%
Passive smoking	2%	3%	2%	2%
Vibration	2%	3%	4%	3%

*In 2020/21 this category was redefined. Was previously "violence and threats".

** In 2020/21 this category was redefined. Was previously "slips, trips, falls on the level".

***In 2020/21 this category was redefined. Was previously "slips, trips, falls from a height".

Table 1 compares the proportion of respondents citing each hazard as a top-five concern over the last seven years. It reveals that there has been one remarkable consistency throughout the period, which is that stress has been far and away the most frequently cited top-five concern. In each survey it has been picked out as a main hazard by more than two in three survey respondents.

In fact, stress – or "stress or overwork" as the hazard was categorised before 2010 - has been the most commonly selected major concern since the series of surveys began in 1998, when overwork or stress" was picked out by 77 per cent of respondents.

Looking at the last couple of years, one of the biggest changes in 2020/21 compared with 2018, is that harassment, violence and verbal abuse was cited by a much larger proportion of respondents as a top-five hazard than "violence and threats" was two years previously. (But note

that the category was expanded somewhat so the two are not strictly comparable.) It was fourth in the list this time, while “violence and threats” had come in ninth place in the list in 2018.

There was a small increase in the proportion of respondents putting bullying and harassment in their top five concerns than in 2018, from 45 per cent to 48 per cent.

There were also jumps in the numbers expressing concern over both low and high temperatures and about infections. Although participants were asked in this question to exclude Covid-19 concerns, this increased concern over infections may nevertheless reflect the pandemic context.

Hazards which took more of a back seat in 2020/21 than previously include working alone, although almost one in five respondents still cited it as a top-five hazard, repetitive strain injury and both workplace transport and road traffic accidents.

Hazards by sector

Certain hazards are much more prevalent in the public sector and others in the private sector. While this is not surprising in some cases, for example in relation to certain physical hazards found predominantly in private sector industries, it is less obvious for others, such as psycho-social hazards, including stress, bullying/harassment and violence and threats.

Table 2 separates the results into public and private sectors, still concentrating on safety representatives’ top five concerns.

Table 2: Hazards by public/private sectors

	Public	Private
Stress	76%	61%
Bullying/harassment	53%	43%
Overwork	40%	24%
Harassment, violence, verbal abuse	35%	26%
Long hours of work	32%	26%
Back strains	26%	37%
Slips, trips, falls	25%	46%
Display screen equipment	25%	13%
Working alone	21%	17%
Low temperatures	20%	22%
High temperatures	19%	18%
Repetitive strain injury	16%	25%
Infections	12%	9%
Handling heavy loads	11%	20%
Asbestos	11%	9%
Dusts	9%	12%
Noise	7%	13%
Cramped conditions	7%	5%
Chemicals or solvents	5%	6%
Workplace transport accidents	4%	9%
Asthma	4%	3%
Dermatitis/skin rashes	4%	3%
Road traffic accidents	3%	9%

Machinery hazards	3%	8%
Falls from height	3%	7%
Vibration	2%	4%
Passive smoking	2%	3%

While stress remains the most widespread main concern in both sectors, thereafter the pattern diverges somewhat.

In the public sector, the leading problems are all psycho-social hazards: after stress come bullying/harassment, overwork, harassment/violence/verbal abuse and long hours of work.

This represents an even higher level of concentration on these areas in the public sector than two years ago. In 2018, back strains were the fourth most common main concern (picked out by 33 per cent), along with long hours, both coming ahead of violence and threats (then 29 per cent).

Proportions citing stress and bullying/harassment have also risen since 2018 (when they were cited by 74 per cent and 49 per cent respectively).

Concern over display screen equipment has also become more prevalent, pinpointed by 25 per cent of public sector respondents, compared with 21 per cent in 2018, and moving up from joint ninth to joint seventh most widespread concern. A possible cause of this could be moves to working from home during the pandemic, which may have been more common in the public sector than the private sector.

This could also be the route for the substantially more common concern over both high and low temperatures.

The rise in concern over infections (from 7 to 12 per cent) is likely to be a result of the Covid pandemic.

At the same time, working alone moved down the priority list in the public sector.

Another worrying point to note in this sector is the rise in concern over asbestos. While relatively low in the priority list, it was cited as a top-five concern by 11 per cent of public sector respondents in the latest survey, up from 8 per cent in 2018. The proportion of public sector safety reps who said asbestos was a top-five concern has almost tripled since 2008, when it was cited by just 4 per cent. The figure has been 8 or 9 per cent in the intervening years until reaching a high in 2020/21.

In the private sector in 2020/21, after stress came slips/trips/falls, bullying/harassment, back strains and harassment/violence/verbal abuse.

Although concern over psycho-social hazards tends to be lower here than in the public sector, some aspects have become of more widespread concern: bullying/harassment and violence and threats in 2018 together attracted a total of 61 per cent of citations, while in 2020 this combined figure was 69 per cent.

Other hazards which were much more often cited as a top-five concern in the private sector this time were back strains (up from 33 to 37 per cent), low temperatures (up from 15 to 22 per cent) and infections (up from 3 to 9 per cent).

Hazards cited by fewer private sector respondents than two years ago were road traffic accidents (down from 14 per cent to 9 per cent) and falls from height (down from 12 per cent to 7 per cent).

Hazards by industrial sector

Table 3 sets out the most widely cited top-five concerns in each of the industries covered.

As ever, stress dominates the top position, being the most widespread concern – or jointly top with others – in 12 of the 14 industrial sectors.

Table 3: the five main hazards of concern by industry (%)

Sector (number of reps responding)	1st concern	2nd concern	3rd concern	4th concern	5th concern
Agriculture and fishing (9)	Bullying/ harassment, long hours, overwork, stress, all 56%				DSE, slips/trips/falls, both 33%
Banking, insurance and finance (33)	Stress 61%	DSE 58%	Low temperatures 42%	High temperatures 30%	Back strains 27%
Central government (141)	Stress 81%	Bullying/ harassment 66%	DSE 51%	Overwork 41%	Harassment/ violence/verbal abuse 38%
Construction (17)	Slips/trips/falls 53%	Dusts, stress both 47%		Back strains, bullying/ harassment, noise all 35%	
Distribution (109)	Stress 61%	Slips/trips/falls 53%	Back strains 47%	Bullying/ harassment 46%	Handling heavy loads 33%
Education (308)	Stress 81%	Overwork 61%	Long hours 50%	Bullying / harassment 46%	Harassment/ violence/verbal abuse 29%
Energy and water (31)	Stress 74%	Back strains, bullying/harassment both 45%		DSE, slips/trips/falls both 39%	
Health services (194)	Stress 80%	Bullying/ harassment 61%	Overwork 42%	Back strains 39%	Harassment/ violence/verbal abuse 36%
Hotels and restaurants (1)	Back strains, bullying/harassment, long hours, overwork, harassment/violence/verbal abuse all 100%				
Leisure services (21)	Bullying/ harassment 57%	Stress 52%	Low temperatures 43%	High temperatures, noise, harassment/violence/verbal threats all 33%	
Local government (212)	Stress 82%	Bullying/ harassment 62%	Harassment/ violence/ verbal threats 42%	Overwork 35%	Working alone 34%
Manufacturing (123)	Stress 54%	Slips/trips/falls 51%	Back strains 41%	Bullying/harassment, repetitive strain injury both 34%	
Other services (303)	Stress 71%	Bullying/ harassment 47%	Slips/trips/falls 43%	Harassment/ violence/verbal threats 38%	Back strains 32%
Transport and communications (296)	Stress 58%	Bullying /harassment 43%	Slips/trips/falls 42%	Long hours, harassment/violence/verbal threats both 34%	
Voluntary sector (8)	Stress 100%	Bullying/harassment, overwork, working alone all 63%			Long hours, harassment/ violence/verbal threats both 38%

There have been a few notable changes in some of the industries since the 2018 survey:

Banking, insurance and finance – the number of reps from this sector responding to the survey shot up from just 3 per cent in 2018 to 33 per cent this time around. Comparisons are therefore of doubtful validity, though it is notable that concern over display screen equipment (DSE), mentioned by one of the three respondents in 2018, was cited by 58 per cent of respondents this time around.

Central government – Concern over DSE has also become more common in this sector than it was in 2018 (51 per cent citing compared with 41 per cent). In addition, harassment/violence/verbal abuse has made it into the five most common concerns which was not the case for “violence and threats” two years ago.

