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The Future for Unions

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The Future for Unions

The Rise of Unions Representing
Professional, Managerial and
Associate Managerial Workers

Higher Education Unionism and Collective Bargaining in Context

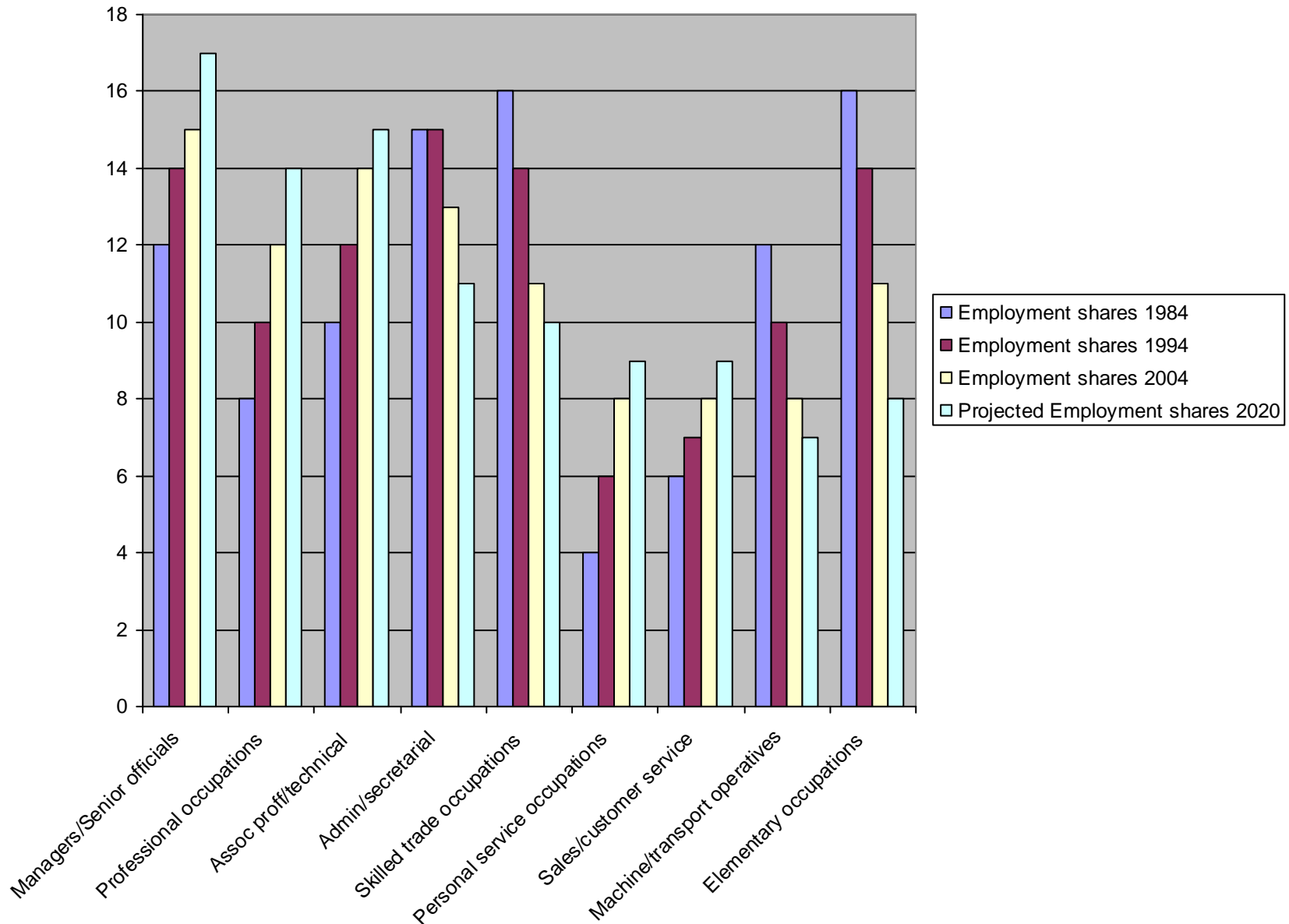
Tom Wilson, Head of Organisation and Services Dept, TUC

