

# Northern Ireland Annual Survey of Hours and Earnings

Theme: Labour Market

Frequency: Annual

Geographical Area: Northern Ireland

## Key points

- Median gross weekly earnings for full-time employees (“weekly earnings”) in April 2020 were £529, a decrease of 1.1% from £535 in 2019. This is the first annual decrease in weekly earnings since 2014 and the largest decrease on record.
- Real weekly earnings decreased by 2.0%. This is the second decrease in real earnings in the last five years and brings real earnings close to levels in 2010.
- In the UK, weekly earnings were £586, an increase of 0.1% from 2019 (£585). Real UK weekly earnings decreased by 0.9% over the year.
- NI now has the second lowest weekly earnings of the 12 UK regions, with London (£761) the highest and the North East (£521) the lowest. NI experienced the second largest decrease (1.1%) in weekly earnings.
- Approximately a fifth of all jobs in NI were ‘low-paid’. This is the lowest proportion in NI in 20 years but is the highest proportion of the 12 UK regions.
- The proportion of jobs below the National Minimum and National Living Wage increased from 1.1% in 2019 to 10% in 2020. More than 90% of employees below this level were on furlough rates of pay during the survey period.
- Private sector weekly earnings decreased by 3.2% over the year, and public sector weekly earnings decreased by 0.9%. Weekly earnings in the public sector (£619) were 34% higher than in the private sector (£463).
- This is the 11<sup>th</sup> year that the gender pay gap for full-time employees in NI has been zero or in favour of females. Median hourly earnings (excluding overtime) for full-time females (£13.28) was 3.6% greater than those for full-time males (£12.82).
- NI remains the only region in the UK where full-time females earn more per hour on average than full-time males. In the UK as a whole, full-time females earned 7.4% less per hour than full-time males.
- Median annual earnings increased by 3.2% for all full-time employees in NI over the year to £28,000, but remained lower than the UK median of £31,000. The highest 10% of earners earned approximately £52,000 and above.
- The median total weekly paid hours by full-time employees in NI decreased by 0.6% over the year to 38.0 hours, and are now 0.5 hours higher than the UK average.

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## **NATIONAL STATISTICS STATUS**

National Statistics status means that our statistics meet the highest standards of trustworthiness, quality and public value, and it is our responsibility to maintain compliance with these standards.

These statistics were designated as National Statistics in September 2011 following a full [assessment](#) against the [Code of Practice](#).

Since the assessment by the UK Statistics Authority, we have continued to comply with the Code of Practice for Statistics, and have made the following improvements:

- Redesigned the ASHE Bulletin, improving the commentary, analysis and presentation, and providing more context.
- Removed pre-release access to enhance trustworthiness.
- Produced a Background Quality Report, assessing the quality of ASHE and its outputs.
- Reduced respondent burden by providing the option to respond electronically to the survey and introducing a new eForm for ease of completion.

## Commentary

Earnings estimates for 2020 are derived from the Annual Survey of Hours Earnings, and relate to the pay-week which included 22<sup>nd</sup> April 2020. This date was a month after the announcement of the Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme, commonly known as the furlough scheme, and approximately 25% of all employees in the survey were identified as being furloughed. The impact of the furlough scheme on pay can be seen across the earnings estimates, and more notably when low pay is considered.

Median gross weekly earnings for full-time employees decreased over the year in nominal (1.1%) and real (2.0%) terms to £529. This is the largest decrease in nominal earnings in 20 years and, after two years of increases in real earnings, returns real earnings to 2010 levels.

Earnings decreased in both the public sector (0.9%) and private sector (3.2%) with decreases in earnings right across the private sector earnings distribution. The picture varied within occupations and industries. The largest change within occupations was a decrease in median pay for 'Skilled trades occupations' while the majority of occupations saw small changes in median pay. The number of decreases and increases in median pay were almost evenly split across the 16 industry groups, though the size of decreases were larger than any increase in industry pay.

The proportion of low paid jobs decreased marginally over the year to 21%, which is the smallest proportion of low paid jobs in 20 years. However the proportion of jobs below the National Minimum and National Living Wage increased from 1.1% in 2019 to 10% in 2020. More than 90% of those below this level were on furlough rates of pay during the survey period.

Comparing earnings for full-time employees by gender shows that the gender pay gap in NI continues to be in favour of women and has widened over the year. This is the eleventh year where full-time working females have earned at least as much as full-time males and NI remains the only region in the UK with a gender pay gap in favour of women. Median hourly earnings (excluding overtime) for full-time females was 3.6% greater than those for full-time males in NI, compared to 7.4% less in the UK. The gender pay gap in NI is driven by a larger proportion of full-time females working in higher paid occupations than males, and a larger proportion of full-time females than males working in the public sector. When all employees (regardless of working pattern) are considered, the gender pay gap is reversed, and males earn more on average than females. This is because a greater proportion of females than males are in part-time work, where average pay is lower.

## Context

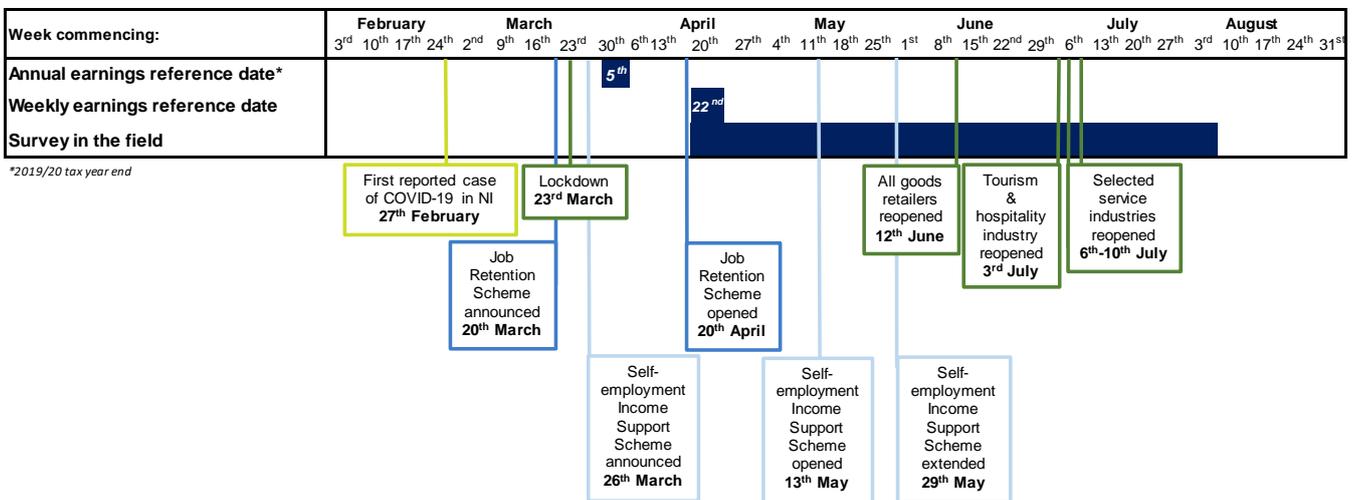
This report presents final revised data for the 2019 Annual Survey of Hours and Earnings (ASHE) and provisional results for 2020. The reference date for the most recent survey was the pay-week (or other pay-period if the employee was paid less frequently) which included 22<sup>nd</sup> April 2020.

### **Users should note that the headline ASHE estimates include those supported under the CJRS.**

The survey reference date was during the early stages of the Coronavirus Pandemic and was within the time period for the first Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme (CJRS) grant. The CJRS was introduced to support employers from 1st March whose businesses were impacted by the pandemic. The first CJRS worked by providing grants to employers of up to 80% of the salary to a maximum value of £2,500 per employee per month, while covering some of the cost of employer pension and National Insurance Contributions. Businesses were asked to include employees who were supported by the CJRS in their ASHE responses, and during statistical processing the achieved sample was linked to an extract of the CJRS to classify furloughed jobs receiving reduced pay. This resulted in approximately 25% of responses being identified as furloughed jobs and approximately 15% of jobs identified as furloughed with reduced pay (i.e. earnings not topped up by their employer). However as not all jobs could be matched there is likely to be an undercount of approximately 20%.

