

Focus on health and safety

**TUC biennial survey of safety
representatives 2018**



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Executive summary

This is the 12th biennial TUC safety representatives' survey. It is designed to provide the TUC and its affiliated trade unions with valuable information to help shape safety campaigning and organisation in the period ahead.

Key findings

Hazards

The five most frequently cited hazards of main concern in 2018 were stress, bullying/harassment, overwork, back strains and slips, trips and falls on the level. The first four are the same as in 2016 but slips, trips and falls has replaced long hours on the level in fifth place, returning the top five to the same position as in 2014.

The most notable change since 2016 in the list of main concerns is the elevation of working alone, which jumped from 10th place to sixth place. One in four safety representatives (25%) cited it this year, compared with one in six (18%) two years ago.

Stress – once again stands out as the dominant health and safety concern, identified as a top-five hazard by 69% of safety representatives in the survey.

- as ever, stress is the main hazard of concern, showing only a tiny fall in the proportion citing it compared with the peak figure of 70% in 2016;
- concern over stress remains higher in the public sector than the private sector, although the gap has narrowed slightly;
- concern about stress is especially prevalent in central government (90% citing it as a top-five concern), health services (85%), and education (84%). It has risen markedly in local government; and
- it is still the most common concern in all sizes of workplaces and in every region/country of the UK except Northern Ireland, where it is the second most common.

Bullying/harassment - concern over this hazard has grown more widespread in recent years, but this year fell back slightly, with 45% of safety representatives putting it in their top five compared with 48% in 2016.

It is still more prevalent in the public sector than the private sector, but while it has declined somewhat in the public sector it has risen very slightly in the private sector.

Bullying/harassment has got markedly more common in local and central government, the two worst sectors for this hazard (cited by, respectively, 80% and 71% of respondents from those sectors). It is more of a problem in larger workplaces (with 100 or more employees) than smaller ones.

Overwork – although still in third place, this has retreated slightly as a top-five concern, with 36% of respondents citing it in 2018, compared with 40% in 2016.

Concern around overwork is much more widespread in the public sector (43% citing it) than the private sector (27%). It has become a major problem in central government, where 63% of respondents cited it as a top-five concern compared with 47% in 2016. It has also risen in health services and is still high in education. The linked concern of long hours is more also now more prevalent in the public sector than the public sector – a reversal of the 2016 pattern.

Concern over slips, trips and falls on the level has risen slightly, from 28% to 31%. It is much more prevalent in the private sector (43%), where it is the third most common concern, than the public sector (23%).

Concern over violence and threats has stabilised (23% of respondents citing it in 2018 compared with 24% in 2016), following a sharp rise noted in 2016.

Managing health and safety

Eight in 10 safety representatives (80%) say their employer has conducted formal risk assessments – the same proportion as in 2016.

Safety representatives in the private sector are more likely than those in the public sector to have experienced formal risk assessments (85% had compared with 77%), and this gap between the sectors is substantially wider than in 2016.

In health services and education, only seven in 10 respondents said their employer had conducted risk assessments.

Even where risk assessments are carried out, one in five of them are thought by safety reps to be inadequate. Fewer than half (47%) of all respondents in the survey felt their employer had conducted adequate risk assessments, the same proportion as in 2016.

The situation was much worse in the public sector, where just 44% of respondents said their employer had conducted adequate risk assessments compared with 56% in the private sector.

Particularly poor industries in this respect are education, where just 25% thought their employer had conducted an adequate risk assessment, and local government, where the figure was 35%.

The involvement of safety representatives in risk assessments remains poor – just 21% said they were satisfied with their involvement (compared with 22% in 2016) and a worrying 41% were not involved at all (compared with 33%).

Most safety representatives (92%) say their employer provides an occupational health service, with another small shift back towards in-house services and away from external provision. This is down to a substantial switch towards in-house provision in the public sector, where 49% of safety representatives said their employer provided the service this way compared with 38% in 2016.

There have been some positive trends in the types of OH services provided, including more widespread access to rehabilitation and more common provision of advice on prevention.

Safety representatives' rights

There has been a small decline in the proportion of safety representatives attending TUC/union stage I and stage II training since 2014, but an increase in attendance at unions' own introductory courses and joint-union-employer courses.

One in seven of all safety representatives in the survey say management has at some time refused them time off for training, rather less than in 2016, but one in six say they have been too busy at work to attend.

Twenty-one per cent are never automatically consulted by their employer over health, safety and welfare matters – although that is down from the 28% saying so in 2016. Correspondingly more (28% compared with 22%) are frequently automatically consulted.

Enforcement

The 2018 survey indicates that inspections by health and safety enforcement agencies remain low, and are perhaps worsening. Over half (52%) of safety representatives say their workplace has never, as far as they know, been inspected by a health and safety inspector, compared with 46% in 2016.

Just 22% said there had been an inspection within the last 12 months (24% in 2016).

There were no sectors in which a majority of safety representatives said there had been an inspection in the last 12 months. The highest figure (other than for sectors with very few respondents) was in manufacturing, where just 43% said there had been an inspection in the last year.

In terms of geographical variations, the regions/countries most likely to have never seen an inspection were Scotland (55%) and the Northern and North West regions in both cases a majority (53%) of safety representatives saying this.

Contact between safety representatives and inspectors has dropped off substantially. Only 31% of safety representatives said they were aware of the most recent visit before it took place, compared with 37% in 2016, although slightly more said a safety representative had spoken with the inspector on that visit (30% compared with 28%).

One in five said their employers had at some point received a legal enforcement notice, slightly more than in 2016, and employers seem more likely to engage with safety representatives in making the necessary improvements.

Four in 10 (41%) respondents said safety representatives had been involved in planning changes after the employer had received a notice – a marked improvement on two years ago when that figure was just 30%. Despite the improvement, a majority (58%) still said that safety representatives had not been involved.

There was also a deterioration in safety representatives' view of employer responses to enforcement notices. For example, only 14% said their employer had complied with the notice and also reviewed other practices in the organisation. The figure was 20% in 2016.

Section one: Introduction

The survey

This is the 12th biennial TUC survey of safety representatives. The report is analysed by senior TUC policy officials and union health and safety specialists in order to understand the changing experience of safety representatives at work and to help provide more support. They also use the survey to inform public policy debates and in work with the Health and Safety Executive (HSE). The TUC wants union safety representatives and safety committees to discuss and use the report to help with their ongoing work.

A total of 1,073 safety representatives responded to the questionnaire either on paper or online in the period March-July 2018, compared with 1,039 in the 2016 survey. 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.

Profile of safety representatives

Twenty-six per cent of the safety representatives responding were women – a slightly lower proportion than in 2016, when the figure was 28%.