UK Unions 1979 – 2008

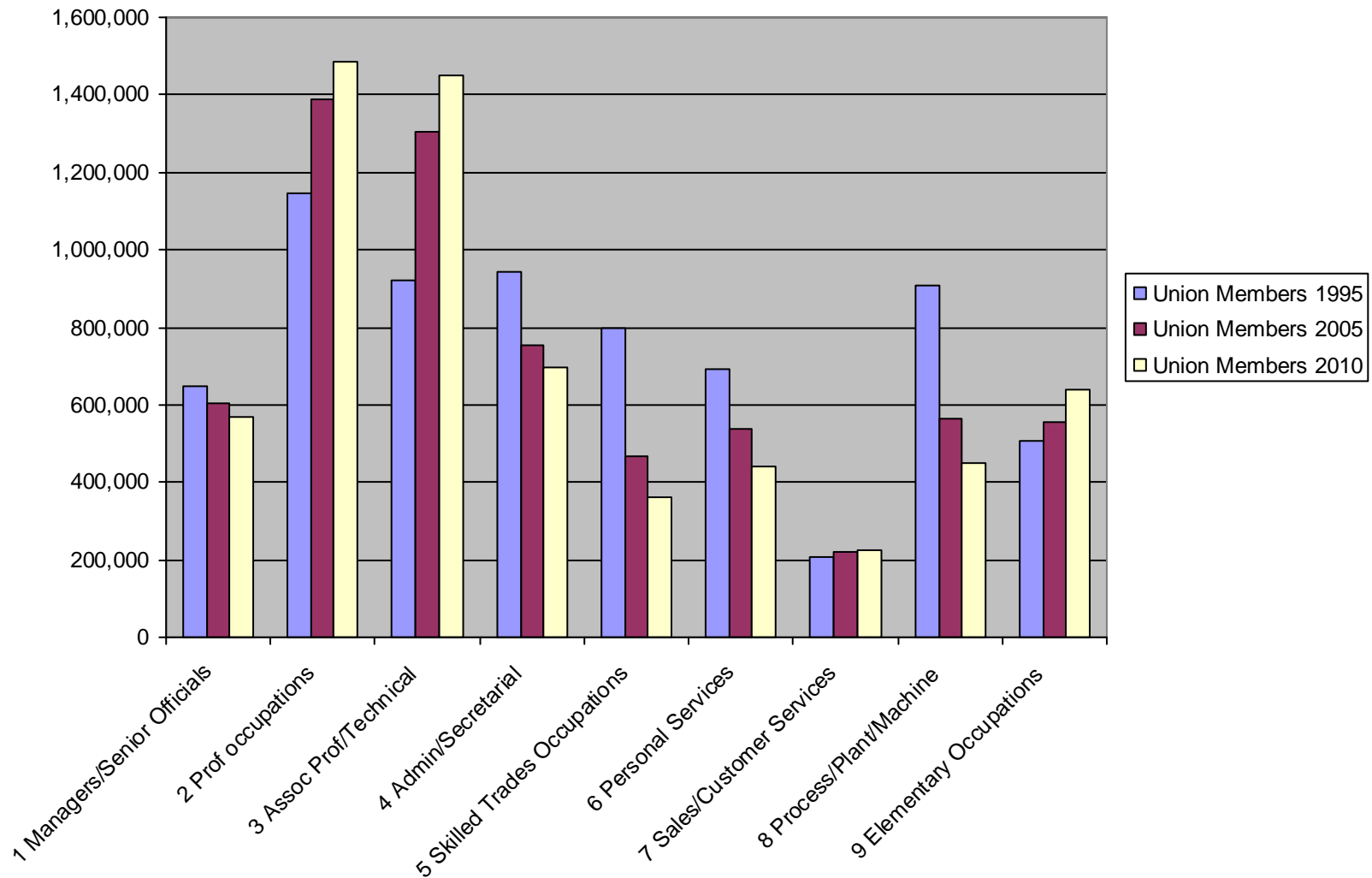
Decline and Renewal

- In 1979 UK unions had 13M members, about 50% of the employed workforce
- By 1997 that had halved to 7M, about 29%, but has stabilised and is now slightly rising
- Under that apparently stable headline figure there is major churning
- Falling low skilled “traditional” union membership, rise in higher skilled/educated members
- Both trends reflect big employment changes