When sub-groups (e.g. age groups, industries, occupations) are considered throughout the publication, the proportion of employees furloughed and on reduced pay in *the ASHE sample* is provided for context. The proportions should not be used as standalone furlough estimates. (HMRC statistics on CJRS are available [here](#))

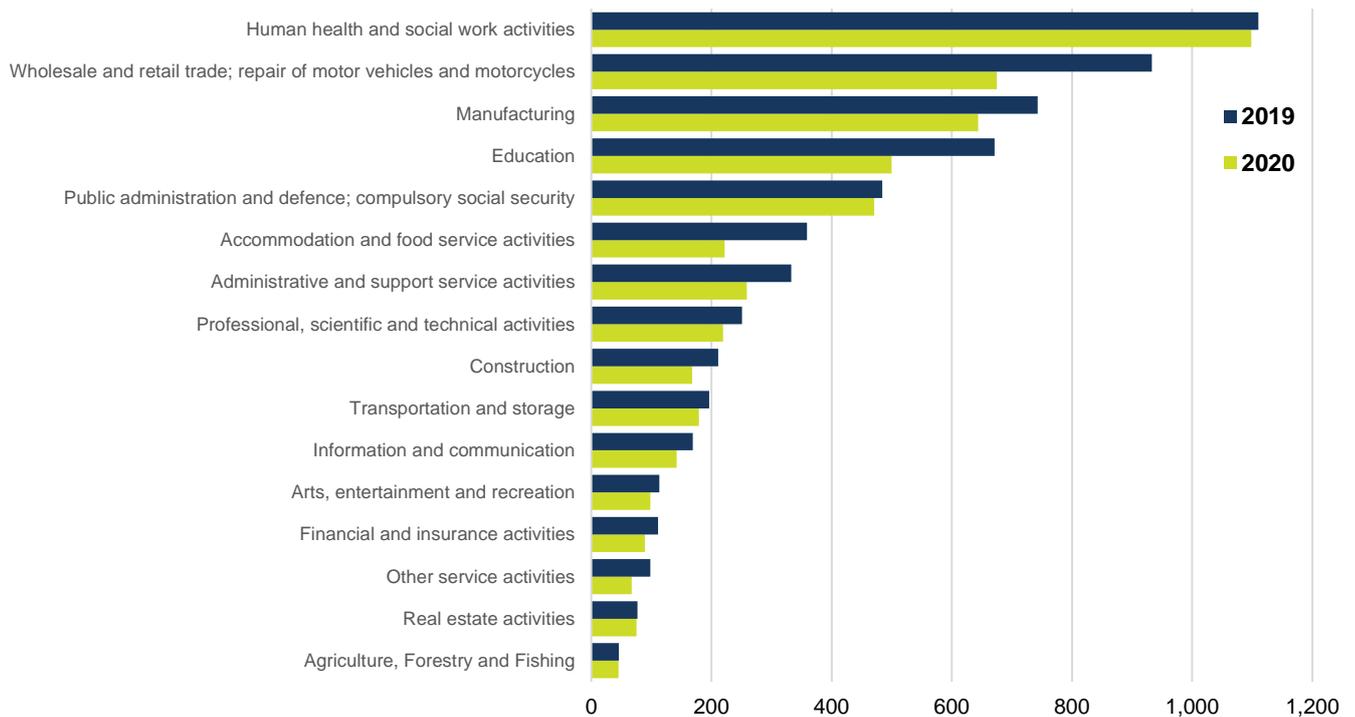
## Data source reference periods and key dates



The coronavirus pandemic impacted the ability of some businesses to return survey forms. A total of 6,207 returns were received by NISRA; 80% of those employees sampled, compared to 90% received in 2019. A number of responses were received after the survey closed, including a number of responses from the Education sector. As is normal practice, those responses will be included in the revised 2020 outputs published in 2021.

While the response rate differed between 2019 and 2020, it should be noted that the composition of the responses received was relatively similar. The chart below shows the industry comparison of the usable sample for the last two years. In 2020, the largest decreases were in the education, accommodation and food services activities, and wholesale and retail trade sectors.

**Figure A: Sample breakdown between April 2019 and April 2020**



The headline measure of earnings from the Annual Survey of Hours and Earnings (ASHE) is median gross weekly earnings for full-time employees. This measure is the main focus of this release, but data are also included for hourly and annual earnings, as well as earnings of full-time, part-time and all employees. More detailed data are included in the downloadable spreadsheets on the [NISRA website](#).

ASHE is a UK wide survey that provides a wide range of information on hourly, weekly and annual earnings by age, gender, work pattern, industry and occupation, including public and private sector pay comparisons. The sample used comprises approximately 1% of all employees in NI who were covered by Pay As You Earn (PAYE) schemes.

ASHE replaced the New Earnings Survey (NES) from 2004. Data are therefore only available on a consistent basis from that year onwards. The introduction of methodological changes in 2006 and 2011 resulted in additional discontinuities in the ASHE time series therefore care should be taken when making comparisons with earlier years. Users should note that, although two data points are available for 2004 and 2006, only those calculated using the most recent methodology are presented in this report.

A [Summary of usage of the Northern Ireland Annual Survey of Hours and Earnings](#) is available on the NISRA website. Users of NI ASHE statistics include the Department for the Economy (DfE) economists who analyse current labour market trends for policy purposes, the Low Pay Commission who recommend rates for the National Living Wage, and Trade Unions who use the data to monitor pay levels and the differences between NI and UK earnings. Results from the [2019 labour market statistics user consultation](#), which included questions relating to ASHE, has been published on the NISRA website.

**Further information on ASHE can be found on the NISRA and Office for National Statistics (ONS) websites:**

[Annual Survey of Hours and Earnings Background Quality Report](#)

[Annual Survey of Hours and Earnings methodology and guidance](#)

[Quality and Methodology Information for the Annual Survey of Hours and Earnings](#)

# 1 Overview of earnings

## 1.1 Median weekly earnings

The headline measure of earnings from the Annual Survey of Hours and Earnings (ASHE) is median gross weekly earnings for full-time employees. This is referred to throughout this section as “weekly earnings”. The mean is not used to summarise earnings as it is susceptible to small numbers of very high earners. A visual explanation of this is available on the [NISRA website](#). Throughout the publication the terms ‘median’ and ‘on average’ are used interchangeably.

**Gross weekly pay** includes basic pay, overtime pay, commissions, shift premium pay, bonus or incentive pay and allowances, and is before deductions for PAYE, National Insurance, pension schemes, student loan repayments and voluntary deductions.

**Median** measures the amount earned by the average individual, i.e. the level of earnings at which half the population are above and half the population are below.

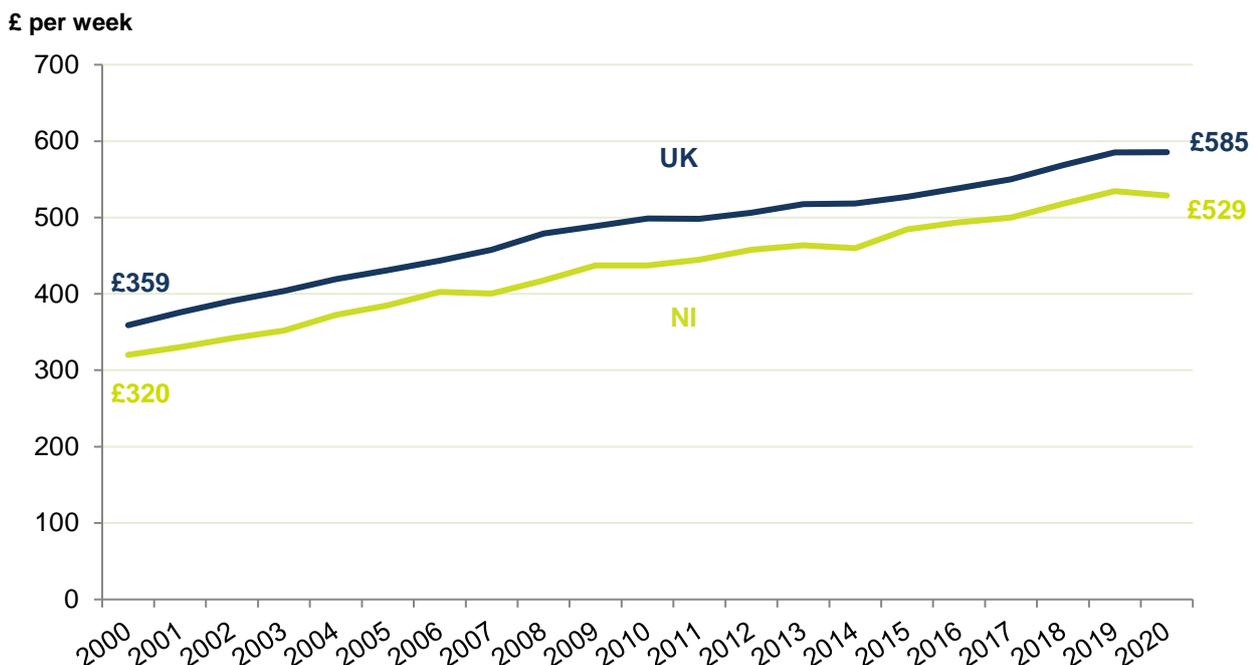
**Full-time employee** is defined as anyone aged 16 years or over that is directly paid from a business’s payroll for carrying out more than 30 paid hours per week (or 25 or more for the teaching professions).