Construction – noticeable here is that dusts, cited as a main concern by 47 per cent in construction this time, and hitting the number two spot, did not even appear in the top five in 2018.

Distribution – this was established as a category on its own this time, whereas in 2018 it included hotels, so is not strictly comparable (although since only one rep responded from the hotels and restaurants this time it may be a similar grouping). But stress was picked out more widely (61 per cent) in distribution this time than in the 2018 group (52 per cent).

Education – despite far more education reps responding this time than in 2018 (308 compared with 68), their top five concerns remain exactly as they were then and were selected by almost the same proportion of respondents.

Energy and water – Stress was cited by an even higher proportion of respondents this time (74 per cent compared with 67 per cent in 2018). Back strains also jumped from the number 5 spot to number 2 (cited by 45 per cent compared with 31 per cent).

Health services – one of the big changes here was in the concern over bullying/harassment, cited by 61 per cent of health services reps compared with 48 per cent in 2018. This meant it overtook overwork as the second most widespread concern. Harassment/violence/verbal abuse also made an entry into the table of five, which “violence and threats” did not two years ago.

Leisure services – on the plus-side, noise was cited by fewer reps this year (33 per cent compared with 50 per cent in 2018). However, harassment/violence/verbal abuse went the other, jumping into the five most common concerns, which it was not two years ago.

Local government – the number of reps responding from this sector quadrupled compared with 2018, but the priority concerns were little changed.

Manufacturing – stress was chosen by fewer manufacturing safety reps as a top-five concern picked out by 54 per cent compared with 66 per cent but was still in the top spot. The proportion citing slips/trips/falls rose from 38 per cent to 51 per cent, and back strains made a foray into the table which it did not in 2018.

Other services – the key change here was the new appearance of harassment/violence/verbal abuse in the five most common key concerns, selected by 38 per cent of reps, overtaking both back strains and overwork.

Transport and communications – similarly, harassment/violence/verbal abuse made the top five table in this industry unlike in 2018, knocking out back strains. It was cited by 34 per cent of reps.

Hazards by workplace size

Table 4: Most common top-five concerns in workplaces of different sizes

Number of workers (number of responses in group)	1st concern	2nd concern	3rd concern	4th concern	5th concern
Under 5 (14)	Stress 71%	Slips/trips/falls 43%	Bullying/harassment, high temperatures/long hours, all 36%		
6–49 (281)	Stress 72%	Bullying/harassment 43%	Back strains 36%	Overwork 33%	Harassment/violence/verbal abuse 32%
50–99 (200)	Stress 68%	Overwork 40%	Bullying/harassment 39%	Long hours 38%	Harassment/violence verbal abuse 34%
100–199 (291)	Stress 68%	Bullying/harassment 43%	Overwork 36%	Long hours 34%	Slips/trips/falls, harassment/violence/verbal abuse, both 33%
200–999 (514)	Stress 71%	Bullying/harassment 50%	Slips/trips/falls 36%	Back strains, overwork, both 32%	
1,000 or more (504)	Stress 74%	Bullying/harassment 62%	Overwork 39%	Harassment/violence/verbal abuse 34%	Long hours 30%

As in previous surveys, stress is the most widespread top-five concern in all sizes of workplace (Table 4). Compared with 2018, there is less variation in its prominence across the range. Indeed, it has become a more common concern among workplaces with fewer than 50 employees than it was two years ago, when it was cited by just 54 per cent.

For the first time the survey asked about the very smallest workplaces (fewer than 5 workers) separately. Although only a small number of workplaces fitted into this category (14), it would seem that apart from stress, the main concerns varied slightly from those in the 6–49 category, with slips/trips falls, high temperatures and long hours being among the five most common top concerns.

In the other workplace size groups, the most common concerns were largely the same pattern as two years ago, although there were a couple of changes. Harassment/violence/verbal abuse newly entered the table for workplaces in the 50–99 category and those with 1,000 or more. Meanwhile long hours made an entry in workplaces with 100–199 and 1,000+ workers.

Table 5: Most common hazards overall by workplace size

	Under 5 workers	6–49 workers	50–99 workers	100–199 workers	200–999 workers	1,000 or more workers
Stress	71%	72%	68%	68%	71%	74%
Bullying/harassment	36%	43%	39%	43%	50%	62%
Overwork	14%	33%	40%	36%	32%	39%
Harassment, violence, verbal abuse*	-	32%	34%	33%	31%	34%

Slips, trips, falls**	43%	28%	25%	33%	36%	29%
Back strains	21%	36%	28%	28%	32%	24%
Long hours of work	36%	28%	38%	34%	24%	30%
Display screen equipment	21%	17%	17%	19%	21%	28%
Low temperatures	21%	20%	23%	25%	23%	15%

Table 5 sets out how the most common top-five hazards overall vary by workplace size. There are few clear patterns, though it is noticeable that bullying/harassment is a more widespread concern in the largest two workplace sizes, especially the very largest. DSE concerns are substantially higher in workplaces with 1,000 or more employees than elsewhere.

Hazards by region/country

Table 6: Main hazards of concern by region/country

Region/country	1st concern	2nd concern	3rd concern	4th concern	5th concern
East Midlands	Stress 67%	Bullying/harassment 49%	Back strains 36%	Slips/trips/falls 35%	Long hours 30%
East of England	Stress 75%	Bullying/harassment 57%	Slips/trips/falls 35%	Harassment/violence/verbal abuse 33%	Back strains 29%
London	Stress 71%	Bullying/harassment 54%	Overwork 37%	Long hours 35%	Harassment/violence/verbal abuse 32%
North East	Stress 77%	Bullying/harassment 47%	Slips/trips/falls 40%	Back strains 38%	Harassment/violence/verbal abuse 36%
North West	Stress 68%	Bullying/harassment 55%	Overwork 38%	Slips/trips/falls 35%	Long hours, harassment/violence/abuse, both 33%
Northern Ireland	Stress 86%	Back strains 45%	Overwork 41%	Bullying/harassment, slips/trips/falls, both 38%	
Scotland	Stress 75%	Bullying/harassment 51%	Overwork 41%	Harassment/violence/verbal abuse 36%	Long hours 31%
South East	Stress 66%	Bullying/harassment 49%	Long hours, overwork, both 34%	Back strains, Harassment/violence/verbal abuse, both 30%	
South West	Stress 67%	Bullying/harassment 50%	Slips/trips/falls 36%	Overwork 35%	Harassment/violence/verbal abuse 33%
Wales	Stress 71%	Bullying/harassment 48%	Slips/trips/falls 38%	Overwork 35%	Long hours 34%
West Midlands	Stress 74%	Bullying/harassment 46%	Overwork 33%	Long hours, slips/trips/falls, both 31%	
Yorkshire and the Humber	Stress 71%	Bullying/harassment 46%	Harassment/violence/verbal abuse 37%	Overwork 36%	Slips/trips/falls 32%

Stress is the most widespread top-five concern in all regions/countries of the UK and bullying/harassment is the second most common in all but Northern Ireland.

The region definitions are not all identical to those in the 2018 survey, but some observations can be made compared with two years ago.

For example, stress is much more dominant in London, Northern Ireland, Scotland, Wales and Yorkshire and the Humber than previously, and bullying/harassment is much more widespread a concern this time in East of England (compared to East Anglia in 2018), London, North West, South West and Yorkshire and the Humber. It is less dominant than in 2018 in Northern Ireland and Wales.

Overwork is a more common concern than in 2018 in the North West, Northern Ireland, Wales and Yorkshire and the Humber.

And the widened category of "harassment/violence/verbal abuse" featured in eight regions' most widespread top five hazards this time, whereas the category "violence and threats" only featured in three in 2018.

Section 3:

Managing health and safety

As well as questions about the main hazards at work, safety representatives were asked about the way health and safety is managed in their workplace. In particular, the TUC asked about health and safety policies, risk assessments and occupational health services.

Health and safety policies

Almost all safety representatives (95 per cent) said their employer had a written health and safety policy – slightly more than in 2018 (93 per cent). The proportion was slightly higher the larger the workplace group, though this was largely because those in the smaller workplaces did not know whether their employer had a policy.