Ninety-three per cent described themselves as White (“White British” or “White – other”), compared with 94% in 2012. Four per cent described themselves as one of the following: “Asian or Asian British”, “Black or Black British”, or “Chinese”. This compares with 2% in 2014, the difference stemming from an increase in those saying they were Asian or Asian British from 1% to 2% and the same change for those saying they were Black or Black British. One respondent was Chinese compared with none in 2016. Another 1% said they were mixed race, as in 2016.

A slightly lower proportion of respondents were under the age of 45 than was the case in 2016 – 27% compared with 29% - although more of this group were aged 16-35. A slightly higher proportion were aged 46-60 (62% compared with 60%), while the percentage of those aged 60+ remained at 11%.

Table A: Age profile of respondents

Age group	2018	2016
16-35	10%	9%
36-45	17%	20%
46-60	62%	60%
60+	11%	11%

There was a change in the profile of respondents in terms of economic sector they are employed in, with the gap between the public and private sector portions shrinking sharply since 2016.

In 2018, 53% of respondents work for organisations in the public sector. This compares with 61% in 2016. Meanwhile the private sector accounted for 45% of respondents in 2018, compared with 37% in 2016. In the current year, 3% of respondents work in the not-for-profit/voluntary sector. (In 2016 it was 2%.)

The largest group of safety representatives in the survey by industry work in transport and communications (38%, compared with 20% in 2016). "Other services" accounts for 17% (as in 2016), health for 13% (compared with 8% in 2016) and education for 7% (compared with 14% in 2014). There was a decline in the proportion from local government, to 6% from 11% in 2016, and from central government, which in 2018 accounts for just 4% of respondents, compared with 11% in 2014.

Twenty-nine per cent of survey respondents work in workplaces with less than 100 workers, up from 25% in 2016, while 31% work in workplaces with 1,000 or more workers (up from 26% in 2016). Overall a little over half of respondents (56%) work in workplaces with over 200 workers, a slightly smaller proportion than in 2016 (59%).

Sixteen per cent of respondents said they had been a safety representative for less than a year. Forty-four per cent had been in the role for over five years and 40% for between one and five years. This profile is virtually unchanged from that of two years ago.

Just 43% of those who responded were also union stewards, substantially fewer than the 52% saying that in 2016, while over half (57%) were only safety representatives.

Safety representatives responded from all regions/countries of the UK. The largest groups of respondents came from the Midlands and the South East and South (each region accounting for 17%) while Scotland and the North West each accounted for 12%. Northern Ireland safety reps accounted for 1%, as in 2016 and 2014. (Due to the very small sample from Northern Ireland, comparative analysis relating to this group is unreliable.)

Ninety four per cent of safety representatives have access to the internet at home (96% in 2016) and 85% have access at work (81% in 2016).

The proportion of safety representatives responding to this survey online (as opposed to on paper) sharply increased to 91%, compared with 73% in 2016, 88% in 2014 and 83% in 2012.

Safety representatives in the public sector were slightly more likely than those in the private sector to respond online, but the gap between the two has shrunk to almost nothing. In 2018 92% of those in the public sector responded online as did 90% of those in the private sector. (In 2016 the figures were 79% and 61% respectively). This marks a reversal of the position in previous surveys in this series, in which private sector respondents were more likely to respond online.

In terms of industries, 100 per cent of respondents from agriculture and fishing; distribution, hotels and restaurants; energy and water; and construction responded online, as did 98 per cent of those from the health services and manufacturing.

Representatives in Northern Ireland were the most likely to respond online (100% did so), followed by those from the Northern region (98 per cent).

Men were rather more likely than women to respond online (91% compared with 89%).

Section two: Hazards at work

Main hazards

Safety representatives were asked to identify the main hazards of concern to workers at their workplace, and then to identify the top five in order of importance. All those mentioned as being in respondent's top five were aggregated to provide a table of "top-five hazards" across all survey respondents, which could be compared with those of previous years (see table 1).

Table 1: The main hazards of concern to workers

	2018	2016
Stress	69%	70%
Bullying/harassment	45%	48%
Overwork	36%	40%
Back strains	32%	32%
Slips, trips, falls on the level	31%	28%
Long hours of work	29%	30%
Working alone	25%	18%
Repetitive strain injuries	23%	26%
Violence and threats	23%	24%
Display screen equipment	18%	21%
Handling heavy loads	14%	13%
High temperatures	14%	16%
Low temperatures	14%	12%
Noise	11%	11%
Dusts	10%	9%
Road traffic accidents	10%	7%
Asbestos	9%	10%
Workplace transport accidents	8%	5%
Cramped conditions	7%	6%
Slips, trips, falls from a height	7%	6%

Chemicals or solvents	5%	6%
Infections	5%	5%
Machinery hazards	5%	5%
Dermatitis/skin rashes	4%	3%
Passive smoking	3%	2%
Vibration	3%	4%
Asthma	2%	1%

The five most frequently cited top-five hazards were stress, bullying/harassment, overwork, back strains and slips, trips and falls on a level. Long hours of work and working alone were in sixth and seventh place respectively.

The most notable change in this list since 2016 is the elevation of **working alone** from 10th place to sixth place in the league of top-five concerns. This is because one in four safety representatives (25%) cited it this year, a much higher proportion than the 18% doing so two years ago. This is the largest percentage point increase of any of the hazards in the table.

In terms of the other most frequently cited hazards, there was a very slight drop in the proportion of safety representatives citing **stress** as a top-five concern. It was listed by 69% of respondents, compared with 70% two years ago, but as always is still far and away the most widespread top-five concern.

The percentage of safety representatives concerned about **bullying/harassment** fell slightly, from 48% in 2016 to 45% this time. And concern about **overwork** has dropped by four percentage points in the last two years, falling back to its 2014 levels. In 2018 36% cited it as a top-five concern, compared with 40% citing in 2016 and 36% in 2014. The linked problem of **long hours of work** has also receded very slightly, from 30% of representatives citing it as a top-five concern in 2016 to 29% in 2018. The level of concern is not back down to pre-2016 levels, however.

The fifth most commonly listed top-five concern now is **slips, trips and falls on the level** – up from 6th place two years ago. The proportion of safety representatives citing this has risen from 28% to 31%.

Concern over **back strains** remains at 32%, the same proportion as in 2016, while the proportion citing repetitive strain injuries as a top-five concern has declined from 26% in 2016 to 23%.

Thankfully there has been no repeat of the large hike in concern over **violence and threats** in the last two years. The proportion of safety representatives saying this was one of their main concerns had shot up between 2014 and 2016 to 24%, but has slipped back slightly this year to 23%.

