



**VIOLENCE AT  
WORK -  
A SURVEY OF  
UNISON  
EMPLOYERS  
IN SCOTLAND  
2019**

October 2019

**UNISON Scotland**  
**Health & Safety Conference**  
**18 October 2019**

**Violent Assaults on Public Service Staff in Scotland**  
**Survey 2019**

**1. INTRODUCTION**

This is the thirteenth annual survey by UNISON Scotland of assaults carried out on workers in our public services.

Using Freedom of Information requests we ask employers to tell us the total number of assaults which have been reported in the latest year for which they have information. This year's survey was carried out from July to October 2019 by e-mail.

**The aggregated returns for our survey show that there were 37662 assaults in total reported in the most recent year.**

Assaults on local government workers account for 55% of this total – an aggregate of **20867**.

Health Boards reported a total of **14714** assaults on NHS workers in their latest annual returns.

At face value this marks decrease on last year of some 3000 assaults. This is obviously to be welcomed but may reflect an incomplete data set rather than a significant improvement. In any event it still represents a near doubling of the 20,000 incidents reported by public sector employers in our first violence at work survey in 2006.

**Assaults on staff by public sector employers by year**

<b>Survey year</b>	<b>2019</b>	<b>2018</b>	<b>2017</b>	<b>2016</b>	<b>2015</b>	<b>2014</b>
Loc Govt	20,867	20,208	22,006	17,605	13,206	15,671
Health	14,714	18,225	19,170	17,116	18,636	15,057
Other	2,081	2,135	1,245	6,445	6,437	6,296
<b>Total</b>	<b>37,662</b>	<b>40,568</b>	<b>42,421</b>	<b>41,166</b>	<b>38,279</b>	<b>37,024</b>

We are firmly of the view that even one assault on a worker who is providing a public service for our communities would be one assault too many. This would be the case whether the assault was reported or not. The longer term trend showing an increase in violence is at least in part the result of a greater willingness on the part of workers to report incidents.

UNISON has worked hard to have violence at work taken seriously by employers as well as staff and the public. There is some evidence over the period that this series of reports has been being published, that this campaigning work has been one of the drivers of improved awareness and reporting amongst workers and employers.

We believe, however, there are many incidents which remain unreported. There are still employers for whom low numbers of incidents seem more likely to be the result of under-reporting than trouble free environments.

## 2. LEGISLATION

UNISON Scotland believes there should be specific legislation on violence against workers delivering a service which covers all public service workers. We were strong advocates of and welcomed the introduction of the Emergency Workers (Scotland) Act (EWA) in 2005 and its subsequent amendments. We did at the time, and have since, argued that legislation should be widened in scope covering not limited but all public service workers.

The EWA has been used extensively since it was passed in 2005. This despite claims from some quarters who maintained there would be no successful prosecutions as common law and other statutory provisions covered most of the Bill's provisions. Proceedings have averaged around 300 per year, and the conviction rate is high as can be seen from the tables below.

	<b>Convictions under the Emergency Workers (Scotland) Act 2005</b>									
	<b>2008-09</b>	<b>2009-10</b>	<b>2010-11</b>	<b>2011-12</b>	<b>2012-13</b>	<b>2013-14</b>	<b>2014-15</b>	<b>2015-16</b>	<b>2016-17</b>	<b>2017-18</b>
<b>EWA 2005 Total</b>	<b>309</b>	<b>290</b>	<b>336</b>	<b>372</b>	<b>354</b>	<b>310</b>	<b>302</b>	<b>269</b>	<b>275</b>	<b>190</b>
<b>Fire/ambulance staff EWA Section 1(1)</b>	<b>76</b>	<b>117</b>	<b>140</b>	<b>164</b>	<b>152</b>	<b>135</b>	<b>134</b>	<b>132</b>	<b>114</b>	<b>94</b>

