

THE CHANGING FACE OF EMPLOYER COLLECTIVE ACTION IN THE UK

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Abstract

This paper provides an empirical analysis of the contemporary form of employers' organization in the United Kingdom (UK). Collective, member-based employers' organizations (EOs) have been recently identified as a neglected institution within the sociology of work and employment relations, largely because the theoretical literature proposes that significant collective action amongst employers in the UK should not exist. The research upon which this paper is based seeks to correct this neglect. It has mapped the population of EOs in the UK, using their websites as the primary source of information. The resulting database contains some 440 EOs identified as dealing with industrial relations or human resource issues. These have a combined membership of some 650,000 employers, or of individuals acting as employers. The research finds that only a small proportion of EOs are engaged in collective bargaining, seen as the core role of 'traditional' EOs. Overall, the fragmentation of industrial relations in recent decades has not acted to largely eliminate employers' collective action, as might have been expected from a reading of the theoretical literature, but has instead led to a refocusing.

1. Introduction

The United Kingdom (UK) is often described as a liberal market economy, in which economic activities are primarily coordinated by markets. Market-based competition is regarded as a core element of the UK's economy. However, this depiction overlooks the fact that employers cooperate in important ways with each other to gain collaborative advantages for their businesses. This paper outlines the findings of a survey focusing on the collaborative actions of UK employers within employers' organisations (EOs). EOs focus on the role of businesses as employers and are concerned with a variety of aspects related to work and employment

relations. They offer services and represent the interests of their members, with activities including providing legal assistance, coordinating and organising joint training initiatives, lobbying government, conducting collective bargaining and the drafting and enforcing of codes of conduct.

Despite the continued existence of EOs in the UK, they have been largely ignored by empirical research. The last book with a major focus on EOs in the UK was the edited volume 'The Power to Manage' by Tolliday and Zeitlin (1991), which shed light on the role of UK EOs from a comparative and historical perspective. In a recent literature review, Barry and Willkinson (2011) searched all major employment relations journals for research on EOs. They found that EOs are an under researched topic, particularly when compared with trade unions. However, their review identified a number of comparative studies, while EOs are studied regularly in Australia, Germany and Austria (e.g. Behrens, 2004; Huemer, Mesch, & Traxler, 1999; Windmuller, 1984). Overall, the article points to important classical studies of UK EOs (Gladstone, 1984), but does not identify a single article that dealt with UK EOs in the last 20 years. One reason as to why EOs have been so neglected can be found within the theoretical literature. This contains three main arguments, all assuming that significant collective action on the part of employers should not take place. Firstly, the Varieties of Capitalism framework (Hall & Soskice, 2001) argues that the organisation of business activities and economic governance differs between liberal market economies and co-ordinated market economies. Collective organisations play an important role within the latter, but the former's focus on market relations mean that their role is very limited. Second, Olson's collective action problem predicts that self-interested firms and individuals will not cooperate and form associations due to the risk of being exploited by free riders (Olson, 1965). While this problem can be overcome by coercion, such as compelling employers to join statutory training regimes, this does not tend

to take place in the UK. As a result of this, Olson's theory implies that collective action is unlikely to occur. Finally, it has been argued that neoliberalism has caused the decline of collective employment relations and of all institutions associated with collective bargaining (Purcell, 1995).

While there is some truth in all of these perspectives, their application tends to overstate the irrelevance of EOs and encourage the neglect of important new activities. Firstly, 44 per cent of employees in the public sector and 16 per cent of those in the private sector were covered by collective bargaining in 2011, equating to 23 per cent of all employees (Van Wanrooy, Bewley & Bryson, 2013). Secondly, EOs have been reinventing themselves to take account of the changing landscape within employment relations. While traditional EOs focusing on collective bargaining and industrial relations (IR) are now few in number, activity carried out by EOs has increasingly fused with that carried out by trade associations. Such associations traditionally had a separate identity from EOs, focusing on broader business interests as opposed to IR. This has created hybrid bodies that combine employment relations and human resource (HR) activity with wider business and economic interests. Finally, new types of organisation have emerged over the last decade, such as employers' forums, which often have a focus on single issues such as equal opportunities and corporate social responsibility.