There was little variation between the public, private and not-for-profit/voluntary sectors on this or between the main industrial sectors. However, those in food or drink manufacturing and in social care were more likely than average to say their employer did not have a health and safety policy.

Risk assessments

Only 74 per cent of respondents said their management had carried out a formal risk assessment in the last two years – rather shocking considering the context 2020/21. It was a smaller proportion than in 2018, when 80 per cent answered that their employer had done so. However, it may be that the wider pool of respondents this time meant less certainty in this area, as a higher proportion of safety representatives said they did not know whether any risk assessments had been done (17 per cent compared with 10 per cent in 2018).

The proportion where risk assessments had been conducted was much lower than average in the distribution industry (64 per cent) and other services (65 per cent). But this may be down to the much lower awareness of the issue, with a much higher than average proportion of respondents in each case (one in four) saying they did not know.

Of the safety representatives saying risk assessments had been carried out, 94 per cent said the assessments had been written down – a higher proportion than two years ago, when it was 89 per cent.

Sixty per cent said their employer's risk assessment(s) had included consideration of the risks to women of childbearing age, in particular pregnant women and breastfeeding mothers. One in five (22 per cent) did not know whether it had.

And 62 per cent said their employer's risk assessment(s) had covered all roles carried out by agency and self-employed workers as well as those directly employed, with another 24 per cent saying they did not know.

Overall, only 62 per cent of those whose employer had carried out a full risk assessment felt it had been adequate – roughly the same proportion as in 2018 (61 per cent). Twenty-three per cent said they were inadequate while 15 per cent did not know.

Satisfaction with risk assessments was slightly higher in the private sector than the public sector and was lowest among respondents from large workplaces.

In the different industries, satisfaction with risk assessments was relatively high in banking, insurance and finance, and in construction, but low in health services and very low in leisure services.

Safety reps' involvement in the risk assessment process

The Health and Safety at Work Act 1974 and the Safety Representatives and Safety Committees Regulations 1977 require that employers consult with recognised trade union safety representatives on health, safety and welfare matters.

However, many safety representatives still say they are not consulted over risk assessments. Survey participants were asked if they or other safety reps were involved in their employer's risk assessment(s):

- Just 15 per cent said safety reps were fully involved, with another 18 per cent involved "a lot"
- 35 per cent said safety reps were involved "a little"
- 27 per cent said safety reps were not involved at all.

The rest did not know.

In earlier TUC safety rep surveys, the question was asked differently, but there is nevertheless evidence of improvement in this area. In both the 2018 and 2016 surveys, far more respondents said they were "not involved at all" (41 per cent in both cases).

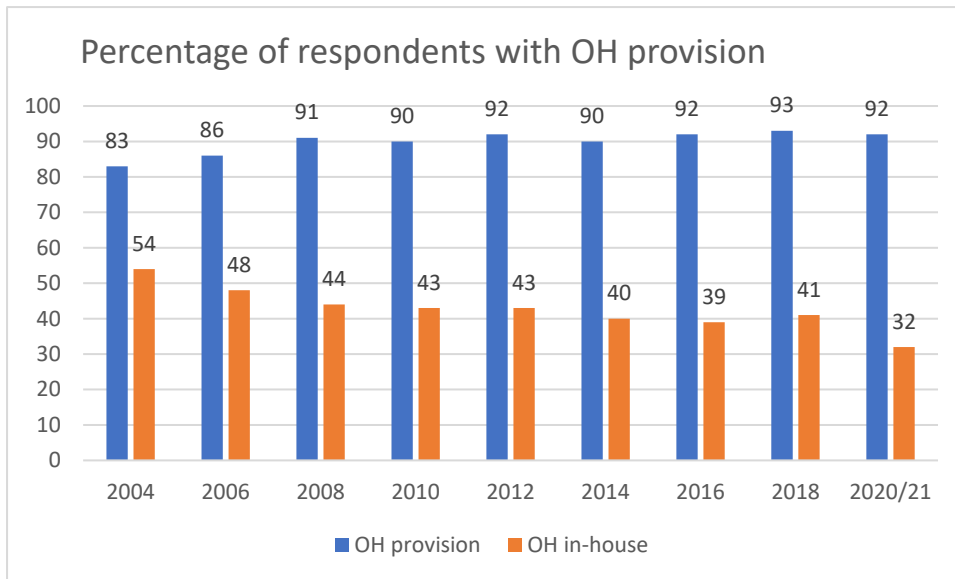
Employer provision of occupational health services

Occupational health (OH) schemes give access to a range of professional advice and services to employees, and 92 per cent of safety representatives said that their employers provide some sort of occupational health service – virtually the same as in 2018 (93 per cent).

The figures were 94 per cent in the public sector and 91 per cent in the private sector.

However, far fewer employers overall provided OH as an in-house service than previously – 32 per cent doing so in 2020/21 compared with 41 per cent in 2018. More now use an external provider – 60 per cent compared with 52 per cent.

The chart below shows that the provision of OH has increased somewhat after 2004, though it plateaued in 2008. But the proportion in-house provision has shrunk significantly, from more than half of employers to fewer than one in three in 2010/21.



The figures suggest this is largely down to change among public sector employers, many more of whom now provide OH services through an external provider. Just 33 per cent of public sector employers provided in-house OH services in 2020 compared with 49 per cent in 2018. Sixty-one per cent provide them through an external provider compared with 45 per cent in 2018.

This split is now very similar to that in the private sector, where 31 per cent provide the service in-house and 60 per cent do so through an external provider. (The 2018 figures were 35 per cent and 59 per cent respectively.)

Table 7: Provision of OH services by workplace size

Number of workers	2020	2018
Fewer than 5	100%	n/a*
6–49	88%	n/a*
50–99	87%	87%
100–199	90%	92%
200–999	93%	95%
1,000 or more	99%	99%

*2018 smallest category was all under 50, of whom 87 per cent provided OH services

As might be expected, OH provision of one sort or another tended to be more widespread the larger the workplace, although surprisingly all workplaces with fewer than five workers had access to OH services. Large workplaces were more likely to provide the service in-house.

The figures for each industry, and how they compare with two years ago, can be seen in Table 8.

Table 8: Provision of OH services by industry

	2020	2018
Agriculture and fishing	100%	100%
Banking, insurance and finance	88%	100%
Central government	99%	100%
Construction	76%	89%

Distribution	85%	n/a*
Education	85%	93%
Energy and water	100%	100%
Health services	98%	98%
Hotels and restaurants	100%**	n/a*
Leisure services	91%	70%
Local government	98%	98%
Manufacturing	93%	100%
Other services	91%	82%
Transport and communications	93%	95%
Voluntary sector	88%	100%

*Distribution, hotels and restaurants were one category in 2018 and 96 per cent provided OH services

**Based on only one respondent from this industry

Of those respondents in organisations with OH services, the most common services provided were more of benefit to the employer than employee – disciplinary assessments and sickness monitoring (Table 9).

Only a minority of respondents with OH services said their employer provided positive aspects of OH services such as access to rehabilitation and advice on prevention.

There has also been a decline in many services compared with 2018, with proportions providing first aid, treatment, rehabilitation and advice on prevention, for example, falling. On the other hand, the proportion conducting disciplinary assessments has almost doubled – from 37 per cent to 65 per cent.

Table 9: Types of OH services provided

	2020	2018
Disciplinary assessments	65%	37%
Sickness monitoring	56%	62%
Health surveillance	52%	56%
Access to rehabilitation	48%	56%
Advice on prevention	42%	44%
Pre-employment medical screening	36%	46%
First aid	32%	40%
Treatment	23%	26%
H&S records provided to reps	14%	9%

Note: percentages do not total 100 per cent because respondents could tick any relevant services

Section 4: Rights of health and safety representatives

Despite attempts to revoke health and safety protections in recent years, safety representatives still have wide-ranging rights and powers under the Safety Representatives and Safety Committees Regulations 1977 and other subsequent health and safety legislation. The TUC survey asked safety representatives about the extent to which they have been able to exercise these rights and powers.

Training

Employers must permit safety representatives to attend training during working time without loss of pay. The Approved Code of Practice (ACOP) to the Safety Representatives and Safety Committees Regulations 1977 states that this training, approved by the TUC or independent unions, should take place as soon as possible after the safety representative has been appointed. The ACOP also allows for further training as necessary.