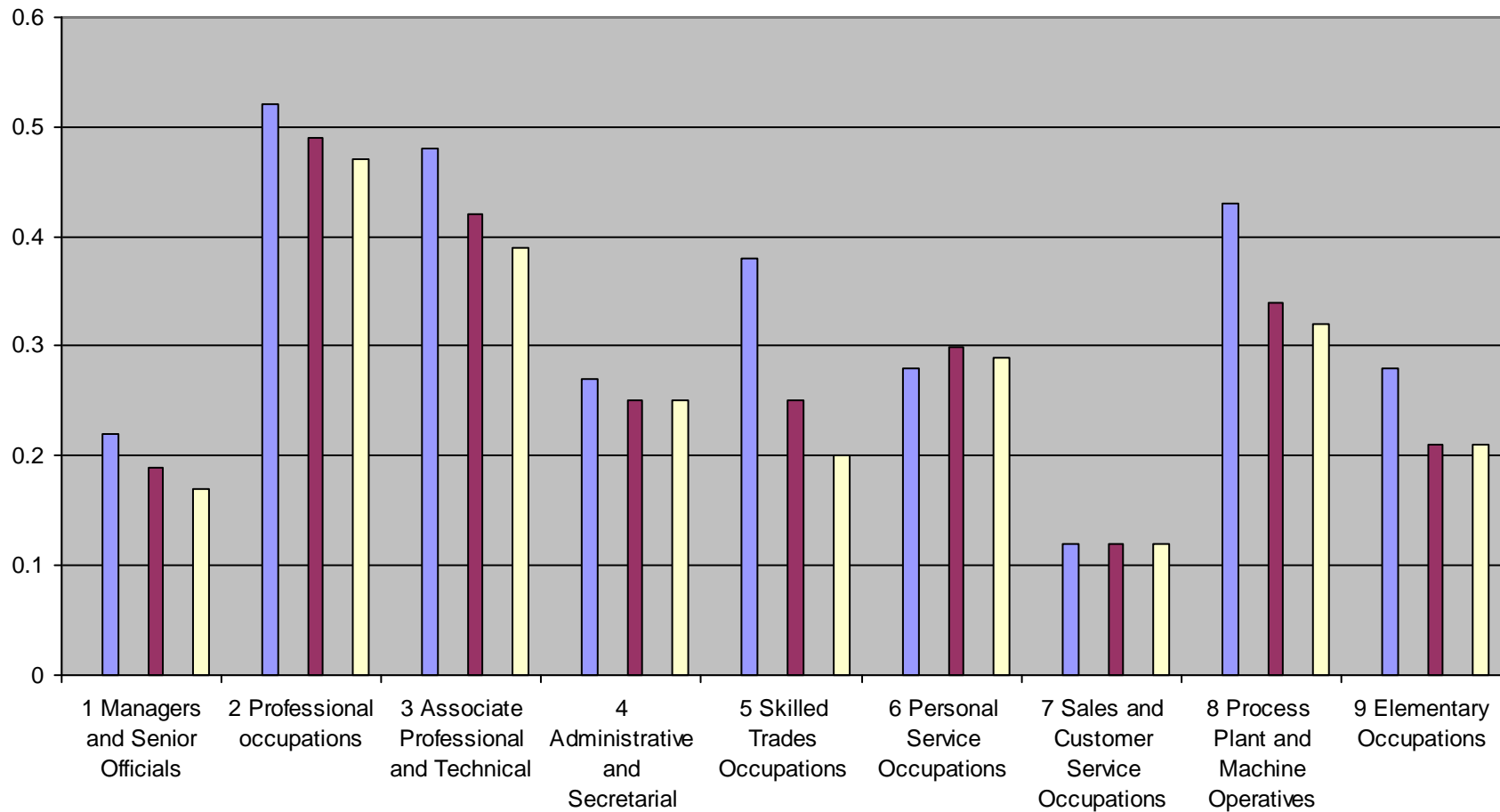
The Changing Face of Employment 1984 - 2020