In this paper we shed some light on the scale and nature of EOs in the UK, with our evidence coming from a survey conducted in 2014-2015. This identified the number of membership based organisations of employers active in the UK, used their websites to quantify those with some involvement within HR issues, before populating a database containing information on the structure and activity of such organisations. This survey is the first stage in an ESRC funded project that seeks to gain a comprehensive understanding of EOs in the UK. Subsequent

stages will make use of primary data including interview-based case studies of individual organisations, as well as surveys of their members. The interview programme is currently well underway. The remainder of the paper is structured as follows. In section 2 we discuss the survey, detail the methodology and highlight some of its strengths and weaknesses. Section 3 presents the main results, outlining the shape and scale of contemporary EO activity. Section 4 concludes and draws implications for current patterns of employers' collective action.

2. Methods

What is an employer organisation?

The 1992 Trade Union and Labour Relations (Consolidation) Act provides a statutory definition of an employers' association as consisting '*wholly or mainly of employers or individual owners of undertakings of one or more descriptions and whose principal purposes include the regulation of relations between employers of that description or those descriptions and workers or trade unions*', or '*are constituent, affiliated or linked to such organisations*' (Certification Office, 2014). This definition reflects the traditional view of EOs, which emphasized their role within formal mechanisms of collective bargaining. The decline of industry or multi-employer bargaining means that many EOs now exist that have no involvement in such activities. We argue for a more flexible definition of an EO, based on membership structure and organizational function. In our view, to be considered as an EO, an organization must firstly have a membership base that is comprised predominantly of employers, or of individuals acting as employers, all of which are required to pay subscription charges. The requirement to pay subscription charges acts to filter out organisations entirely dependent on other sources of funding. Secondly, it must have some activity within IR or HR.

Within IR, activity could include collective bargaining or providing related advisory services, while that within HR could include training, recruitment services or advising on health and safety, employment law, equality or other labour issues such as elements of corporate social responsibility.

Existing Sources

The traditional starting point for any examination of EOs in the UK has been the Certification Office. Established by the government in 1975, its responsibilities include the publication of a list of EOs that have chosen to join its register, along with each EO's annual return containing some financial and organisational data. According to its website, 56 EOs are currently registered. However, while this enables some analysis to be carried out, such as tracking trends over time, two problems exist. Firstly, inclusion is on a purely voluntary basis. This means that some high profile EOs, such as the Confederation of British Industry (CBI), are not featured. Secondly, the definition excludes many of the newer organisations that focus on training and corporate social responsibility, such as the Corporate Alliance against Domestic Violence. Overall, the Certification Office significantly understates the number of EOs in the UK. This is implicitly accepted by the Certification Office itself in its publication of a second list of 40 EOs, defined on its website as 'those associations known to the Certification Officer which have not applied to be on the official list'. Some other listings are available, but they generally combine EOs with professional bodies based on individual membership. For example, a commercial directory lists some 5,000 across the UK and the Republic of Ireland (Thompson, 2011), while a web-based directory compiled by the Trade Association Forum (a non-statutory body funded by its members that was established in 1997 by the CBI and the Department of Trade and Industry) lists some 2,400. The Trade Association Forum also carries

out occasional benchmarking surveys of its members, with the most recent being carried out in 2010, while 100 trade associations responded to its 2005-06 survey (Trade Association Forum, 2006).

Our approach

Our approach uses the Trade Association Forum's directory as a starting point, due to its size and contemporary nature. The first step was to screen the database, so as to remove professional bodies, merged or defunct organizations and those whose geographic focus was outside of the UK. This generated a longlist of 873 trade and employer organizations. The second stage examined these to identify those that had some role within HR or IR. This generated a shortlist of 375 organizations. However, it became apparent that even this did not capture the totality of EOs in the UK. Cross-checks against the Certification Office's lists led to the inclusion of further organizations, such as regional local government associations, while ongoing research led to the identification of membership based employer forums, such as the Business Disability Forum. In total, 67 additional organizations were identified, giving a total of 442. A questionnaire was then developed containing some 60 questions to be answered for each EO across: 1) the membership composition and the extent to which this is based on employer size, sector, industry or the nature of the issue(s) with which it deals; 2) the internal structure and governance arrangements; 3) the nature of the activities and services provided to, and on behalf of, members; 4) the extent and nature of the relationship with trade unions and other institutions of worker voice, as well as any political role, including the nature and extent of contact with government and its agencies.

