

# **Unions, joint regulation and workplace equality policy and practice in Britain: evidence from the 2004 Workplace Employment Relations Survey**

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**A version of this paper is forthcoming in *Work, Employment & Society*.**

## **Abstract**

*This article provides an empirical assessment of the relationship between unionisation and the adoption of equal opportunities (EO) policies and practices in British workplaces, using data from the 2004 Workplace Employment Relations Survey. The results demonstrate an association between union recognition and the adoption of a range of EO practices. However, this association largely only holds where unions are able to influence EO decision-making via negotiation or consultation. There is little evidence that the equality practices adopted in unionised workplaces where negotiation and consultation does not occur are any different from those adopted in non-unionised workplaces.*

## **Introduction**

The impact of trade unions on discrimination and labour market inequality has been a matter of public concern for many years. It is often argued that, historically, unions did little to support the interests of women and minority groups, and if anything reinforced rather than challenged inequalities (Colling and Dickens, 1998, p. 406; Dex and Forth, 2009, p. 237; Dickens, 1997, p 287). More recently, however, observers have suggested that unions have increasingly sought to prioritise equality matters (Dex and Forth, 2009, p. 246; Dickens, 1999, p. 15; Hunt and Rayside, 2000). There is a growing expectation, for example, that they will actively bargain over equality and encourage employers to adopt equality practices in order to protect workers from discrimination. Hence, unions may now have a central role to

play in advancing the equality agenda and ultimately helping promote a more inclusive society (Dickens, 2007; Heery, 2006).

This article seeks to address these debates by providing an empirical assessment of the relationship between unionisation and the adoption of equal opportunities (EO) policies and practices in British workplaces, using data from the 2004 Workplace Employment Relations Survey (Department of Trade and Industry, 2005). Considerable previous research has sought to address this issue, with several studies reporting that unions in Britain have had a positive effect in advancing the equality agenda in recent years (Dickens, 2007, p. 484; Metcalf et al., 2001). Formal written EO policies have been found to be more common in unionised workplaces than elsewhere (Dex and Forth, 2009, p. 243 and 250; Hoque and Noon, 2004, p. 488; Kersley et al., 2006, p. 238; Walsh, 2007, p. 305), and a relationship has been identified between unionisation and the adoption of specific EO practices. For example, Kersley et al. (2006, p. 248) and Walsh (2007, p. 307) point to the greater prevalence of recruitment and selection monitoring by gender in unionised workplaces, while Bewley and Fernie (2003, p. 102) point to the greater prevalence of promotion monitoring and reviews of selection procedures by gender to identify indirect discrimination. Several recent studies also report that family-friendly practices in Britain are more prevalent in unionised workplaces than elsewhere (Bewley and Fernie, 2003; Budd and Mumford, 2004; Dex and Smith, 2002).

This article seeks to expand on this research by exploring the proposition that while there may be a positive association between unionisation and workplace equality practice overall, this relationship might be more pronounced in certain circumstances. In particular, this article addresses the argument that the union effect might be particularly strong in instances where equality decision-making is subject to negotiation. In addition, whereas earlier studies focus mainly on the impact of unions and equality bargaining on gender equality practices, this article expands on these studies by considering practices covering a

range of equality strands (ethnicity, disability and age as well as gender), thereby providing much needed research evidence on these other aspects of discrimination (Briskin, 2006, p. 12; Dex and Forth, 2009, p. 232).

## **Unions and Equality**

The 2004 Workplace Employment Relations Survey (WERS) demonstrates that managers in 15 percent of British workplaces with a recognised union negotiate over equality issues (Kersley et al., 2006, p. 194). There is, however, some debate over what such negotiations are likely to achieve. On the one hand, the collective voice/ institutional response model of unionism suggests that where unions voice female and minority employee demands for equality, employers may respond by providing improved equality practices (Freeman and Medoff, 1984). Collective voice effects of this nature are likely to be stronger in instances where unions can use their monopoly power within negotiations to extract improvements from management (Budd and Mumford, 2004, p. 206; Dickens et al., 1988). In addition, Dickens (1997, p. 288-9) argues that negotiation via equality bargaining can mainstream equality initiatives that might otherwise remain contingent and partial. It can also provide a mechanism by which legal rights might be converted into substantive outcomes (Dickens, 1999, p. 15; Heery, 2006, p. 522). Beyond this, it can affect employers' cost-benefit analysis of taking equality action by increasing the cost of failing to do so (Colling and Dickens, 1998, p. 405).

On the other hand, there are several factors that might limit the impact of negotiations over equality. First, while getting equality onto the bargaining agenda might be an important step forward, the impact this subsequently has on employer equality practices depends on whether equality matters are prioritised within negotiations (Blackett and Sheppard, 2003, p. 437). This is unlikely to happen if women and/ or minority groups are under-represented within union negotiating teams (Baird et al., 2009, p. 674-5; Dickens 1997, p. 288), as is frequently the case (Hart, 2002, p. 614).

Second, decentralised bargaining structures may have deleterious effects. As Colling and Dickens (1998, p. 400) argue, both union and employer commitment to equality, and also

the knowledge and expertise necessary to facilitate meaningful negotiations over equality, tend to be greater at corporate or national level than at local level. Given this, it is perhaps unsurprising that decentralised collective bargaining systems, according to Blackett and Sheppard (2003, p. 442), invariably accentuate enterprise-specific productivity or efficiency concerns rather than broader social concerns.

Third, it is widely argued that negotiation will be more effective where it is underpinned by legal rights for equality, as these provide a 'useful lever' (Dickens, 1997, p. 288) for unions within negotiations (Blackett and Sheppard, 2003, p. 451; Gilbert and Secker, 1995, p. 204; Heery, 2006, p.540). However, compliance with EU equality law in Britain has been somewhat minimalist (Colling and Dickens, 1998, p.392), the result being a weak, individual compliance model that, while attempting to balance efficiency and justice concerns, has tended to favour the former over the latter (Dickens, 2007).

A final argument relates to general union weakness, particularly in the private sector. As argued by Colling and Dickens (2001), the strength of unions to extract concessions from management within negotiations over equality (and within collective bargaining more broadly) is becoming increasingly questionable given the hostility of the environment in which unions operate and also given that employers may increasingly view unions as presenting less of a credible strike threat.