Union Membership by Occupation 1995 - 2010



Union Density by Occupation 1994, 2004, 2010



Not a Public Sector Effect

- Is the rise in union membership among profs/assoc profs a public sector effect?
- True that density much higher in public than private but:
- Density is just as high among private sector teachers and nurses
- Plenty of private sector professions are becoming/remaining unionised – journalists, actors, airline pilots, footballers, screenwriters

Where Unions are Losing

- Skilled trades – 38% to 20% fall in density; 800K to 361K fall in membership
- Process/Plant machine workers – 43% to 32% fall in density; 908K to 450K fall in membership
- Elementary trades – 28% to 21% fall in density but rise from 506K to 640K in membership

Where Unions are Stable

- Top managers a small fall – 22% to 17% and 648K to 570K
- Professionals – 52% to 47% fall in density but membership up from 1.1M to 1.5M
- Assoc Professionals – 48% to 39% but rise from 920K to 1.45M

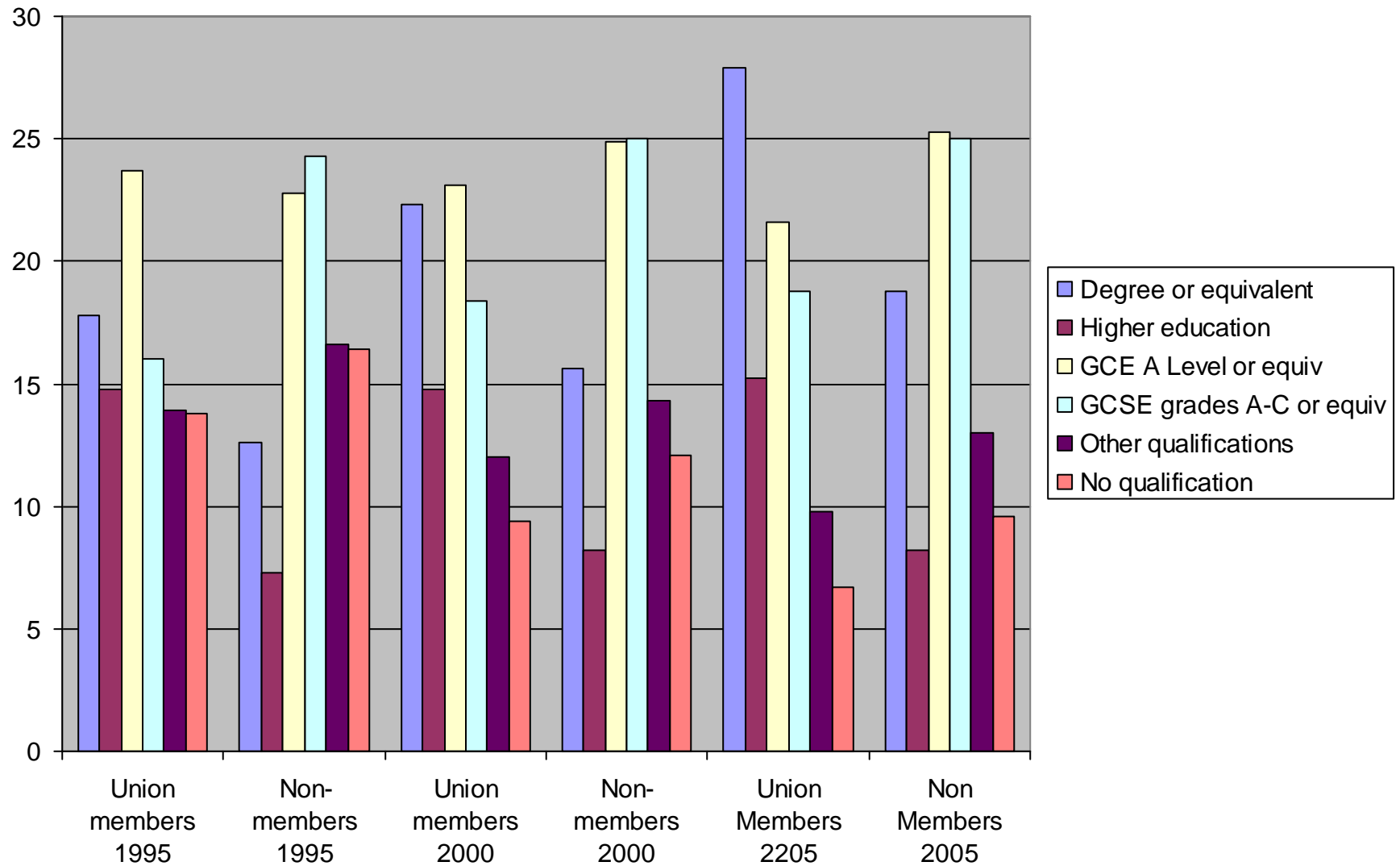
Feminization of the Unions?