### Key findings

- Weekly earnings in NI decreased by £5.90 (1.1%) over the year and increased by £0.30 (0.1%) in the UK
- This is the largest of only three decreases recorded in NI over the last 20 years

### Largest annual decrease in earnings in 20 years – impacted by furlough pay

Figure 1: Median gross weekly earnings for full-time employees in NI and the UK, April 2000 to April 2020



Note: there were a number of methodological changes during the series in 2004, 2006 and 2011. See Section 4 Further information for full details.

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Over the last 20 years in NI, the median gross weekly earnings for full-time employees has increased by an average of around £10 each year. However, over the year to April 2020, weekly earnings decreased by £6 to £529. This is only the third annual decrease in the last 20 years, and is the largest decrease on record.

Weekly earnings decreased in 5 of the 12 UK regions over the year. The decrease of 1.1% in NI was the second largest decrease of all the regions (second only to North East which decreased by 2.2%), and weekly earnings in NI remain the second lowest of all the UK regions.

Weekly earnings overall in the UK increased by 0.1% to £586. The difference between the UK and NI median therefore widened over the year with NI median weekly earnings now £57 or 9.7% below the UK median.

## 1.2 Real earnings

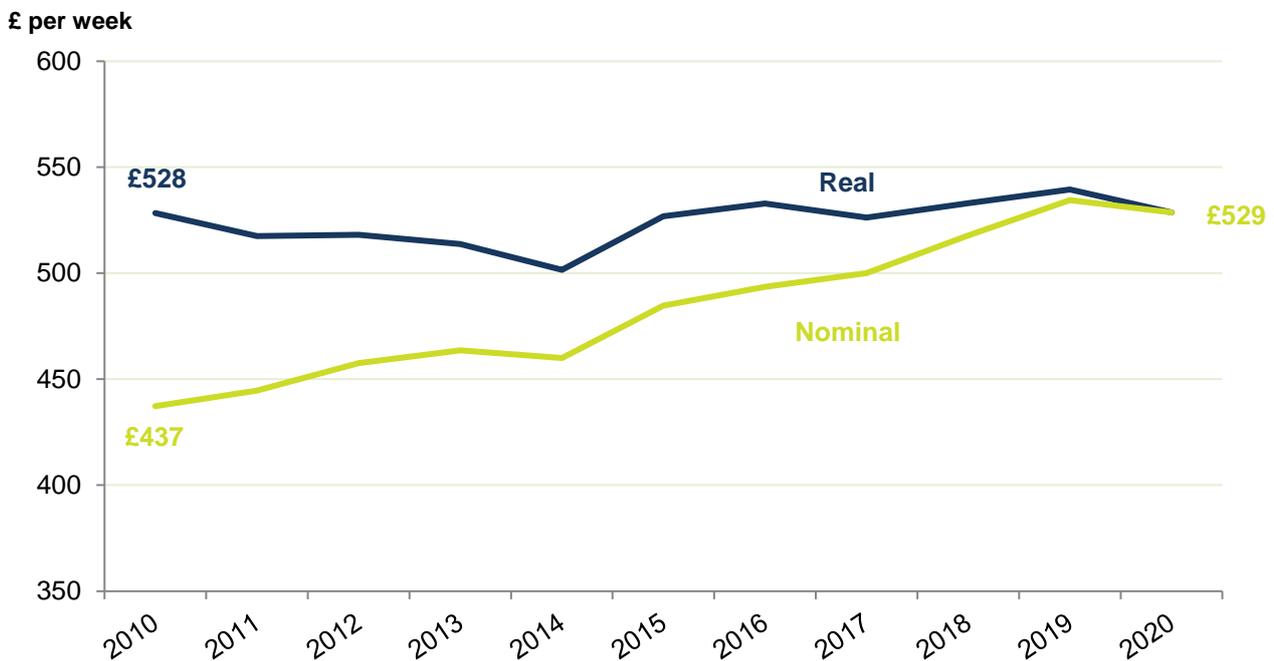
**Real earnings** are earnings with the effects of inflation removed. This provides a comparison of the amount of goods and services that can be bought over time (also known as purchasing power). Real earnings are calculated by adjusting historic earnings data using the Consumer Price Index including owner occupiers' housing costs (CPIH).

### Key findings

- Real earnings decreased over the year (2.0%)
- Real earnings have returned to 2010 levels

### Gains in real earnings in 2018 and 2019 reversed as earnings return to 2010 levels

**Figure 2: Median gross weekly earnings for full-time employees in nominal and real (2020) terms, April 2010 to April 2020**



Note: there was a methodological change during the series in 2011.  
See Section 4 Further information for full details.  
Non-zero axis

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Figure 2 shows that, while nominal weekly earnings have generally increased each year since 2010 (with the exception of 2014 and 2020), real earnings have not. Nominal weekly earnings in 2020 are approximately £90 more than in 2010, while real earnings have remained relatively unchanged.

Over the year, real weekly earnings decreased by 2.0%, in contrast to the increase of 1.2% recorded the previous year. This compares with an annual decrease of 0.9% in the UK, following an increase of 1.0% over the year to 2019.

### 1.3 Total Paid hours

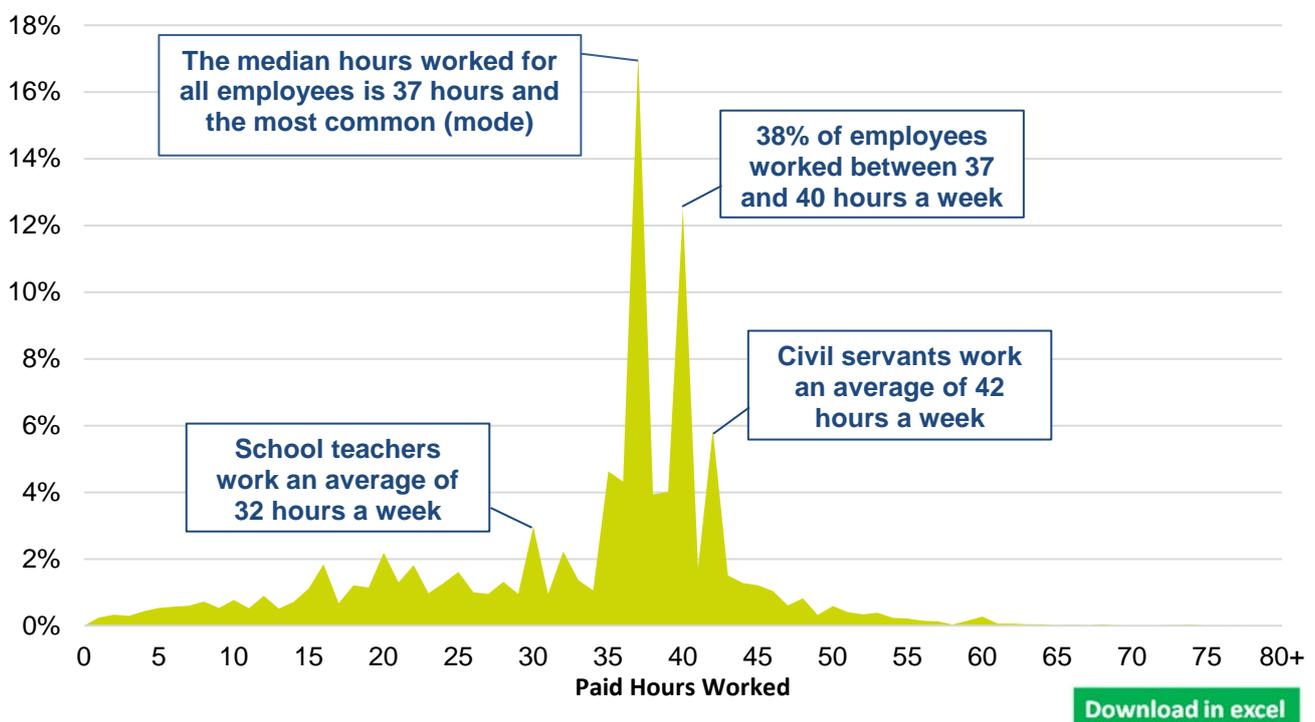
**Total weekly paid hours worked** is made up of paid basic hours and paid overtime hours. It is calculated using employees on adult rates whose pay was unaffected by absence. It includes people on paid leave and furloughed staff who were paid for hours they didn't work, but excludes people on statutory sick and maternity pay.