EWA Section 2(1) Other emergency workers	79	39	42	34	39	31	41	29	21	8
EWA Section 3(1) Assisters of Emergency staff	4	2	5	1	2	1	-	2	-	1
Assaults on health workers in hospitals EWA Section 5(1)	150	132	149	173	161	143	127	106	140	89

Data extracted from Scottish Govt FOI release FOI/201900000819 11/04/19 & Scottish Government workbook dated 9 March 2018  
<https://www.gov.scot/Resource/0053/00532563.xlsx> published as part of the Criminal Proceedings in Scotland 2016-17 statistics:  
<https://www.gov.scot/Topics/Statistics/Browse/CrimeJustice/Datasets/DatasetsCrimProc/CP1617EWA> )

It is a measure of the seriousness of the assaults that of the 190 convictions under the EWA in 2017-18 57 of them resulted in custodial sentences.

By definition the EWA is on emergency services - but all workers who deal with the public are at risk of violent assault, as our survey results show. The narrow focus of the Act on 'blue light' workers provides protection to groups of workers who are predominantly male. Meanwhile large and mainly female occupational groupings such as nurses, care workers and classroom assistants lack comparable protection. This remains an equal opportunities issue.

The most significant effort so far to improve matters was Hugh Henry MSP's proposed Protection of Workers (Scotland) Bill in 2009 which would have widened the scope for prosecutions, this fell when opposed by the Scottish Government.

In Oct 19 Daniel Johnson MSP lodged his brought Protection of Workers (Retail and Age-Restricted Sales etc) (Scotland) Bill - which can be seen here: <http://www.parliament.scot/parliamentarybusiness/Bills/107499.aspx>. UNISON has supported this proposed bill while noting again the narrow focus - this time aimed at 'workers in the retail sector and those applying or enforcing an age-restriction in relation to the sale or supply of goods or services'. The Bill will be considered by Parliament provided it achieves the support of at least 18 other MSPs from at least half of the parties or groups represented in the Parliament.

UNISON Scotland will continue support further attempts by MSPs to extend the legislation covering violence at work to offer legal protections to all public service workers. We reiterate our call to the Scottish Government that action is necessary and we will continue to hold them to account on this.

### 3. FREEDOM OF INFORMATION SURVEY 2019

Our annual Violence at Work survey is sent to all local authorities and area health

boards in Scotland, as well as to other public service providers in which UNISON organises who are subject to the Freedom of Information legislation. We ask for details on the number of assaults on workers during the past year, broken down by job title or department and nature of assault.

In response to the 2018 survey, we have had responses from all 14 area health boards the 8 special health boards, 20 out of 27 FE colleges surveyed, 16 out of 16 Higher Education institutions, and 9 out of 10 Non Departmental Public Bodies. 30 out of 32 local authorities provided responses.

It is clear that local councils and the further education colleges have borne the brunt of austerity economics over the last decade. We know that this has had a huge negative effect on all of the jobs and services they provide to local communities. It is extremely worrying that the reporting of violence at work and possibly the right to freedom of information enshrined in law might be affected by the pressures facing public sector employers.

This year, for the first time in five years, the Scottish Fire and Rescue Service have responded to our Freedom of information request.

Police Scotland responses over the years have varied from no response, to details of assaults on officers (but not police staff). This year, for the second year running they have provided a figure for officers and staff but no detailed breakdown of this.

Culture and leisure trusts were included in the scope of the Freedom of Information legislation in 2014 – this is the first time we have surveyed them on violence at work reports. We received responses from 11 out of 13 culture and leisure trusts.

### **Local Government**

The figure for our 2019 survey is **20,867**. This is a 3% on last year (against a background where assaults in other areas have stayed broadly steady or registered small declines.) This continues a worrying trend. In 2014, our survey found 15,671 reported incidents (itself a 6% increase on the previous year). Local government figures for violent incident reports have risen by around 33% over the last five years.

The following table lists the number of incidents for the most recent year under report for each local authority.