The 2020/21 survey asked safety representatives about the range of training they had received. The responses are set out in Table 10, together with comparisons with previous years' responses where possible. It should be noted that the question refers to health and safety training received by the respondent at any point, not just in the period covered by the survey.

Table 10: Training received

	2020	2018	2016	2014	2012
TUC Education Stage 1*	44%	72%	76%	73%	74%
TUC Education Stage 2*	28%	44%	47%	46%	46%
Course provided by your union	57%	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
Course provided by employer	13%	13%	14%	18%	19%
Joint union-employer course	6%	11%	6%	10%	7%
TUC Diploma/Certificate in OSH	15%	18%	18%	18%	17%
Another health and safety course	18%	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
No health and safety training	8%	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a

*In previous surveys, these were defined as TUC/Union Stage 1 and Stage 2.

** 2020 figure not strictly comparable with earlier years when the question referred only to basic/introductory union courses. n/a: not asked in same format.

The most common form of training received is one provided by their own union. This may reflect the efforts made by many unions to provide health and safety courses for their reps to help members during the Covid-19 pandemic.

However, it may be that changes to the question definitions affected these numbers: the proportion saying they have been through TUC Education Stages 1 and 2 is much lower than in previous surveys when the question previously included Union Stage 1 and 2 courses.

Only 13 per cent of respondents had received training from their employer – the same as in previous surveys – despite the pandemic.

Training and experience

The TUC survey also examines the training received by safety representatives with different levels of experience in the role. Table 11 sets out the training received by safety representatives who have been in the role for different lengths of time.

Table 11: Training received by term as safety representative

	Under 1 year	1–5 years	Over 5 years
TUC Education course Stage 1	33%	37%	56%
TUC Education course stage 2	5%	19%	46%
Course provided by your union	42%	58%	64%
Course provided by employer	4%	9%	19%
Joint union/employer course	1%	3%	10%
TUC Certificate in Occupational Safety and Health	2%	7%	28%
Another health and safety course	10%	14%	26%
I have not received any health and safety training	23%	6%	2%

Note: percentages do not total 100 per cent as respondents could tick as many as applied.

The figures suggest that the vast majority of safety representatives (those in post for a year or more) have had some health and safety training. This has predominantly been provided by their union or TUC Education or both.

Encouragingly, even among new safety representatives (those in post for less than a year), more than three-quarters have had some health and safety training – again largely thanks to their union or the TUC or both. More than four in 10 have (42 per cent) received training from their union and a similar proportion (42 per cent) from different courses provided by the TUC. Hardly any have received training from their employer.

Time off for training

The regulations and subsequent court cases have established the right of safety representatives to time off for training. However, 30 per cent of those responding to the 2020 survey said there have been times when they have been unable to attend training courses. This compares with 25 per cent in 2018.

The most common reasons cited were “I was too busy at work” or “my employer refused time off”, both selected by 12 per cent of respondents.

Nine per cent said it was because they could not make the time or location of the course and 4 per cent because of their family responsibilities. Small numbers in each case said there were barriers due to their health or disability (1 per cent) or they lacked appropriate technology or IT skills to access the training (1 per cent).

Consultation in “good time”

Safety representatives have the right to be consulted on health, safety and welfare matters by their employer. The survey asked respondents to select which of three descriptions about how their employer consults with them most closely fitted their experience, with the following results:

- 42 per cent said “my employer consults me/my union on a regular scheduled basis AND when urgent issues arise”
- 22 per cent said “my employer consults me/my union whenever urgent issues arise BUT NOT on a regular scheduled basis”, and
- 30 per cent said “my employer consults me/my union infrequently/only when I/my union raise(s) issues with them”.

Employers are more likely to conduct regular scheduled consultation where they have at least 200 workers or fewer than five employees than where they have middle-sized workforces.

There is very little difference in this pattern between the public and private sectors but there were substantial variations between different industries, as shown in Table 12.

Table 12: Level of employer consultation with safety representatives by industry

	Scheduled AND urgent	Urgent NOT scheduled	Infrequent NOT scheduled
Banking, insurance and finance	64%	12%	15%
Local government	61%	19%	25%
Construction	53%	18%	29%
Transport and communications	49%	24%	25%
Energy and water	48%	35%	13%
Central government	45%	27%	23%
Agriculture and fishing	44%	11%	33%
Education	39%	22%	33%
Manufacturing	39%	24%	33%
Distribution	39%	20%	39%
Other services	37%	22%	34%
Health services	35%	24%	35%
Voluntary sector	25%	-	50%
Leisure services	14%	19%	62%

Industries where employers tend to perform worse than average in the area of safety representative consultation include distribution, health services, the voluntary sector and leisure services.

It is also worrying that in some of the most dangerous industries, such as construction, high proportions of employers only consult unions on health and safety issues infrequently or when issues are raised with them.

Inspections

The right to inspect the workplace is one of the most crucial rights safety representatives have, allowing them to identify hazards and highlight action to be undertaken by management. The ACOP states that safety representatives can inspect every three months, or more frequently by agreement, so long as they notify the employer in writing.

The 2020 survey found a wide variation in the frequency of safety representative inspections in the last 12 months, with more than one in four (26 per cent) not conducting any, compared with 18 per cent in 2018.

- 20 per cent had conducted one inspection (17 per cent in 2018)
- 14 per cent had conducted two inspections (16 per cent in 2018)
- 20 per cent had conducted three to four inspections (30 per cent in 2018)
- 17 per cent had conducted five or more inspections (20 per cent in 2018).

Further analysis reveals that more experienced reps tended to have carried out more inspections. Almost half (47 per cent) of those with over five years' experience carried out three or more inspections in the last 12 months compared with 36 per cent of those with one to five years' experience. This was a bigger gap than in 2018, when the equivalent proportions were 57 per cent and 51 per cent. In 2020, 15 per cent of those in post for less than a year had carried out three or more inspections (compared with 27 per cent in 2018).

Time spent on safety representatives' duties

Getting time off for training is not the only problem safety representatives face. It extends to time off for functions in the workplace, including for investigations, inspections, gathering information from members on hazards and meeting management. Previous TUC and academic research has identified the lack of time and facilities as serious impediments to safety representatives carrying out their functions.

In addition, the last few years has seen some employers clamping down on facilities time for representatives in general, so it is useful to see if this has affected safety representatives. The 2020/21 TUC survey asked respondents to quantify how much time they had spent on health and safety matters in the previous week.

It is worth noting that the week under consideration would have in all cases been during the Covid-19 pandemic. This may account for the finding that a large proportion of safety representatives – more than one in six – had spent over 20 hours on health and safety matters in one week.

The results showed that:

- 40 per cent had spent an hour or less (compared to 45 per cent in 2018)
- 35 per cent had spent between one and five hours (also 35 per cent in 2018)
- 11 per cent had spent five to 10 hours (10 per cent)
- 17 per cent had spent over 20 hours (compared to 11 per cent).

Paid time off for safety duties

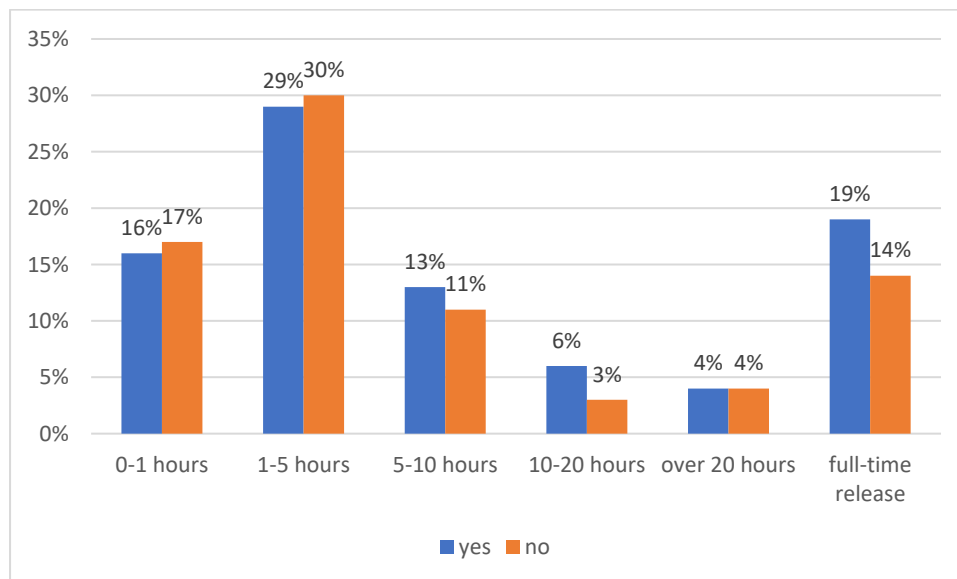
For the first time, the 2020/21 survey asked respondents about their paid time away from their job responsibilities to carry out their role as a rep.