- In 2003 female density overtook male, 30% to 28%
- In 2005 numbers followed suit: 3.346M women to 3.331M men
- Density highest among women – assoc profs 27% to 20% in private sector and 75% to 67% in public sector
- Density broadly the same within particular occupations - unions are following the feminisation of the professions/assoc professions

Youth NOT the Problem

- Membership among young workers is low
- Young people work in shops, catering, hotels, bars etc – always been low density sectors (less so in USA?)
- Young people have temporary jobs
- Where a retail job, e.g., is unionised and permanent then young and old equally likely to join
- One in ten workers is a student – unions now more active on campus

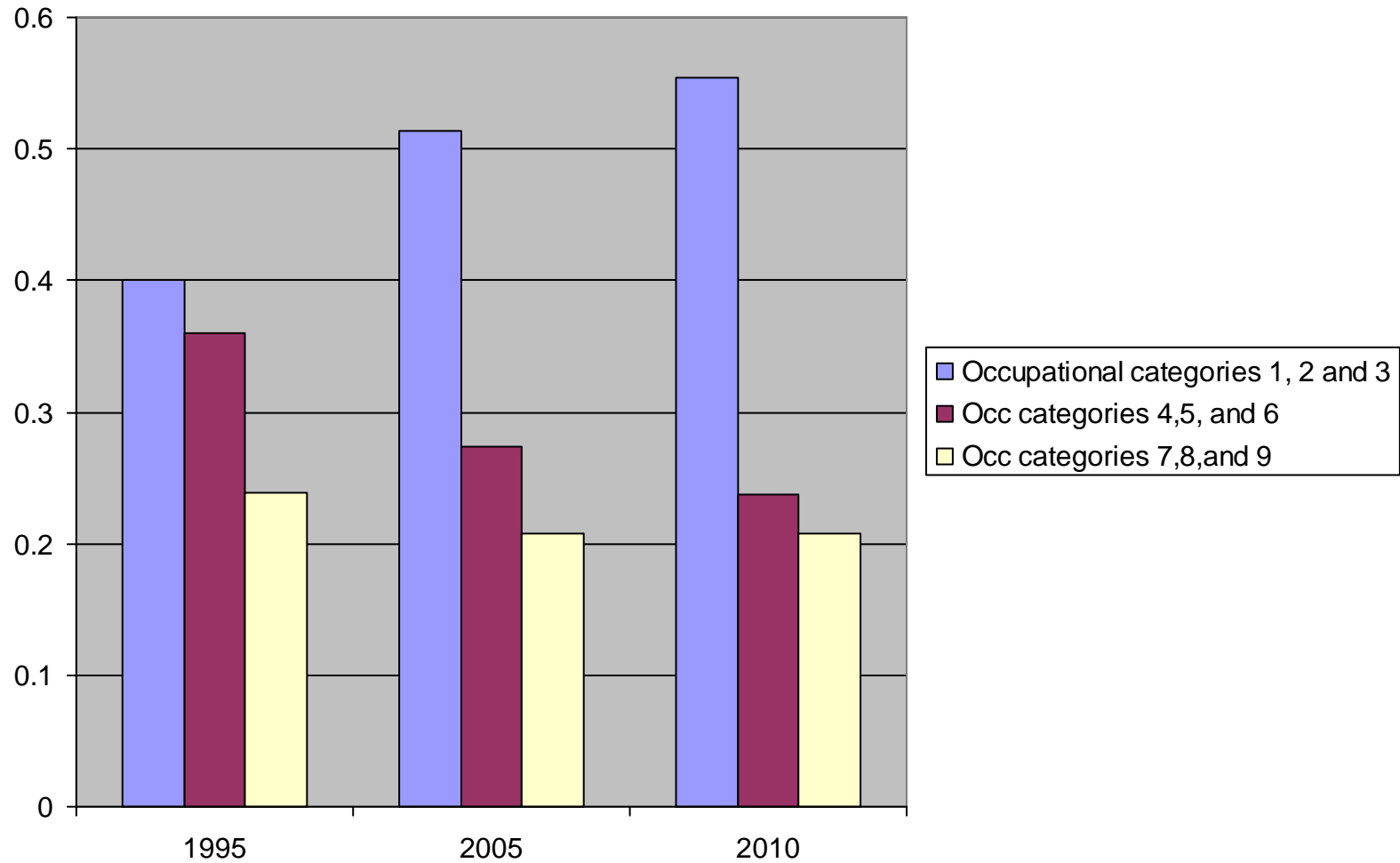
An Educated Membership



A Degree is the Norm

- By 2005 43% of union members had a degree or equivalent HE level qualification, up from 27% in 1995
- In 1995 30% of members had no qualification, in 2005 16.3% - halved in ten years
- By 2008, around half all union members are likely to have a degree or HE equivalent qualification
- By 2020, on current trends, 60% of members will have a degree or equivalent.

The Changing Shape of Unions



Some Effects of these Changes

1 - Vulnerable Workers

- Traditionally, unions have been champions of the lowest paid, least skilled and most vulnerable
- Membership in that group is now under 10%
- They remain at the heart of trade unionism
- Members continue to be altruistic, they join for self interest **AND** to help the most needy and improve society

Effect 2 – Unions Promote Skills

- Skills/qualifications generally better than strikes at getting sustainable higher pay/better jobs