The above arguments suggest, therefore, that there may be limits to what negotiation over equality is able to deliver. That said, much of the empirical evidence to date has suggested that where such negotiations occur, successful outcomes generally emerge (see, for example: Baird et al., 2009, p. 687; Dickens et al., 1988, p. 65; Heery, 2006, p. 539). However, as Heery (2006, p. 522) argues, much of the evidence is case-based, and given this, there is a need for quantitative analyses of representative data to generalise the findings to the wider population of organisations. Given this, the first two aims of this article are to draw on

data from WERS 2004 in order to identify: first, the extent to which there is an overall positive relationship between union recognition and employer equality practice (as identified within earlier studies); and second, the extent to which the relationship between unionisation and employer equality practice is stronger in instances where equality decision-making is subject to negotiation than in instances where the union can exercise voice via consultation but cannot negotiate, or where the union is not involved in employer decision-making on equality whatsoever.

In considering this second aim, however, one must bear in mind that employer equality practice in many British workplaces is poor, with EO policies often representing little more than an 'empty shell' (Hoque and Noon, 2004). As highlighted by WERS 2004, less than one in four British workplaces monitor or review their procedures to identify indirect discrimination with respect to gender, ethnicity, disability or age. In addition, only one in ten workplaces monitor and review procedures with respect to promotions, while relative pay rates are reviewed by ethnicity in only 5 percent of workplaces and by gender in 7 percent of workplaces (Walsh, 2007, p. 307). Hence, even if the analysis finds that equality policies are more prevalent in workplaces where negotiation over equality occurs, equality practices within such workplaces may still be notable by their absence. Given this, the third aim of the article is to evaluate the extent of adoption of equality practices in instances where negotiation over equality takes place, and whether the approach to equality in such instances can be considered to be one of substance.

The final aim of the article is to assess the relative influence of negotiation over equality in the public and private sectors. One might anticipate that its influence will be stronger in the public sector, where a higher union density and a higher percentage of female employees (Kersley et al., 2006, p. 112) alongside more positive employer attitudes (Kumar 1993, p. 223) may provide public sector unions with greater bargaining power to extract

concessions from management (see also: Kirton and Greene, 2006, p. 432-433). In addition, the introduction of statutory duties to promote equality, the Single Status Agreement in local government and Agenda for Change in the NHS may have provided public sector unions with additional leverage. Against this, however, the introduction of the statutory duty on public sector employers to promote race equality introduced in 2001 did not prevent a reduction in the proportion of public sector employers using special procedures to attract job applicants from ethnic minority groups (Dex and Forth, 2009, p. 251; Kersley et al. 2006, p. 244). One should not assume, therefore, that the apparently more favourable institutional environment in the public sector will increase automatically the potential for negotiation over equality to have a positive effect.

### **Data and methods of analysis**

The analysis uses data from the WERS 2004 management survey. This comprises 2,295 observations with a response rate of 64 percent (Kersley *et al.*, 2005) and is designed to be nationally representative of workplaces with five or more employees within Standard Industrial Classification major groups D to O (agriculture, hunting, forestry and fishing and mining and quarrying are excluded), when probability weighted to take into account the complex nature of the WERS survey design. The respondent to the survey is the manager at the workplace who has primary responsibility for employment relations matters. The representativeness of WERS makes it an ideal data set by which to estimate macro-level union effects on workplace equality practice.

The first aim of the article is to estimate the relationship between union recognition and the adoption of workplace EO policy and practice. This is assessed in a series of equations within which the dependent variables relate to the EO policies and practices in operation at the workplace. The Appendix table describes the dependent variables used and gives their means. Given the dichotomous nature of these variables, maximum likelihood

survey probit is used. In order to identify whether the policies and practices asked about are more prevalent in unionised workplaces than elsewhere, a dichotomous independent variable is included in the equations where 1 = recognised union (22 percent of workplaces) and 0 = otherwise. Several observable characteristics that might affect the association between union recognition and the adoption of EO policies and practices are controlled for. These include workplace and organisation size, Standard Industrial Classification major group, whether the workplace is in the public or private sector, whether the workplace is a single independent establishment, financial performance, national ownership, workplace age and the proportion of workforce that is female, ethnic minority, disabled or 50 years old or older. The means of the control variables are given in the Appendix table.

The article's second key aim is to assess whether the association between union recognition and employer equality policy and practice is more pronounced in instances where negotiation over equality occurs than elsewhere. The survey asks respondents whether managers normally negotiate or consult with or inform trade unions when deciding EO issues. This allows for the creation of a 5 part categorical variable<sup>1</sup> as follows:

- i) Managers negotiate with unions when deciding EO issues (3.7 percent of workplaces)
- ii) Managers consult unions when deciding EO issues (9.6 percent of workplaces)
- iii) Managers provide unions with information on EO (4.1 percent of workplaces)
- iv) Managers do not involve unions when making EO decisions (4.3 percent of workplaces)
- v) Non-union workplaces (78.3 percent of workplaces)<sup>2</sup>

Replacing the dichotomous union recognition independent variable in the probit equations described above with this categorical variable enables an evaluation of whether the relationship between unionisation and the adoption of equality policies and practices is stronger in instances where negotiation over equality occurs than in instances where unions

can exercise voice effects via consultation but are unable to negotiate, or are unable to influence employer decision-making whatsoever.

The article's third aim is to evaluate the extent of adoption of equality practices in instances where negotiation over equality occurs, and whether the approach to equality within such workplaces can be considered to be of substance. To address this, a 12 point scale<sup>3</sup> is constructed based on the dependent variables described in the Appendix table. This scale is then used to assess the number of equality practices adopted where negotiation over equality occurs relative to the number adopted elsewhere. The same scale is used to evaluate the article's fourth aim of addressing whether the influence of negotiation over equality is stronger in the public than the private sector, by evaluating whether negotiation raises the number of practices used to a greater extent in the former than the latter sector.

The data are weighted throughout the analysis by the inverse of each workplace's probability of selection into the sample. This is essential if unbiased population estimates are to be obtained.