#### Key findings

- Median weekly paid hours remained at 37 hours for all employees in NI and the UK
- Full-time weekly paid hours was 0.5 hours greater in NI than the UK

#### No notable change in total paid hours worked over the year

**Figure 3: Distribution of total weekly paid hours for all employees in NI, April 2020**



Although approximately a quarter of employees were furloughed and working zero hours, their *paid* hours were unaffected. In 2020, full-time employees in NI worked an average of 38.0 hours per week, compared to 37.5 hours in the UK. The median weekly paid hours worked has remained constant in the UK for full-time employees since 2004 (37.5 hours). It has been more varied for full-time employees in NI, ranging from a low of 37.5 hours in 2003 to a high of 38.9 hours in 2008. The median paid hours for full-time employees decreased over the year by 0.3 hours (0.6%).

When compared to the UK, the median paid hours in NI were 0.5 hours higher for full-time employees (38.0 hours compared with 37.5 hours), 1.0 hours higher for part-time employees (20.0 hours compared with 19.0 hours) and 0.5 hours higher for all employees in 2020 (37.4 hours compared with 36.9 hours).

Nearly 38% of employees worked between 37 and 40 hours per week, equivalent in hours to the standard '9 to 5'. Two clear peaks are evident at 37 hours and 40 hours for full-time employees while the working patterns of part time employees is more varied. The noticeable peak at 32 hours includes school teachers and at 42 hours includes NI civil servants. Comparing with last year, although those working under 30 hours per week remained unchanged (27%), those working over 42 hours decreased from 12% to 10%.

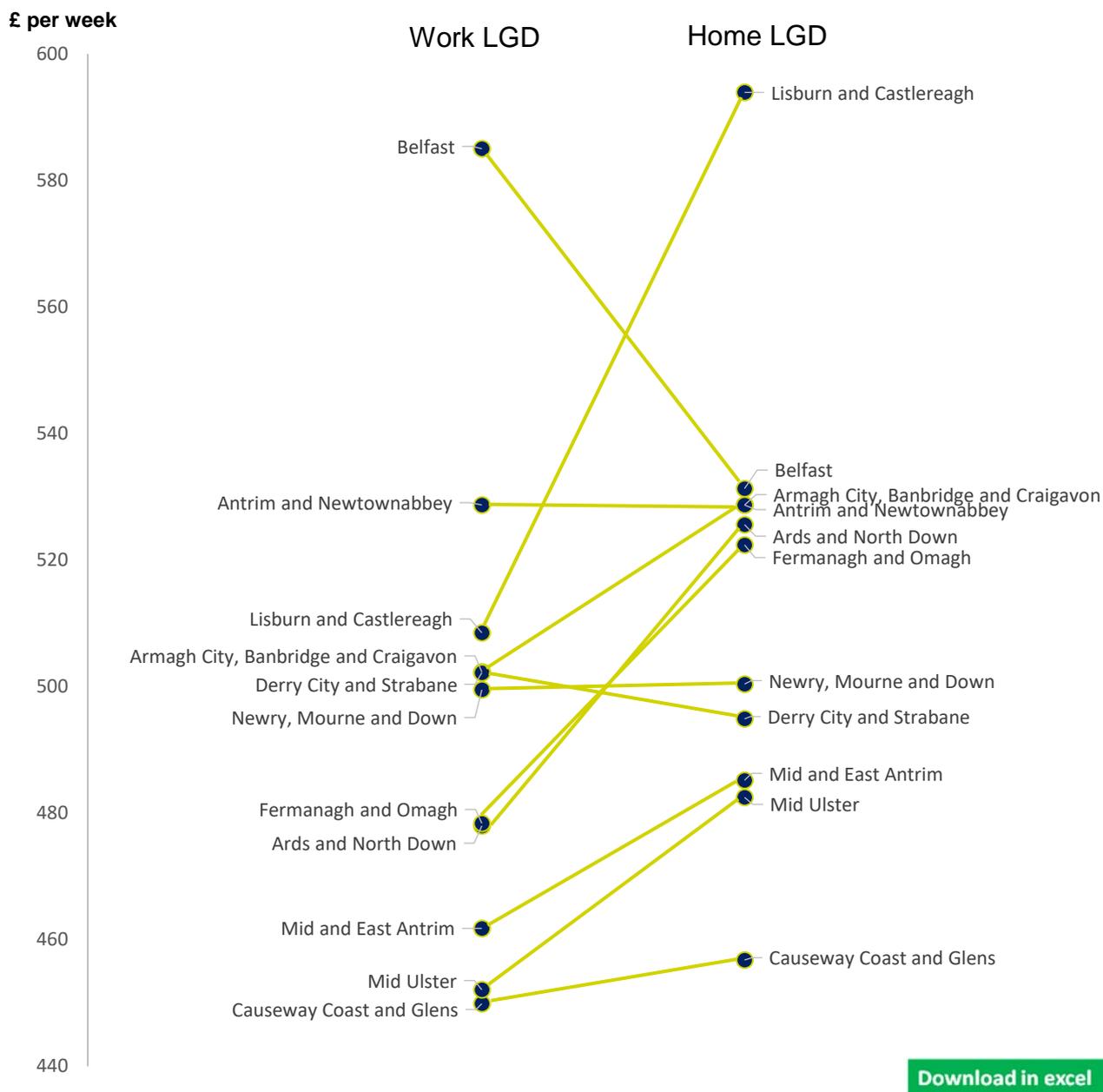
## 1.4 Earnings by Local Government District

### Key findings

- Weekly earnings by place of work were highest in Belfast and lowest in Causeway Coast and Glens
- Fermanagh and Omagh had the largest decrease in median earnings over the year
- Ards and North down had the largest increase in median earnings over the year

Employees working in Belfast, and employees living in Lisburn and Castlereagh earn the most on average

Figure 4: Median gross weekly earnings for full-time employees in NI by work and home LGD, April 2020



In April 2020, full-time employees working in Belfast earned £585 on average per week. This was £135 more than the median weekly earnings for those working in the Causeway Coast and Glens (£450).

Causeway Coast and Glens had the lowest earnings of the local government districts, but had a small increase in median weekly pay for full-time employees (0.4%) over the year. The largest decrease in earnings was in Fermanagh and Omagh, with a decrease of £54 over the year (10.1%) to £478. In contrast, Ards and North Down had the largest increase, with an increase of £31 over the year (6.9%) to £478. Only 4 of the 11 council areas reported an increase in median earnings for full-time employees who work there.

When earnings by place of residence are considered, the ranking of the LGDs changes, reflecting commuting patterns. Median weekly pay for full-time employees was highest for residents in Lisburn and Castlereagh (£594, up 0.5%) and lowest for Causeway Coast and Glens (£457, down 5.4%) residents. Similar to work location, only 4 of the 11 council areas reported an increase in median earnings for full-time employees who live there.

Median earnings were lowest in Causeway Coast and Glens, Mid Ulster, and Mid and East Antrim while Belfast, Antrim and Newtownabbey, and Lisburn and Castlereagh had the highest earnings when both place of work and residence were considered.