<b>Employer</b>	<b>Assaults</b>
Aberdeen City	344
Aberdeenshire	936
Angus	110
Argyll & Bute	34
City of Edinburgh	383
City of Glasgow	4406

Clackmannanshire	109
Dumfries & Galloway	749
Dundee City	695
East Ayrshire	1601
East Dunbartonshire	94
East Lothian	777
East Renfrewshire	
Falkirk	270
Fife	2127
Highland	*
Inverclyde	243
Midlothian	540
Moray	*
North Ayrshire	346
North Lanarkshire	866
Orkney (inc Orkney College)	13
Perth & Kincross	1512
Renfrewshire	567
Scottish Borders	618
Shetland	<5
South Ayrshire	334
South Lanarkshire	649
Stirling	536
West Dunbartonshire	257
West Lothian	1559
Western Isles	192
<b>Total</b>	<b>20 867</b>

Whilst the overall picture is a slight decrease overall – within that total there was a vast amount of variation. Seven councils had recorded 100+ increases, with the number of incidents doubling in Western Isles, Scottish Borders Council, Stirling and an 83% increase in Fife.

It remains the case that areas with similar population sizes can register wildly different levels of reported violence. It may be the case that increased totals are the result of developing new systems or changes in how incidents are categorised. (Some councils have been revising their systems in recent years – this is discussed more fully in the 2017 report).

We hold to our previously expressed view that a wider framework backed by legislation would assist in removing discrepancies giving a better idea of the scale of the problem.

UNISON Scotland continues to call for all councils to use the guidelines and toolkit produced in 2010 by the Scottish Centre for Health Working Lives fully into practice, in order that we can reduce the level of violent assaults across Scotland.

### **Health Service**

The aggregate figure for violent incidents in the territorial health boards has fallen significantly over the last year from **17,787** last year to **14,410** in the current survey.

However as with local government figures the trend over the last decade has been an increase. The number of reported incidents of violence against health workers in these NHS area boards is, even with this welcome drop, more than 14% higher than it was in 2013 when the figure was 12,687.

The slight drop in the headline figure serves to conceal a huge volatility. Six of the Health Boards (Argyll and Bute Greater Glasgow & Clyde, Highland, Lanarkshire, and Western Isles) all registered an increase in assaults. In some cases there were considerable increases on the previous year's figures with increases of several hundred in Ayrshire and Arran and the Borders and a doubling of assaults in the western Isles. The most remarkable increase was Forth Valley going from 228 recorded incidents last year to this years 1569.

If these increases seem dramatic they show no less fluctuations than the seven Health Boards (Borders, Dumfries and Galloway , Fife, Lothian, Shetland, and Tayside) where the number of incidents fell. Although many of these drops were considerable those in Fife (from 3328 to 1007) and the even greater drop in Lothian (from 2300 to to 355) seem positively dramatic.

<b>Employer</b>	<b>Number of incidents</b>
Ayrshire & Arran	971
Borders	480
Dumfries & Galloway	115
Fife	1007

Forth Valley	1569
Grampian	2206
Greater Glasgow and Clyde	5182
Highland	1401
Lanarkshire	673
Lothian	355
Orkney	5
Shetland	13
Tayside	328
Western Isles	105
<b>Total</b>	<b>14410</b>

Of eight special health boards, all but one provided responses. The aggregate total for these was 438, which were mainly accounted for by 263 reported assaults on Scottish Ambulance Service staff.

<b>Employer</b>	<b>Number of incidents</b>
Education for Scotland	0
Golden Jubilee	27
Healthcare Improvement Scotland	0
NHS 24	0
NHS Health Scotland	0
NHS National Services	2



Scottish Ambulance Service	231
State Hospital	47
<b>Total</b>	<b>438</b>

This figure is down on last years with significant decreases in NHS24 down to zero, with further drops at the State Hospital at Carstairs and proportionately smaller drops in the ambulance Service and at the Golden Jubilee.

