

# Characteristics of Environmentally Active Trade Unions in the United Kingdom

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## **ABSTRACT**

A survey of twenty-two UK unions suggests that their environmental activism is generally unrelated to either membership trends or unions' financial health, although large, multi-sector unions are generally the most active. Adequate resourcing, discussion of environmental matters at senior levels of the union and positive relations with external environmental organisations are all associated with environmental activism. Although an environmental agenda appears popular with members and encounters little resistance from employers, few unions currently evidence serious or regular engagement and environmental work is largely confined to large and/or public-sector workplaces where the union is already well-established. This limited adoption may be attributable to a combination of the absence of supportive legislation and public funding, the agenda's inability to generate an attractive "product" for members, and already-crowded local agendas. However, most unions surveyed anticipate that their environmental agenda will expand in the future.

## **KEYWORDS**

unions; environment; labour–environment relationship; employee relations

## **Introduction**

The environment represents unions' newest developmental campaigning and bargaining agenda. Unions have typically been presented as the "weak link" in the labour–environmental relationship (LER), one which needs to be cajoled and incentivised to participate. However, my research shows that ideological, demographic and programmatic differences between labour and environmental movement organisations (EMO) have been exaggerated (Farnhill, 2014a). Unions have regularly adopted pro-environmental policies, and environmental concern constitutes a growing proportion of the overall agenda of many unions.

There is insufficient academic work and official data evaluating the environmental activities of unions in the United Kingdom (UK). For example, the issue has never been addressed by the UK's Workplace Employment Relations Survey. My research, based on a survey of twenty-two unions conducted during 2010–2011, helps to fill this gap by auditing UK unions' environmental agenda and identifying what an environmentally active union looks like. I establish what unions' environmental agenda comprises, and evaluate the contribution of several organisational factors. The findings suggest that unions' environmental function must be consciously asserted and does not emerge "naturally" from the contexts within which they operate or from membership specificities. True, larger unions are more active; but activism shows limited sectoral patterning and is generally unrelated to membership profiles, membership trends or financial health. However, adequate resourcing, relations with external environmental

actors and discussion of “the environment” at senior levels of the union all associate with environmental activism.

Unions claim the environment is popular with members and activists. However, relatively few unions show serious, regular engagement, and even those that do would find it difficult to describe their activism as widespread. It is generally confined to large and/or public-sector workplaces where the union is already well-established (and either a small-scale intervention or a “flagship” project).

Workplace greening is the cornerstone of unions’ green agenda; it has developed sluggishly compared to their other developmental agendas – health and safety, equality and diversity, and learning and skills. This is possibly because the agenda does not generate an attractive “product” for employees (such as safer working practices, fairer systems of performance management or enhanced promotion prospects). The absence of supportive workplace legislation, statutory time-off rights and generous government funding are also factors (although a full examination of these aspects is beyond the scope of this paper). Employers appear willing to engage with unions on the environment. It is heavily promoted by the Trades Union Congress (TUC) – the national coordinating centre for British unions – and it is generally supported by union leaderships. Low take-up may therefore also be attributable to, *inter alia*, crowded local agendas of branch-based executives. Although not yet a “core” union activity, most unions anticipate increasing their engagement.

## **Previous Research on Environmental Unionism**

The survey on which this paper reports formed part of a wider project to establish how “the environment” functions as a vehicle for union renewal; these wider aims inform the analysis wherever possible, although reporting on them *per se* is not the purpose of this paper. As we shall see, even popular agendas, facilitative of good employee relations, take time to develop.

LER theorists typically focus on certain variables to explain the patterning of unions’ environmental orientation. These include their class composition, their strategies within the political system, ideological and programmatic differences, policy-making mechanisms, and sectoral specificities (Siegmann, 1985; Silverman, 2004). Geography has also been treated as a dependent variable within a case-study approach investigating coalitional behaviour (Miller, 1980; Hojnacki, 1997; Obach, 1999, 2002; Diani, 2002; Doherty et al., n.d.).

Growing awareness of global climate change has also prompted researchers to adopt an international perspective comprising partisan approaches advocating greater union involvement (Rathzel and Uzzell, 2013; Hampton, 2015), largely descriptive accounts cataloguing national initiatives (Rivera Alejo and Murillo, 2014) and thoughtful evaluations of the obstacles faced by unions seeking recognition as international environmental “go to” actors (Silverman, 2006).

While this article both catalogues and seeks to understand UK unions’ contemporary environmental activism, it also attempts to understand the impact of environmental activism *on unions*. Of primary interest to LER scholars, therefore, may be its contribution to literature on union renewal.

## **The Labour-environmental Relationship in the UK**

Pro-environmental policy-making has been a feature of British trade unionism since at least the late 1960s, but unions and EMOs sustained only an arm’s-length relationship until the

mid-1990s (Farnhill, 2014b). In the 1990s an increasingly moderate trade union movement encountered a largely de-radicalised environmental movement and this facilitated greater collaboration (Farnhill, 2014b). This new, improved LER reflected unions' modernisation agendas and was intended to facilitate unions' rehabilitation within the UK's policy-making milieu. It included social partnerships, the devolution of power to sub-national union tiers (to better reflect membership diversity) and the adoption of systems of employee relations predicated on trust and suitable for progressing unions' developmental agendas (which required ongoing dialogue).

The environmental campaigning, organising and bargaining agenda of unions takes five broad forms. First, unions support and legitimise key environmental campaigns. Second, they use environmental arguments to strengthen traditional union demands (such as greater investment in public transport to reduce car dependency and pollution). Third, they strengthen the importance of environmental considerations within various policy domains (e.g. tougher environmental objectives in the UK's transport and planning regimes). Fourth, unions seek to reform the environmental agenda itself, so that decision-making is democratic and accountable, and policy itself is fairer. Finally, unions are engaged in "workplace greening", which refers to site-specific or employer-specific activities focused on the environmental performance of organisations.

Table 1 shows how much time unions are spending on a range of environmental categories.<sup>1</sup> Unions' activities have coalesced around a relatively limited number of issues that are important to them,<sup>2</sup> suggesting that unions exercise some control over the agenda which may reflect membership interests. But the clearest message from Table 1 is that environmental activism appears to be a minority pursuit within unions. Workplace greening – focused on, inter alia, environmental audits, waste policies and water usage – comprises the bulk of their green agenda (Farnhill, 2013).