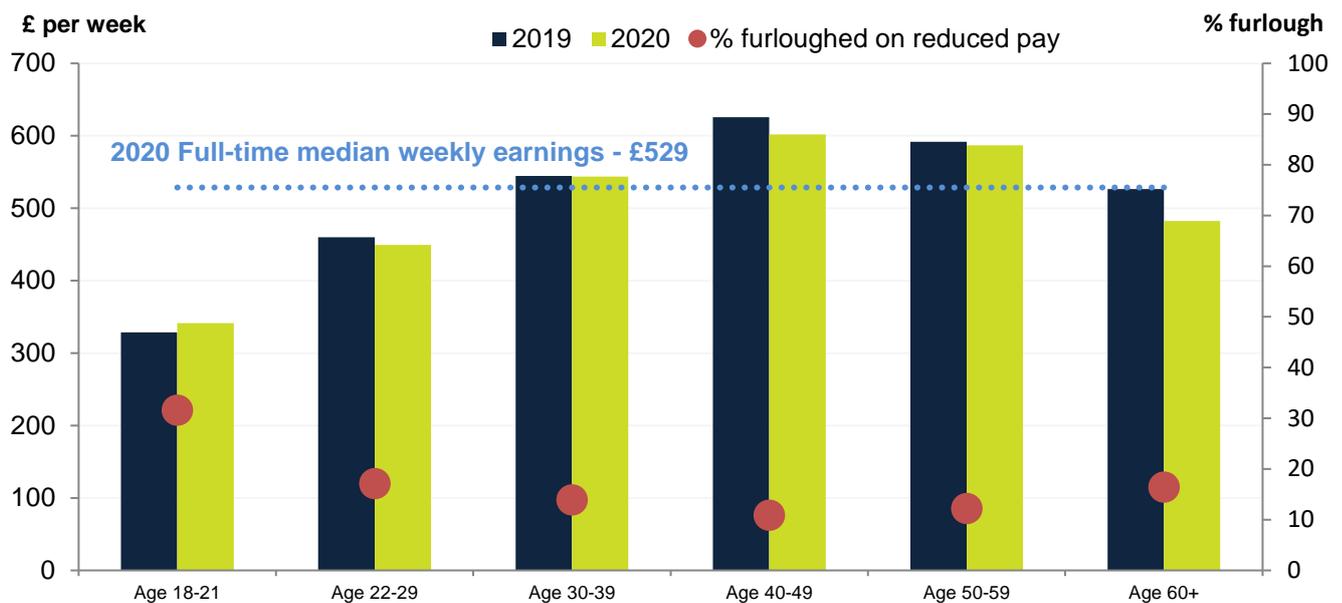
## 1.5 Earnings by age group

### Key findings

- Full-time employees aged 40-49 had the highest weekly earnings in 2020 and those aged 18-21 had the lowest
- Employees aged 60+ saw the largest decrease in earnings
- Those aged 18-21 had the only increase from the age groups considered

### 40-49 year olds have the highest earnings on average

Figure 5: Median gross weekly earnings for full-time employees in NI by age group, April 2020



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Figure 5 shows the median weekly earnings for full-time employees by age group in both 2019 and 2020. The proportion furloughed on reduced rates of pay in each age group is included for context. Within the survey sample, approximately 25% of all employees were furloughed and 15% furloughed and on reduced rates of pay.

Analysis of full-time weekly earnings by age group shows that those aged 18-21 (£341) are the lowest paid age group, earning on average approximately £190 a week below the median for all full-time employees. Although this age group had the highest percentage of employees furloughed at reduced rate of pay, it showed an increase in full-time weekly earnings over the year.

The largest decrease in weekly earnings over the year was recorded in the 60+ age group (8.4%).

Employees aged 40-49 had the highest weekly earnings and were the only age band with average earnings of more than £600 in 2020. They were also the age band with the lowest proportion of employees furloughed on reduced rate of pay at the time of the survey.

## 1.6 Earnings by occupation

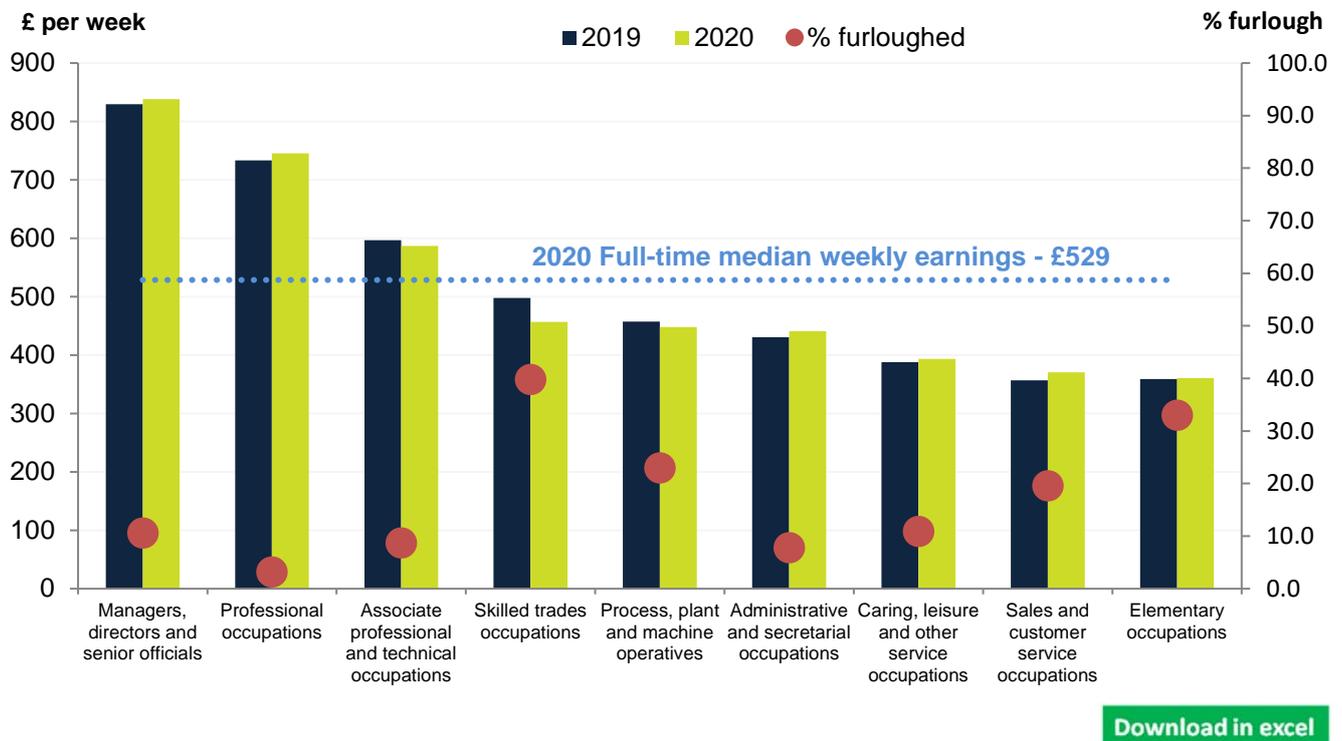
**Occupation:** Results are collated using the 2010 Standard Occupation Classification (SOC10).

### Key findings

- ‘Managers, directors and senior officials’ had the highest full-time weekly earnings and ‘Elementary occupations’ had the lowest
- ‘Sales and customer service occupations’ showed the largest increase in weekly earnings over the year and ‘Skilled trade occupations’ showed the largest decrease

### Skilled Trade Occupations saw the largest decrease in median earnings

**Figure 6: Median gross weekly earnings for full-time employees in NI by occupation, April 2020**



Analysis of full-time weekly earnings by occupation group shows that ‘Elementary occupations’ (£360) is the lowest paid group, earning on average approximately £170 a week below the median for all full-time employees. ‘Managers, directors and senior officials’ (£838) remained the highest paid group, at £310 a week above the median for all full-time employees and more than double that of the three lowest paid groups.

Weekly earnings decreased in three of the nine occupation groups over the year, with the largest decrease occurring in ‘Skilled trades occupations’ (£457), which decreased by £41 (8.3%) between April 2019 and April 2020. Earnings for ‘Process, plant and machine operatives’ and ‘Associate professional and technical occupations’ also decreased over the year (2.0% and 1.7% respectively).

The largest increase occurred in ‘Sales and customer service occupations’ (£370), which increased by £14 (3.8%) between April 2019 and April 2020. ‘Professional occupations’ and ‘Administrative and secretarial occupations’ also increased by more than £10 per week over the year. The highest earning occupation group, ‘Managers, directors and senior officials’, saw an increase of £9 (1.1%)

over the year, with 'Elementary occupations', at the other end of the earnings scale, seeing a smaller increase of £2 (0.5%).

Although 'Skilled trades occupations' had both the highest percentage of furloughed staff on reduced pay in the occupational headline groups (recorded by the ASHE survey) and the highest decrease in median earnings, there was no overall relationship between the proportion furloughed and change in median earnings across occupation groups. 'Administrative and secretarial occupations', and 'Associate professional and technical occupations' reported, respectively, an increase and a decrease in median earnings, despite having similar proportions furloughed on reduced rates of pay.