## **Results**

### *The presence of equal opportunity policies*

Table 1 presents the analysis of the relationship between unionisation and the presence of a formal written EO policy that makes explicit reference to gender, race, disability and age. There is no evidence that such policies are any more prevalent in unionised workplaces than elsewhere. The overall union recognition variable does, however, mask variation within the union sector, with gender, race, disability and age EO policies all being more widespread in workplaces where the union is consulted over equality than in non-union workplaces. It is perhaps notable that it is only consultation that makes a difference – there is no evidence that

formal written EO policies are more prevalent in unionised workplaces where negotiation over equality occurs than in non-union workplaces.

INSERT TABLE 1 HERE

Although it would appear that formal written EO policies are no more prevalent in unionised workplaces than in non-unionised workplaces, it is nevertheless possible that EO policies in unionised workplaces are more likely to be policies of substance. As discussed earlier, previous research suggests that many EO policies in Britain are ‘empty shells’, being little more than statements of good intent that contain few supporting EO practices (Hoque and Noon, 2004). Given this, the following sections seek to identify whether specific EO practices are more likely to have been adopted in unionised workplaces, and whether the association between unionisation and the adoption of equality practices is greater in instances where negotiation over equality occurs.

#### *Monitoring/ reviewing of recruitment and selection and promotion*

Table 2 explores whether recruitment and selection and promotions are monitored and reviewed to identify indirect discrimination by gender, race, disability and age. The results suggest that, overall, monitoring and reviewing of this nature is more common in workplaces with union recognition than elsewhere. In terms of whether the association is stronger where negotiation over equality occurs, the results suggest that the prevalence of recruitment and selection monitoring and reviewing, and the prevalence of promotion monitoring (but not promotion reviewing) is higher in instances where negotiation takes place than in non-union workplaces. By contrast, that there is no evidence that either recruitment and selection or promotion monitoring and reviewing is more widespread where the union is not involved in

EO decision-making, and there is only very weak evidence to suggest that it is more widespread where the union is informed over EO decisions than in non-union workplaces.

However, the results also demonstrate that, as for negotiation, recruitment and selection monitoring and reviewing and promotion monitoring are more prevalent where consultation over equality occurs. In addition to this, promotion reviews are also more prevalent. Hence, the union effect is arguably stronger where unions are able to exercise voice effects via consultation than in instances where negotiation over equality occurs.

INSERT TABLE 2 HERE

*Special procedures to encourage applications from disadvantaged groups*

Table 3 suggests that special procedures to encourage applications from ethnic minorities and disabled people are more prevalent among workplaces with union recognition than elsewhere, and that this association holds irrespective of whether the union is involved in equality decision-making. However, although special procedures to encourage applications from older workers and from women returning to work after having children are, overall, no more prevalent in workplaces with union recognition than elsewhere, they are nevertheless more prevalent among workplaces where negotiation over equality occurs than in non-union workplaces. This points to the importance of negotiation where these elements of employer equality practice are concerned.

INSERT TABLE 3 HERE

### *Reviews of relative pay rates*

Table 4 explores reviews of relative pay rates by gender, race, disability and age. The results suggest that reviews by race are more prevalent, and reviews by disability are slightly more prevalent (at the 10 percent significance level), in workplaces with union recognition than elsewhere.

In terms of whether the association is stronger in instances where negotiation over equality occurs, the results suggest that reviews of relative pay rates by race are more prevalent where negotiation over equality takes place than in non-union workplaces, and reviews by disability and age are slightly more prevalent (at the 10 percent significance level). By contrast, reviews of relative pay rates are no more prevalent in workplaces where the union is not involved in EO decision-making, while in workplaces where the union is informed about EO decisions, reviews of relative pay rates are *less* prevalent than in non-union workplaces.

However, the results also suggest that reviews of relative pay rates by race, disability and age are all more prevalent where consultation over equality occurs than in non-union workplaces, with the relationships for reviews by disability and age being stronger than where negotiation over equality occurs. Again, therefore, the results suggest that the union effect is stronger where unions are able to exercise voice effects via consultation than where negotiation over equality occurs.

INSERT TABLE 4 HERE

### *Flexible working and family-friendly practices*

In terms of the relationship between unionisation and flexible working and family-friendly practices, the evidence presented in Table 5 suggests that four of the eight practices asked about (workplace nursery, financial help with childcare, leave for carers of older adults and maternity leave at full rate of pay) are more widespread, and job sharing is slightly more widespread (at the 10 percent significance level), within unionised workplaces than elsewhere.

There is also some evidence pointing to the importance of negotiation, with workplace nurseries being more prevalent, and flexitime, financial help with childcare and leave for carers of older adults being slightly more prevalent (at the 10 percent significance level) in workplaces where negotiation occurs than in non-union workplaces. In workplaces where the union is informed about equality decisions, job sharing and financial help with childcare are more prevalent, and workplace nurseries are slightly more prevalent than in non-union workplaces. However, flexitime is less prevalent. Where the union is not involved at all in equality decision-making, working at or from home in normal working hours, term-time only contracts and workplace nurseries are slightly less widespread than in non-union workplaces.

However, the association between unionisation and the adoption of flexible working and family-friendly practices is particularly strong where consultation with the union over equality occurs, with six of the eight flexible working/ family-friendly practices being more widely adopted in such workplaces than in non-union workplaces. Hence, the union effect on the adoption of flexible working and family-friendly practices would appear to be greater in instances where unions are able to exercise voice via consultation than in instances where negotiation over equality occurs.

## INSERT TABLE 5 HERE

### *The extent of adoption of equality practices and public/private sector differences*

Overall, the results reported thus far demonstrate that the association between unionisation and the adoption of a range of equality practices largely holds only in instances where negotiation or consultation over equality occurs. However, what the analysis to this point does not demonstrate is how extensively these practices are used within such workplaces. As argued earlier, while the uptake of employer equality practices may be higher than elsewhere it still might not be particularly high given that the usage of these practices is very low within British workplaces as a whole (Walsh, 2007). An exploration of this issue using the 12 point scale described earlier, however, shows that only 2 percent of non-union workplaces and 14 percent of unionised workplaces where the union is not involved in EO decision-making have adopted six or more of the 12 practices. By contrast, the figure for unionised workplaces where consultation occurs is 35 percent and the figure where negotiation occurs is 39 percent. Thus, the approach taken to equality would indeed seem more likely to be of substance where either negotiation or consultation takes place. That said, a significant proportion of workplaces in which negotiation or consultation occurs have adopted very few equality practices. In particular, 26 percent of unionised workplaces where consultation occurs and 27 percent of unionised workplaces where negotiation occurs have adopted only two or fewer practices. Although this compares favourably with figures of 51 percent for workplaces where unions are only informed on equality decisions or are not involved in equality decision-making, and 70 percent for non-union workplaces, it nevertheless suggests an absence of EO practices in a significant minority of workplaces where negotiation or consultation over equality occurs.