Three in four (75 per cent) said they did get paid time off, though the entitlement varies considerably:

- 16 per cent got an hour or less per week
- 29 per cent got one to five hours per week
- 13 per cent got five to 10 hours per week
- 5 per cent got 10–20 hours per week
- 4 per cent got over 20 hours per week
- 17 per cent were on full-time release.

Perhaps surprisingly, the average amount of paid time away from their job does not vary very much according to whether the respondent is a rep or steward as well as a safety representative, except for those with full-time paid release (see chart).

Paid time off by whether respondent is a rep/steward as well (yes) or not (no)



Joint union-management committees

The work of safety committees has been identified as a key factor in making safety representatives' work effective. However, almost a quarter of safety representatives (23 per cent) said that there was not a joint committee where they work.

Even where there is a committee, in more than one in four cases the committee rarely meets. This means that, overall, well under half of workplaces covered by the survey (43 per cent) currently have a union-management safety committee that meets at all regularly, despite having safety representatives in the organisation.

The likelihood of having a joint safety committee is higher the larger the workplace - apart from the tiny workplaces, who do quite well (Table 13).

Table 13: Proportion with safety committees meeting regularly by workplace size

Number of workers	Committee that meets regularly
Fewer than 5	57%
6–49	33%
50–99	36%
100–199	40%
200–999	54%
1,000 or more	71%

Safety representatives in the public sector were more likely to have joint committees meeting regularly than those in the private sector (54 per cent compared with 48 per cent), while 45 per cent of those in the voluntary/not-for-profit sector had them.

Table 14: Proportion with safety committees meeting regularly by industry

Agriculture and fishing	78%
Energy and water	65%
Local government	64%
Manufacturing	63%
Health services	61%
Transport and communications	61%
Central government	57%
Construction	53%
Distribution	47%
Education	39%
Voluntary sector	38%
Other services	35%
Banking, insurance and finance	33%
Leisure services	29%

The industries most likely to have joint union-management safety committees meeting regularly were agriculture and fishing, energy and water, local government and manufacturing. The worst were leisure, banking, insurance and finance and other services (Table 14).

Sources of information and support

Safety representatives were asked what sources of information they regularly use to update their knowledge and understanding.

The most commonly used sources were their union’s own website or newsletters, with nearly all respondents (96 per cent) saying they used these either “often” (64 per cent) or “occasionally” (32 per cent). In addition, most (86 per cent) said they used information from their employer, 83 per cent TUC website/materials and 82 per cent the HSE website (Table 15).

Table 15: Information sources used regularly

	Often	Occasionally
Your union website/newsletters	64%	32%
Your employer	41%	45%
HSE website	37%	45%
TUC website/materials	32%	51%
Risks newsletter	25%	37%
Hazards Magazine/website	22%	36%
Labour Research Department	13%	31%
Sector press/website	13%	43%

In a new additional question for 2020/21, respondents were specifically asked if they made use of specific TUC online materials.

Presented with a list of types of TUC online material, over half (56 per cent) of all those participating in the survey had made use of one or more type, most prominently guidance documents.

- 19 per cent had used TUC webinars
- 14 per cent had use TUC Education interactive guides
- 14 per cent had used TUC Education eNotes
- 28 per cent had used TUC guidance documents
- 3 per cent had used TUC blogs.

Section 5: Enforcement

The survey asked about visits by health and safety inspectors, be they HSE inspectors, Environmental Health Officers or other relevant safety inspectors (such as from the Railways Inspectorate).

The responses indicated that more than six in 10 safety representatives did not know of any visit ever by the relevant safety inspectorate. This was split between 22 per cent saying there had never been one and 39 per cent who did not know.

And, despite the Covid-19 pandemic, fewer than one in four respondents said there had been an inspection to their workplace “within the last 12 months”.

- 24 per cent of safety representatives said that their workplace had been inspected within the last 12 months (compared with 22 per cent in 2018)
- 10 per cent said the last inspection was between one and three years ago (compared with 16 per cent)
- 6 per cent said it was over three years ago (compared with 11 per cent)
- 22 per cent said there had never, as far as they know, been an inspection, with another 39 per cent saying they did not know if there had been. (In 2018, 52 per cent said their workplace had never, to their knowledge, been inspected, but there was not an additional “don’t know” option).

Inspections are more likely to have taken place in the last year in the private sector than in the public sector (27 per cent compared with 23 per cent). And, approximately speaking, the larger the employer the more likely they are to have seen an inspection in the last 12 months.

Table 16: Last inspection by HSE or relevant inspectorate, by industry

	Within the last 12 months	Never, as far as I know	Don't know
Agriculture and fishing	22%	-	56%
Health services	30%	9%	40%
Distribution	33%	21%	39%
Energy and water	24%	21%	52%
Voluntary sector	-	50%	38%
Education	20%	22%	42%
Manufacturing	48%	5%	20%
Banking, insurance and finance	9%	12%	76%
Leisure services	10%	48%	33%
Construction	41%	29%	12%
Local government	23%	21%	35%
Central government	12%	48%	30%
Transport and communications	16%	25%	45%
Other services	25%	20%	38%

There were no industries where a majority of safety representatives said there had been an inspection in the last 12 months (Table 16). The industry most likely to have done so was manufacturing. The respondents most likely to say their workplace had never, to their knowledge, had inspection were those from the voluntary sector, leisure services and central government. Even in one of the most dangerous industries – construction – 29 per cent said there had never been an inspection as far as they knew.

Table 17: Inspection in last year by key industry/occupation

Industry/occupation (number of respondents to survey)	Inspection in last 12 months
Food or drink manufacturing (63)	34%
Social care (70)	25%
An NHS hospital (158)	30%
Essential retail (eg a supermarket open during 'lockdown') (184)	27%
Warehousing, delivery and logistics (115)	34%

Even safety representatives in sub-sectors or occupations which largely kept functioning during the Covid-19 pandemic were unlikely to have seen an inspection by the HSE or relevant safety inspectorate over the period (Table 17). Only one in three of those in food or drink manufacturing and in warehousing, delivery and logistics had seen an inspection in the last 12 months, and the proportions were even lower in social care, hospitals and essential retail.

Inspectors and safety representatives

Contact between safety representatives and inspectors is scarce, according to the 2020/21 survey. Only 18 per cent of safety representatives said they were aware of the most recent visit before it took place.

In terms of discussions during the visit, 15 per cent said they or another safety representative had spoken with the inspector on their most recent visit.

Improvements and enforcement action

The survey asked safety representatives about whether their employers had made improvements to health and safety management – either because of the possibility of a visit by inspectors, or because of enforcement action taken against other employers, such as a notice or prosecution.

Table 18: Improvements because of the possibility of a visit

	2020	2018	2016	2014	2012
Not at all	14%	17%	22%	19%	26%
A little	20%	19%	19%	16%	18%
Somewhat	21%	21%	16%	20%	15%
A lot	14%	15%	17%	16%	20%
Don't know	32%	28%	26%	29%	22%

Table 18 indicates the extent to which safety representatives feel employers have made health and safety improvements because of the possibility of an inspection. The results suggest that that only a minority of respondents (35 per cent) say their employer has made anything more than “a little” improvement – almost the same as two years ago. However, fewer safety representatives than in 2018 say there have been no improvements at all (14 per cent compared with 17 per cent).

The survey also asked safety representatives whether their employer had, in the last two years, made improvements to health and safety after hearing about an enforcement notice or prosecution of another company (see Table 19).

Table 19: Improvements after hearing about a notice or prosecution

	2020	2018	2016	2014	2012
Yes	25%	22%	22%	23%	27%
No	25%	23%	31%	29%	26%
Don't know	50%	55%	47%	48%	47%

One in four said their employers have made improvements because of this situation, slightly more than in 2018. However, half did not know whether they had.

