

Socio-economic Classification (United Kingdom)¹

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Summary

In 2001 the Office for National Statistics replaced 'Social Class based on Occupation' (formerly the Registrar General's 'Social Class') and 'Socio-economic Groups' with a new 'Socio-economic Classification' (SEC) for all official statistics and surveys. The new SEC is an occupationally based classification but contains rules to provide coverage for the whole adult population.

The version of the classification which will be used for most analyses has eight classes, the first of which is subdivided into two. Depending on the analytic purpose and/or the quality of data, this can be compressed into either a five- or three-class version. Table 1 illustrates these three versions of the classification and the relationship between them.

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Table 1 Analytic versions of the 2001 Socio-economic Classification

8 Classes		5 Classes		3 Classes	
1	Higher managerial and professional occupations	1	Managerial and professional occupations	1	Managerial and professional occupations
1.1	Large employers and higher managerial occupations				
1.2	Higher professional occupations				
2	Lower managerial and professional occupations				
3	Intermediate occupations	2	Intermediate occupations	2	Intermediate occupations
4	Small employers and own account workers	3	Small employers and own account workers		
5	Lower supervisory and technical occupations	4	Lower supervisory and technical occupations	3	Routine and manual occupations
6	Semi-routine occupations	5	Semi-routine and routine occupations		
7	Routine occupations				
8	Never worked and long-term unemployed	Never worked and long-term unemployed		Never worked and long-term unemployed	

Note: 'Large employers' refers to individuals who employ others in enterprises employing twenty-five or more persons.

For complete coverage of the whole adult population there is a ninth class which includes full-time students and those whose occupations are not stated or inadequately described.

With the exception of full-time students and the long-term unemployed, the new SEC classifies non-employed persons (unemployed, retired, those looking after a home, those on government employment or training schemes, the sick, disabled and so on) according to their last main job.

Classes and categories

Classes 1 to 8 in the new SEC are further divided into fourteen functional categories with the ninth class divided into three residual categories. The functional categories represent a variety of labour market positions and the status of employment and have been broken down into a number of sub-categories primarily for bridging and continuity with the previous classification schemes. These categories and sub-categories, along with their relationship to the nine classes, are illustrated in Table 2.

Table 2 Analytic classes and operational categories of the 2001 Socio-economic Classification

<i>Analytic classes</i>	<i>Operational categories and sub-categories</i>
1.1	L1 Employers in large organisations
	L2 Higher managerial occupations
1.2	L3 Higher professional occupations
	L3.1 'Traditional' employees
	L3.2 'New' employees
	L3.3 'Traditional' self-employed
	L3.4 'New' self-employed
2	L4 Lower professional and higher technical occupations
	L4.1 'Traditional' employees
	L4.2 'New' employees
	L4.3 'Traditional' self-employed
	L4.4 'New' self-employed
	L5 Lower managerial occupations
	L6 Higher supervisory occupations
3	L7 Intermediate occupations
	L7.1 Intermediate clerical and administrative
	L7.2 Intermediate sales and service
	L7.3 Intermediate technical and auxiliary
	L7.4 Intermediate engineering
4	L8 Employers in small organisations
	L8.1 Employers in small organisations (non-agriculture)
	L8.2 Employers in small organisations (agriculture)
	L9 Own account workers
	L9.1 Self-employed workers (non-agriculture)
	L9.2 Self-employed workers (agriculture)

5	L10	Lower supervisory occupations
	L11	Lower technical occupations
	L11.1	Lower technical craft
	L11.2	Lower technical process operatives
6	L12	Semi-routine occupations
	L12.1	Semi-routine sales occupations
	L12.2	Semi-routine service occupations
	L12.3	Semi-routine technical occupations
	L12.4	Semi-routine operative occupations
	L12.5	Semi-routine agricultural occupations
	L12.6	Semi-routine clerical occupations
	L12.7	Semi-routine childcare occupations
7	L13	Routine occupations
	L13.1	Routine sales and service occupations
	L13.2	Routine production occupations
	L13.3	Routine technical occupations
	L13.4	Routine operative occupations
	L13.5	Routine agricultural occupations
8	L14	Never worked and long-term unemployed
	L14.1	Never worked
	L14.2	Long-term unemployed
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9	L15	Full-time students
	L16	Occupations not stated or inadequately described
	L17	Not classifiable for other reasons
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Note: In categories L3 and L4, 'Traditional' refers to occupations regarded as 'professional' by the former Social Class and Socio-economic Group classifications, with 'New' referring to occupations not previously so regarded.