Occasional surveys carried out by the TUC between 2002 and 2012 have revealed membership's continuing concern about the environment, accompanied by a belief that government is not doing enough and that environmental protection cannot be left to private enterprises (TUC, 2002, 2004, 2007, 2012). There is no statutory entitlement to facility time for environmental work, and few union green representatives (UGRs) receive any. Despite this, management/union discussions on the environment became more frequent throughout the 2000s, although much of it is informal. This situation suggests that those responsible for the agenda locally are "squeezing" it in alongside better-established agendas and that much environmental bargaining remains dependent upon a benevolent management. The results also suggest that little is being done to capitalise on members' and activists' enthusiasm for the environment.

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<sup>1</sup> Categories were derived from analysing the TUC's environmental policies from 1967 to 2011 using content (designation) analysis (Farnhill, 2014a).

<sup>2</sup> Correlational analysis – not presented here – shows that the amount of time spent on specific categories broadly correlates with the importance unions attach to them.

**Table 1: Amount of time spent by unions on various environmental categories**

Category	Significant Amount (Number of unions)	Fair Amount	None/Little
Transport	3	8	10
Energy	3	7	10
Global Warming/Atmospheric Pollution	1	9	11
Manufacturing/Economy	4	3	14
Environmental Regulation/Policy Instruments	1	8	11
Marine Environment	0	2	18
Farming/Food	0	5	15
Human Health	2	7	12
Wildlife/Conservation	0	1	19
Water	2	6	12
International Environmental Issues	4	11	5
Research and Development/Science	2	5	13
Housing/Land-use	2	4	14
Emergency Services	2	2	16
Population Growth	0	3	17
Infrastructure Projects	1	6	13

## Methodology

### **Rationale**

There has been a gradual increase in unions' green agenda, with activism characterised by a diverse repertoire including institution building, workplace greening, lobbying, campaigning, joint meetings with employers and strategic relations with external environmental actors. It was also clear that this is an agenda in transition, and that participation varies considerably (Farnhill, 2013).

Slowly, increasing numbers of unions are becoming environmentally active. This is an under-developed and potentially significant field of study. My survey is designed to contribute data about this field by identifying the characteristics of environmentally active unions, especially what they do that denotes and facilitates their environmental activism.

### **Respondents**

As previously mentioned, the survey formed part of a wider project focused on environmental policy-making by the TUC. The questionnaire was administered by post to the Environmental Policy Officers (EPO) of all unions in England and Wales affiliated to the TUC; in order to achieve a UK perspective, it was also administered to unions organised solely in Scotland and Northern Ireland (and affiliated to the Scottish TUC and the Northern Ireland Committee of the Irish Federation of Trade Unions respectively). Twenty-two unions responded (Table 2), a response rate of 31%, from unions representing approximately 80 per cent of the UK's seven million trade union members. A range of micro, small, medium, large and super

unions responded.<sup>3</sup> Only two unions organised solely in Northern Ireland responded, but many respondent unions are organised across the whole of the UK. The respondents comprise both private and public sector unions, including some with sizeable memberships in both sectors, and represent thirteen industrial sectors, excluding four that described themselves as a multi-sectoral “General Union”.

**Table 2: Alphabetical list of respondent unions and sectors**

	<b>Union</b>	<b>Major Sector(s)</b>
1	Bakers Food and Allied Workers Union	Food Manufacturing
2	British Association of Colliery Managers (1)	Mining
3	Communication Workers Union	Post and Parcel Services
4	Connect Sector (Prospect) (2)	Communications
5	Diageo Staff Association (3)	Diageo (drink industry)
6	Fire Brigades Union	Emergency Services
7	FDA	Civil Service
8	GMB	General Union
9	Hospital Consultants and Specialists Association	Health
10	National Union of Teachers	Education
11	Northern Ireland Public Services Association	Public Services
12	Prospect	Public Services/General
13	Public and Commercial Services Union	Civil Service
14	Transport and Salaried Staff Association (4)	Transport
15	Union of Shop, Distributive and Allied Workers	Retail
16	UNISON	Local Government
17	Unite	General Union
18	Unite Ireland	General Union
19	United Road Transport Union	Transport
20	University and College Union	Education
21	Writers Guild of Great Britain	Writers/Creative
22	Yorkshire Independent Staff Association (5)	Financial Services

*Notes*

1. *Joined Prospect in 2014.*
2. *Connect was merging with Prospect in 2010 but retained its own “identity” as part of transitional arrangements.*
3. *Returned incomplete, but with a covering note detailing the union’s activities. Dissolved in 2010.*
4. *Completed by a senior lay representative.*
5. *Merged into Aegis in 2014.*

**Independent variables**

Background measures are considered to see if patterns of environmental activism vary according to union size, finances and sector (public/private). Additional independent variables include: commitment of senior officers to the environment; the existence of environmental policy-making structures and UGRs; relations with EMOs and the employment of EPOs.

<sup>3</sup> There is no agreed system of classifying unions by size. I adopted the following system based on membership: <5 000: Micro; 5 001–50 000: Small; 50 001–300 000: Medium; 301 000–1 000 000: Large; >1 000 000: Super.

Correlational analysis was undertaken to measure the strength of the relationship between the independent variables with unions' overall environmental activism score. So, for example, if the commitment of senior officers goes up, does the union's overall activism increase (+ve), decrease (-ve) or stay the same (0)? Correlation is not causation, of course, and certain variables may be the products of unions' environmental activism rather than their cause. The strength of the relationships, however, remains important, and directionality can frequently be intuited. Alas, the small *N* prevented more sophisticated tests required to evaluate the precise contribution of individual variables to unions' environmental activism.

### **Dependent variables**

The main analysis uses Environmental Activity Score (EAS) – the sum (or  $\mu$ ) of scores to twenty-three questions in the survey (see Appendix). It is a basic measure of an individual union's overall activism as comprising factors which can be construed as evidence of environmental activism (see also Figure 1).<sup>4,5</sup>

### **Limitations**

This is a small-*N* study problematising generalisability. Its main value is that it investigates an under-researched field of union activity on which future research can build. Additionally, the questionnaires were completed by EPOs, and it is possible that responses may reflect the thoughts of individuals rather than wider thinking across the union.<sup>6</sup> Responses may have been formulated to present their respective organisations in a favourable light. These are, of course, occupational hazards. Greater understanding of unions' environmental activism should incorporate a temporal dimension and secure a larger number of respondents (including unions' sub-national environmental actors).