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	74%	64%
Bullying/harassment	49%	44%
Overwork	43%	27%
Back strains	33%	33%
Long hours of work	33%	26%
Violence and threats	29%	17%
Working alone	29%	19%
Slips, trips, falls on the level	23%	43%
Display screen equipment	21%	14%
Repetitive strain injuries	21%	27%
High temperatures	14%	15%
Handling heavy loads	13%	17%
Low temperatures	13%	15%
Dusts	11%	11%
Asbestos	8%	10%
Noise	8%	15%
Cramped conditions	7%	8%
Infections	7%	3%
Road traffic accidents	6%	14%
Chemicals or solvents	5%	6%
Workplace transport accidents	5%	11%

Dermatitis/skin rashes	4%	4%
Slips, trips, falls from a height	4%	12%
Machinery hazards	3%	7%
Passive smoking	3%	2%
Vibration	2%	5%
Asthma	1%	3%

This indeed shows that concern over psycho-social hazards is more widespread in the public sector than the private sector. A big divide is found in relation to violence and threats, which is listed as top-five concern by 29% of safety representatives in the public sector but just 17% in the private sector. However, this gap has slightly narrowed compared with 2016.

Similarly, stress is more commonly pinpointed in the public sector (74% compared with 64%) but again this shows a narrowing of the divide between the sectors in the last two years.

And 29% of public sector respondents cite violence and threats as a top-five concern compared with 17% of those in the private sector. This gap is also slightly smaller than in 2016.

A notable divide has opened up between the two sectors in relation to working alone. In 2018 this was cited as a top-five concern by 29% of respondents in the public sector but only 19% in the private sector. In 2016 the equivalent figures were not only lower but also much closer together. Working alone was then picked out by 18% representatives in the public sector and 17% in the private sector.

There is also now far more concern in the public sector than the private sector around overwork. While 27% of private sector safety representatives had this as a top-five concern, this applied to a massive 43% of those in the public sector. This gap has widened since 2016.

The most marked difference of all between the public and private sectors in 2018, however, is in concern about slips, trips and falls on the level. While 43% of private sector safety representatives had this as a top-five concern, only 23% of those in the public sector did. This 20 percentage-point divide is much wider than the seven-point gap of 2016.

Other hazards where concern is substantially more widespread in the private sector include: slips, trips and falls from a height, highlighted as a top-five concern by 12% in that sector compared with only 4% in the public sector; and road traffic accidents (14% private, 6% public). The gaps in these cases is wider than in 2016.

A further breakdown also reveals different concerns between safety representatives in different industries. Table 3 lists the top-five hazards for 14 industrial sectors.

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

Sector (number of reps responding to the question)	1st concern	2nd concern	3rd concern	4th concern	5th concern
Agriculture & fishing (2)	Dermatitis, RSI, workplace transport accidents, bullying/harassment, stress, all 50%				
Banking, insurance and finance (3)	Overwork, stress, both 100%		Bullying/harassment 67%	DSE, asbestos, dusts, high temperatures, low temperatures, RSI, working alone, all 33%	
Central government (41)	Stress 90%	Bullying/harassment 71%	Overwork 63%	DSE 41%	RSI 39%
Construction (9)	Slips level, stress, both 56%		Long hours, overwork, both 44%		Slips height, 33%
Distribution and hotels (25)	Back strains 56%	Heavy loads, RSI, stress, all 52%			Slips level 48%
Education (68)	Stress 84%	Bullying/harassment 65%	Overwork 62%	Long hours 49%	Violence 28%
Energy and water (42)	Stress 67%	DSE 43%	Slips level 36%	RSI 33%	Back strains, long hours, Overwork, all 31%
Health services (123)	Stress 85%	Overwork 55%	Bullying/harassment 48%	Back strains 45%	Working alone 39%
Leisure services (10)	Noise, bullying/harassment, stress, all 50%			High temperatures, low temperatures, RSI, all 30%	

Local government (55)	Stress 80%	Bullying/harassment 64%	Overwork 47%	Violence 42%	Working alone 35%
Manufacturing (56)	Stress 66%	Slips level 38%	RSI, bullying/harassment, both 36%		High temperatures 32%
Transport and communications (373)	Stress 60%	Bullying/harassment, 41%	Slips level 39%	Back strains 36%	Long hours 35%
Voluntary sector (2)	Overwork, passive smoking, stress, all 100%			Long hours, violence, working alone, bullying/harassment, all 50%	
Other services (171)	Stress 68%	Bullying/harassment 50%	Slips level 42%	Back strains 34%	Overwork 29%

Agriculture and fishing

As only two safety representatives responded from this industry, it is difficult to draw conclusions or make comparisons.

Banking, insurance and finance

As only three safety representatives responded from this industry, comparisons with 2016 are unreliable, but all three cited overwork and stress as top-five concerns.

Central government

Although stress is still the number one hazard in this sector, concern over bullying/harassment has risen from 61% in 2016 to 71% this year. Another notable change is concern about overwork has become more widespread, with the proportion of representatives citing it as a top-five hazard increasing from 47% to 63%. This hazard has leapfrogged DSE and RSI into third place.

Construction

Other than slips, trips and falls on the level, the physical hazards previously cited as top five concerns in this industry, such as back strains and machinery, have been overtaken by stress. However, the small number of respondents from this sector means comparisons are unreliable.

Distribution and hotels

The top five concerns in this industry are the same as in 2016, with the most significant change being that the proportion of representatives citing concern over RSI has risen from 38% to 52%.

Education

The first four most widespread concerns in this sector are the same as in both 2016 and 2014 – stress, overwork, bullying/harassment and long hours (though in a slightly different order). But the big change is that concern over violence and threats has come in at number five in the list, cited by 28% of respondents and replacing previously fifth-placed DSE.

Energy and water

Stress is still the most widespread concern in this sector, though it is slightly less dominant than in 2016. DSE is back among the top five concerns, cited by 43%, having dropped out in 2016. It has leapfrogged concern over slips, trips and falls on a level, which has abated somewhat. RSI has newly entered the top five list, cited by 33%.

Health services

Stress has become an even more dominant a theme in the health services, with another increase in representatives citing it as a top-five concern, from 82% in 2016 to 85% this year. Concern over overwork has also risen, from 50% to 55%, and worry over working alone has newly entered the list, displacing long hours and violence.

Leisure services

Noise has this year joined bullying/harassment and stress at the top of the list of concerns in this sector. High and low temperatures and RSI have also entered the top-five list, replacing back strains, slips on a level and long hours.

Local government

Concern over stress and bullying/harassment, already high in 2016, have now become even more widespread. The proportion of representatives citing stress as a top-five concern is up from 72% to 80% and those citing bullying and harassment is up from 54% to 63%. One change in the list this year is the introduction of working alone as the fifth most commonly listed hazard, cited by 35% of respondents.

Manufacturing

Concern over bullying and harassment and high temperatures have replaced that over back strains in this sector's list in 2018. However, stress has become overwhelmingly the most commonly cited top-five concern, with 66% listing it this time compared with 51% in 2016.