### **Police Scotland**

Police Scotland provided a figure of 1685 assaults on 'officers/staff members' for 2018/19. Our requests for a breakdown of figures to show the nature of the assault, the category of worker (job title, area of work etc) have, once again been refused on grounds of cost. This figure is slightly down on the 1710 figure given last year. The full information provided is given below.

<b>Divisions</b>	<b>Total</b>
North	200
East	374
West	985
Specialist Divisions	126
SPA	0
<b>Total</b>	<b>1,685</b>

### **Fire and Rescue Scotland**

Fire and Rescue Scotland reported that there were 61 assaults on SFRS staff in relation to operational incidents. They also provided a geographic breakdown, by local authority. This indicates that there were attacks reported in fifteen of the thirty two local authorities. The number of attacks has declined considerably since the last report we received which was in 2015, then the figure was 255.

### **Universities**

We had responses from all of the 17 higher education institutions surveyed this year. None of them had anything to report save Edinburgh - who recorded 13 incidents and Glasgow School of Art with 2 .

<b>Employer</b>	<b>Number of incidents</b>
Aberdeen University	0

Abertay	0
Dundee Uni 0	0
Edinburgh Uni 0	13
Glasgow Caledonian	0
Glasgow School of Art	2
Glasgow University	0
Heriot Watt	0
Napier Uni	0
Queen Margaret Uni	0
Robert Gordon Uni	0
Royal Cons of Scotland	0
St Andrews Uni	0
Stirling Uni *	0
Strathclyde Uni	0
UHI	0
Univ of West of Scotland	0
<b>Total</b>	<b>13</b>

### Colleges

We received responses from only half of the Further education institutions we surveyed which is a similar response rate to last year.

The total number of violent incidents reported by the colleges in the latest year was 49 (down from 73). Both the drop and the majority of the incidents are accounted for by Ayrshire College.

<b>Employer</b>	<b>Number of incidents</b>
Ayrshire College	33
Borders College	2
City of Glasgow	6
Dundee & Angus College	0
Edinburgh College *	1
Forth Valley College	0
Glasgow Clyde College	1
Glasgow Kelvin College	4
New College Lanarkshire	1
Newbattle Abbey College	0
North East Scotland	1
Perth College	0
South Lanarkshire College	0
SRUC	0

West Highland College	0
<b>Total</b>	<b>49</b>

Overall the universities and colleges continue to report very low numbers of assaults. Given that one college accounts for more than half of all the reports, UNISON remains concerned that the low level of reports in others is likely to be due to under-reporting.

### **Non-Departmental Public Bodies (NDPBs)**

Ten out of the 11 NDPBs surveyed provided figures this year. There were 29 assaults in total. The Care Inspectorate noted zero incidents, compared with 11 last year. Skills Development Scotland reported 15, and SEPA reported 14 assaults. Almost all of the incidents mentioned were verbal assaults.

<b>Employer</b>	<b>Number of incidents</b>
Care Inspectorate	0
John Wheatley Housing	4
Loch Lomond & Trossachs National Park Authority	1
Scottish Children's Reporter Administration	3
Scottish Enterprise (Information Commissioner)	0
Scottish Environment Protection Agency	13
Scottish Qualifications Authority	0
Scottish Social Services Council	0
Skills Development Scotland	9
<b>Total</b>	<b>30</b>

### **Culture and Leisure Trusts**

We received responses from 11 out of 13 culture and leisure trusts –second year in which we have asked them to respond to the Violence at Work survey. This year shows a sharp increase from 93 to 238 incidents. We are attributing this better reporting . Better however does not mean adequate – the large number of zero responses seem to indicate a significant amount of underreporting.

<b>Employer</b>	<b>Incidents</b>
Angus	121

Dundee	0
East Ayrshire	11
East Dunbartonshire	0
East Renfrewshire	0
Falkirk	0
Glasgow Life	97
High Life Highland	2
North Lanarkshire	7
Perth & Kinross	0
Scottish Borders	0
<b>Total</b>	<b>238</b>

#### 4. COMMUNITY AND VOLUNTARY SECTOR

Violence at work is unquestionably a serious problem in the Community and voluntary sector. Such are the limitations of current Freedom of Information legislation that the vast bulk of this sector cannot be effectively examined by using FOI.