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<sup>4</sup> The survey utilised Likert scales which are problematic. Most obviously, respondents may not interpret and answer questions identically. A further problem concerns the equivalence of items. Where all items feature the same score range the scores can simply be added up, but who is to say that the impact of having a "Committed" leadership (on a union's environmental agenda) is five times that of having an national executive committee (NEC) that is "Completely Uninterested"? This problem is also invoked when handling multiple Likert scales – even if they have used the same scoring system, who is to say that in respondents' minds – and in the real world – the impact of a behaviour or attitude worth two points on one scale is really identical to the impact of a behaviour or attitude worth two points on another scale? These problems have led some researchers to weight scores, and there are several ways to achieve this. I have opted for the simplest – that is, to re-score the items so that the "span" of responses to all questions – from highest to lowest – feature the same ratio (De Vaus, 1991).

<sup>5</sup> Although several variables treated here as independent also contributed to EAS, their *relative* contribution is minor.

<sup>6</sup> Competing attitudes towards the environment – including the extent to which it should be prioritised – undoubtedly exist within individual unions. Respondents were deliberately asked to complete the survey in an official, rather than a personal, capacity and to reflect their union's dominant attitudes towards green issues. While I cannot prove this has happened there is no *prima facie* reason to suggest it has not.

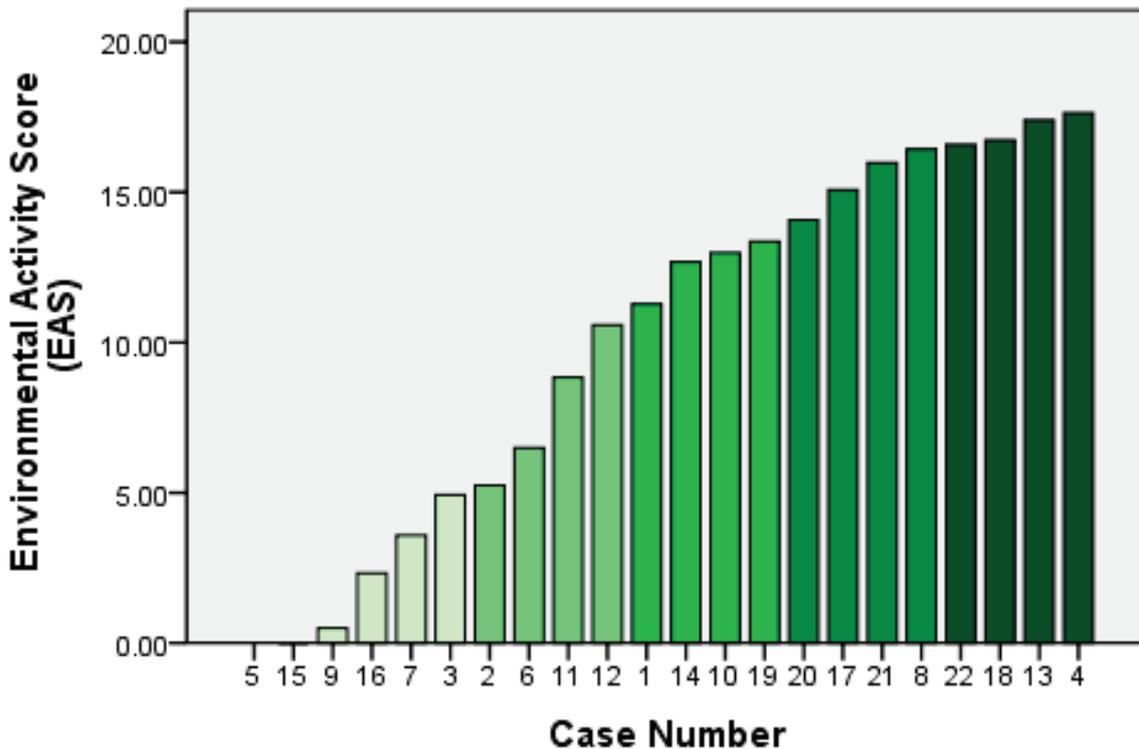


Figure 1: Environmental Activity Score of respondent unions

## Findings

### *Background measures*

#### Union size and membership trends<sup>7</sup>

Norton (2004: 207) and Farnhill (2014b: 47) posit that novel bargaining agendas may more easily emerge in large, diverse unions where new, knowledgeable collectives can coalesce to successfully assert them. Membership may also be important if engagement with “the environment” forms part of a membership renewal strategy. Results of one-tailed Pearson correlation for the variable EAS with Total Membership shows a strong positive correlation ( $r = .588$ ,  $p$  [one-tailed] significant at  $<.01$ ), but  $R^2$  ( $0.588^2 \times 100$ ) shows that Total Membership still only accounts for 34.5 per cent of variation in EAS scores. Spearman correlation of Membership Trend and EAS ( $r_s = .064$ ) was *Ns* ( $p >.05$ ). The statistic is affected by two “super” unions, each with a high EAS. When these two cases were excluded, EAS and Total Membership showed a medium positive correlation ( $r = .498$ ,  $p$  [one-tailed] significant at  $<.05$ ) while EAS and Membership Trend remained *Ns* ( $p >.05$ ). Although larger unions are more environmentally active there is no *prima facie* evidence that environmental activism is being undertaken as a

<sup>7</sup> Membership data was obtained from the relevant Trade Union Certification Officer. Membership trend was categorised as: Down, Static or Up. Spearman’s correlation coefficient is used for Membership Trend, as it is a non-parametric correlation suitable for ordinal data.

response to increasing or decreasing memberships.

### Finances<sup>8</sup>

Union size and income are related, and the willingness of unions to adopt the agenda may be influenced by the financial resources available. Thus poorer unions may be less likely to divert resources away from productivist agendas. EAS and Size of Union Deficit/Surplus (% of Income) shows a medium negative correlation –  $r = -.467$ ,  $p$  [one-tailed] significant at  $<.05$  – meaning lower surpluses (or higher deficits) are associated with higher EAS scores.  $R^2$  is 0.218, meaning that the size of union surplus/deficit accounts for 21.8 per cent of variation in EAS scores. Although declining memberships are unrelated to unions’ environmental activism, it remains possible that indebted unions are more willing to experiment with new agendas for other reasons – for example, to improve relations with employers. However, the value of  $R^2$  shows that almost 80 per cent of variation in EAS cannot be accounted for by financial status.