While the database was primarily populated from EO websites, the starting point was to gather data from a small number of other web sources. Certification Office records were used to collect data contained within the returns made by registered EOs, the Financial Analysis Made Easy online database was accessed to obtain annual turnover data where available and the House of Commons website was searched to identify EOs that had testified before subject committees. Each EO's website was then examined, with keyword searches made for more than 10 terms such as 'annual report', 'unions', 'adjudication' and 'bargaining'. Once this had been done, each website was visually searched to populate the database. Overall, the shortlisting process involved the individual examination of over 2,400 websites, while populating the database involved the manual collection and inputting of over 20,000 individual data points into an access database.

This approach enables data to be captured on a far larger number of organisations than those listed by the Certification Office, enabling a more realistic estimate of both the total number of employers' organisations, as well as their overall pattern of activity. However, it depends on the data that each organisation places on its website. For example, an EO may neglect to update its website with details of the European organisation of which it is a member, or it may not include details of external accreditation that applies to its training courses. While we have assumed that website contents represent a reasonably accurate portrait of an organisation's primary activities, the absence of data does not necessarily mean that a particular attribute or service is absent. Subsequent stages of this project involve interviews with, and case studies of, individual EOs. This will enable much of these data to be tested.

3. Survey results

Organisation

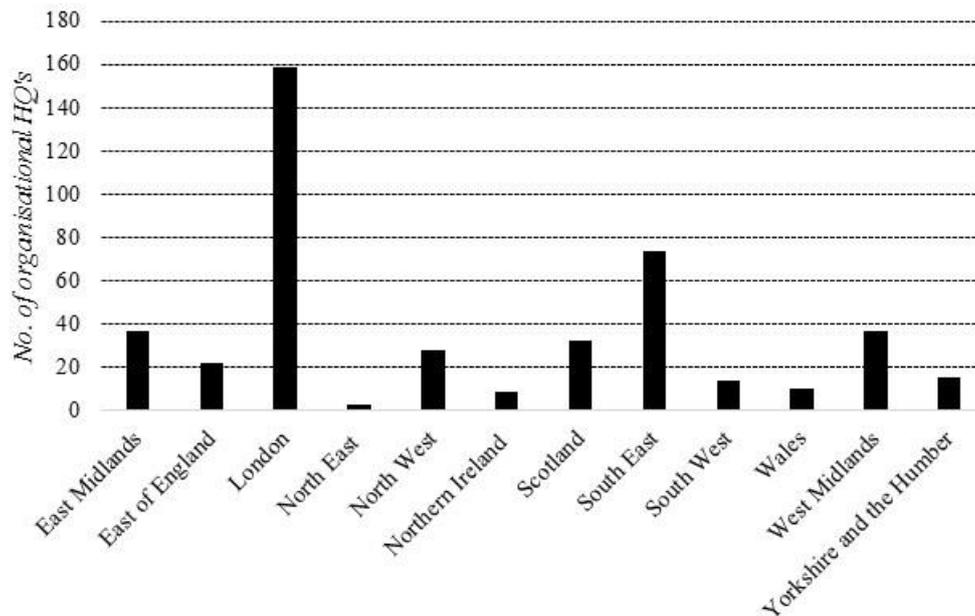
Most EOs tend to have broad geographical coverage, with 371 (84 per cent) of those surveyed accepting membership from all parts of the UK. However, within the 71 remaining organisations, there is a clear bias towards Scotland given its increasingly distinct political identity and long history of institutional governance. Overall, 21 organisations (five per cent of those surveyed) exist to serve to the interests of Scottish employers, including NFU Scotland, the Scottish Building Federation and Scottish Engineering. This level of representation is unique among the UK nations and regions, with for example, Northern Ireland having nine (two per cent of those surveyed), such as the Northern Ireland Hotels Federation, and Wales having five (one per cent of those surveyed), such as Colleges Wales. Regions in England have a total of 28 organisations, many of which relate to local government. The balance of the organisations are the four that cover England and Wales (such as the Home Builders Federation) and the four (such as Careers England) that cover only England.