- Unions now putting far more effort into skills
- Training their own members
- Demanding more training from employers
- Urging government to reform the skills system

Effect 3 - Occupational Unionism?

- Occupational unions are smaller but growing much faster than general unions
- Today's professionals are the equivalent of yesterdays tradesmen/women
- So do Trades unions do better than sectoral, general or industrial unions? (UK v USA?)
- Some unions looking to sectoralise, seeking right balance between occupation and clout

Effect 4 - A More Demanding Membership

- Today's professional members want a professional service
- Unions are learning from charities that being businesslike makes sense – using ICT better
- There is more internal specialism and professionalism among union staff, better member relations
- Unions more likely than SME's to be “investors in people”

Effect 5 – No Less Assertive

- “Middle Class” union members no less likely to go on strike; e.g. teachers, airline pilots, screenwriters
- In 2005, almost half all strike days in education where great majority of union members are prof/assoc prof
- “New” issues on the bargaining table – skills, stress, equality
- Many of the occupational, prof/assoc prof unions seen as radical, on the left – and plenty not
- Are today’s professionals the new working class?

Some Predictions for HE trade Unionism

- Membership should rise further among faculty, maybe less so among admin and lesser qualified staff
- HE unions may become more occupation-based, less general. More women members – and leaders?
- HE unions may split by occupation: teaching v. research v. admin. Not by employer – public v. private.
- Will bargaining follow suit?