### Sector – public or private

In the 1990s private sector unions replaced public sector unions as the main progenitors of TUC environmental policy (Farnhill, 2014 a). However, there is only a weak point-biserial correlation (used here and elsewhere for discrete dichotomous variables with two categories) between EAS and Public/Private Sector:  $r_{pb} = .28$ ,  $p$  (one-tailed)  $> .05$ . In addition to being  $N_s$ ,  $R^2$  is 0.078, meaning unions’ public/private sector status accounts for just 7.8 per cent of variation in EAS. (Two unions, each organised substantively in both the public and private sectors were excluded from the analysis.) Although private sector unions are now the dominant environmental *policy-makers* it seems that environmentally *active* unions are just as likely to be found in the public sector as they are the private sector. Their motivations may differ, however – private sector unions (particularly those in energy-intensive and “dirty” industries) may be driven by membership interests, while public sector unions may be driven by an ecological “world view”.

### Memberships

Much has been written about the different membership bases of the labour and environmental movements. EMOs are, so the argument goes, dominated by post-modernist “new middle classes” while unions reflect blue-collar interests (Cotgrove and Duff, 1980; Byrne, 1997: 67). Additionally, the science behind environmentalism may appeal more to professionals, wired-in to particular knowledge communities and possessing the cognitive skills required to appreciate what is happening to the ecosystem (Norton, 2004: 108). However, Farnhill’s (2013) research shows that historically union members and activists have been just as concerned about environmental degradation as the wider population. Furthermore, not only do private sector and blue-collar unions dominate contemporary TUC environmental policy-making but evidence from the TUC Green Workplaces Projects shows the agenda enjoys cross-occupational support (TUC, 2008, 2010a). On the other hand, Waddington (2004) argues that unions representing skilled and professional workers are more likely to be welcomed and consulted with on technical issues than unions representing low-skilled or unskilled employees. However, EAS has a weak point-biserial correlation with the variables Blue Collar or White Collar, and the relationship is  $N_s - r_{pb} = -.189$ , (one-tailed)  $p = > .05$ ). Point biserial correlation was also run after categorising

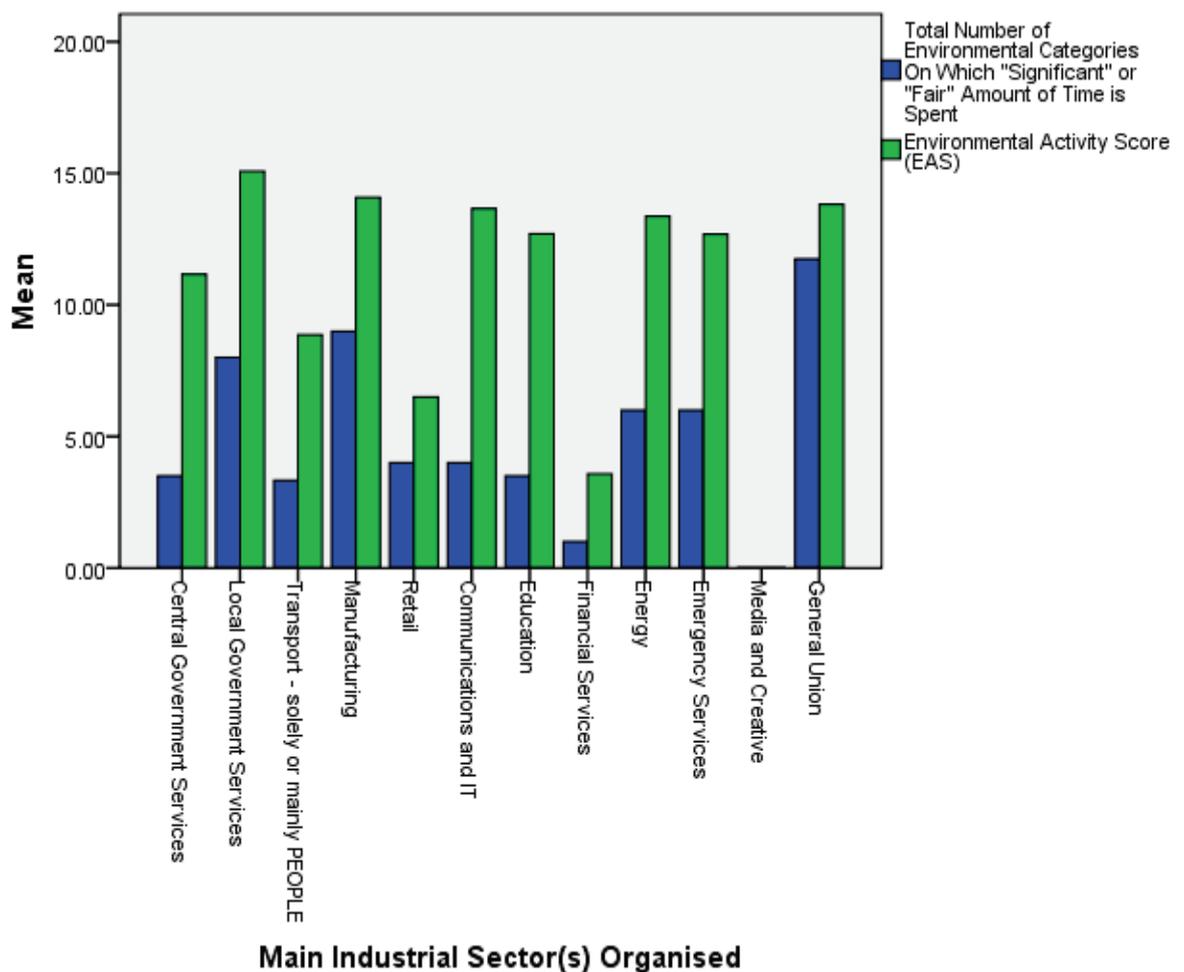
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<sup>8</sup> Financial data was obtained from the relevant Trade Union Certification Officer.

unions as either Unskilled/Semi-skilled or Skilled/Professional, and the result was weaker ( $r_{pb} = -.098$ , [one-tailed]  $Ns p \Rightarrow .05$ ). Tentatively, employers do not seem to discriminate between skilled and unskilled workers – unions representing skilled workers may be more welcomed in the boardroom, but employers may well recognise the importance of securing shop-floor support and knowledge for the behavioural changes often required by environmental reforms.