Transport and communications

Twice as many safety representatives responded to the survey in 2018 compared with 2016, but their main concerns are little changed. Stress is still the most widespread concern but concern over long hours has slipped back from second to fifth place.

Voluntary sector

Only two safety representatives responded from this sector so it is difficult to reach conclusions, but it is noticeable that passive smoking is in both of their top-concerns this year, which is not in any other sectors' lists.

Other services

Concern over this sector's number one hazard – stress – has crept up this year, with 68% of representatives citing it as a top-five concern compared with 66% in 2014. The other four most widespread concerns remain the same as two years ago, with a rise in the proportion concerned about slips, trips and falls on the level and a fall in those concerned with overwork.

Hazards and workplace size

Table 4 shows the five major health and safety concerns identified by safety representatives according to the number of people in their workplaces.

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 50 (155)	Stress 54%	Back strains 41%	Bullying/harassment 33%	Slips level, long hours, working alone, all 32%	
50-99 (126)	Stress 75%	Overwork 38%	Bullying/harassment 37%	Back strains 34%	Long hours 33%
100-199 (149)	Stress 61%	Bullying/harassment 52%	Back strains, overwork, both 33%		Slips level, violence, both 31%
200-999 (251)	Stress 71%	Bullying/harassment 49%	Overwork 34%	Back strains 33%	Slips level 32%
1,000 or more (305)	Stress 78%	Bullying/harassment 52%	Overwork 40%	Working alone 33%	Slips level 32%

As before, stress is the most common concern in all sizes of workplace. Since 2016, concern has become slightly more widespread in the largest workplaces (with 1,000 or more workers), where 78% of representatives cited it as a top-five concern compared with 73% two years ago. However, concern has become less widespread or stayed at the same level in all other sizes of workplace.

Bullying and harassment was the second most widespread concern in all sizes of workplace two years ago but now slips into third place in the two smallest sizes of workplace. Now concern over back strains has become the second most common top-five concern in workplaces of under 50 employees, and overwork has come in at number two in workplaces with 50-99 employees. However, in middle-sized workplaces (with 100-199 workers), concern over bullying and harassment has got more widespread than in 2016.

Table 5 looks at how the most common hazards – listed by more than 20% of safety representatives overall - vary in prevalence according to size of workplace.

Table 5: most common hazards overall by workplace size

	Under 50 workers	50-99 workers	100-199 workers	200-999 workers	1,000 or more workers
Stress	54%	75%	61%	71%	78%
Bullying/harassment	33%	37%	52%	49%	52%
Overwork	31%	38%	33%	34%	40%
Back strains	41%	34%	33%	33%	29%
Slips, trips, falls on the level	32%	29%	31%	32%	32%
Long hours of work	32%	33%	30%	31%	27%
Working alone	32%	17%	19%	18%	33%
Repetitive strain injuries	23%	24%	26%	27%	22%
Violence and threats	14%	23%	31%	20%	26%

Concern over stress, bullying and harassment and violence and threats is more widespread in all sizes of workplace with over 50 workers than in the smallest workplaces. On the other hand, workplaces with under 50 workers have more widespread concern over back strains than all the others.

Interestingly, while concern over working alone is, perhaps not surprisingly, more common in the smallest workplaces than most of the others, it is just as widespread in those with 1,000 or more workers.

While overwork is most common in the very largest workplaces, these establishments are the least likely to have long hours of work as a top-five concern.

Hazards by region/country

Table 6 sets out which regions are the worst/second worst for each of the main hazards of concern. It shows that some regions/countries appear to be the worst with respect to multiple hazards.

Table 6: Regions/countries reporting most concern for each main hazard

Top-five concern	Worst area	2nd worst area	% cited nationally
Stress	East Anglia 82%	Northern Ireland 80%	69%
Bullying/harassment	Northern Ireland 90%	Northern 63%	45%
Overwork	East Anglia 50%	Scotland 40%	36%
Back strains	North West 40%	East Anglia 38%	32%
Slips, trips, falls on the level	South West 40%	Wales 38%	31%
Long hours of work	East Anglia 40%	Yorkshire & Humberside 34%	29%
Working alone	Northern Ireland 50%	Northern 31%	25%
Repetitive strain injuries	Midlands 32%	North West, Yorkshire & Humberside, 25%	23%
Violence and threats	London 36%	Scotland, Northern Ireland, 30%	23%
Display screen equipment	Northern Ireland 30%	South West 25%	18%
Handling heavy loads	Yorkshire & Humberside 22%	Northern, Northern Ireland, 20%	14%
High temperatures	Wales 25%	London 23%	14%
Low temperatures	Yorkshire & Humberside, London, 18%		14%
Noise	London 19%	North West 17%	11%
Dusts	London 19%	North West 13%	10%
Road traffic accidents	South West 19%	Yorkshire & Humberside 13%	10%
Asbestos	Wales, East Anglia, 16%		9%
Workplace transport accidents	Northern 18%	South East 14%	8%
Cramped conditions	Northern Ireland 20%	North West 13%	7%

Slips, trips, falls from a height	Wales 20%	South West 13%	7%
Chemicals or solvents	North West, South West 9%		5%
Infections	East Anglia 8%	Scotland 7%	5%
Machinery hazards	North West 12%	Midlands 8%	5%
Dermatitis/skin rashes	East Anglia 8%	Wales, South West, Yorkshire & Humberside, 6%	4%
Passive smoking	Scotland 7%	Northern Ireland, North West, London, 4%	
Vibration	North West, Yorkshire & Humberside, 5%		3%
Asthma	Northern Ireland 10%	East Anglia 4%	2%

The North West and Northern Ireland are the regions/countries that appear most frequently in the table, each being the first or second-worst region/country for nine of the 27 hazards listed.

The North West is the worst or joint worst for back strains, chemicals and solvents, machinery hazards and vibration, and the second worst or joint second worst for RSI, noise, dusts, cramped conditions and passive smoking.

Northern Ireland is the worst for bullying/harassment, working alone, display screen equipment, cramped conditions and asthma, and second worst or joint second worst for stress, violence and threats, handling heavy loads and passive smoking. (However, the small sample size of 10 respondents from Northern Ireland means comparisons are unreliable.)

Table 7 sets out the five most widespread concerns in each individual region/country.