The final aim of the article is to identify whether the influence of negotiation over equality is stronger in the public than the private sector. The results using the 12 point scale described earlier point to considerable evidence for negotiation and consultation effects in both sectors. In the public sector, 9 percent of non-union workplaces, 20 percent of unionised workplaces where the union is not involved in EO decision-making, 44 percent of unionised workplaces in which consultation occurs and 40 percent of unionised workplaces in which negotiation occurs have six or more of the 12 practices in place. In the private sector, the corresponding figures are 2 percent, 12 percent, 23 percent and 39 percent. Therefore, not only is there significant evidence of positive negotiation and consultation effects in both sectors, but if anything, negotiation effects appear to be more pronounced in the private than the public sector.

### **Discussion and conclusions**

This article provides an empirical assessment of the relationship between unionisation and the adoption of EO policies and practices in British workplaces. Where formal written EO policies are concerned, these are no more likely to have been adopted in unionised workplaces than elsewhere. This is contrary to the findings of earlier research based on WERS 1998 (Hoque and Noon, 2004). It would seem, therefore, that the gap has closed between the union and non-union sectors with regard to this issue. Notably, the results appear to contradict Dex and Forth (2009, p. 250), Kersley et al. (2006, p. 238) and Walsh (2007), who report, also using WERS 2004 data, that EO policies are more prevalent in the union sector. While these authors are correct to point to these differences within the analyses they present, the differences disappear within the multivariate analysis conducted here which controls for a range of observable workplace characteristics that might bias estimates of this relationship.

A different picture emerges with regard to EO practices. Here, the analysis finds that a range of EO practices (recruitment and selection and promotion monitoring and reviewing, special procedures to encourage applications from (some) disadvantaged groups, and reviews of relative pay rates by race and disability) are more prevalent in unionised than non-unionised workplaces. A number of family-friendly and flexible working practices (job-sharing, workplace nurseries, financial help with childcare, leave for carers of older adults and maternity leave at the full rate of pay) are also more prevalent in unionised workplaces. The analysis therefore supports earlier research pointing to the greater uptake of EO practices in unionised workplaces (Bewley and Fernie, 2003; Budd and Mumford, 2004; Dex and Smith, 2002). That said, there is no consistent evidence of a union effect in the 4 in 10 unionised workplaces where negotiation or consultation over equality does not occur – indeed, some equality practices are *less* prevalent in these workplaces than in non-union workplaces. This suggests that the positive union influence on employer equality practice might be benefitting a narrower segment of the workforce than has been assumed on the basis of previous research.

The second aim of the article was to identify whether the union effect on equality is particularly pronounced where negotiation over equality occurs. The results demonstrate that the union effect is indeed greater where negotiation occurs than in instances where unions are only informed about equality decisions or are not involved in equality decision-making. However, the union effect is equally if not more pronounced in instances where unions are able to exercise voice effects via consultation. There are a number of ways of interpreting this finding. One interpretation would be that consultation provides an equally (if not more) effective route as negotiation by which the joint regulation of equality might occur. As such, ‘soft’ joint regulation via consultation may provide greater scope for unions to influence employer equality practice than ‘hard’ joint regulation via collective bargaining. The results

could also be interpreted as supportive of the arguments made by several commentators discussed earlier that the potency of collective bargaining may be limited in Britain given: a lack of women in senior union negotiating positions; the decentralised nature of bargaining; the limited nature of equality legislation; and general union weakness.

Against this, however, the strength of the consultation effect could also be interpreted as reflecting the possibility that employers who are prepared to consult with unions on equality are perhaps more positively disposed in the first instance to the introduction of equality practices than are employers that need to be pressured into discussing equality with unions via negotiation. Hence, the apparently stronger consultation effect might not be an indication that consultation is an inherently more effective route by which unions might bring about change, but instead is an indication of employers' pre-dispositions to equality. The fact that consultation effects appear stronger in the public than the private sector may be testimony to this. Either way, further research addressing the differential impact of negotiation and consultation would provide useful insights into the effectiveness of the different routes by which unions might be able to influence employer equality practice.

The third aim of the article was to identify whether the approach taken to equality in workplaces where negotiation over equality occurs can be considered to be one of substance. The analysis found that although employer equality practice is better in instances where negotiation (and consultation) occurs than in non-union workplaces, it remains the case that in over a quarter of such workplaces, equality practices are notable by their absence. This further suggests the caution urged in the literature in terms of what negotiation over equality might achieve may be entirely justified. It also suggests that the factors that limit the potency of negotiation might also limit the ability of unions to extract concessions from management through consultation.

The final aim of the article was to explore whether negotiation effects are more pronounced in the public than the private sector. In the event, the analysis found the opposite. While this may be testimony (as suggested above) to the extent to which private sector employers need to be pressured via collective bargaining into making improvements in equality practice, it is nevertheless perhaps ironic, as noted by Dickens (1997, p. 289), that while negotiation over equality would appear to be leading to positive gains in the private sector, the decline in private sector union coverage over the past three decades means that such gains will benefit relatively few women and minority groups.

It is worth raising a caveat with regard to the results presented here. Although equality practices are more widespread where negotiation and consultation over equality occurs, there is no guarantee that the practices will apply to the whole workforce or lead to better equality outcomes. As argued by Hoque and Noon (2004), equality practices on occasion apply only to certain segments of the managerial/ professional workforce, and hence for large sections of the (particularly non-managerial) workforce, they are little more than 'empty shells'. Additionally, while EO practices may be more widespread where negotiation and consultation occurs, there is no guarantee that these practices will actually lead to equal treatment for women and minority groups. Research on the extent to which the union influence on workplace equality practices leads to improvements in equality outcomes for all sectors of the female and minority workforce would provide useful insights into the precise nature and extent of the influence of unions on workplace equality.