### Industrial sector

The small  $n$  prevents a generalisable sectoral analysis of unions' environmental activism. Figure 2 shows how unions' EAS differs by sector, as does the number of environmental issues they handle.



**Figure 2: Mean EAS and mean total number of environmental categories on which union spends “fair” or “significant” amounts of time, by industrial sector**

General Union and Manufacturing unions encounter the most environmental issues, possibly because they have large memberships – including in industries where “the environment” presses hardest. Indeed, Pearson correlation of the variables Total Membership and Total Number of Environmental Categories on which Time is Spent correlate strongly and positively –

$r = .532$ ,  $p$  (one-tailed) significant at  $< .01$ . Local Government, Manufacturing, General Union, Communications and IT, Energy, Education and Emergency Services all score highly for EAS. There was a mixture of public and private respondents for these sectors. Retail, Financial Services and Media and Creative score the lowest – respondents were all in the private sector. Sectoral differences in systems of employee relations may be relevant. Where well-established systems exist (e.g. local government), unions may find it easier to establish a new workplace agenda compared to sectors (such as retail) where employee relations are non-existent or under-developed or tense, where unions may instead remain focused on productivist agendas.

There is also a strong, positive Pearson  $r$  correlation between Total Number of Environmental Categories on which Time is Spent and EAS -  $r = .622$  ( $p$  [one-tailed] significant at  $< .005$ ) and  $R^2$  is 0.387. The more issues a union is engaged with, the more active it is likely to be overall (and vice versa). The number of environmental issues engaged with accounts for 38.7 per cent of variation in unions' overall environmental activism. There may be a quite simple dynamic at work: larger, more diverse unions encounter the most environmental issues and this fuels greater overall engagement, including beyond workplaces. However, the modest statistic shows that it is possible for a union to engage with a relatively limited number of environmental issues but still evidence high EAS (and vice versa) because 61.3 per cent of variability in unions' overall environmental activism does not associate with the number of environmental issues engaged with.

There are several ways of understanding this. EAS is a measure of overall activism within and beyond the workplace: just because a union is focused on a limited number of workplace environmental issues does not mean it cannot be acting more concertedly overall than a union handling multiple issues. It may also be the case that unions in “dirty” sectors may be pursuing an employer-focused workplace greening bargaining agenda concentrated on a limited number of issues, while those seeking to develop a green agenda but organised in sectors where “the environment” presses least may be participating in wider environmental campaigning.

Unions' environmental activism may therefore be influenced by the complex relationship between union size, sectoral specificities (the state of employee relations and the salience of “the environment”) and the types of environmental activities undertaken by individual unions.

### ***Theatres of environmental activity***

#### **Workplaces**

During my research I also accessed union grey literature, which suggests that large numbers of union-organised workplaces are doing *something* on the environment. Much of it is small-scale, however, and often the reportage does not indicate clearly whether the union actually contributed to a particular innovation, whether it was employer-led or prompted by other non-union interests in the workplace. My questionnaire revealed that seventeen respondent unions were implementing a green agenda somewhere, with most activity occurring in large private-sector organisations (eight unions), the public sector (five unions), and within unions themselves (ten unions); there is less activity in smaller private sector organisations (four unions) and in communities (two unions).<sup>9</sup> This patterning is unsurprising. It is evidence of capacity-building and the agenda's newness. Additionally, unions are stronger in the public sector and large

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<sup>9</sup> The total number here exceeds seventeen because some unions are operationalising a green agenda in more than one theatre of activity.

organisations than in the private sector and small ones. It makes sense to initiate new agendas in settings where the union is established and has the capacity to absorb the extra work.

### Communities

The limited numbers of unions participating in community-based environmental activities reflects the immaturity of community unionism in the UK generally (Wills and Simms, 2004: 66; Parker, 2008). Unions may understand their community work as part of their recruitment, organising and political revival strategies and may therefore behave cautiously, seeking guarantees regarding potential payback before committing – union resources are precious and civil alliance-building can be time- and labour-intensive. Alliances may also necessitate shared decision-making and power-sharing processes which unions may not be comfortable with (Tattersall, 2005: 108). Unions cannot be forced to engage with civil society; even when there is intrinsic solidarity (in this case with local green groups) the workplace remains unions' primary focus and they must decide for themselves how far and fast they wish to engage (Friedman, 2004: 366; Hyman, 2004: 345). A community-based green agenda might empower branches and lay representatives (particularly UGRs where they exist), extending the "reach" of trade unionism where it is compatible with the organising model and social partnership. But the difficulties, uncertainties and sensitivities associated with community unionism help to explain the immaturity of UK unions' community-based green agenda.

Still, in 2011 the Trades Union Councils Joint Consultative Committee identified "Green Workplaces" and "Green Communities" as strategic priorities (TUCJCC, 2011). Additionally, several unions have formed Climate Action Groups tasked with developing community-based environmental campaigns and working with local government on issues such as public transport, housing insulation and food waste.

Furthermore, the Campaign Against Climate Change (CCC) was formed in 2005. It is an explicitly political campaign group focused on mobilising mass community-based action against global warming, emphasising the links between climate change and social justice. Nested within CCC is the Campaign Against Climate Change Trade Union Group (CCTU) whose *One Million Climate Jobs NOW!* (2009) and *One Million Climate Jobs – Solving the Economic and Environmental Crises* (2010) sold in large numbers. They offer a Keynesian solution to environmental degradation based on the creation of one million new green jobs in the housing, renewable energy and transport sectors. CCTU is an important addition to the UK's red-green campaign landscape, encouraging grassroots union activists to become environmentally active nationally and locally, and the creation of a politically-charged red-green agenda capable of uniting ecologists and trade unionists. CCTU seeks to do so by working within unions; unions can affiliate nationally, regionally or at branch level. Affiliates are prompted to use AGMs and conferences to secure resolutions to support the campaign and to form local CCTU groups. CCTU is at "arm's length" from individual unions and the TUC, and so is able to initiate and associate itself with radical environmental praxis from which the TUC and certain union leaderships might prefer to remain distant.

Despite evidence that unions are seeking to accelerate their community-based green agenda, it remains inchoate. Tellingly, in *Swords of Justice and Civic Pillars: The Case for Greater Engagement Between British Trade Unions and Community Organisations* (TUC, 2010), the TUC does not mention the environment once!

