Exclusive: 1m are employed in call centres... and where they work

CALL centres now employ more people than the combined total in teaching, the police and the armed forces. That is just over 1m staff, 3.56 per cent of the working population.

The figures are from the latest report by ContactBabel, UK Contact Centres in 2011: The State of the Industry (see end).

It says that UK call centres spent more than £21.5 billion in 2010. About three-quarters of this (74.4 per cent) went on salaries.

The report shows the importance of the call centre industry to the north (see table) – the top four regions as a percentage of the working population are the four most northerly mainland regions. However, the South-East has the greatest number of jobs as a result of its wider overall population, although the North-West is closing the gap.

During the last five years the greatest proportional growth has been in Northern Ireland, with Scotland also seeing a compound annual growth rate of more than four per cent.

Scotland and the North-West have added the greatest number of jobs, with the West Midlands and Yorkshire the next tier down.

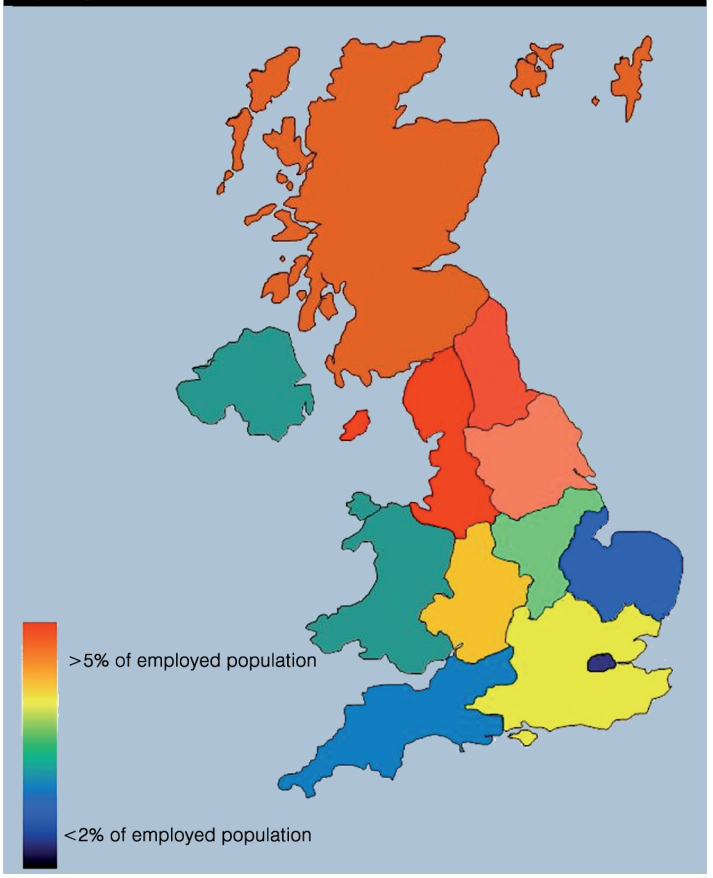
Despite the take-up of offshoring, ContactBabel reports that the UK call centre industry has grown by 435 per cent since 1995 (see table) and currently has more than 5,500 sites.

While retail and distribution accounts for 16 per cent of these, many of this sector's centres are relatively small. Those with far in excess of 100 agent positions are the utilities, communications, finance and outsourcers. Manufacturing and engineering sectors are the smallest on average.

The industry has recovered from its dip in 2009, due to the economic downturn, to post a small growth of 2,750 agent positions in 2010.

● Based on primary research with more than 3,000 UK call centres, UK Contact Centres in 2011: The State of the Industry details the current and future size and structure of the industry. Full details, including a order form, can be downloaded from www.contactbabel.com or by request from info@contactbabel.com The report costs £1,095, plus VAT.

Employed population working as contact centre staff, by region



Agent positions in UK call centres, 1995-2010, and annual changes

	Agent positions	Net change
1995	145,000	
1996	170,000	25,000
1997	205,000	35,000
1998	245,000	40,000
1999	290,000	45,000
2000	340,000	50,000
2001	395,000	55,000
2002	445,000	50,000
2003	490,000	45,000
2004	525,000	35,000
2005	560,000	35,000
2006	595,000	35,000
2007	635,000	40,000
2008	650,000	15,000
2009	628,500	–21,500
2010	631,250	2,750

Source: ContactBabel
Due to shift working, the number of employees can be calculated by multiplying the number of workstations by 1.62

Call centre employment by region, 2010, and changes, 2005-2010

Region	2010 agent positions	2010 jobs	2010 % of employed population	2005 jobs	2005 2010 CAGR*
North-West	105,000	175,350	5.54%	149,175	3.3%
Scotland	78,000	130,260	5.28%	105,238	4.4%
North-East	36,500	61,685	5.25%	53,299	3.0%
Yorkshire	73,500	122,525	5.13%	105,270	3.1%
W Midlands	57,500	95,220	3.88%	78,457	3.9%
South-East	114,500	185,490	3.68%	173,586	1.3%
E Midlands	38,500	63,525	3.02%	53,388	3.5%
N Ireland	13,000	21,713	2.79%	15,907	6.4%
Wales	21,750	36,323	2.74%	30,501	3.6%
SW & CI**	31,000	50,530	1.98%	45,483	2.1%
East Anglia	23,000	37,260	1.90%	34,219	1.7%
London	39,000	61,620	1.63%	54,539	2.5%
Totals	**631,250**	**1,041,500**	**3.57%**	**899,062**	**3.0%**

Notes: * compound annual growth rate; ** South-West and Channel Islands; due to shift working, one agent position equals an average of 1.62 FTE