Finally, the results have implications for both unions and government policy. Where unions are concerned, in recent times many unions have made commitments to ensuring equality of opportunity for their members (Dickens, 2007; Heery, 2006). The results here suggest that if they are serious in these commitments, there are two key routes they might pursue. First, it is essential (notwithstanding the barriers they might face regarding employer

reluctance for equality to be determined via negotiation) that they seek to ensure that equality is included on the bargaining agenda, and that they encourage negotiating officers to prioritise equality matters. Second, it is essential that they engage with employers on equality via consultation processes, and where consultation over equality does not occur, this is something they press for. Should they do so, this may enable them to have a significant influence on the equality practices employers subsequently adopt.

Where government policy is concerned, during its time in office, the Labour Government made efforts to encourage employers to adopt flexible and family-friendly practices given the potential impact of such practices on workforce morale and productivity (Bloom and Van Reenan, 2006). The new Conservative-led Coalition Government has also made much of its commitment to fairness and the family. The Conservative manifesto, for example, made a commitment for Britain to become ‘the most family-friendly country in Europe’ (Conservative Party, 2010, p.42), and it viewed employer provision of family-friendly practices as central in achieving this. The results presented in this article demonstrate that such practices are particularly prevalent in instances where negotiation and consultation with unions on equality occurs. Hence, one route by which the Coalition Government might achieve its goals would be to encourage employers to engage in genuine joint regulation of equality via either meaningful consultation or negotiation with unions. The record of previous Conservative administrations in terms of union engagement suggests, however, that this is unlikely to happen. It is probable, therefore, that important avenues by which employer equality practices might be improved, and by which the Government might achieve its commitment to fairness, will remain overlooked for the foreseeable future.

## **End Notes**

<sup>1</sup> Although this classification uses data from the management survey, a similar classification could be constructed using the WERS worker rep survey. This is not done here, however, as this would reduce the amount of usable data (a worker rep survey was not conducted in all unionised workplaces). There is reasonable agreement (62 percent of cases) between management and worker rep respondents in terms of whether negotiation takes place or not, and there is no particular reason to assume that management views on this matter are any more or less valid than are those of worker reps.

<sup>2</sup> There are a small number of workplaces within which there is union presence but not union recognition, and the union negotiates, is consulted over EO or is informed over EO. In order to maintain a clear comparison between the non-union category and the union categories, these workplaces are dropped from the analysis.

<sup>3</sup> The variables used in the scale are: any form of recruitment and selection monitoring or reviewing; any form of promotion monitoring or reviewing; special procedures to encourage applicants from women or any minority groups; reviews of the relative pay rates of women or any minority groups; and the eight flexible working/ family-friendly practice described in the Appendix table.

## **Acknowledgements**

We would like to thank the WERS Sponsors – the Department of Trade and Industry, the Economic and Social Research Council, the Advisory, Conciliation and Arbitration Service, and the Policy Studies Institute – for allowing access to the data and the Trades Union Congress for funding the analysis conducted here. They are not responsible for any of the findings or claims made in the article.

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Table 1: Association between unionisation and the presence of an EO policy

|                                       | Presence of a formal written policy on equal opportunities with explicit reference to treatment or discrimination on the grounds of: |           |       |           |            |           |        |            |
|---------------------------------------|--|-----------|-------|-----------|------------|-----------|--------|------------|
|                                       | Gender   |           | Race  |           | Disability |           | Age    |            |
| Union recognition                     | 0.272  | (0.214)   | 0.314 | (0.218)   | 0.297      | (0.207)   | 0.195  | (0.176)    |
| F                                     | 10.45  |           | 11.17 |           | 10.84      |           | 8.95   |            |
| Prob>F                                | 0.000  |           | 0.000 |           | 0.000      |           | 0.000  |            |
| N                                     | 1702   |           | 1702  |           | 1702       |           | 1702   |            |
| -----                                 |  |           |       |           |            |           |        |            |
| <i>Reference category: Non- union</i> |  |           |       |           |            |           |        |            |
| Negotiation over EO                   | -0.006   | (0.358)   | 0.054 | (0.388)   | -0.033     | (0.351)   | -0.290 | (0.283)    |
| Consultation over EO                  | 0.508  | (0.258)** | 0.663 | (0.274)** | 0.649      | (0.262)** | 0.721  | (0.221)*** |
| Union informed over EO                | 0.346  | (0.243)   | 0.361 | (0.241)   | 0.286      | (0.239)   | 0.142  | (0.233)    |
| Union recognised/ not involved in EO  | 0.149  | (0.330)   | 0.133 | (0.323)   | 0.149      | (0.313)   | -0.046 | (0.277)    |
| F                                     | 9.73   |           | 10.44 |           | 9.90       |           | 8.26   |            |
| Prob>F                                | 0.000  |           | 0.000 |           | 0.000      |           | 0.000  |            |
| N                                     | 1702   |           | 1702  |           | 1702       |           | 1702   |            |

Notes:

Survey probit analysis. Co-efficients given, standard errors in brackets.

\*\*\* significant at 1 percent; \*\* significant at 5 percent.

Controls include: workplace size, SIC major group, organisation size, public sector, national ownership, workplace age, single independent workplace, financial performance. The equations also control for the following workforce characteristics: proportion of workforce female (column 1); proportion of workforce ethnic minority (column 2); proportion of workplace disabled (column 3); proportion of workforce 50 years old or older (column 4).