### **Endogenous characteristics**

This section investigates a limited number of endogenous characteristics in order to identify which, if any, associate with environmental activism. Results are shown in Tables 3 and 4. A combination of Pearson, Spearman and point-biserial correlations were utilised, according to whether the independent variable was interval, ordinal or dichotomous. The variables “Does your union have one or more staff with environmental policy responsibility?” and “Does union produce specialist environmental resources and materials for activists and members?” are dichotomous and therefore point-biserial correlation was used. All dependent variables used in Spearman’s rho are ordinal.

**Table 3: Relationships between selected organisational characteristics and EAS**

<b>Correlations</b>		
		<b>Environmental Activity Score (EAS)</b>
Does your union have one or more staff with environmental policy responsibility? (1)	Pearson Correlation	.730**
	Sig. (1-tailed)	.000
	N	21
Does union produce specialist environmental resources and materials for activists and members? (2)	Pearson Correlation	.785**
	Sig. (1-tailed)	.000
	N	21
External Contact Score (3)	Pearson Correlation	.870**
	Sig. (1-tailed)	.000
	N	21
*. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (1-tailed).		

#### *Notes*

1. *Point-biserial correlation*

2. *Point-biserial correlation*

3. *Respondent unions were awarded a mark for each external environmental organisation they reported regular contact with.*

Unions’ environmental activism evidences significant medium and/or strong positive relationships with five variables:<sup>10</sup> the employment of EPOs (capable of accounting for 53.29 per cent of variation in EAS); the provision of specialist environmental resources (61.62 per cent); external contacts (75.69 per cent); regular discussion of the environment by NECs (34.6 per cent); and the extent of union’s branch-based environmental function (52.85 per cent) (derived from  $R^2$  and  $R_s^2$  as appropriate). (See Table 4.)

<sup>10</sup> Of course, directionality of any relationship cannot be inferred from point-biserial correlation test results.

**Table 4: Relationships between selected organisational characteristics and EAS**

Correlations			Environmental Activity Score (EAS)
Spearman's rho	How often does the NEC discuss environmental matters?	Correlation Coefficient	.589*
		Sig. (1-tailed)	.003
		N	21
	How committed to environmental agenda are union's most senior officials?	Correlation Coefficient	.346
		Sig. (1-tailed)	.067
		N	20
	Percentage of branches that have allocated environmental responsibilities to one or more activists	Correlation Coefficient	.727*
		Sig. (1-tailed)	.002
		N	14
	Percentage of branch committees with an environmental rep on them	Correlation Coefficient	.131
		Sig. (1-tailed)	.402
		N	6
*Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (1-tailed).			

### EPOs

The low numbers of unions that report employing staff with explicit responsibilities for environmental issues is interesting because more unions report environmental activity than report employing EPOs; someone must be doing the work. In such circumstances it is likely that environmental issues are dispersed across the union and dealt with ad hoc by Full Time Officers (FTO) or delegated to senior lay representatives. Eight unions employed support staff to deal with environmental issues, typically just one or two people; usually providing administrative services to EPOs.

Of the seven unions employing EPOs, the trend was to allocate responsibility to a single post-holder. EPOs are classed as senior officials within union hierarchies. They may not spend all their time on environmental work; additional responsibilities include research, education and organising as well as some non-environmental bargaining responsibilities. Despite the links between health and safety and the environment, only two EPOs also had responsibility for health and safety.

The typical EPO has been in post for at least two years, having worked in a different role for the same union for an unspecified period before that. They are middle-aged and well-educated, but do not have a formal environmental qualification. They are long-standing union professionals rather than purposely recruited environmental specialists, suggesting that unions see the environment as another agenda to be developed via traditional FTO skillsets (rather than

an unknown and/or largely technical matter).

### Training and resources for UGRs

Eleven unions produce their own environmental resources (sometimes in collaboration with external expert bodies) for union green representatives; twelve unions encourage members to access environmental training. Many unions now have green pages on their websites featuring links to key environmental organisations/resources, and some produce bespoke literature, much of which is focused on workplace greening. Some unions, such as Prospect and UCU, issue newsletters and have established UGR networks and/or Facebook groups to encourage an *esprit de corps*.

The TUC also provides environmental training and resources to UGRs. In 2010, for example, it established a national online network which comprises an e-newsletter and training materials, case studies and resources to support workplace negotiations (Pearce, 2012). It also offers an on-line course for UGRs, and has developed a taught course for roll-out by TUC Regional Offices.

### Relations with EMOs

Respondents were asked to indicate which environmental management organisations they had regular contact with, and were given a range of organisations to choose from: the Green Party; the Carbon Trust; National Trusts; Royal Society for the Protection of Birds; World Wildlife Fund; Campaign to Protect Rural England; Friends of the Earth; Greenpeace; A World To Win; CCC; Stop Climate Chaos Coalition; People and Planet; Rising Tide; Christian Ecology Link; Operation Noah. This list is not exhaustive but includes many of the most well-known organisations, selected to represent four main types. The Green Party is an explicitly political organisation. The Carbon Trust is by far the most important and well-established technocratic and advisory body in the UK, providing chargeable and pro bono environmental services to organisations as well as funding for green initiatives. Certain well-known “traditional” environmental organisations were selected to represent the more conservative (and conservation-focused) bodies active in the green agenda. Finally, a selection of “new social movement” (NSM) EMOs was provided.

Twelve unions reported regular contact with an environmental organisation. Contact with The Carbon Trust was fairly common (seven unions). This is unsurprising; until recently it was also an awarding body which co-funded the TUC’s early workplace greening initiatives and advised unions on their own in-house greening.

Unions have barely any contact with the Green Party (two unions) which, since at least the late 1990s, has attempted to develop closer ties with unions via its Green Party Trades Union Group (GPTU). Membership of the GPTU is open to all party members (GPTU website, 2010). The weak relationship between unions and the Green Party is almost certainly associated with the latter’s political weakness and with unions’ historical relationship with the Labour Party. Combined, these appear to trump the increasing alignment between the environmental policies of trade unions and the labour market policies of the Green Party. The Green Party was, and remains, largely excluded from the labour movement. Rootes (1995: 84) argues that the Labour Party’s inclusiveness during the 1980s meant that environmentalism was unable to compete effectively with the agendas of other (radical) actors. Thus environmentalism within the Labour Party remained undeveloped and the Green Party largely ignored by the British left.