Detailed category descriptions and examples of occupations

L1 Employers in large organisations

Individuals who employ others (and thus assume some degree of control over them) in enterprises employing twenty-five or more persons, and who delegate some part of their managerial and entrepreneurial functions on to salaried staff.

The most common occupations, accounting for around half of L1, are employers in marketing and sales, other service industry proprietors, and other managers and

administrators. It should be noted, however, that higher professionals who are also large employers are not allocated to this category but to L3.

L2 Higher managerial occupations

Positions in which there is a 'service relationship' with the employer, and involving general planning and supervision of operations on behalf of the employer.

As a general rule, a cut-off of twenty-five employees is used as an indicator of the distinction between higher and lower managerial occupations (in L5).

Example occupations include general managers and administrators, production managers, specialist managers (for example, marketing, computers and personnel), financial controllers, officers in the armed forces, police inspectors and fire station officers.

A 'service relationship' is one in which employees are required to exercise delegated authority, specialised knowledge or expertise in the interests of their employer. This typifies senior managerial, professional and administrative positions in this category and the following category (L3) where there is a long-term and diffuse exchange in which employees render service to their employing organisation in return for compensation both in the present and in the future. This is distinct from a 'labour contract' which entails a relatively short-term and specific exchange of money for effort which typifies positions in L12 and L13.

L3 Higher professional occupations

Positions, whether occupied by employers, the self-employed or employees, covering all types of higher professional work. Employees in these groups have a 'service relationship' with their employer.

- L3.1 'Traditional' professional employees
- L3.2 'New' professional employees
- L3.3 'Traditional' self-employed professionals
- L3.4 'New' self-employed professionals

'Traditional' refers to occupations regarded as 'professional' by the former Social Class and Socio-economic Group classifications, with 'New' referring to occupations not previously so regarded.

Examples of 'traditional' professional occupations include chemists, scientists, engineers, health, legal, chartered and certified accountants, architects and clergy.

Examples of 'new' professional occupations include teaching, management accountants, computer analysts/programmers, occupational and speech therapists, personnel officers, career advisers and flight deck officers.

It should be noted that an occupation that has been designated as professional is professional regardless of employment status. For example, a manager who is also a scientist is classified as a professional (in L3) and not as a manager (in L2 or L5), likewise, a supervisor who is also a scientist is classified as a professional and not as a supervisor (in L6).

L4 Lower professional and higher technical occupations

Positions, whether occupied by employers, the self-employed or employees, and covering lower professional and higher technical occupations. Employees in these groups have an attenuated form of the 'service relationship'.

- L4.1 'Traditional' lower professional and higher technical employees
- L4.2 'New' lower professional and higher technical employees
- L4.3 'Traditional' self-employed lower professional and higher technical
- L4.4 'New' self-employed lower professional and higher technical

Employees in this category share fewer of the conditions associated with the service relationship when compared with those in L3.

The distinction between 'traditional' and 'new' is the same as in L3.

Examples of 'traditional' occupations in this category include marketing and sales managers, technicians, nurses, midwives, radiographers, chiropodists, welfare and community workers, entertainers, surveyors, journalists, vocational and industrial trainers, ship's officers and immigration officers.

Examples of 'new' occupations in this category include building and contract managers, commodity brokers, police sergeants and constables, fire-fighters, NCOs and other ranks in the armed forces (excluding officers in L2).

L5 Lower managerial occupations

Positions in which there is an attenuated 'service relationship', and where those employed in these positions generally plan and supervise operations on behalf of the employer under the direction of senior managers.

As mentioned in L2, as a general rule a cut-off of twenty-five employees is used as an indicator of the distinction between higher and lower managerial occupations. However, some occupational groups are regarded as inherently lower managerial and are allocated to L5 regardless of organisation size. The new SEC places all managers in organisation with less than twenty-five employees in L5, except when their professional status would allocate them to L3 or L4.

A wide range of roles with supervisory responsibility are included in this category whether or not they include 'manager' in their title.

L6 Higher supervisory occupations

Positions (other than managerial) having an attenuated form of 'service relationship' which cover intermediate occupations included in L7. These positions involve formal and immediate supervision of others engaged in such occupations.