The survey went on to ask safety representatives about actual notices served. Only 18 per cent of safety representatives said their employers have at some point received a legal enforcement notice – slightly fewer than the 20 per cent of 2018.

This group were asked about their employer’s response to the most recent enforcement notice.

First, reps were asked if they were involved in taking steps to make improvements to comply with the notice.

- 42 per cent said they or other safety reps knew about the notice and were consulted on improvements to comply with it
- 25 per cent said they or other safety reps knew about the notice but were not consulted on improvements to comply with it
- 7 per cent said they or other reps did not know about the notice and were not consulted on improvements to comply with it. Another 17 per cent said they didn’t know.

Secondly, where there had been at least one notice issued, safety representatives were asked about the extent of their employer’s response to the (most recent) notice.

- 37 per cent said they complied with the notice and also reviewed other practices in the different departments/work activities
- 7 per cent said they implemented best practice and the effect has lasted for at least several months but only in one work activity/area
- 10 per cent said they implemented best practice but the effect was short term
- 30 per cent said they did the minimum they could to comply with the notice.

Section 6: Covid – reducing the workplace risk

The 2020/21 TUC safety reps survey included a special additional set of questions related to the Covid-19 pandemic, which are looked at in the final three sections of this report.

The first of these examines actions taken by employers to reduce their employees' risks of contracting or transmitting the virus.

Overall, 92 per cent of respondents said their workplace was open for workers, that is, some or all workers were working from their usual place of work, rather than working from home or being furloughed.

Some of the analysis presented here specifically covers safety representatives working in certain key industries or occupations which largely kept functioning during the Covid-19 lockdowns. These include food or drink manufacturing, social care, NHS hospitals, essential retail (e.g. a supermarket that remained open during 'lockdown') and warehousing, delivery and logistics,

Covid and risk assessments

The majority of safety representatives (91 per cent) said their employer had updated their risk assessments to take account of new hazards posed by Covid-19.

However, this did not necessarily apply to those working in some sectors which largely kept open during lockdowns (Table 20). Just 77 per cent of safety representatives in food or drink manufacturing said their employer updated the risk assessment, as did only 76 per cent of those in essential retail.

Table 20: Risk assessment updated in light of Covid by key sector

Key sector (number of respondents to survey)	Risk assessment updated
Food or drink manufacturing (63)	77%
Social care (70)	90%
An NHS hospital (158)	93%
Essential retail (184)	76%
Warehousing, delivery and logistics (115)	92%

Government Covid guidance indicates that employers of more than 50 workers should publish their risk assessment on their public website. Only 44 per cent of all respondents to the survey in workplaces of more than 50 employees confirmed that their employer had done this, although another 38 per cent said that they did not know.

One in three safety representatives (34 per cent) said that neither they nor other safety reps were consulted in the production of the Covid-19 risk assessment. Only 57 per cent confirmed they had, with another 10 per cent saying they did not know.

Preventative measures

Personal protective equipment (PPE)

Survey participants were asked if their employer had provided adequate PPE, such as masks or gloves. The results were patchy:

- 53 per cent said enough appropriate PPE had *always* been provided
- 35 per cent said enough had *sometimes* been provided
- 5 per cent said enough appropriate PPE had *not* been provided.

Even in certain sub-sectors”, substantial proportions of safety reps felt that sufficient and appropriate PPE had not always been provided (Table 21). The worst case was NHS hospitals, where 44 per cent felt this to be the case.

Table 21: Enough and appropriate PPE provision by key sector

	Enough appropriate PPE has ALWAYS been provided	Enough appropriate PPE SOMETIMES provided	Enough appropriate PPE NOT provided	PPE not required by our risk assessment
Food/drink manufacturing	62%	31%	5%	-
Social care	57%	31%	6%	2%
NHS hospital	51%	44%	4%	1%
Essential retail	63%	31%	5%	1%
Warehousing, delivery, logistics	69%	28%	3%	-

Physical/social distancing

Fewer than one in three safety representatives (31 per cent) said their employer was implementing appropriate physical distancing between employees all of the time, with another 37 per cent saying they were doing so “most of the time”. One in four said they did so “some of the time”. A small proportion (3 per cent) said they were doing so none of the time. In addition, 3 per cent answered “not applicable – it is not possible to maintain physical distance from other employees in my workplace”.

Table 22: Implementing appropriate distancing between employees by key sector

	All of the time	Most of the time	Some of the time	None of the time	Not possible in my workplace
Food/drink manufacturing	41%	38%	20%	2%	-
Social care	29%	44%	18%	-	5%
NHS hospital	26%	43%	22%	-	9%
Essential retail	31%	27%	32%	10%	1%
Warehousing, delivery, logistics	23%	31%	39%	1%	6%

Even in some sub-sectors, substantial proportions did not appear to be maintaining physical distance for all or most of the time (Table 22). And in one in 10 essential retail workplaces there was no distancing between employees at all.

The picture was even worse in relation to physical distancing between employees and customers, clients or patients.

Across the survey, 29 per cent said this was being maintained all the time, 33 per cent most of the time, 22 per cent some of the 4 per cent none of the time.

Table 23: Implementing appropriate distancing between clients and employees by key sector

	All of the time	Most of the time	Some of the time	None of the time	Not possible in my workplace
Food/drink manufacturing	38%	29%	16%	2%	14%
Social care	25%	33%	18%	4%	16%
NHS hospital	28%	33%	18%	1%	20%
Essential retail	20%	33%	32%	12%	3%
Warehousing, delivery, logistics	29%	28%	29%	4%	9%

The figures for this employee-client distancing were worrying in the in the sub-sectors (Table 23). Apart from in food and drink manufacture, physical distancing measures between employees and customers/clients/patients were no more prevalent, and in some cases was even more rare, than between employees. Essential retail was again the biggest problem area, with more than one in 10 saying there were no measures to distance employees from customers.

Ventilation

Safety representatives were asked if their employer had improved ventilation and air circulation inside the workplace. The majority said either that they did (28 per cent) or that it was not necessary or applicable. However, more than one in five (22 per cent) said they did not, and that this constituted a hazard. Another 12 per cent did not know.

Table 24 shows the proportion of workplaces in the sub-sectors where employers had not improved ventilation and air circulation and where this constituted a hazard.

Table 24: No improved ventilation, constituting a hazard, by key sector

Food/drink manufacturing	22%
Social care	22%
NHS hospital	33%
Essential retail	17%
Warehousing, delivery, logistics	18%

Workplace cleaning and hygiene facilities

While across the survey the majority of employers (78 per cent) had improved the intensity and/or frequency of cleaning in the workplace, one in six respondents (17 per cent) said this was not the case.

Table 25: No improved workplace cleaning by key sector

Food/drink manufacturing	11%
Social care	18%
NHS hospital	18%
Essential retail	32%
Warehousing, delivery, logistics	14%

There was a similar proportion of workplaces that did not have enhanced cleaning during the pandemic (Table 24). In the worst case, this applied to one in three essential retail employers.

The vast majority of employers overall (91 per cent) had improved hygiene facilities such as handwashing facilities or providing hand sanitiser, though 6 per cent had not.

Work patterns

Six in 10 safety representatives (60 per cent) said their employer had changed the pattern of work or the number of workers in their workplace, for example by staggering start and finish times.

Rather fewer employers (42 per cent) had risk assessed staffs' travel to work and considered ways to reduce the risks, such as making car parking available or enabling travel at quieter times.

Table 26: Changed work patterns and travel to work by industry

	Changed work patterns/numbers	Risk-assessed travel to work
Construction	86%	79%
Central government	77%	53%
Agriculture and fishing	75%	75%
Leisure services	75%	50%
Local government	71%	47%
Manufacturing	71%	44%
Energy and water	68%	68%
Banking, insurance and finance	63%	74%
Education	62%	44%
Transport and communications	58%	38%
Distribution	58%	28%
Voluntary sector	57%	29%
Health services	49%	48%
Other services	42%	28%

There were wide variations in the proportion of employers who took these actions depending on the industry. Three quarters or more of employers had changed work patterns or the number of workers in the workplace in construction, central government, agriculture and leisure services. However, in some industries this seems not to have been an option, such as in health services, transport and communications and distribution.

Construction and agriculture also top the list of industries in terms of risk assessing employees' travel to work to consider ways to reduce their risks, along with banking, insurance and finance. This was far less prevalent in transport and communications, the voluntary sector, distribution and other services.