In terms of headquarters location, a pattern emerges where only a minority of EOs (159, 36 per cent of those surveyed) are located in London (see Figure 1). Reasons for this may be historical, reflecting the number of organisations representing manufacturing, traditionally located outside of London, while high costs in the capital city may also be a factor. Organisations most likely to be located in London are those which have a strong lobbying component to their work, such as the Engineering Employers Federation (EEF) or the British Bankers Association. EOs also make limited use of regional offices, with only 33 (seven per

cent) operating any subsidiary offices, although these are often among the most high profile, such as the Federation of Small Businesses (FSB) and the CBI.

FIGURE 1

Headquarter location of surveyed EOs



Source: EO Database

In terms of organisational resources, the survey captured data on the number of people employed by each organisation, as well as their annual turnover. However, availability was limited, with turnover data being captured on 193 organisations (44 per cent of those surveyed) and employees for 207 (47 per cent of those surveyed). The median turnover was £1.15 million, and the median number of employees was 9. However, these data need to be treated with caution, as smaller organisations are less likely to make such information available, and are thus under-represented in this sample. In relation to size distribution, the Trade Association Forum has stated that the organisational landscape (of EOs and trade associations) is ‘characterised by a relatively small number of large and medium sized associations and a very

long “tail” of small and very small associations, many of which employ few staff’ (Trade Association Forum, 2006). However, the number of members per EO can be used as a proxy for size. These data are available for most EOs, and are examined in the subsequent section on membership.

Governance

EOs are free to choose their corporate structure, while there is no requirement to be officially registered or authorised. However, EOs generally have a chair, a governing body to guide and oversee activity, an annual general meeting and a document that sets out their governance structures. Of the EOs surveyed, 381 (86 per cent) provided details of their chair, with limited data available for the remainder. The chair’s role is to provide non-executive leadership, with day to day management in the hands of a chief executive. The chairs are not usually directly elected, and tend to be selected from within the governing body (often known as a ‘board’ or ‘council’). For example, the articles of association of the Association of Graduate Recruiters (2013) states that ‘the directors must appoint one of themselves to be Chairman of the Board of Directors’ while those for the British Soft Drinks Association (2014) state that ‘the Council shall appoint a Board of Management consisting of the President and Vice President of the Association’. While there can be confusion within publicly available data between chairs being elected by a governing body and elected by the membership, member-elected chairs do exist, such as those of the National Outdoor Events Association and the National Farmers’ Union (NFU).

Evidence that a governing body is in place exists for 378 bodies (86 per cent of those surveyed), with evidence on its current or constituted size being available for 307 organisations (81 per

cent of those with a governing body evidenced). These ranged in size from three to fifty-two members, with EOs most commonly having governing bodies of between 11 to 20 members (see Figure 2).

FIGURE 2

Number of members in governing bodies

No. of members	No. of EOs with a governing body per sizeband
1 to 10	96
11 to 20	176
21 to 30	24
31 to 40	5
41 +	6

Source: EO Database

There was evidence of membership elections to governing bodies for 252 organisations (66 per cent of those with a governing body evidenced). Many organisations have different classes of membership. For example, many EOs offer associate membership, often to supplier companies, that offers access to their services but does not entitle the member to vote. In some cases, such as the Bathroom Manufacturers Association, voting rights are associated with member size. At the same time, arrangements are often in place to ensure diverse representation, with 118 EOs (47 per cent of those with membership elections evidenced) having places formally reserved for different categories of membership, usually member company size, type or region of operation. For example, the 43 strong Council of the Engineering Construction Industry Association comprises representatives elected by region, by membership type and by general member election, while the Council itself has the right to nominate further members. Extensive use was also made of issue specific working groups to