Table 2: Association between unionisation and recruitment and selection monitoring/ reviewing

| Recruitment and selection monitored by:   |        |            |        |            |            |            |        |            |
|---|--------|------------|--------|------------|------------|------------|--------|------------|
|   | Gender |            | Race   |            | Disability |            | Age    |            |
| Union recognition   | 0.522  | (0.184)*** | 0.493  | (0.185)*** | 0.470      | (0.181)*** | 0.389  | (0.172)**  |
| F   | 8.80   |            | 9.60   |            | 8.73       |            | 3.71   |            |
| Prob>F  | 0.000  |            | 0.000  |            | 0.000      |            | 0.000  |            |
| -----   |        |            |        |            |            |            |        |            |
| <i>Reference category: Non-union</i>  |        |            |        |            |            |            |        |            |
| Negotiation over EO   | 1.025  | (0.304)*** | 1.119  | (0.290)*** | 1.092      | (0.294)*** | 0.753  | (0.277)*** |
| Consultation over EO  | 0.595  | (0.226)*** | 0.532  | (0.227)**  | 0.504      | (0.222)**  | 0.466  | (0.218)**  |
| Union informed over EO  | 0.482  | (0.272)*   | 0.386  | (0.281)    | 0.521      | (0.266)**  | 0.422  | (0.257)    |
| Union recognised/ not involved in EO  | 0.117  | (0.263)    | 0.112  | (0.271)    | 0.050      | (0.279)    | 0.062  | (0.261)    |
| F   | 8.39   |            | 9.28   |            | 8.64       |            | 3.45   |            |
| Prob>F  | 0.000  |            | 0.000  |            | 0.000      |            | 0.000  |            |
| -----   |        |            |        |            |            |            |        |            |
| Recruitment and selection procedures reviewed to identify indirect discrimination by: |        |            |        |            |            |            |        |            |
|   | Gender |            | Race   |            | Disability |            | Age    |            |
| Union recognition   | 0.368  | (0.178)**  | 0.394  | (0.174)**  | 0.397      | (0.182)**  | 0.443  | (0.176)**  |
| F   | 8.12   |            | 7.66   |            | 8.18       |            | 7.30   |            |
| Prob>F  | 0.000  |            | 0.000  |            | 0.000      |            | 0.000  |            |
| -----   |        |            |        |            |            |            |        |            |
| <i>Reference category: Non-union</i>  |        |            |        |            |            |            |        |            |
| Negotiation over EO   | 0.811  | (0.271)*** | 0.863  | (0.268)*** | 0.829      | (0.278)*** | 0.956  | (0.269)*** |
| Consultation over EO  | 0.573  | (0.228)**  | 0.578  | (0.222)*** | 0.607      | (0.229)*** | 0.644  | (0.228)*** |
| Union informed over EO  | 0.354  | (0.257)    | 0.411  | (0.257)    | 0.320      | (0.265)    | 0.570  | (0.265)**  |
| Union recognised/ not involved in EO  | -0.274 | (0.280)    | -0.231 | (0.274)    | -0.186     | (0.303)    | -0.518 | (0.282)*   |
| F   | 7.63   |            | 7.32   |            | 7.64       |            | 7.41   |            |
| Prob>F  | 0.000  |            | 0.000  |            | 0.000      |            | 0.000  |            |
| -----   |        |            |        |            |            |            |        |            |
| Promotions monitored by:  |        |            |        |            |            |            |        |            |
|   | Gender |            | Race   |            | Disability |            | Age    |            |
| Union recognition   | 0.600  | (0.201)*** | 0.603  | (0.206)*** | 0.583      | (0.206)*** | 0.465  | (0.221)**  |
| F   | 8.49   |            | 10.46  |            | 9.93       |            | 8.28   |            |
| Prob>F  | 0.000  |            | 0.000  |            | 0.000      |            | 0.000  |            |
| -----   |        |            |        |            |            |            |        |            |
| <i>Reference category: Non-union</i>  |        |            |        |            |            |            |        |            |
| Negotiation over EO   | 0.788  | (0.316)**  | 0.802  | (0.308)*** | 0.916      | (0.312)*** | 0.859  | (0.334)*** |
| Consultation over EO  | 0.782  | (0.242)*** | 0.798  | (0.240)*** | 0.778      | (0.247)*** | 0.719  | (0.269)*** |
| Union informed over EO  | 0.545  | (0.300)*   | 0.554  | (0.327)*   | 0.590      | (0.304)*   | 0.291  | (0.322)    |
| Union recognised/ not involved in EO  | 0.261  | (0.307)    | 0.199  | (0.333)    | 0.045      | (0.351)    | -0.332 | (0.318)    |
| F   | 7.82   |            | 9.65   |            | 9.24       |            | 7.70   |            |
| Prob>F  | 0.000  |            | 0.000  |            | 0.000      |            | 0.000  |            |
| -----   |        |            |        |            |            |            |        |            |
| Promotion procedures reviewed to identify indirect discrimination by:                 |        |            |        |            |            |            |        |            |
|   | Gender |            | Race   |            | Disability |            | Age    |            |
| Union recognition   | 0.355  | (0.179)**  | 0.348  | (0.185)*   | 0.368      | (0.186)**  | 0.338  | (0.194)*   |
| F   | 6.68   |            | 8.20   |            | 8.92       |            | 6.48   |            |
| Prob>F  | 0.000  |            | 0.000  |            | 0.000      |            | 0.000  |            |
| -----   |        |            |        |            |            |            |        |            |
| <i>Reference category: Non-union</i>  |        |            |        |            |            |            |        |            |
| Negotiation over EO   | 0.345  | (0.291)    | 0.403  | (0.289)    | 0.414      | (0.291)    | 0.388  | (0.315)    |
| Consultation over EO  | 0.738  | (0.223)*** | 0.714  | (0.229)*** | 0.713      | (0.231)*** | 0.731  | (0.242)*** |
| Union informed over EO  | 0.057  | (0.304)    | 0.061  | (0.324)    | 0.070      | (0.312)    | 0.203  | (0.300)    |
| Union recognised/ not involved in EO  | -0.152 | (0.258)    | -0.250 | (0.248)    | -0.159     | (0.269)    | -0.643 | (0.337)*   |
| F   | 6.39   |            | 7.62   |            | 8.20       |            | 6.40   |            |
| Prob>F  | 0.000  |            | 0.000  |            | 0.000      |            | 0.000  |            |

Notes:

N=1702 for all equations.

Survey probit analysis. Co-efficients given, standard errors in brackets.

\*\*\* significant at 1 percent; \*\* significant at 5 percent; \* significant at 10 percent

Controls as described in table 1.