The impact of furlough pay on the median depends on the number of jobs furloughed, where the furloughed are in the earnings distribution, and the earnings range. Those furloughed who were paid above but relatively close to the median have the largest impact on the median. In contrast, a concentration of furloughed employees below the median, or a concentration of very high earners furloughed, does not impact the median. See visual explanation of how decreases in earnings affect pay on the [NISRA website](#)

## 1.7 Earnings by industry

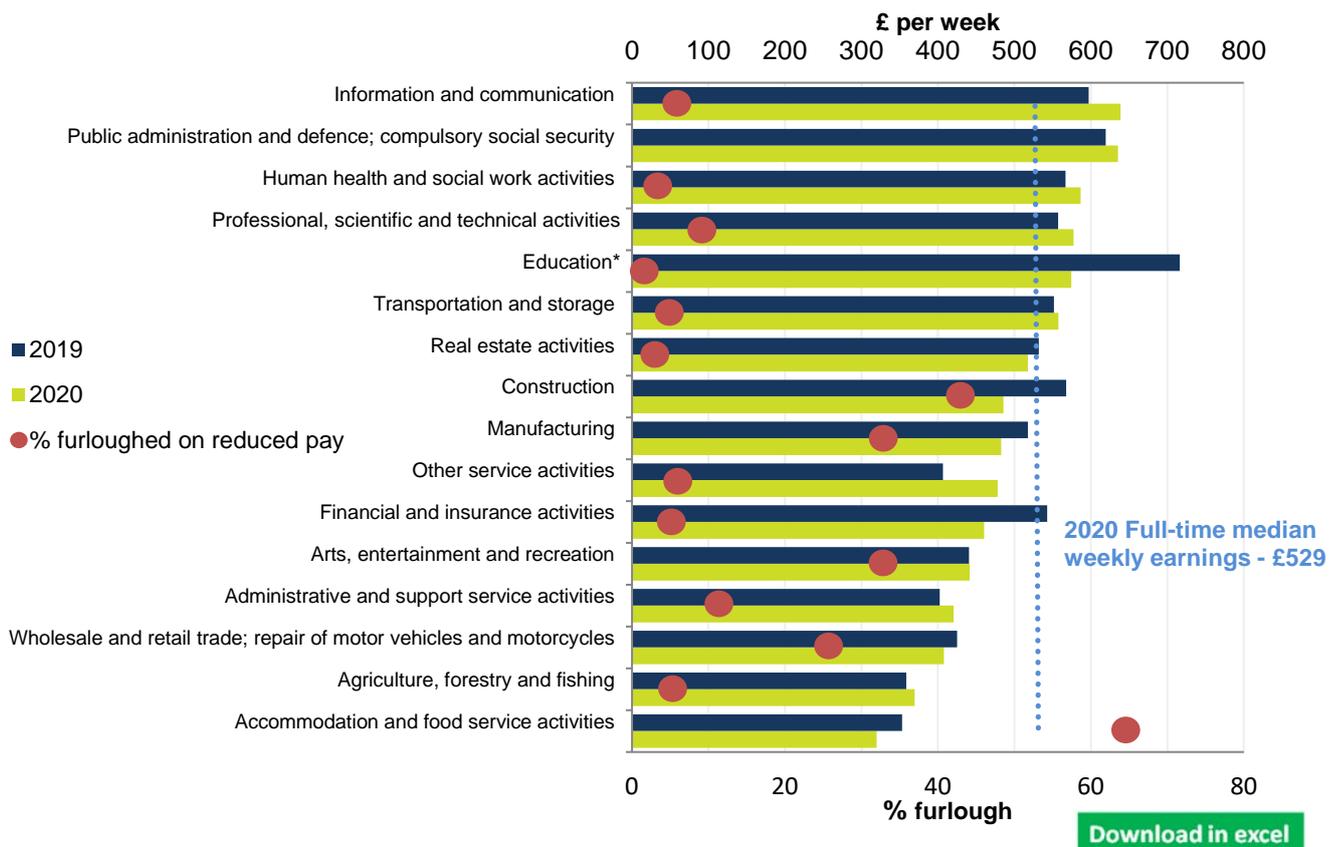
**Industry:** Results are collated using the 2007 Standard Industrial Classification (SIC07).

### Key findings

- ‘Information and communication’ industry had the highest full-time weekly earnings and ‘Accommodation and food services activities’ had the lowest
- Decreases in full-time earnings were reported in almost half of industry sectors over the year (7 out of the 16 reported in the survey in both years<sup>1</sup>)

### Change in median earnings varied by sector

**Figure 7: Median gross weekly earnings for full-time employees in NI by industry, April 2020**



In NI, weekly earnings for full-time employees at April 2020 were highest in ‘Information and communication’ (£639) and lowest in ‘Accommodation and food service activities’ (£320). Decreases were recorded in 7 of the 16 sectors that were reported for full-time employees<sup>1</sup>.

\*The quality of the provisional 2020 estimate in the ‘Education’ sector has been impacted by a relatively low response rate and bias in returns from this sector. A significant number of responses relating to the ‘Education’ sector were received after the survey closed and will be included in the 2020 final revised estimates. Changes in earnings across the industry sectors ranged from a decrease in ‘Financial and insurance activities’ (15% to £460), to an increase of 18% in ‘Other service activities’ (£478).

Four of the five industries with the largest proportion (all above 25%) of employees furloughed on reduced pay during the survey period saw decreases in earnings over the year ranging from 4.1% to 14%. The impact of furlough on individual industry sectors is dependent on the number of employees furloughed, where they are in the earnings distribution, and the distribution range.

<sup>1</sup> Full-time estimates were not published for 5 of the 21 industry sectors due to small sample sizes in those sectors.

## 1.8 Public/private sector comparison

**Public sector:** The NI public sector can be broken down into five areas: NI central government; Bodies under aegis of NI central government; UK central government employees based in Northern Ireland; Local government; Public corporations.

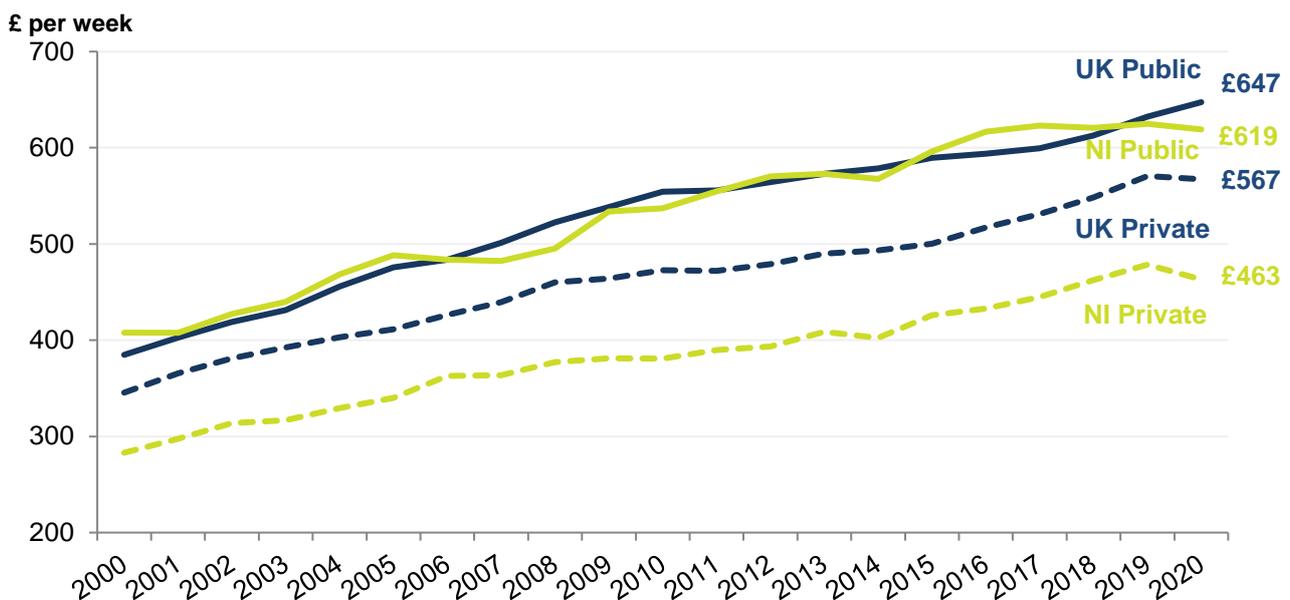
**Private sector:** The private sector encompasses all for-profit businesses (that are not owned or operated by the government). This does not include any non-profit body or mutual association.

### Key findings

- Median public sector earnings were a third higher than private sector earnings
- Larger decrease in private sector full-time weekly earnings over the year than in the public sector
- Largest difference between NI and UK median earnings in both public and private sector in the last 20 years

### Gap between NI and UK pay widens in both public and private sector

**Figure 8: Median gross weekly earnings for full-time employees in NI and the UK in the public and private sectors, April 2000 to April 2020**



Note: there were a number of methodological changes during the series in 2004, 2006 and 2011.

See Section 4 Further information for full details.

ASHE recorded 0% of public sector and 24% of private sector employees were furloughed at a reduced rate at 22<sup>nd</sup> April 2020

Non-zero axis

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Over the past 20 years, NI and UK median public sector earnings have been more closely aligned than NI and UK private sector earnings, and the public sector median for both NI and UK has been higher than the private sector median.