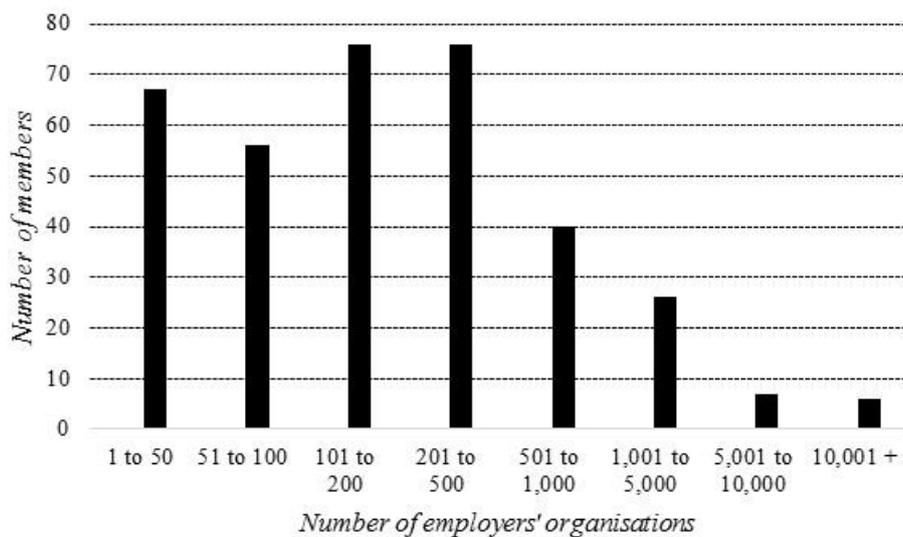
involve members, with evidence of such groups being used by 235 EOs. For example, the Chemical Industries Association has more than 30 specialist networks covering energy and water, regulatory matters, training, skills and broad economic issues.

Membership

Data on member numbers are available for 354 organisations (80 per cent of those surveyed). Membership ranges from 6 to 195,000, with a median of 170. These organisations have a combined membership total of over 650,000. Six have more than 10,000 members; the FSB (c.195,000), the CBI (c.190,000), the NFU (c.55,000), the National Federation of Retail Newsagents (c.15,500), the Freight Transport Association (c.14,000) and the Ulster Farmer’s Union (c.11,500). The smallest organisations in our database, in terms of membership numbers, are Colleges Northern Ireland and the Caterers Offshore Trading Association.

FIGURE 3

Membership numbers



Source: EO Database

Membership of the organisations surveyed is generally aimed exclusively at employers, or individuals acting as employers, such as retail newsagents or farmers. The distinction between employers, individuals acting as employers and individuals is often blurred, but some organisations do allow individual membership. These operate within the overlap between professional organisations and EOs, often within sectors that have a high concentration of self-employment such as the media. Examples of EOs in this sector that allow individual membership include the British Interactive Media Association and Publishing Scotland. Other EOs restrict full membership to companies, but allow individuals to join as associates. For example, the Asbestos Removal Contractors Association's website states that associate member status may be granted to 'a person, company or organisation [...] who in the opinion of the Council can directly assist the aims and objectives of the Association'. Finally, a small number of organisations (15, or 3 per cent of those surveyed) accept other EOs as members. These are generally, although not exclusively, federated organisations, providing a mixture of centralised managerial and service related functions to their autonomous federal members. Such organisations include the British Allied Trade Federation (BATF), the Society of Maritime Industries and the Federation of Environmental Trade Associations. For example, the BATF incorporates five such autonomous members, themselves representing 2,500 companies within jewellery, giftware and travel accessories.