Table 7: Main hazards of concern by region/country

Region/country	1st concern	2nd concern	3rd concern	4th concern	5th concern
East Anglia	Stress 82%	Overwork 50%	Long hours 40%	Back strains, bullying/harassment, 38%	
London	Stress 62%	Bullying/harassment 48%	Back strains, overwork, 37%		Violence 36%
Midlands	Stress 76%	Bullying/harassment 47%	Overwork 39%	RSI 32%	Long hours 30%
North West	Stress 65%	Back strains 40%	Bullying/harassment 38%	Slips level 33%	Long hours 30%
Northern	Stress 71%	Bullying/harassment 63%	Slips level, overwork, 37%		Back strains 35%
Northern Ireland	Bullying/harassment 90%	Stress 80%	Working alone 50%	DSE, back strains, overwork, violence, 30%	
Scotland	Stress 69%	Bullying/harassment 47%	Overwork 40%	Violence 30%	Back strains 29%
South East and South	Stress 70%	Bullying/harassment 51%	Back strains 36%	Overwork 35%	Slips level 34%
South West	Stress 69%	Slips level, bullying/harassment 40%		Overwork 39%	Long hours 30%
Wales	Stress 66%	Bullying/harassment 56%	Slips level 38%	Long hours 30%	Overwork 28%
Yorkshire & Humberside	Stress 61%	Bullying/harassment 39%	Back strains, slips level, 36%		Long hours 34%

Although stress is a slightly less dominant concern overall than it was in 2016, it is still the number one concern in all regions/countries except Northern Ireland, where it comes in at number two.

It is more dominant in some regions/countries than others, with more than three quarters of representatives in East Anglia, the Midlands and Northern Ireland putting it in their top five, compared with just 61% doing so in Yorkshire and 62% in London.

And in those three regions, concern over stress has actually become more dominant than it was two years ago. In East Anglia it was cited by 82% of safety representatives compared with 64% in 2016; in the Midlands the proportion rose from 73% to 76%; and in Northern Ireland it increased from 78% to 80% (even though it was pipped by bullying and harassment there).

However, stress has become less dominant in London, the North West, Scotland, the South East and South, the South West, Wales and Yorkshire and Humberside.

Bullying and harassment is also still a predominant concern in all regions, although in East Anglia it has been overtaken by concern about overwork and long hours. The proportion of safety reps listing bullying and harassment in their top five concerns declined in seven regions/countries but increased in the Northern region, the South East and South, Northern Ireland and Wales.

Overwork features in the top five concerns in nine of the 11 regions/countries, though it is not always as high up in the list as it was in 2016. The other most widespread concerns are back strains (featuring in seven regions/countries each) and slips, trips and falls on the level and long hours (each featuring in six). Violence featured three times in the table, including in Scotland, where it did not appear in the top five in 2016.

Section three: 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

More than nine out of 10 safety representatives (93%) said that their employer had a written health and safety policy – the same proportion as in 2016 and 2014. There was little difference between the public and private sectors on this, but respondents from the not-for-profit sector were slightly more likely to say that there was a written policy.

Workplaces with 1,000 or more workers were more likely than smaller ones to have written policies, but the difference was not large.

Any differences in compliance between the industrial sectors were blurred by varying levels of knowledge on the part of respondents. For example, it would seem that compliance in the health services was only at 87%, but 9% of respondents in that sector did not know whether or not there was a policy.

The most compliant region/country was the North West, where 98% of respondents said their employer had a policy, followed by the Northern region and East Anglia, where the figure in each case was 96%. The least compliant place was Northern Ireland, where the proportion with policies was 80% (though this was substantially better than in 2016 when it was just 56%).

Risk assessments

Under the Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations 1999, and other regulations, employers have a duty to make “suitable and sufficient” assessments of the risks. Where there are five or more workers, they should also record the significant findings.

Risk assessments conducted

The Health and Safety Executive has said that the ability of employers to conduct risk assessments is the key building block of good risk management. Eighty per cent of safety representatives said their employer had carried out formal risk assessments this year, the same proportion as in 2016. Nine per cent said they had not carried them out and another 10% did not know.

Of those saying risk assessments had been carried out, 89% said the assessments were recorded. This was a smaller proportion than in 2016, but a higher proportion (10%) did not know whether they were recorded. Just 1% said they were not recorded.

Respondents in the private sector were more likely than those in the public sector to say their employer had conducted a formal risk assessment, 85% saying this compared with 77% (although a higher proportion of public sector respondents did not know). This gap between the sectors is considerably wider than it was in 2016 (82% compared with 79%).

Safety representatives from workplaces with 50-99 workers were the most likely to say their employer had carried out risk assessments, 85% saying 'yes', while those from establishments with 100-199 workers were the least likely (76%).

The conducting of risk assessments varies considerably across industries. The worst one (other than the voluntary sector, from which there were only two survey respondents) is the health services sector, where just 69% said they had been carried out. This compares with 80% in 2016. Education was also poor, with 71% of employers having conducted risk assessments (although a high proportion of respondents in this sector did not know whether they had).

At the other end of the scale, all three banking sector safety representatives responding to this question said their employer had conducted risk assessments, as did 91% of those in manufacturing. However, this was a drop from the 97% compliance in manufacturing seen in 2016.

There was a certain amount of regional variation in the level of compliance on formal risk assessments. While 88% of safety representatives in the Northern region and in Wales said their employer had conducted them, this was true of just 70% in Northern Ireland.

Adequacy of risk assessments

While most employers have conducted risk assessments, in those cases where they did only 61% of the safety representative considered the assessments to be adequate (compared with 62% in 2016). One fifth (19%) said they were not adequate while 21% did not know whether they were adequate.

This means that less than half of all respondents to the survey (47%) felt confident that their employer had conducted risk assessments that were adequate – the same proportion as in 2016.

However, there was a substantial difference between the sectors on this: while 56% of respondents from the private sector said their employer had conducted adequate risk assessments, this was true of only 44% in the public sector. There was no divide in 2016. In the not-for-profit sector in 2018, a shockingly low 35% said there had been an adequate risk assessment, compared with 62% in 2016.

The stand-out worst industry in this area was education, where only 25% of the respondents in that sector said their employer had conducted a risk assessment that was adequate. However, a large proportion (25%) did not know whether they had. Local government also appeared to perform badly on this measure, with 35% of safety representatives saying there had been adequate risk assessments.

Looking across the region/countries, the worst area was Northern Ireland, where just 20% of respondents said their employer had carried out risk assessments that were adequate,

followed by London, where it was 40%. The best was the North West, though even there the figure was only 56%.

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 find the risk assessment process unsatisfactory in terms of their own involvement:

- just 21% said they were satisfied with their involvement in drawing up risk assessments;
- 38% said they were involved, but not enough; and
- a massive 41% said they were not involved at all.

These figures are virtually the same as in 2016.

Employer provision of occupational health services

Occupational health (OH) schemes give access to a range of professional advice and services to employees, and 93% of safety representatives said that their employers provide some sort of occupational health service – very slightly higher than in 2016 (92%).

A slightly larger proportion than two years ago say their employer provides an in-house service (41% compared with 39% in 2016), with correspondingly fewer delivering their OH service through an external provider (52% compared with 53%).

There is very little difference between the economic sectors in terms of their likelihood of providing occupational health services, but there is a substantial difference in their means of doing so.