Table 3: Association between unionisation and special procedures to encourage applications from disadvantaged groups

|                                      | Special procedures in place to encourage applications from: |            |                   |            |                 |            |               |           |
|--------------------------------------|---|------------|-------------------|------------|-----------------|------------|---------------|-----------|
|                                      | Women returning to work after having children               |            | Ethnic minorities |            | Disabled people |            | Older workers |           |
| Union recognition                    | 0.296   | (0.208)    | 0.870             | (0.193)*** | 1.353           | (0.210)*** | 0.129         | (0.199)   |
| F                                    | 3.56  |            | 10.27             |            | 9.59            |            | 3.71          |           |
| Prob>F                               | 0.000   |            | 0.000             |            | 0.000           |            | 0.000         |           |
| N                                    | 1702  |            | 1702              |            | 1702            |            | 1702          |           |
| <hr/>                                |   |            |                   |            |                 |            |               |           |
| <i>Reference category: Non-union</i> |   |            |                   |            |                 |            |               |           |
| Negotiation over EO                  | 0.920   | (0.319)*** | 1.454             | (0.306)*** | 1.768           | (0.323)*** | 0.734         | (0.325)** |
| Consultation over EO                 | 0.244   | (0.282)    | 0.802             | (0.226)*** | 1.480           | (0.257)*** | -0.322        | (0.228)   |
| Union informed over EO               | -0.384  | (0.242)    | 0.731             | (0.275)*** | 1.395           | (0.301)*** | 0.079         | (0.299)   |
| Union recognised/ not involved in EO | 0.228   | (0.271)    | 0.653             | (0.258)**  | 0.904           | (0.281)*** | 0.260         | (0.263)   |
| F                                    | 3.56  |            | 9.63              |            | 8.88            |            | 3.62          |           |
| Prob>F                               | 0.000   |            | 0.000             |            | 0.000           |            | 0.000         |           |
| N                                    | 1702  |            | 1702              |            | 1702            |            | 1702          |           |

Notes:

Survey probit analysis. Co-efficients given, standard errors in brackets.

\*\*\* significant at 1 percent; \*\* significant at 5 percent

Controls as described in table 1.

Table 4: Association between unionisation and reviews of relative pay rates

|                                      | Reviews of relative pay rates by: |           |        |            |            |            |        |            |
|--------------------------------------|-----------------------------------|-----------|--------|------------|------------|------------|--------|------------|
|                                      | Gender                            |           | Race   |            | Disability |            | Age    |            |
| Union recognition                    | 0.072                             | (0.261)   | 0.492  | (0.227)**  | 0.466      | (0.255)*   | 0.334  | (0.207)    |
| F                                    | 9.49                              |           | 8.05   |            | 7.85       |            | 5.50   |            |
| Prob>F                               | 0.000                             |           | 0.000  |            | 0.000      |            | 0.000  |            |
| N                                    | 1702                              |           | 1702   |            | 1702       |            | 1702   |            |
| <hr/>                                |                                   |           |        |            |            |            |        |            |
| <i>Reference category: Non-union</i> |                                   |           |        |            |            |            |        |            |
| Negotiation over EO                  | 0.187                             | (0.385)   | 0.781  | (0.356)**  | 0.665      | (0.383)*   | 0.595  | (0.352)*   |
| Consultation over EO                 | 0.356                             | (0.308)   | 0.998  | (0.267)*** | 0.875      | (0.294)*** | 0.702  | (0.254)*** |
| Union informed over EO               | -0.740                            | (0.315)** | -0.708 | (0.303)**  | -0.577     | (0.288)**  | -0.625 | (0.224)*** |
| Union recognised/ not involved in EO | -0.059                            | (0.332)   | -0.259 | (0.328)    | -0.177     | (0.410)    | 0.004  | (0.322)    |
| F                                    | 9.19                              |           | 8.67   |            | 8.76       |            | 6.01   |            |
| Prob>F                               | 0.000                             |           | 0.000  |            | 0.000      |            | 0.000  |            |
| N                                    | 1702                              |           | 1702   |            | 1702       |            | 1702   |            |

Notes:

Survey probit analysis. Co-efficients given, standard errors in brackets.

\*\*\* significant at 1 percent; \*\* significant at 5 percent; \* significant at 10 percent

Controls as described in table 1.

Table 5: Association between unionisation and flexible working/ family-friendly practices

|                                      | Working at or from home in normal working hours |            | Job sharing                   |            | Flexitime                        |           | Term-time only contracts            |            |
|--------------------------------------|---|------------|-------------------------------|------------|----------------------------------|-----------|-------------------------------------|------------|
| Union recognition                    | -0.247  | (0.176)    | 0.319                         | (0.173)*   | 0.223                            | (0.180)   | -0.120                              | (0.184)    |
| F                                    | 6.67  |            | 7.91                          |            | 3.37                             |           | 11.13                               |            |
| Prob>F                               | 0.000   |            | 0.000                         |            | 0.000                            |           | 0.000                               |            |
| <hr/>                                |   |            |                               |            |                                  |           |                                     |            |
| <i>Reference category: Non-union</i> |   |            |                               |            |                                  |           |                                     |            |
| Negotiation over EO                  | -0.123  | (0.295)    | 0.427                         | (0.308)    | 0.522                            | (0.293)*  | 0.122                               | (0.262)    |
| Consultation over EO                 | -0.179  | (0.230)    | 0.456                         | (0.233)**  | 0.485                            | (0.237)** | 0.001                               | (0.244)    |
| Union informed over EO               | -0.174  | (0.256)    | 0.490                         | (0.216)**  | -0.475                           | (0.234)** | -0.134                              | (0.306)    |
| Union recognised/ not involved in EO | -0.496  | (0.220)**  | -0.059                        | (0.230)    | 0.145                            | (0.267)   | -0.496                              | (0.236)**  |
| F                                    | 6.31  |            | 7.50                          |            | 3.20                             |           | 10.13                               |            |
| Prob>F                               | 0.000   |            | 0.000                         |            | 0.000                            |           | 0.000                               |            |
| <hr/>                                |   |            |                               |            |                                  |           |                                     |            |
|                                      | Workplace nursery                               |            | Financial help with childcare |            | Leave for carers of older adults |           | Maternity leave at full rate of pay |            |
| Union recognition                    | 0.520   | (0.235)**  | 0.678                         | (0.229)*** | 0.408                            | (0.198)** | 0.392                               | (0.164)**  |
| F                                    | 10.72   |            | 9.89                          |            | 7.66                             |           | 3.85                                |            |
| Prob>F                               | 0.000   |            | 0.000                         |            | 0.000                            |           | 0.000                               |            |
| <hr/>                                |   |            |                               |            |                                  |           |                                     |            |
| <i>Reference category: Non-union</i> |   |            |                               |            |                                  |           |                                     |            |
| Negotiation over EO                  | 0.717   | (0.338)**  | 0.599                         | (0.325)*   | 0.617                            | (0.327)*  | 0.465                               | (0.292)    |
| Consultation over EO                 | 0.898   | (0.310)*** | 0.923                         | (0.270)*** | 0.556                            | (0.241)** | 0.679                               | (0.220)*** |
| Union informed over EO               | 0.581   | (0.335)*   | 0.828                         | (0.369)**  | 0.335                            | (0.306)   | 0.244                               | (0.261)    |
| Union recognised/ not involved in EO | -0.432  | (0.289)*   | 0.005                         | (0.366)    | -0.039                           | (0.391)   | 0.153                               | (0.240)    |
| F                                    | 9.75  |            | 9.35                          |            | 7.58                             |           | 3.80                                |            |
| Prob>F                               | 0.000   |            | 0.000                         |            | 0.000                            |           | 0.000                               |            |