Most EOs represent private sector employers, with 406 (92 per cent) of all organisations surveyed doing so. These organisations generally restrict membership to single industries or sectors, with those representing multiple sectors being small in number, although they do tend to be among the most high profile organisations, such as the FSB or the CBI. However, while the organisations representing the public sector are fewer in number and in membership, their reach is likely to be greater given the size of their members' employment bases in sectors such

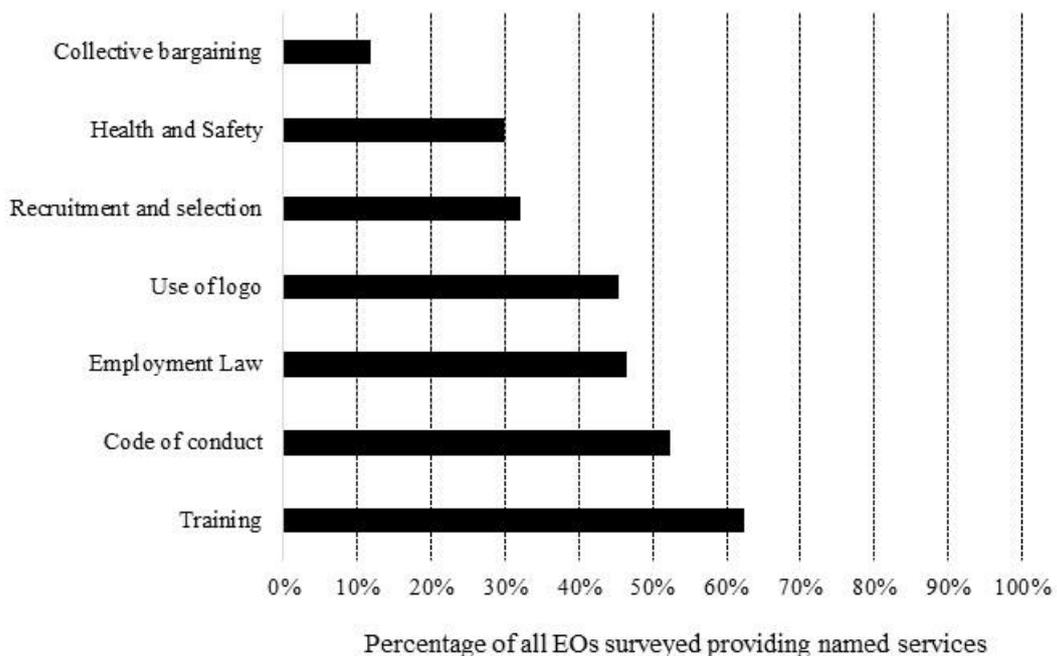
as the NHS, local government and academia, as well as the survival of collective bargaining in much of the public sector (see following section). As well as this, issue specific employers' forums often have leading firms and public sector organisations as members. For example, the members of the Business Disability Forum collectively employ almost 20 per cent of the UK workforce.

Member Services

EOs provide a very broad range of services to their members, with Figure 4 providing data on some of these.

FIGURE 4

Selected member services



Source: EO Database

Overall, our focus has been on identifying EOs that provide HR and IR services. Given that some activity in these fields was a condition for inclusion, all EOs surveyed are active within one or both areas. However, there are very significant differences in the scale and nature of HR or IR activities carried out by EOs. For the purposes of the survey, HR activities were defined as recruitment, training, equality, work organisation, health and safety, worker communication, managing conflict, pensions, performance management, employment law and employee engagement. Of all EOs surveyed, 430 (97 per cent) carried out some activity. The most common activity within HR was the provision of training, with 276 organisations (62 per cent of those surveyed) reporting activity of this kind. However, provision ranged from the delivery of a small number of technical seminars to training schemes with full external accreditation. Accreditation, such as CPD or City and Guilds, was provided by 160 EOs. Some of the more active organisations include the Asbestos Removal Contractors Association, which runs training centres providing 26 types of courses ranging from removal training to management issues, while the EEF delivers 10,000 training days annually across a broad range of qualifications. However, while the 276 EOs that provide training generally focus on industry specific issues, only 107 provide management development. Overall, while many EOs are involved in training, the collective output is likely to be relatively small, especially when compared to established providers such as colleges and commercial training organisations. The second most common HR service was the provision of advice on employment law, provided by 205 EOs (46 per cent of those surveyed). In general, EOs tend to offer a helpline operated by an outsourced commercial provider, with subscription income being used to fund ‘free’ access to the service. The third most common service was recruitment and selection, with 142 EOs (32 per cent of those surveyed) active, generally through the provision of a vacancy advertising service. However, EOs generally provide a relatively narrow range of HR services, with relatively few providing support across all, or most, of the categories listed