Vulnerable groups of workers

Safety representatives were asked whether their employers had conducted additional risk assessments and put in place risk mitigation measures for particularly vulnerable groups of workers: pregnant workers, workers who might be at risk of domestic abuse, Black and Minority Ethnic (BME) workers and “vulnerable” and “clinically extremely vulnerable” people as defined in government guidance.

Pregnant workers

Just four in 10 respondents (41 per cent) of safety representatives said there had been additional risk assessment for pregnant workers. Only 17 per cent of respondents said there had been additional mitigation for that group, while 13 per cent said there were no pregnant workers at their workplace.

Those saying there had been measures were asked what form they took. In the majority of cases (74 per cent), this took the form of individualised risk assessments, while in just over half (54 per cent) of cases, pregnant workers had been enabled to work from home. Additionally:

- In one in six (17 per cent) of cases where employers had taken steps they had provided suitable PPE equipment
- In 36 per cent of cases alternative duties/redeployment had been offered
- One in seven (14 per cent) of cases involved suspension on full pay in line with legal protections
- 13 per cent involved pregnant workers being furloughed
- In 15 per cent of cases early maternity leave had been offered
- 6 per cent of cases involved unpaid leave
- In 3 per cent of cases the employer had suspended pregnant workers on occupational sick pay
- In 1 per cent of cases the employer had suspended pregnant workers on Statutory Sick Pay.

(All the percentage figures in this list are the percentage of those saying there had been mitigating measures – not of all respondents in the survey.)

Domestic abuse

Periods of lockdown during the pandemic have been associated with significantly increased levels of domestic violence. One in five respondents said their employer had taken some steps to respond to this.

The most common measure was to provide information about specialist support services (16 per cent of cases where steps had been taken), followed by providing guidance for employees (15 per cent). Small numbers had reviewed and updated the risk assessment (8 per cent of those taking steps) and/or provided additional support to individuals (8 per cent).

BME workers

Hardly more than one in four employers (26 per cent) had carried out any additional risk assessment for BME workers, according to respondents. And only a very small proportion (11 per cent) said there had been additional mitigation for that group, while 7 per cent said there were no BME workers at their workplace.

Those saying there had been measures were asked what form they took. In the majority of cases (86 per cent), this took the form of individualised risk assessments. Additionally:

- In 29 per cent of cases where measures had been taken there had been adjustments to job functions
- In 39 per cent of cases there had been adjustments to job location (eg working from home)
- In 21 per cent of cases there had been adjustments to shifts, such as start and finish times.

(All the percentage figures in this list are the percentage of those saying there had been mitigating measures – not of all respondents in the survey.)

Vulnerable (“shielded”) workers

Just over four in 10 respondents (43 per cent) said their employer had put in place additional risk assessment for workers who are defined by the government as “vulnerable”. And barely more than one in four (26 per cent) had put in place additional risk mitigation for this group.

Those saying there had been measures were asked what form they took. Again, in the majority of cases (71 per cent), this took the form of individualised risk assessments, though in 56 per cent of cases there were adjustments to job location, such as working from home. Additionally:

- In four in 10 cases where steps had been taken (39 per cent), there had been adjustments to job functions
- In 26 per cent of cases, shifts (such as start and finish times) had been adjusted
- In one in four cases (25 per cent), people had been suspended on full pay
- In one in five cases (20 per cent) vulnerable staff had been furloughed
- In 6 per cent of cases they had been suspended on occupational sick pay
- in 5 per cent of cases they had been suspended on Statutory Sick Pay.

(All the percentage figures in this list are the percentage of those saying there had been mitigating measures – not of all respondents in the survey.)

Section 7: Covid cases at the workplace

This section looks at the incidence of Covid cases at survey respondents' workplaces and how employers responded to them.

Incidence of positive Covid tests at the workplace

A massive 83 per cent of respondents to the survey said there had been people at their workplace who had tested positive for Covid-19, with only 10 per cent saying that there had not been. (The remaining 7 per cent did not know if there had been a positive case.)

Where there had been cases, safety representatives were asked whether it had been an isolated case or whether it had affected a "significant group of workers". Well over half of those saying there had been positive cases (57 per cent) said a significant group of workers had tested positive while 31 per cent said there had only been an isolated case. The rest did not know whether it was one or more positive cases.

Table 27 sets out for different industries the incidence, first, of any positive tests at all at the workplace and, secondly, of where there had been a significant group of positive tests.

Table 27: Incidence of positive Covid tests among workforce by industry

	Anyone tested Covid-positive	Significant group tested Covid-positive
Construction	94%	80%
Health services	93%	76%
Manufacturing	93%	69%
Education	90%	58%
Transport and communications	83%	56%
Distribution	87%	54%
Local government	77%	52%
Other services	76%	51%
Voluntary sector	75%	50%
Central government	75%	45%
Banking, insurance and finance	55%	29%
Energy and water	81%	23%
Agriculture and fishing	63%	20%
Leisure services	65%	18%

It shows that the industries with the highest incidence on both counts are construction, the health services, manufacturing and education. In those industries, at least 90 per cent of workplaces had experienced at least one positive test. They had also a higher than average proportion seeing a significant group of positive tests.

Industries with a much lower than average proportion of group positive cases include leisure services (many of which may have been closed for much of the duration of the pandemic), agriculture and fishing, energy and water and banking, insurance and finance.

Table 28 looks at the incidence of “significant group” positive tests in the “key sectors”.

Table 28: Incidence of group of positive tests by key sector

Food/drink manufacturing	69%
Social care	52%
NHS hospital	76%
Essential retail	48%
Warehousing, delivery, logistics	55%

It shows that the key sector with the highest incidence of groups of positive cases is, not surprisingly, NHS hospitals. However, the incidence is also higher than average in food and drink manufacturing.

Table 29 looks at safety representatives’ reports of positive tests by region/country.

Table 29: Incidence of positive Covid tests among workforce by region

	Anyone tested Covid positive	Significant group tested Covid positive
North West	92%	68%
East Midlands	89%	55%
West Midlands	87%	57%
North East	86%	60%
Yorkshire and the Humber	84%	64%
Northern Ireland	83%	54%
Wales	82%	61%
South East	82%	56%
London	82%	55%
South West	78%	45%
East of England	77%	44%
Scotland	73%	49%

The areas where safety representatives were most likely to report any positive tests at all in their workplace were the North West, East Midlands, West Midlands and North East regions.

However, the areas most likely to have seen significant groups of positive cases in their workplace are slightly different (see greyed out boxes). These are the North West, Yorkshire and the Humber, Wales and the North East.

Employer responses to positive Covid tests

Safety representatives who said there had been positive Covid test(s) were asked what steps their employer had taken in response (Table 30).

Table 30: Employer responses to positive Covid cases at workplace

	All workplaces with positive cases	Isolated positive test case	Significant group of positive cases
Alert the union	31%	29%	34%
Require workers to self-isolate	83%	76%	87%
Closed a part or all of the workplace	27%	25%	30%
Improved health and safety in the workplace	20%	15%	22%
Paid occupational sick pay to those ill or self-isolating	53%	49%	57%
Paid statutory sick pay to those ill or self-isolating	22%	17%	24%
Reported cases to HSE or relevant regulator	26%	20%	33%

Fewer than one in three (31 per cent) said the employer had alerted the union, with only slightly more than that (34 per cent) doing so where there had been a significant group of positive tests.

In most cases – but not all – the employer had required workers to self-isolate (83 per cent). They had paid occupational sick pay to those ill or self-isolating in 53 per cent of cases and statutory sick pay in 22 per cent of cases.

A part or all of the workplace had been closed in only 27 per cent of instances (30 per cent where there was a significant group of positive tests), and health and safety had been improved in 20 per cent. In 26 per cent of instances overall, and 33 per cent where there had been a significant group of positive tests, they had reported cases to the relevant regulator.

Covid deaths in the workforce

More than one in eight safety representatives (12 per cent) said there had sadly been cases of death due to Covid-19 among their colleagues. Another 21 per cent did not know if there had.

One in 10 of those saying there had been deaths said the employer had reported it to the HSE or relevant regulator, though most (75 per cent) did not know whether they had.