Public sector employers are much more likely than private ones to provide the service in-house, 49% of all representatives in the public sector saying their employer provided OH services in this way, compared with 35% of all those in the private sector. Just 19% of those in the not-for-profit sector said this.

On the other hand, 59% of all private sector respondents said their services were provided through an external provider, compared with just 45% in the public sector (and 73% in the not-for-profit sector).

This represents a major reversal of the situation in 2016, when public sector employers using external providers massively outnumbered those using in-house provision (by 57% to 38%).

Employees' access to occupational health services varies according to workplace size and industrial sector. These differences are set out in tables 8 and 9.

Table 8: Provision of occupational health services by workplace size

Number of workers	2018	2016	2014	2012
Under 50	87%	84%	84%	82%
50-99	87%	88%	90%	87%
100-199	92%	90%	85%	86%
200-999	95%	93%	92%	92%
1,000 or more	99%	96%	97%	97%

The larger the workplace, the more likely is the employer to provide an occupational health service, with 99% of workplaces with over 1,000 employees providing one compared with 87% of those with under 50 staff.

Table 9: Provision of occupational health services by sector

Sector	2018	2016	2014	2012
Agriculture & fishing	100%	100%	100%	82%
Banking, insurance and finance	100%	80%	73%	91%
Central govt	100%	95%	97%	96%
Energy and water	100%	97%	94%	95%
Manufacturing	100%	93%	94%	95%
Voluntary sector	100%	86%	75%	100%
Health services	98%	96%	97%	96%
Local govt.	98%	96%	95%	96%
Distribution and hotels	96%	82%	80%	77%
Transport and communications	95%	93%	92%	95%
Education	93%	88%	85%	82%
Construction	89%	50%	86%	93%
Other services	82%	87%	86%	84%
Leisure services	70%	90%	80%	100%

Table 9 shows how levels of occupational health service provision vary according to industrial sector. At the top end there appears to be 100% coverage in several sectors (though in some cases this is based on small numbers of replies). The worst coverage is in

leisure, where 70% had such provision (though again this is based on only 10 replies from this sector).

Levels of occupational health service provision do not vary massively by region/country. The area with the lowest coverage – at 88% - is London, while that with the highest coverage (98%) is the North. Employers in Northern Ireland are more likely than others to provide the services in-house than others, 70% doing so while just 20% use an external provider.

Table 10 shows how frequently different types of occupational health service are provided.

Table 10: Types of occupational health services provided

Service provided	2018	2016	2014	2012
Sickness monitoring	62%	64%	68%	71%
Access to rehabilitation	56%	45%	49%	46%
Health surveillance	56%	54%	56%	54%
Pre-employment medical screening	46%	40%	40%	43%
Advice on prevention	44%	38%	41%	46%
First aid	40%	42%	46%	54%
Disciplinary assessments	37%	43%	45%	50%
Treatment	26%	22%	23%	25%
Records which safety reps are given	9%	10%	12%	14%

Note: percentages do not total 100% because respondents could tick any relevant services provided.

There are a number of positive trends in these figures, one of which is the more widespread access to rehabilitation they indicate, which has risen from 45% to 56%. Similarly, the proportion of services providing advice on prevention has increased from 38% to 44%, and access to treatment has also increased slightly. Also, provision of disciplinary assessments has receded.

Less positive, however, is the increased provision by occupational health services of pre-employment medical screening services.

Section four: Rights of health and safety representatives

Despite the attacks on 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.

Unionlearn, the TUC's learning and training wing, provides a range of courses through the network of trade union studies centres in further and higher education colleges and through the Workers' Educational Association (WEA). Individual unions also provide their own approved training courses for induction and a range of safety matters. In addition, some employers provide training on specific issues.

The 2016 TUC survey asked safety representatives about the range of training they had received. The responses are set out in Table 11.

Table 11: Training received

Health and safety training received	2018	2016	2014	2012
TUC/Union Stage 1	72%	76%	73%	74%
TUC/Union Stage 2	44%	47%	46%	46%
Own union introductory course	34%	28%	32%	32%
Other TUC/union courses	20%	20%	21%	20%
Course provided by employer	13%	14%	18%	19%
Joint union-employer course	11%	6%	10%	7%
TUC Diploma/Certificate in OSH	18%	18%	18%	17%

Note: percentages do not total 100% because respondents could tick any relevant courses attended.

The most common form of training received is the Stage I and II courses provided by the TUC and individual unions. Seventy-two per cent of safety representatives have attended the stage I course and 44% the Stage II course. These figures are slightly down on 2016 levels, but for representatives' own union introductory training the figure is up. There has also been a slight increase in attendance at joint union-employer courses.

Training and experience

The TUC survey also examines the training received by safety representatives with different levels of experience in the role. Table 12 sets out the training received in 2018 (and 2016) by safety representatives who have been in the role for different lengths of time.

Table 12: Training received by term as safety representative

	Under 1 year	1-5 years	Over 5 years
TUC/Union Stage I course	73% (67%)	71% (76%)	73% (78%)
Other TUC/Union Stage II course	14% (13%)	42% (43%)	57% (61%)
Own union introductory /basic course	27% (25%)	30% (27%)	40% (31%)
Other TUC/Union course	13% (13%)	13% (16%)	29% (27%)
Course provided by employer	5% (8%)	9% (9%)	20% (19%)
Joint union-employer course	3% (4%)	7% (4%)	17% (8%)
TUC Certificate in Occupational Safety and Health	4% (3%)	12% (14%)	29% (26%)

Note: percentages do not total 100% as respondents could tick as many as applied. Figures in brackets show the results from the 2016 survey.

There has been an increase in the proportion of new safety representatives – those who have been in post for less than a year – to attend the TUC's or their own union's basic level course and, marginally a Stage II course. Slightly fewer have attended an employer-provided course than previously.

For safety representatives who have been in post for over five years there appears to have been a change in pattern compared with reps of similar experience two years ago. While fewer have been on the TUC courses or a union Stage II course than had done in 2016, more have been on all other types of training. In particular, more have attended their own union's basic course and more have participated in joint union-employer courses.

Safety representatives of middling experience (one to five years) are also slightly more likely to have attended their own union’s basic course than previously.

Time off for training

The regulations and subsequent court cases have established the right of safety representatives to time off for training. However, 25% of those responding to the 2016 survey say there have been times when they have been unable to attend training courses. This is an improvement on 2016 when 31% said there were such occasions.

The most common reason cited is being “too busy at work”, listed by 17%. But 15% say they have been unable to take up courses because management has actually refused permission to take time off.

Ten per cent of safety representatives say that family responsibilities prevented them from taking time off to take up training, while 8% said the course was not at the right time of the day or week. Less than 1% said were “prevented by lack of access or barriers to disability”.