above. These are either those that offer access to business support helplines offering a broader range of topics than employment law, engage in collective bargaining, or who have decided to offer a comprehensive employment service. For example, the British Office Supplies & Services Federation retains specialist HR advisors who offer a full consultancy service across a broad range of service areas. However, such organisations are relatively few and far between, with only 32 providing HR consultancy services.

The provision of IR services such as collective bargaining and associated services such as advice on negotiating with unions was restricted to a relatively small number of organisations. 52 EOs (12 per cent) were active within collective bargaining structures. Such activity generally involves being a signatory to joint agreements that act to regulate pay and working conditions. These include the Construction Industry Joint Council Working Rule Agreement, whose signatories include nine EOs, the National Agreement for the Engineering Construction Industry, signed by three EOs, and those operating within local government and the NHS. As well as their role in negotiations, EOs active within collective bargaining generally provide guidance to their members as to broad IR issues. For example, the Engineering Construction Industry Association assists its members in the negotiation of supplementary project agreements and the operation of project joint councils mandated by the joint agreement, while it also provides a range of guidance such as best practice guides to industrial relations and workforce engagement. COSLA (the representative body for Scottish local authorities) provides a subscription-only database that includes every collective bargaining agreement active in Scotland, employee schemes of services, and associated guidance. However, some EOs are involved in an advisory (as opposed to a signatory) role within collective bargaining, such as the regionally based organisations representing local government, who feed into decisions taken on collective bargaining by the Local Government Association. The remaining

organisations active within IR are generally larger EOs that have the capacity to offer combined HR and IR advisory services.

Virtually all organisations surveyed provided some business services, such as conferences, networking, business development, or some advice as to business management. For example, 312 (71 per cent of those surveyed) make membership lists available, often as a business development measure to enable potential customers to identify service providers. EOs often seek to establish membership as a mark of quality that members can use to assist business development. Member codes of conduct are used by 231 EOs (52 per cent of those surveyed), often with disciplinary provisions should the code not be followed. For example, the British Vehicle Renting and Leasing Association's code sets out customer service standards which all members must follow as a condition of membership, with serious breaches potentially resulting in expulsion (BVRLA, 2011). Such codes are often accompanied by a conciliation or mediation service, generally aimed at resolving disputes between member companies and their customers. However, EOs active within collective bargaining often seek to resolve employment disputes, with an aim of the Association of British Orchestras being 'to mediate in and assist in the settlement of disputes or differences arising between orchestras or between orchestras and performers' (ABO, 2012).

As well as using codes of conduct to support best practice, EOs often encourage member companies to use their logos as a mark of quality, with 201 doing so. Finally, EOs frequently organise award ceremonies at which their members receive recognition, with 244 (55 per cent of those surveyed) having these in place. Such ceremonies act to raise the EO's profile within its member base, act as a membership networking opportunity, promote best practice, and enable the EO to communicate and promote its priorities. For example, the EEF runs a 'Future

of Manufacturing’ award designed to ‘highlight the resilience, determination and ingenuity of the UK’s manufacturing community’. The breadth of the EEF’s activities is reflected in the variety of award categories, which comprise apprentices, business efficiency, business growth, developing people, environmental efficiency, health and safety, exports and new product development. Overall, a key trend within EOs, especially those representing employers in the private sector where collective bargaining is now relatively limited in scope, appears to be a growing emphasis on a broad range of service provision.