Table 31: Covid deaths occurred at workplace by industry

	Yes	Don't know
Health services	40%	19%
Transport and communications	15%	22%
Local government	14%	29%
Agriculture and fishing	13%	50%
Leisure services	12%	24%

Distribution	11%	14%
Other services	8%	18%
Energy and water	7%	44%
Manufacturing	6%	15%
Banking, insurance and finance	6%	16%
Education	5%	21%
Central government	5%	20%
Hotels and restaurants	-	-
Voluntary sector	-	14%
Construction	-	25%

The industry where deaths were most frequently seen among the workforce, according to the survey, is health services, where 40 per cent of respondents said colleagues had died due to Covid (Table 31). Transport and communications, local government and agriculture and fishing also had higher than average incidences reported by safety representatives.

In most industries, large proportions of safety representatives did not know whether there had been any deaths in the workforce.

Table 32: Covid deaths occurred at workplace by region

	Yes	Don't know
London	21%	25%
Scotland	13%	27%
West Midlands	13%	15%
North West	13%	20%
South East	12%	21%
East Midlands	11%	21%
North East	10%	15%
South West	10%	19%
East of England	10%	15%
Wales	9%	18%
Yorkshire and the Humber	9%	21%
Northern Ireland	3%	7%

London was the region/country where the highest proportion of safety reps said there had been Covid deaths at their workplace (Table 32). Higher than average incidences were also reported in Scotland, the West Midlands and the North West.

Section 8: Safety reps in the Covid pandemic

The value of union safety representatives has never been as evident as during the pandemic – but this has meant a lot of extra work for many of them and also new issues to deal with.

Extra time spent by safety reps

Almost three quarters (73 per cent) said they had spent additional time performing safety rep functions during the Covid-19 pandemic. Reps were asked if they spent any more time either as paid time away from their job responsibilities or of their own time, or both:

- 34 per cent said they spent extra time primarily during work hours as part of their paid time away from their job responsibilities
- 13 per cent said they did so primarily in their own time
- 26 per cent did so in both works' time and their own time
- 21 per cent had not spent extra time
- 7 per cent could not answer as they had only become a rep during the pandemic.

The proportion of safety representatives who had primarily or partly spent extra time of their own for the additional functions during the crisis was higher for those working in the public sector (38 per cent) than those in the private or voluntary sectors (both 33 per cent).

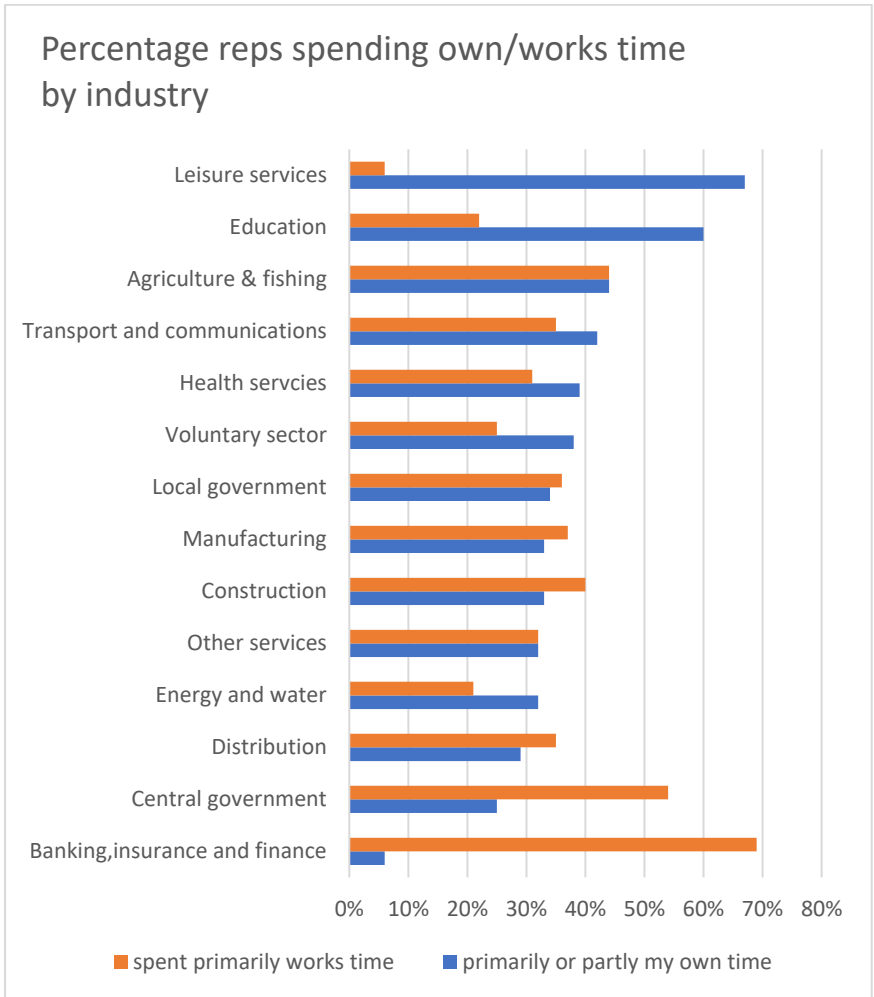
There was little difference between those who were also stewards/general reps and those who were solely safety reps (39 per cent who were general reps compared with 37 per cent for who were not).

There was a substantial variation by industry in the proportion of safety representatives who had to some extent used their own time to carry out the additional health and safety work required during the pandemic (Table 33 and chart below).

Table 33: Reps spent own time on extra Covid duties by industry

	Primarily or partly my own time	Spent primarily works time
Leisure services	67%	6%
Education	60%	22%
Agriculture and fishing	44%	44%
Transport and communications	42%	35%
Health services	39%	31%
Voluntary sector	38%	25%
Local government	34%	36%
Manufacturing	33%	37%
Construction	33%	40%
Energy and water	32%	21%

Other services	32%	32%
Distribution	29%	35%
Central government	25%	54%
Banking, insurance and finance	6%	69%



Two thirds of those in the leisure industry had used their own time, as had 60 per cent of those in education. At the other end of the scale, reps in banking, insurance and finance had largely been able to carry out their extra safety duties in their employers' time.

Safety reps who had spent additional time on rep duties since the Covid pandemic were asked to estimate how many extra hours per week they had spent. This revealed that 20 per cent of them had spent an extra 5–10 hours a week, 10 per cent of them had spent an extra 10–20 hours a week and another 8 per cent had spent a stunning 20 hours or more per week. The remainder had spent anything up to five extra hours a week.

These responses indicate that an astonishing one in five of *all* 2,138 safety representatives participating in the survey (including those who had not spent additional time) spent at least an extra five hours per week on their safety rep functions during the Covid-19 pandemic. One in 10 spent at least an additional 10 hours a week.

Dealing with mental health issues

Some of these extra hours may well have been spent on cases of mental health problems among their colleagues. A massive 65 per cent of safety representatives said there had been an increase in mental health issues they had dealt with since the pandemic.

Only 2 per cent said they had dealt with fewer mental health issues. (16 per cent said the number had not changed while 17 per cent said they did not know.)

Reps in the public sector were slightly more likely than those in the private sector to say they had dealt with an increase in mental health issues (67 per cent compared to 61 per cent).

Reps in some industries were extremely likely to have seen an increase mental health issues since the pandemic (Table 34).

Table 34: reps dealt with increase in mental health issues by industry

Sector	Dealt with increase in mental health issues since the Covid-19 pandemic
Voluntary sector	88%
Health services	78%
Education	70%
Local government	68%
Other services	67%
Energy and water	64%
Banking, insurance and finance	61%
Central government	61%
Distribution	59%
Manufacturing	58%
Leisure services	56%
Construction	56%
Transport and communications	55%
Agriculture and fishing	25%

The industry where safety representatives were most likely to have dealt with a rise in mental health issues since the pandemic was the voluntary sector, where a worrying nine in 10 respondents (88 per cent) had seen an increase. This was closely followed by health services (78 per cent), with education (70 per cent) and local government (68 per cent) also seeing very widespread rises in mental health problems.

Drilling down into the “key sectors” which largely remained operational during lockdowns reveals that in some cases reps were particularly likely to have seen a rise in mental health issues. This was the case of course in NHS hospitals (78 per cent seeing an increase) but also in social care (73 per cent) and essential retail (67 per cent).

Published by
Trades Union Congress
Congress House
Great Russell Street
London
W1B 3LS

tuc.org.uk

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