Consultation in “good time”

Safety representatives have the right to be consulted on health, safety and welfare matters by their employer. The survey asked about consultation in two different situations: first, under normal conditions when consultation ought to be automatic, and secondly, when safety representatives ask or make requests. The responses to these questions are contained in Table 13.

Table 13: Management consultation with safety representatives

Consultation	Frequently	Occasionally	Never
Automatically	28% (22%)	51% (50%)	21% (28%)
When you ask	41% (38%)	52% (55%)	7% (7%)

Note: Figures in brackets refer to the results of the 2016 survey

In the first situation, only 28% of safety representatives say they are frequently automatically consulted – though this is rather more than two years ago. A correspondingly smaller proportion than previously said they are never automatically consulted in good time, but this still accounts for one in five safety representatives. In the situations where safety representatives ask or make requests, there is a slight increase in the proportion who say this happens frequently rather than only occasionally.

Safety representatives in the smallest and the largest workplaces are more likely than those in middle-sized workplaces to have frequent consultation, both automatically and on request. And those in the not-for-profit sector are much more likely to have frequent consultation of both sorts than those in the private or public sectors.

Further analysis of these figures reveals the worst performing industry to be education, where 35% of safety representatives say they are never automatically consulted, and only 10% say they are frequently automatically consulted. In addition, 12% are never consulted even on request and just 18% are frequently. Construction was also a poor performer on

consultation, but the low numbers responding from this sector (nine) make percentage comparisons unreliable.

Regional analysis indicates that the East Anglia is best for automatic consultation and the Northern region for consultation on request. Northern Ireland and Wales are the worst for automatic consultation and the North West for consultation on request.

Inspections

The right to inspect the workplace is one of the most crucial rights safety representatives have 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, as long as they notify the employer in writing.

As ever, the 2018 survey found a huge variation in the frequency of safety representative inspections in the last 12 months. However, safety representatives appear to have been making more frequent inspections in the latest year, and one in five had conducted five or more inspections.

- 17% had conducted one inspection (compared with 20% in 2016);
- 16% had conducted two inspections (14% in 2016);
- 30% had conducted three or four inspections (28% in 2016); and
- 20% had conducted five or more inspections (15% in 2016).

In addition, 18% said they had conducted no inspections in the last 12 months. Two years ago, the figure was 22%.

Further analysis reveals that more experienced representatives tend to carry out more frequent inspections. Well over half (57%) of those with over five years' experience carried out three or more inspections in the last 12 months compared with 51% of those with one to five years' experience. However, the gap has narrowed since 2016, when the equivalent proportions were 51% and 42% respectively. In 2018, 27% of those in post for less than a year had carried out three or more inspections (compared with 26%).

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 impacted on safety representatives. The 2018 TUC survey asked respondents to quantify how much time they had spent on health and safety matters in the previous week. The results showed that:

- 45% had spent an hour or less (compared with 52% in 2016);

- a third (35%) had spent between one and five hours (also 35% in 2016);
- 10% had spent between five and 10 hours (7% in 2016); and
- 11% had spent over 10 hours (6% in 2016).

These figures reveal that safety representatives are in fact spending more time on average on inspections than they were in 2016, which is consistent with the findings that they are conducting more inspections.

Again, the more experienced representatives tend to spend longer on their health and safety functions. One in three representatives with more than five years' experience (31%) spent over five hours a week on this work, compared with 14% of those with one to five years' experience. This divide has widened in the last two years, mostly because of a very large increase among the most experienced reps. In 2016, the equivalent proportions spending this much time were 17% and 11% respectively.

Joint union-management committees

The work of safety committees has been identified as a key factor in making safety representatives' work effective. However, one in six safety representatives (17%) said that their employer had not set up a joint committee (a slight improvement in the situation compared with the 20% saying this in 2016).

Larger workplaces – those with at least 200 employees – are much more likely to have a safety committee than those with fewer than 200. For example, 91% of workplaces with 1,000 or more have one, at least on paper, but only 74% of those with 100-199 workers do so.

Even where there is a committee, in one in five cases the committee rarely meets. This means that, overall, just two in three workplaces covered by the survey (67%) have a union-management safety committee that meets at all regularly, despite having safety representatives on the premises.

On a more positive note, more respondents from smaller establishments say there are committees which regularly than did so in 2016.

Table 14: Proportion with safety committees meeting regularly

Number of workers	
Under 50	60% (49%)
50-99	63% (55%)
100-199	55% (54%)
200-999	64% (64%)
1,000 or more	75% (75%)
Overall	61% (64%)

Safety representatives in the public sector were slightly more likely to have safety committees meeting regularly than those in the private sector (68% compared with 63%), while 77% of those in the not-for-profit sector also had them.

The industrial sectors most likely to have safety committees meeting regularly were energy and water (81%), construction (78%), manufacturing (75%) and local government (75%), although the very small numbers of respondents in agriculture and fishing, the voluntary sector, and banking, insurance and finance also all said they had them.

There was little regional variation, although top of the league was Northern Ireland, where eight of the 10 respondents had committees meeting regularly.

Sources of information

In a new question put to safety representatives in 2018, they were asked what sources of information they regularly use for their role, either often or occasionally.

The most commonly used source was their union’s own website or newsletters, with nearly all respondents (96%) saying they used these either “often” (60%) or “occasionally” (36%). In addition most (89%) said they used the HSE website, 87% said they used information from their employer, 83% used the TUC website, 64% used Hazards magazine/website, 62% used Risks and 43% used the Labour Research Department.

Other sources mentioned by several representatives included IOSH (Institution of Occupational Safety and Health), meetings and other union reps or full-time officers.

Table 15: Information sources used regularly

	Often	Occasionally
TUC website	30%	53%
Risks newsletter	25%	37%
Hazards Magazine/website	24%	40%
Your union website/newsletters	60%	36%
HSE website	42%	47%
Labour Research Department	13%	30%
Your employer	43%	44%

Those who had been a safety rep for less than a year were substantially less likely than more experienced reps to use Risks, Hazards and the HSE.

Section five: 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 half of respondents' workplaces had never, to their knowledge, been inspected. This was a substantial increase compared with 2016. And slightly fewer respondents said their workplace had been inspected within the last year.

- 52% of safety representatives said that their workplace had never, as far as they knew, been inspected by a health and safety inspector (compared with 46% in 2016);
- 11% said the last inspection was over three years ago (compared with 14%);
- 16% said it was between one and three years ago (compared with 16%); and
- Only 22% said their workplace had been inspected within the last 12 months (compared with 24%).

There were no sectors in which a majority of safety representatives said there had been an inspection in the last 12 months. (There were only two respondents from each of agriculture and fishing and the voluntary sector, giving percentage figures little meaning.)