Typically, these higher supervisory positions are found in large bureaucratic organisations and employees in these positions are supervising the work of others and thereby exert a degree of authority over them. All supervisors of the intermediate positions in L7 are included in L6, without any distinction between manual and non-manual work.

The supervisors of occupational groups in category L7 provide the examples for category L6.

L7 Intermediate occupations

Positions not involving general planning or supervisory powers, in clerical, sales, service and intermediate technical occupations. Positions in this group are 'mixed' in terms of employment regulation, in other words, are intermediate with respect to the service relationship and the labour contract.

- L7.1 Intermediate clerical and administrative occupations
- L7.2 Intermediate sales and service occupations
- L7.3 Intermediate technical and auxiliary occupations
- L7.4 Intermediate engineering occupations.

Although positions in L7 offer some features of the service relationship, they do not usually involve any exercise of authority (other than in applying standardised rules and procedures where discretion is minimal) and are subject to quite detailed bureaucratic regulation.

Examples of occupations include civil service administrative officers and assistants, debt collectors, library assistants, secretaries, telephonists, medical technicians, dental nurses, flight attendants, driving instructors, data processing operators, routine laboratory testers, electrical engineers (not professional), installation and maintenance engineers.

L8 Employers in small organisations

Persons (other than higher or lower professionals) who employ others (and thus assume some degree of control over them) and carry out all or most of the entrepreneurial and managerial functions of the enterprise but employ less than twenty-five employees.

- L8.1 Employers in small organisations (industry, commerce, services, and so on, excluding agriculture)
- L8.2 Employers in small organisations (agriculture)

Employers in small organisations, although they do employ others, do not usually devolve most of their management or entrepreneurial functions onto them. Small employers remain essentially in direct control of their enterprises. The distinction between large and small employers consists of applying a size cut-off of twenty-five

employees, but in fact it is likely to be the case that the majority of small employers have only one or two, and at most ten employees. For this reason, most are in many ways similar to self-employed or own account workers (in L9).

The range of enterprises in this category is inevitably quite large and includes, for example, restaurants, hairdressers, local retail outlets, builders, electricians, painters, printers, transport companies and driving schools. It should be noted that agriculture includes horticulture, forestry and fishing.

L9 Own account workers

Self-employed positions in which the persons involved are engaged in any (non-professional) trade, personal service, semi-routine, routine or other occupation but have no employees other than family workers.

L9.1 Self-employed workers (non-agriculture)

L9.2 Self-employed workers (agriculture)

Own account workers neither sell their labour to an employer nor buy the labour of others.

L10 Lower supervisory occupations

Positions (other than managerial) having a modified form of 'labour contract', which cover occupations included in categories L11, L12 and L13, and involve formal and immediate supervision of others engaged in such occupations.

Positions in L10 have different employment relations and conditions from those in L12 and L13, but similar conditions to those in L11. Operationally these positions are distinguished most easily by job title ('foreman' or 'supervisor') in an operational group which, when combined with employee status, is allocated to L11, L12 or L13.

The 'foremen' and 'supervisors' of occupational groups in categories L11, L12 and L13 provide the examples for category L10.

L11 Lower technical occupations

Positions in which employees are engaged in lower technical and related occupations and thereby have a modified form of the 'labour contract'.

L11.1 Lower technical craft occupations

L11.2 Lower technical process operative occupations

A modified form of labour contract distinguishes this category. Employees in this category are more likely than those in L12 and L13 to have some service elements in their employment relationship. These positions, therefore, are more likely than those in L12 and L13 to give their occupants opportunities for promotion, payment of a salary as opposed to a weekly or hourly wage, greater work autonomy and so on.

Occupations to be found in this category include toolmakers, precious stone workers, machine tool setters, electrical maintenance fitters, motor mechanics, cabinet makers, piano tuners, metal polishers, rail guards, tannery production operatives, glass and ceramic furnace operatives, transport operatives and rail signal operatives.

L12 Semi-routine occupations

Positions in which employees are engaged in semi-routine occupations which have a slightly modified labour contract.

L12.1 Semi-routine sales occupations

L12.2 Semi-routine service occupations

L12.3 Semi-routine technical occupations

L12.4 Semi-routine operative occupations

L12.5 Semi-routine agricultural occupations

L12.6 Semi-routine clerical occupations

L12.7 Semi-routine childcare occupations

Employees in these positions are regulated by an only slightly modified labour contract typified by a short term and direct exchange of money for effort. The category name of 'semi-routine employees' is designed to indicate the fact that employers must perforce slightly improve on the basic labour contract for this group, in other words, that the work involved requires at least some element of employee discretion.