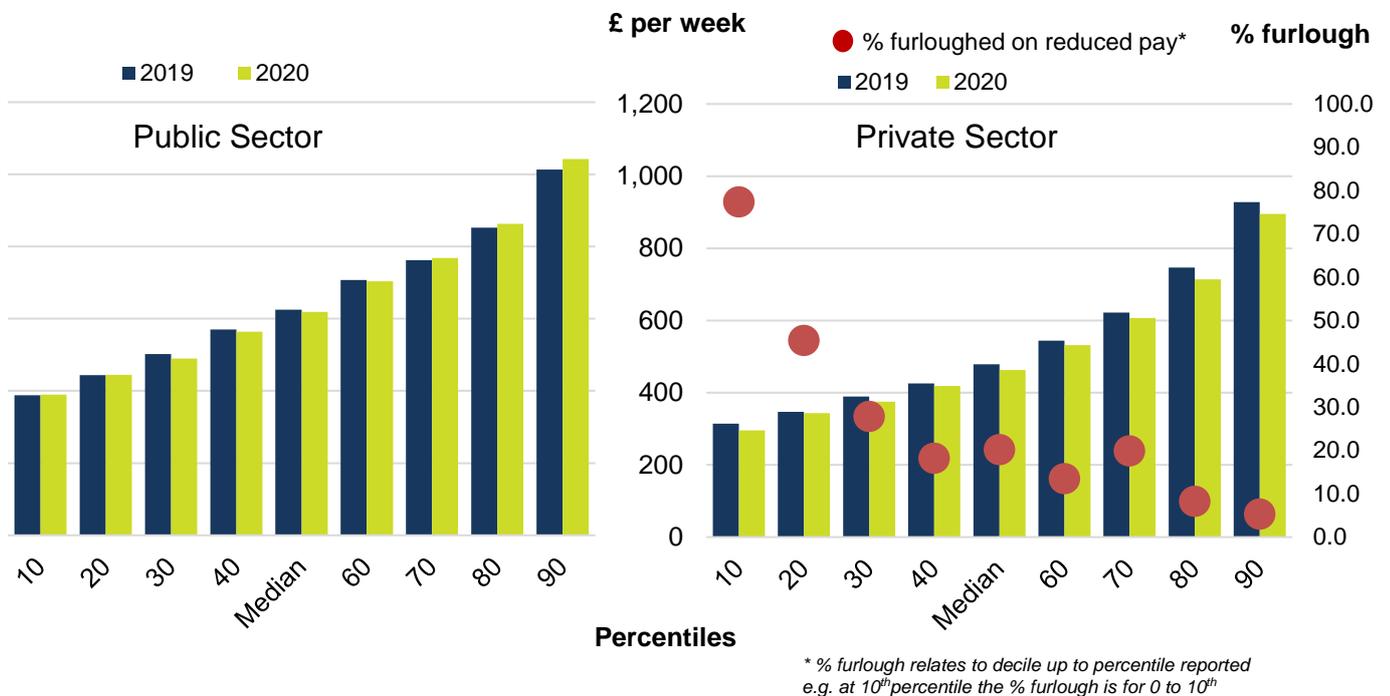
In April 2020, full-time weekly earnings of public sector employees (£619) in NI were 34% higher than those for private sector employees (£463). In comparison, full-time weekly earnings in the UK were 14% higher in the public sector (£647) than in the private sector (£567). Some of the difference between earnings in the public and private sectors is due to differences in the composition of the respective workforces. For example, many of the lowest paid occupations exist primarily in the private

sector, while there is a larger proportion of graduate-level and professional occupations in the public sector. Further detail on differences in the composition of the respective workforces is available at: [NI ASHE public and private sector analysis](#)

In 2020 both the NI public and private sector full-time medians were below their UK equivalent, and, at £28 and £104 lower respectively, represented the largest differences since 2000. Within the public sector, the divergence resulted from an increase in UK public sector pay of 2.4% while public sector earnings in NI decreased by 0.9%. Within the private sector, although both NI and UK median earnings decreased over the year (the first private sector decrease in UK for 20 years), the rate of decrease was lower in UK at 0.6% than in NI at 3.2%.

### Decreases across all earning groups in the Private sector, where almost a quarter of employees were furloughed on reduced pay

**Figure 9: Median gross weekly earnings for public and private sector full-time employees, April 2019 and April 2020**



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Decreases were experienced right across the distribution of NI private sector employees, of whom 24% were furloughed on reduced pay. Those in the lowest 10% experienced the largest decrease in earnings over the year of 5.7%; within this grouping, over three-quarters received furlough pay at a reduced rate in the survey period. The pay at the 90<sup>th</sup> percentile (the value at which 10% are paid higher) decreased by 3.5%.

The picture varied within the public sector. Those in the lowest 10% of the public sector full-time weekly earnings distribution increased by 0.5%, and those in the highest 10% increased by 2.9%, the greatest increase within the deciles.

## 2 Low and high pay analysis

### Key findings

- Median hourly pay for all employees in NI is lowest of all regions (£11.98)
- The percentage of low-paid and high-paid jobs in NI at their lowest in 20 years
- NI has the highest percentage of low-paid jobs of all the UK regions

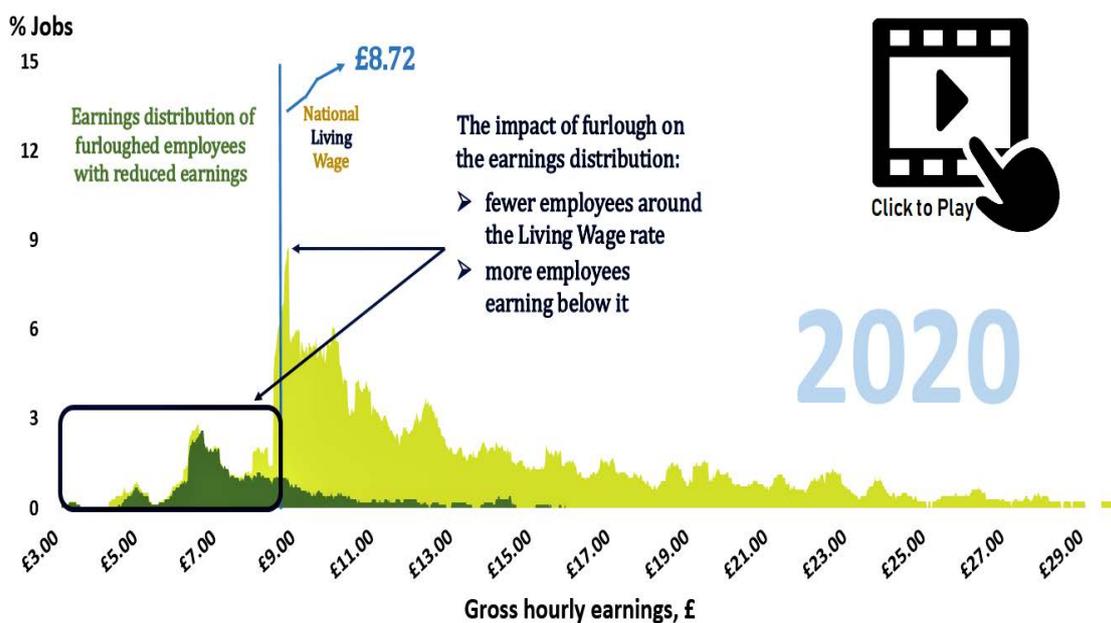
The **National Living Wage (NLW)** was introduced by the Government on 1 April 2016 for all working people aged 25 and over. It is currently set at £8.72 per hour.

The **National Minimum Wage (NMW)** applies for those under the age of 25. It was introduced on 1 April 1999 and ranges between £4.15 and £8.20 per hour. Further details and a full breakdown of rates can be found in section 4.

At £11.98, median hourly pay for all employees (full-time and part-time combined) in Northern Ireland remains the lowest of all the UK regions and is currently £1.70 below the UK median (£13.68). This has been the broad trend since 2000, with NI median hourly pay the lowest or second lowest of all the regions in each of the last 20 years. The percentage difference in 2020 (14%) is the largest over this time period between the NI and UK median hourly earnings.

A comparison of the distribution of hourly pay between 2002 and 2020 is shown below and can also be viewed on the [NISRA website](#).

**Figure 10: Gross hourly earnings distribution for all employees and furloughed employees with reduced earnings in NI, April 2002 to April 2020**



[Download in excel](#)

Note: Jobs shows proportion of jobs within +/-20p of shown pay rate

This cannot be used as a measure of non-compliance with the minimum wage legislation as it is not always possible to determine from the survey data whether an individual is eligible for the minimum wage. For example, if employees receive free accommodation, employers are entitled to offset hourly rates.