Only one union reported regular contact with older environmental bodies. Although these

are often considered “go to” actors by governments, their interest in environmental politics is more likely to be indirect, peripheral or narrowly focused. They may also be concerned that alliances with overtly political partners (such as unions) may compromise their influence with other key actors, alienate members and even jeopardise their charitable status. Crucially, these older bodies may not see themselves as part of a progressive movement and do not expound a normative vision of “the good life” that accords with unions’ wider transformative agendas.

Of the twelve unions reporting regular contact with new social movement EMOs, eight were in contact with the CCC, six with Friends of the Earth, four each with Greenpeace and the Stop Climate Chaos Coalition, and three with the student-led People and Planet. This is, of course, a two-way street. As I have argued elsewhere, unions are building relationships with NSM EMOs and NSM EMOs are reciprocating (Farnhill, 2014b). Traditional organisations are less likely to be courting unions.

Overall, unions reporting regular contact with at least one environmental organisation (of any type) were in relationships with three to four organisations, typically NSM EMOs, of which the Campaign Against Climate change and Friends of the Earth are the most popular. It appears that despite pursuing a distinctly conservative workplace greening agenda, unions also understand “the environment” as a cross-cutting, politically-charged, progressive agenda which NSM EMOs are considered more able and willing to assist with.

#### Union leaderships and national executives

Speaking at the 2010 TUC Green Conference, Frances O’Grady, the TUC’s Deputy General Secretary, said “the environment is a strategic priority for the trade union movement. Our next priority is to be seen as strategic actors in this agenda by government and by business”. One would therefore expect to see union leaderships engaging with environmental issues. Salamon (1992: 193) argues: “Any union leader ... would argue that the role is not simply to carry out the membership’s wishes without question but to interpret them in the light of the external environments within which the organisation exists and to determine what is feasible and realistic”. They are, then, likely to play key roles in unions’ agenda-setting processes where, as Danford et al. (2003: 11) argue, they will be concerned with reconciling competing demands (from various parts of the organisation) in order to minimise conflict.

The survey shows a majority (twelve) of senior officials are committed or highly committed to their union’s environmental agenda. Six respondents describe their senior officials’ attitude as neither committed nor uninterested and two unions describe their senior officials as uninterested. Further, fifteen union NECs “Occasionally” discuss environmental issues while two do so “Regularly” and only five “Never”. Although just seven unions have created formal national dedicated committees to discuss the environment, the figure rises to twelve for informal and/or ad hoc meetings. The data suggests union elites are generally – and genuinely – interested in the environment and that it is frequently discussed at a senior, national level.

Surprisingly, environmental activism is only moderately related to the commitment of senior officials (which accounts for just 11.97 per cent of variation in EAS and is at any rate  $N_s$ ,  $p >.05$ ). This is surprising because leaderships exert significant control over union expenditure (and the accompanying results suggest resourcing is important) and strategic direction (which includes decisions regarding the adoption of new agendas). Siegmann (1985) noted that some union leaderships were uninterested in prosecuting an environmental agenda even when their members wanted them to, but such resistance was harder to sustain in more democratic unions. Similarly, Mason’s (1999: 177) case study of the Transport and General Workers Union’s

environmental agenda attributes its success to a combination of supportive national officials and decentralised structures. Slightly differently, Yates (2004: 349) maintains that it is the actual tension between grassroots autonomy and centralised leadership control which enhances innovation and strategic capacity: too much leadership stifles innovation but too little risks tactical disunity and poor resource management. Leaderships' moderate influence revealed here reminds us that unions are polyarchic, democratic, member-led organisations with multiple centres of power and decision-making (Salamon, 1992), and the regularity with which environmental issues are discussed in senior forums appears more important than the support of senior officials per se.

### UGRs and sub-national structures

My questionnaire asked, "Who is driving unions' interest in the environment?" Respondents provided a "bottom-up" picture: employers, as external actors, have the least influence, followed by national union officials and committees, branches and individual members. Unions' national delegate conferences have the most influence; although they are national bodies, they typify lay government and place members and branches at the forefront of policy-making. One must, however, acknowledge the risk that respondents would want to emphasise the democratic nature of their unions and play down the influence of elites and appointed full-time officers.

Ten unions have green representatives at branch level and five have none at all. Seven do not know; it is possible that HQ-based EPOs are unfamiliar with what is happening across the wider union or there is a lack of effective governance over this relatively new union function. This contrasts with the situation regarding unions' other relatively recent function of learning and skills. There individual unions can provide accurate data regarding the number of union learning representatives (and the number of members accessing their services) because unions' learning agenda was initially funded by taxpayers' money which required an audit trail. In addition, environmental work may be performed on an ad hoc basis by Health and Safety Representatives or other branch officers who do not necessarily identify themselves as UGRs.

Of the ten unions who do report having branch environmental representatives, six believe that no more than 10 per cent of their total branches have green representatives, while four believe that 11–30 per cent of their branches do. Further, where UGRs do exist their environmental role is likely to be their main role in less than 10 per cent of cases. For example, six unions indicate that many of their UGRs are also likely to be Health and Safety Officers. Finally, only six unions indicated that their UGRs are formally represented on branch committees. Leaving aside the difficulties associated with identifying and counting UGRs, it seems that only a relatively small number of unions have any, and those that do, do not have many. Their green role is not always their main role, and if they are members of their branch committees it is not necessarily in their capacity as a UGR.

That the existence of UGRs appears to be more important than their formal presence on branch committees ( $N_s [p > .05]$  and  $n$  is considerably smaller) is further evidence of newness and capacity-building. For now, environmentally active unions are distinguishable by the presence or absence of unfinished "fit for purpose" sub-national structures. If UGRs are peripheral, exercising limited influence on branches' bargaining and campaigning priorities, this may explain why an agenda supposedly popular with members and activists remains rare. For example, earlier research found that established local hierarchies could be resistant to new agendas (Farnhill, 2013).

The immaturity of some unions' sub-national structures contrasts sharply with the activities of the TUC and certain unions' national-level activities, which instead indicate that the environment is viewed as a strategic priority worth allocating resources to. A core-periphery model of understanding unions' resourcing of the environment is therefore suggested: well-defined structures exist at the centre (the TUC), becoming "patchier" as the focus shifts outwards to individual unions and "patchier" still when we look at individual unions' sub-national provision.

## Conclusion

This article has attempted to identify the characteristics of an environmentally active union. The data suggests that environmental activism within unions is generally unrelated to matters such as finances and membership trend, although larger unions are generally more active. Neither is there a clear relationship between industrial sectors and environmental activism, although unions in some sectors may encounter more industry-related environmental issues and this may stimulate wider activism. Tentatively, the most environmentally active unions are larger, multi-sector unions, but sectoral patterning is complex and possibly linked to the salience of the environment and the state of employee relations.