Table 16: Most recent inspection by industry

Sector	Last 12 months	Never
Agriculture & fishing*	50%	-
Banking, insurance and finance*	-	67%
Central government	15%	44%
Construction*	44%	44%
Distribution and hotels	28%	40%
Education	21%	41%
Energy and water	29%	52%
Health services	23%	39%
Leisure services	30%	50%
Local govt.	16%	56%
Manufacturing	43%	18%
Other services	19%	53%
Transport and communications	16%	55%

Voluntary sector*	50%	50%
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*Small numbers responding from these sectors render percentage comparisons unreliable

The largest workplaces (with 1,000 or more employees) were slightly more likely to have seen an inspection in the last year than the smallest (with less than 50), (24% compared with 21%). However, that divide has narrowed compared with 2016, when the respective proportions were 26% and 14%. Medium-sized workplaces (100-199 workers) were the least likely of all to have had an inspection in the last 12 months in 2018 (14%).

The regions/countries most likely to have seen an inspection in the last 12 months were Wales and London (23% had in each case) and Northern Ireland (3 of the 10 respondents, 30%). The regions least likely to have seen one in that period were East Anglia (16%) and Yorkshire and Humberside (17%). The regions/countries most likely to have never seen an inspection were Scotland (55% of safety representatives saying this) and the Northern and North West regions (53% saying so in both cases).

Inspectors and safety representatives

Contact between safety representatives and inspectors has dropped off noticeably. Only 31% of safety representatives said they were aware of the most recent visit before it took place, compared with 37% in 2016.

In terms of discussions during the visit, 30% said they or another safety representative had spoken with the inspector on their most recent visit, a slightly higher proportion than the 28% saying this in 2016.

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 17 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 only a minority of respondents (36%) feel their employers have made anything more than "a little" improvement. However, this is slightly better than in 2016, when the equivalent figure was 33%. And fewer safety representatives say there have been no improvements at all than in 2016 (17% compared to 22%).

Table 17: Improvements because of the possibility of a visit

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

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 18).

Table 18: Improvements after hearing about a notice or prosecution

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

Just over one in five said their employers have made improvements because of this situation, as in 2016. However, more than half did not know whether they had.

The survey went on to ask safety representatives about actual notices served. Only one in five safety representatives (20%) said their employers have at some point received a legal enforcement notice – although that is slightly more than the 18% of 2016.

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

First they were asked whether safety representatives were involved in taking steps to make improvements to comply with the notice (see table 19).

Table 19: Involvement of safety reps in taking steps to comply with a notice

	2018	2016	2014	2012
Heard about it after the changes were made	21%	24%	25%	22%
Heard about the changes planned but no safety reps involved in planning	37%	46%	36%	36%
Safety rep(s) involved in planning after receipt of notice	41%	30%	39%	42%

There is positive news here, in that more of the respondents in these workplaces said that at least one safety representative was involved in planning changes immediately or soon after receipt of the notice. Correspondingly fewer said safety representatives had not been involved at all, although they are still in the majority.

These responses indicate a return to the sort of picture found in 2012.

Secondly safety representatives were asked about the extent of their employer’s response to the notice (see table 20).

Table 20: Employers’ response to a legal enforcement notice

	2018	2016	2014	2012
Comply and review other practices elsewhere	14%	20%	15%	47%
Implement best practice, effect longer term in one active/area	15%	14%	15%	12%
Implement best practice, effect short term in one activity/area	43%	33%	35%	17%
Minimum to comply	34%	34%	35%	30%

Very few safety representatives (14%) picked out the most comprehensive of the presented employer responses to legal enforcement notices - that their employer had complied with the notice and also reviewed other practices in the organisation.

This represents deterioration since 2016, when 20% selected this employer response, and a very marked worsening of the situation compared with 2012.

Section six: Conclusions

The main purpose of the biennial survey is to help the TUC and its affiliated trade unions to better understand the hazards and problems faced by union safety representatives. This information should help unions and the TUC to improve the support they provide for safety representatives in workplaces, as well as to prioritise strategically in national political work with the Health and Safety Executive (HSE) and other bodies.

This section summarises the findings from the survey in context and suggests ways the TUC, unions, the HSE and the Government can act to develop health and safety work.

Hazards

Once again, stress is, by far, the top concern for union health and safety representatives across all sectors and industries. It is the issue that union representatives have to deal most, within the vast majority of sectors, both public and private. Linked to stress are of course bullying/harassment and overwork which were second and third highest concerns. Long hours and violence were also prominent in the top 10 concerns.

Stress and workload are also issues that traditionally the HSE and local authorities have been unwilling to take enforcement action over. The increased emphasis that the HSE is giving to this area is therefore welcome.

Overall, the findings show that a wide range of preventable workplace hazards are still all too prevalent across sectors and industries. The TUC will continue its campaigning to ensure they are prevented.

Managing health and safety

There are two questions on risk assessments that the survey raises. The first is, why are so many employers getting away with either doing no risk assessment, or an inadequate one? This is an issue across all sections, but most noticeable in education, where just 25% of employers had conducted a risk assessment that the safety representative thought was adequate, and in local government, where the figure is 35%. The second question is why are employers failing to consult their union health and safety representatives on risk assessment? The number of representatives who are not involved at all has risen from 33% in 2016 to 41%, and only 21% say that they were satisfied with their involvement. Given the benefits that workforce involvement can make, and the legal requirement on employers to consult, this is an issue that the HSE must address.

The number of workplaces with some kind of occupational health coverage for employees has remained constant at 92% for several years although the coverage and type of occupational health provision does not indicate the level of the service, with some only monitoring staff sickness as opposed to prioritising prevention. The rise in the use of in-house services in the public sector is a welcome trend.

Rights of health and safety representatives

There has been a welcome increase the number of employers who are automatically consulting health and safety representatives on health and safety issues, but it is still only 28% rather than the 100% that it should be.

Levels of training, in particular through the TUC have fallen slightly. In part this may be due to less classroom courses being available due to government cuts, but another factor is likely to be the fact that employers rarely provide cover for representatives who want to attend or even refuse permission. As a result, 32% were unable to attend training because they were too busy or their employer refused to give them time off.

This will continue to be a problem until such time as employers start to recognise the value of having union health and safety representatives.

Enforcement

The decline in inspection activity was once more reflected in the responses. Over a half said that, to their knowledge, their workplace had never been inspected and only 22% said their workplace had been inspected in the past 12 months.

Even amongst the workplace that received an inspection from health and safety enforcement, only 30% of the union health and safety representatives were able to speak to an inspector directly, despite all inspectors being expected to contact any health and safety representatives.

The continued reduction in regular, proactive inspections makes the monitoring and subsequent improvement of workplace health and safety even more difficult to manage and the TUC will continue to call for an increase in the number of inspections and for the HSE and local authorities to ensure that all inspectors automatically insist in meeting health and safety inspectors where they exist.

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