Occupations to be found in this category include sales assistants, petrol pump forecourt attendants, traffic wardens, shelf fillers, educational assistants, security guards, postal workers, hospital porters, cooks, hairdressers, builders, carpenters, dressmakers, drivers of road goods vehicles, bus drivers, taxi drivers, storekeepers, gardeners, assemblers, rail construction workers, farm workers, clerical assistants and childcare assistants.

L13 Routine occupations

Positions where employees are engaged in routine occupations which have a basic labour contract.

- L13.1 Routine sales and service occupations
- L13.2 Routine production occupations
- L13.3 Routine technical occupations
- L13.4 Routine operative occupations
- L13.5 Routine agricultural occupations

Employees in these positions are regulated by a basic labour contract and are thus even less likely than those in L12 to have opportunities for promotion, autonomy over work and so on. That is, these positions have the least need for employee discretion. The category name of 'routine employees' is designed to indicate this fact.

Waiters and waitresses, bar staff, machinists, sorters, packers, railway station staff, road construction workers, building labourers, dockers, couriers, refuse collectors, car park attendants and cleaners are some of the occupations to be found in L13.

L14 Never worked and long-term unemployed

Positions which involve involuntary exclusion from the labour market, specifically:

- 1 *those who have never been in paid employment but would wish to be; and,*
- 2 *those who have been unemployed for an extended period while seeking or wanting work.*

- L14.1 Never worked
- L14.2 Long-term unemployed

It should be noted that both the long-term unemployed and the never worked but available for work are difficult to define.

For most non-employed persons (the unemployed, the retired, those looking after a home, those on government employment or training schemes, the sick, disabled and so on), the normal procedure is to classify them according to their last main job. The main exception to this rule is full-time students (see L15). Those who have never worked but are seeking, or would like paid work, should be allocated to L14.1. In the case of the long-term unemployed, there is an argument that they should not be classified according to their last job, but should be assigned to category L14.2. However, it is not possible to define the long-term unemployed in any hard and fast way with respect to the length of time they need to be unemployed before they become long-term unemployed. The recommendation is to apply a one-year rule.

L15 Full-time students

Persons over 16 years of age engaged in full-time courses of study in secondary, tertiary or higher education institutions.

Full-time students would not normally be allocated a class position, although they are recognised as a category for reasons of completeness. Since many students will have or had paid occupations, they could, of course, be classified by current or last main job if preferred. Normally, however, it is not expected that they would be classified in this way.

L16 Occupations not stated or inadequately described

This category exists for those situations where the occupational data requested in response to surveys and censuses are not given or are inadequate for classificatory purposes.

L17 Not classifiable for other reasons

For example, if the research design excluded the elderly from being asked employment questions, such cases should be allocated to this category for completeness.

Full details can be found on the National Statistics website: www.statistics.gov.uk.

Relationship between SEC and social class

Table 3 illustrates the approximate relationship between the eight-class version of the new SEC with the former Registrar General's 'Social Class' and the socio-economic class indicators used by advertisers, market researchers and pollsters.

Table 3 The approximate relationship between the eight-class version of the Socio-economic Classification and social class

<i>New eight-class SEC</i>		<i>Former Registrar General's social class</i>		<i>Former socio-economic class indicators</i>	
1	1.1 Large employers and higher managerial occupations	I	Professional, administrative	A	Upper middle class
	1.2 Higher professional occupations	II	Managerial and technical	B	Middle class
2	Lower managerial and professional occupations	III	Skilled workers (non-manual)	C1	Lower middle class
3	Intermediate occupations	N			
4	Small employers and own account workers	III	Skilled workers (manual)	C2	Skilled working class
5	Lower supervisory and technical occupations	M			
6	Semi-routine occupations	IV	Partly-skilled	D	Working class
7	Routine occupations	V	Unskilled labour	E	Subsistence level
8	Never worked and long-term unemployed		Other		Other

Source: Based on the National Statistics website: www.statistics.gov.uk.

Note: The alignment is only approximate due to the differences in criteria used to allocate individuals to their respective classes in the above schemes.