Notes:

N=1702 for all equations

Survey probit analysis. Co-efficients given, standard errors in brackets.

\*\*\* significant at 1 percent; \*\* significant at 5 percent; \* significant at 10 percent

Controls as described in table 1. All equations control for the proportion of workforce female with the exception of the 'leave for carers of older adults' equation.

Appendix table: Means of dependent and control variables

Dependent variables

*Workplace has a formal written policy on EO or managing diversity that explicitly mentions equality of treatment or discrimination on the grounds of:*

|            |       |
|------------|-------|
| Gender     | 0.561 |
| Race       | 0.551 |
| Disability | 0.534 |
| Age        | 0.419 |

*Recruitment and selection monitored by:*

|            |       |
|------------|-------|
| Gender     | 0.186 |
| Ethnicity  | 0.185 |
| Disability | 0.183 |
| Age        | 0.175 |

*Recruitment and selection procedures reviewed to identify indirect discrimination by:*

|            |       |
|------------|-------|
| Gender     | 0.164 |
| Ethnicity  | 0.173 |
| Disability | 0.164 |
| Age        | 0.142 |

*Special procedures to encourage applications from:*

|   |       |
|---|-------|
| Women returning to work after having children | 0.107 |
| Members of ethnic minority groups             | 0.083 |
| Disabled people                               | 0.091 |
| Older workers                                 | 0.062 |

*Promotions monitored by:*

|            |       |
|------------|-------|
| Gender     | 0.088 |
| Ethnicity  | 0.086 |
| Disability | 0.079 |
| Age        | 0.066 |

*Promotion procedures reviewed to identify indirect discrimination by:*

|            |       |
|------------|-------|
| Gender     | 0.095 |
| Ethnicity  | 0.095 |
| Disability | 0.092 |
| Age        | 0.084 |

*Relative pay rates reviewed by:*

|            |       |
|------------|-------|
| Gender     | 0.056 |
| Ethnicity  | 0.037 |
| Disability | 0.032 |
| Age        | 0.051 |

*Family-friendly/ flexible working practices in place for any employees at the workplace:*

|  |       |
|--|-------|
| Working at or from home in normal working hours  | 0.256 |
| Job sharing schemes (sharing a full time job with another employee)  | 0.245 |
| Flexitime (no set start or finish times but an agreement to work a set number of hours per week or per month)  | 0.343 |
| Working only during school or term-time  | 0.121 |
| Workplace nursery or nursery linked with workplace   | 0.021 |
| Financial help with childcare (e.g. loans, repayable contributions to fees for childcare outside of the workplace, subsidised places not located at the establishment) | 0.056 |
| A specific period of leave for carers of older adults  | 0.061 |
| Maternity leave at normal, full rate of pay  | 0.556 |

## Control variables

|   |       |
|---|-------|
| <i>Workplace size:</i>                  |       |
| 5-9 employees                           | 0.426 |
| 10-24 employees                         | 0.338 |
| 25-49 employees                         | 0.123 |
| 50-99 employees                         | 0.063 |
| 100-199 employees                       | 0.030 |
| 200-499 employees                       | 0.016 |
| 500-999 employees                       | 0.003 |
| 1000+ employees                         | 0.002 |
| <i>Organisation size:</i>               |       |
| 5-99 employees                          | 0.404 |
| 100-999 employees                       | 0.233 |
| 1000-9999 employees                     | 0.193 |
| 10000+ employees                        | 0.169 |
| <i>SIC major group:</i>                 |       |
| Manufacturing                           | 0.119 |
| Gas, electricity and water supply       | 0.001 |
| Construction                            | 0.043 |
| Wholesale and retail trade              | 0.234 |
| Hotels and restaurants                  | 0.093 |
| Transport, storage and communication    | 0.046 |
| Financial intermediation                | 0.053 |
| Real estate, renting                    | 0.162 |
| Public admin., defence, social security | 0.018 |
| Education                               | 0.035 |
| Health and social work                  | 0.119 |
| Other community, social, personal       | 0.078 |
| Public sector                           | 0.104 |
| Single independent workplace            | 0.381 |
| <i>Financial performance:</i>           |       |
| No competition/ data                    | 0.080 |
| Above average financial performance     | 0.474 |
| Average financial performance           | 0.362 |
| Below average financial performance     | 0.084 |
| <i>National ownership:</i>              |       |
| UK owned                                | 0.930 |
| North American owned                    | 0.034 |
| Non-UK EU owned                         | 0.023 |
| Rest of World                           | 0.013 |
| <i>Workplace age:</i>                   |       |
| 0-4 years old                           | 0.102 |
| 5-9 years old                           | 0.152 |
| 10-19 years old                         | 0.244 |
| 20+ years old                           | 0.502 |
| <i>Proportion of workforce:</i>         |       |
| Female                                  | 0.535 |
| Ethnic Minority                         | 0.064 |
| Disabled                                | 0.009 |
| 50 years old or older                   | 0.217 |

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N=1702