Other efforts to highlight the issue have however been made. . It was to help tackle the issue that we launched **It's Not Part of the Job** - a new health and safety guide for the sector in September 2017.

The guide is aimed at the representatives and stewards for workers in the community and voluntary sector who are most vulnerable to violence at work, and provides policies and strategies for tackling workplace violence.

'It's Not Part of the Job' builds on the Healthy Working Lives strategy and toolkit published in 2010 and the UNISON UK health and safety guide on tackling violence at work produced in 2013.

UNISON UK launched its Violence at Work Charter at its communities conference in 2017. The Charter commits voluntary sector organisations to comply with their duty of care to staff when it comes to violence in the workplace. The organisation which sign up pledge to:

- collect and monitor data on violent incidents;
- provide proper structured support for staff who experience violence;
- provide thorough risk assessments when staff are placed in vulnerable situations;
- train staff so they know how to deal with threatening situations.

A number of CVS bodies have signed up to the charter – including UK wide organisations which operate in Scotland, and Scottish charities such as Capability Scotland and Glasgow Association for Mental Health. Work to have the Charter adopted by other employers continues.

## **5. CONCLUSIONS**

Violence at work remains a serious problem for workers in many of our public services. UNISON Scotland calls for all employers engaged in delivering public services - whether in local government, health or any of the other services and importantly the community and voluntary sector - to put the guidelines produced in 2010 by the Scottish Centre for Health Working Lives fully into practice, in order that we can make the level of violent assaults fall across Scotland.

**The massive scale of violence against public service workers - including those in the community and voluntary sector - has been at least partially revealed over the last decade. What minimal changes there appear to have been might well be a result of more public services being put beyond the reach of Freedom of Information inquiries through contracting out.**

**We need to have accurate and reliable systems for reporting all violence against public sector workers, in order to achieve truly effective measures to overcome and eliminate the problem.**

**Employers engaged in delivering public services - whether local government, health or the community and voluntary sector - should put the guidelines on violence in the workplace produced in 2010 by the Scottish Centre for Health Working Lives fully into practice. Community and voluntary sector employers should be pressed to sign up to the UNISON Violence at Work Charter.**

**We support the extension of legislation covering violence at work to cover all workers engaged in delivering public services - and not just the emergency services. The Scottish Government must move to address this issue.**

**We now need action by employers and stronger legislation, regulation and oversight by government to end the aggro. It really isn't 'part of the job'.**

**Further information/links:**

UNISON Scotland Health and Safety page

<http://www.unison-scotland.org/about-us/health-and-safety/>

UNISON UK Health and Safety page

<https://www.unison.org.uk/get-help/knowledge/health-and-safety/>

It's not part of the job

UNISON Scotland Health and Safety guide and toolkit for reps and stewards in the community and voluntary sector

<http://www.unison-scotland.org/2017/09/19/not-part-job-health-safety-guide-tackling-violence-work/>

UNISON charter to commit employers to tackle violence at work, UNISON Community Conference, March 2017

<https://www.unison.org.uk/news/article/2017/03/community-violence/>

Healthy Working Lives

<http://www.healthyworkinglives.com/>

Managing Occupational Violence and Aggression in the Workplace Tools and Strategies

Resource produced by Healthy Working Lives for employers and employees to tackle the

issue of violence and aggression in the workplace - April 2010

[http://www.healthyworkinglives.com/resources/managing-occupational-](http://www.healthyworkinglives.com/resources/managing-occupational-violence-and-)

[aggression-in-the-workplace-tools-and-strategies-55264](http://www.healthyworkinglives.com/resources/managing-occupational-violence-and-aggression-in-the-workplace-tools-and-strategies-55264)

TUC's Work SMART page

<https://worksmart.org.uk/work-rights/health-and-safety>

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