Several endogenous variables correlate strongly with unions' overall environmental activism, including union elites' interest in the environment, the resources available to (prospective) UGRs and links with EMOs. This suggests that headquarters retains key powers of initiative, despite unions insisting that members are "in the driving seat" and the organisational reforms introduced in the 1990s to empower branches. These endogenous variables possess greater explanatory power than union size, membership and sectoral considerations but may themselves be the product of unions' environmental activism, not the cause.

The precise commitment of unions' national leaderships varies, and unions' sub-national environmental praxis is underdeveloped. Leaderships exert considerable influence over expenditure and strategic direction – including whether or not to adopt new agendas. However, most leaderships did appear interested and approximately half of the respondent unions provided environmental training and resources to (prospective) UGRs. Variation in activism may, of course, be attributable to insufficient resourcing: for example, EPOs are rare, juggle their environmental work with other responsibilities, and lack technical expertise and administrative support.

Unions insist that the absence of facility time constrains their environmental activism, so the problem is at branch/workplace level and one of employee relations. Facility time would clearly be advantageous but unions are adept at coping without it (or with insufficient allocations) for all manner of activities, so its unavailability is not deterministic. Besides, as I have shown elsewhere, employers are content to subject environmental performance to employee relations – possibly because (for now) unions are prosecuting a conservative, technocentric agenda that does not place serious demands on employers and because much activity is directed towards reducing employers' energy bills (Farnhill, 2013, 2016). Employer resistance cannot easily explain unions' current piecemeal environmental activism.

If low take-up is a branch/workplace problem – and assuming memberships are interested – the problem may be one of local executives failing to commit. This could be due, *inter alia*, to enviro-scepticism, unfamiliarity or already crowded local agendas.

Unions' workplace environmental agenda emerged in the mid-to-late 1990s, but it has

matured much more slowly than their equality/diversity and learning/skills agendas, and the absence of supportive legislation and funding is implicated. Like these other agendas it may work well as a vehicle for partnership – at least for now, while still largely technocentric. But the evidence that partnership generates positive outcomes for unions is highly contested. Further, because the agenda does not generate any keenly felt injustices, there is scant evidence that it works as a recruitment tool. There will need to be a qualitative shift in the green agenda – away from the “sword of justice” and towards “vested interest” – if it is to function in this manner. Popular agendas facilitative of consensual employee relations are, by themselves, inadequate. Nevertheless, unions anticipate that their involvement in environmental matters will increase in future years. The environment remains an inchoate function of the UK trade union movement – but one in transition.

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## APPENDIX: EAS Scoring Regime

Question	Options	Available Mark	Cumulative Maximum Mark
Employs at least one member of staff with environmental policy responsibility	Yes/No	1/0	1
Employs support staff with environmental responsibility	Yes/No	1/0	2
Produces specialist environmental resources for members and activists	Yes/No	1/0	3
Has <i>formal</i> committees for forming and implementing environmental policy	Yes/No	1/0	4
Has <i>informal</i> committees for forming and implementing environmental policy	Yes/No	1/0	5
How often does the union’s National Executive Committee discuss environmental issues?	Never Occasionally Regularly Always	0 0.33 0.66 1	6
Commitment of union’s senior officials	Completely uninterested Relatively uninterested Neither committed nor uninterested Committed Highly committed	0 0.25 0.5 0.75 1	7
Participates in “Trade Union Sustainable Development Advisory Committee” (1)	Yes/No	1/0	8

Has regular contact with one or more EMOs	Yes/No	1/0	9
Provides/encourages environmental training for activists and members	Yes/No	1/0	10
% of branches that have allocated environmental responsibilities to one or more activists	0 1–10 11–30 31–50 51–70 >70	0 0.2 0.4 0.6 0.8 1	11
% of activists for whom the environment is the sole or dominant role	<10 11–30 31–50 51–70 >70 Don't know	0.2 0.4 0.6 0.8 1 0	12
% of Branch Committees containing a member or members sitting on them in their capacity as a union rep responsible for environmental matters	<10 11–30 31–50 51–70 >70 Don't know	0.2 0.4 0.6 0.8 1 0	13
Any individuals (lay or otherwise) with environmental responsibilities at intermediate levels of the union	Yes/No	1/0	14
Any structures responsible for environmental issues at intermediate levels of the union	Yes/No	1/0	15
Time spent on environmental policy areas	At least one "Significant" At least one "Fair" No or Little (2)	1 0.5 0 (1)	16
Union's future environmental agenda	Increasing significantly Increasing slightly Staying the same Decreasing slightly Decreasing significantly	1 0.5 0 0 0	17
Attitudes towards "the environment"	Statement 3 received highest mark out of 10. Statement 3 did not receive highest mark out of 10. (4)	0 1	18
According to experience, how effective is the environment as a recruitment tool?	Very effective Effective Neither Ineffective No experience	1 1 1 1 0 (5)	19
According to experience, how effective is the environment as a retention tool?	Very effective Effective Neither Ineffective No experience	1 1 1 1 0 (6)	20
According to experience, how effective is the environment as a tool for recruiting new activists?	Very effective Effective Neither Ineffective No experience	1 1 1 1 0 (7)	21

Implementing a workplace greening agenda?	Yes/No	1/0	22
According to experience, how effective is the environment in contributing to the union's influence with employers?	Very effective	1	23
	Effective	1	
	Neither	1	
	Ineffective	1	
	No experience	0 (8)	

*Notes*

1. A key joint TUC/Government body established in 1997.
2. Only the highest relevant mark was awarded, and only once. So a union which spent "Significant Amounts of Time" on several environmental issues and "Fair Amounts of Time" on several others would still only receive 1 mark. This is designed to avoid discrimination against single sector unions which may be less likely than multi-sector and general unions to encounter multiple environmental issues.
3. Unions were asked to award a score to 12 attitudes towards/reasons for becoming involved in 'the environment'. Analysis of unions' responses is forthcoming.
4. An explicitly negative statement "The Environment is a bit of a red-herring for unions.... Compared with pay ... and learning ... and health and safety etc. there is no attractive green 'product' for members and potential members."
- 5,6,7,8. As long as respondents were attempting to use the agenda for this purpose they scored – even if they found it ineffective.