Representation and lobbying

Representing the collective interests of their members within the broad political system has long been a primary goal of EOs. Those with the strongest links to trade unions are the 52 that have some activity within collective bargaining, as these will either take part in, or advise on, negotiations over pay and working conditions. While website data may understate the extent of EOs’ often informal relationships with trade unions, there is evidence of a further 49 organisations having some linkages, giving a total of 101, or 23 per cent of all organisations surveyed. For example, the Publishers’ Association met with government ministers as part of a joint delegation with creative industry trade unions to discuss digital copyright, the British Ceramics Confederation has worked with the unions to develop a joint approach to improving health and safety standards and a number of EOs are part of the Cross-Industry Construction Apprenticeship Task force, along with UNITE.

Relationships between EOs tend to be informal, with the occasional exception of federally constituted organisations such as the British Marine Federation, or of bodies that represent the views of a number of EOs, such as the National Specialist Contractors Council. However,

membership of European EOs is relatively common, especially for larger EOs, given their focus on representing members' views. Of the 30 largest organisations by membership number, 17 are part of European organisations. These organisations generally focus on representing collective interests to the European Commission and on sharing best practice.

Forming political relationships with the aim of influencing current or future government policy is an important area for EOs, with 258 (58 per cent of all organisations surveyed) stating that they carry out activity such as lobbying government, acting as a contractor or responding to consultations. Recent examples include the EEF lobbying the government to limit the time period for which holiday back pay can be claimed. However, developing and sustaining political relationships is often dependent on informal and private communication, meaning that accurate quantitative data are difficult to identify. Despite this, some data are available, as the House of Commons' committees depend on a steady flow of expert witnesses to be examined by MPs carrying out inquiries on specific subjects. Parliament's website shows that 136 EOs (31 per cent of those surveyed) have been questioned by MPs' committees over the past decade. The topics on which they have been questioned cover a vast range with, for example, the Consumer Credit Trade Association being questioned on payday loans and the Association of Labour Providers being queried on modern slavery. As well as political communication, all of the surveyed EOs make some effort at engaging with the public through their websites, but the level of effort varies widely. For example, 232 (52 per cent of all surveyed) update their sites with news, 211 (48 per cent) have a Twitter account, 135 (31 per cent) use Facebook, while 48 (11 per cent) use blogs. Overall, communication with the public and political spheres remains a priority, but the extent to which this is done reflects the organisations' size, with larger EOs maintaining teams of dedicated press and public affairs officers, thus enabling an effort that cannot be matched by smaller organisations.

4. Conclusions

The survey demonstrates that EOs have retained a significant presence in the UK. Our research identifies some 440 organisations, with a combined membership of some 650,000 employees. All of these EOs are active within HR, IR or both areas. EOs can be divided into a number of overlapping categories. Traditional EOs are those whose activities include a focus on collective bargaining and associated IR advisory services. Hybrid EOs are those whose activities include some focus on HR along with an emphasis on broader business and economic issues. As well as these, recent years have seen the emergence of a small number of single issue employers' forums. Overall, collective bargaining and the provision of IR services is now very much a minority activity within EOs, although these activities remain significant in scale, given the scale of the workforce covered. The research highlights differences between EOs representing public and private sector employers, reflecting the different levels of collective bargaining. EOs with members mainly drawn from the public sector generally conform to the more traditional view of employer's organisations, given that pay bargaining remains common within activities such as further and higher education, local government and the NHS. While pockets of collective bargaining remain in place in the private sector, the transformation of IR over the past 30 years has led to EOs whose members are drawn from this sector placing a far greater emphasis on the provision of other services. Such services include the provision of advice and support across employment law, health and safety, general business issues as well as the provision of codes of conduct and training.

Overall, the fragmentation of IR in recent decades has not acted to largely eliminate employers' collective action, but has instead led to a refocusing and blurring of traditional distinctions. EOs must offer services of benefit to members across a broad range of topics if they are to

maintain their membership and financial base. Theories that propose that either the UK's market-led economic structure, the existence of the collective action problem or the rise of neo-liberalism should lead to a lack of contemporary employers' collective action struggle to provide a full explanation as to why a large number of employers have chosen to join an EO. It is likely that this has been driven by members' perceptions of the advantages offered by provision of HR and IR services, the chance to have some political influence and the availability of other services.

Word count: 5,359

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