## Furlough impacts number paid below National Living Wage

Figure 10 shows the earnings distribution for 2020. The shape of the chart is typical of a skewed earnings distribution with more jobs at lower earnings and tailing off towards higher earnings.

When the [interactive version](#) is played showing 2002 to 2020, the peak of the chart, which shows the wage rate with the largest proportion of jobs, can be seen moving to the right each year in line with increases in the National Minimum/Living Wage.

The shape of the distribution has also changed over time. In 2002, 8% of jobs were within 20p of the minimum wage, compared with 6% within 20p of the National Living Wage in 2020. Between 2008 and 2019, the peak generally became more pronounced each year as earnings compressed around the National Minimum/Living Wage. The largest increase in compression coincided with the largest increase in minimum wage (70p) which occurred in 2016 when the National Living Wage was introduced (increasing for those aged 25+ from a National Minimum Wage of £6.50 in April 2015 to National Living Wage of £7.20 in April 2016). The proportion of jobs within 20p of the minimum wage increased from 9% in 2015 to 11% in 2016.

2020 shows a reversal in this trend of increased compression, with the proportion within 20p of the National Living Wage halving from 12% in 2019 to 6% in 2020. Notably a cluster of 3% within 20p of £6.60 is evident. This hourly rate is approximately 80% of the 2019 NLW and likely to reflect those receiving support through the Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme which was based on the previous year's earnings.

When considering the hourly earnings of all employees, the lowest earning 10% of workers in the private sector (those at the 10th percentile) earned the same as 80% (furlough rate) of the current National Living Wage (£8.72). In contrast, those at the 10th percentile of the public sector (£9.89) earned more per hour than those at the 40th percentile of the private sector (£9.55).

Using a different derived hourly rate which excludes overtime and shift premium payments and in-line with [ONS methodology](#), the proportion of jobs paid below the National Living Wage and National Minimum Wage in 2019 was 1.1% and increased to 10% in 2020. However, more than 90% of those below these rates were on furlough rates of pay.

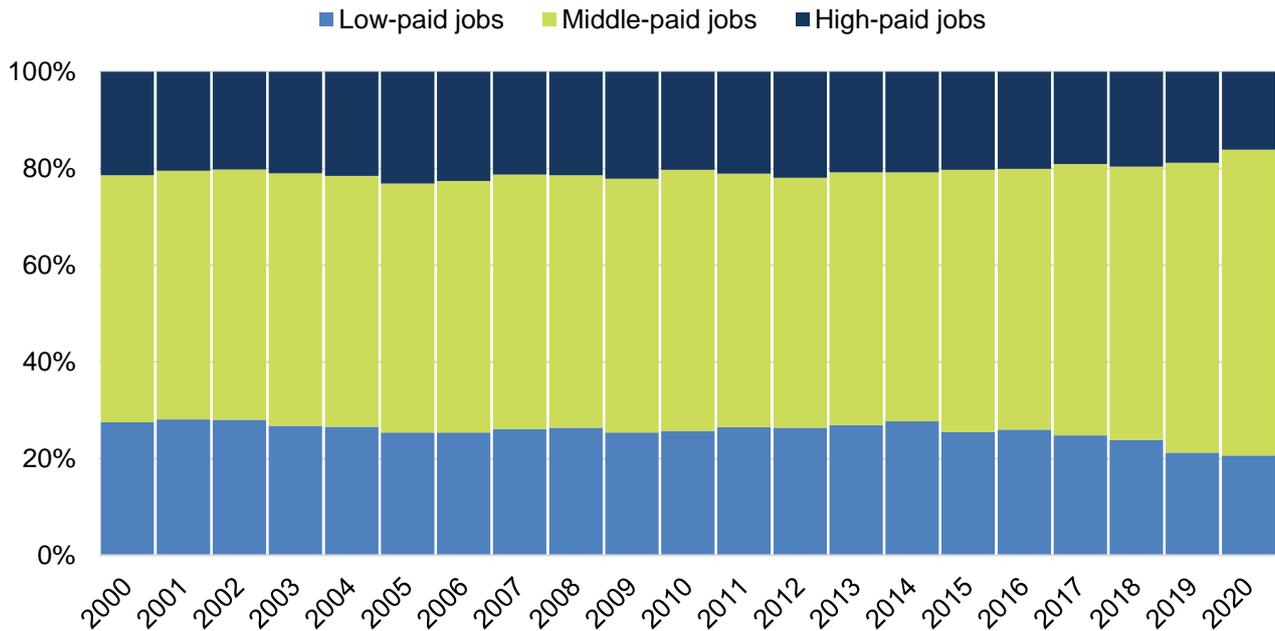
## Proportion of low paid jobs decreased marginally over the year

The following [Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development \(OECD\)](#) definitions of low pay and high pay are used.

**Low pay** is defined as the value that is two-thirds of the UK median hourly earnings (e.g. £13.62 x 2/3 = £9.08 in 2020)

**High pay** is defined as the value that is 1.5 times the UK median hourly earnings (e.g. £13.62 x 1.5 = £20.43 in 2020).

**Figure 11: Proportion of low-paid and high-paid employee jobs in NI, April 2000 to April 2020**



[Download in excel](#)

Note: there were a number of methodological changes during the series in 2004, 2006 and 2011.

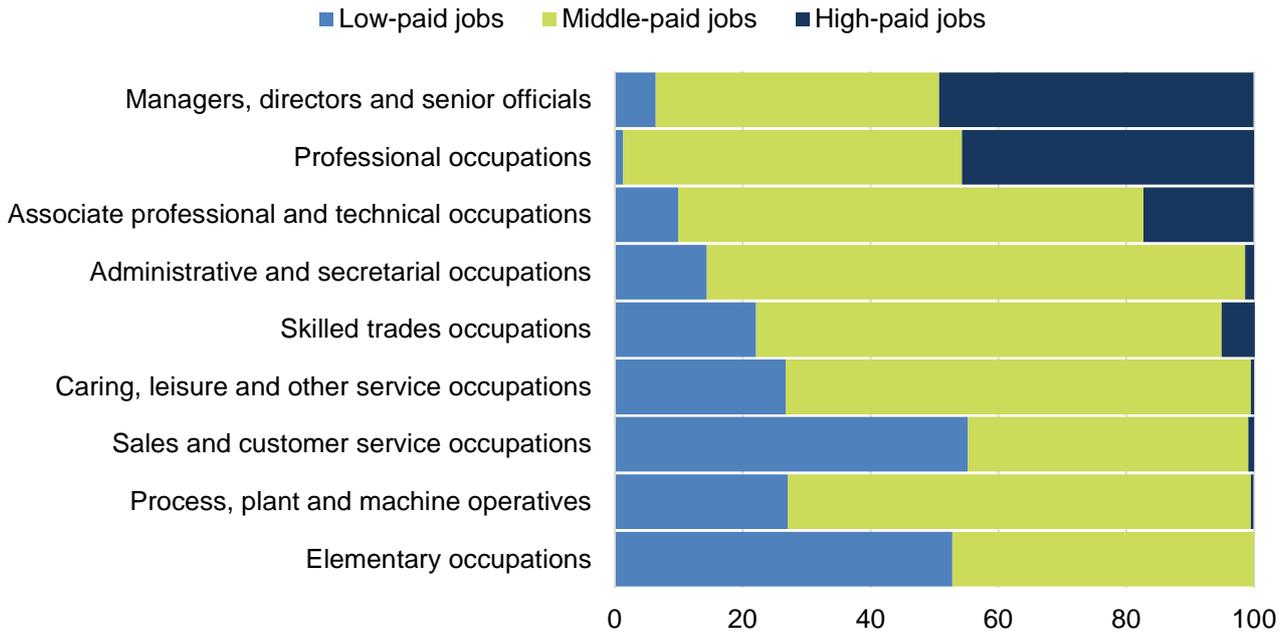
See Section 4 Further information for full details.

Hourly earnings for all employees is used to calculate high and low pay in line with ONS methodology.

Figure 11 shows that, over the last 20 years the proportion of low-paid jobs has decreased from 28% in 2001 to its lowest proportion of 21% in 2020. It decreased slightly (under 1pps) over the year to 2020. Since the introduction of the National Living Wage in 2016, the proportion of low-paid jobs has decreased by 4.9pps.

The proportion of high paid jobs is also at its lowest in the 20 year period at 16%, compared to a high of 23% in 2005. As the proportions of both low-paid and high-paid jobs have decreased, the proportion of middle-paid jobs has increased to 63% in 2020, the highest on record.

**Figure 12: Proportion of low-paid and high-paid employee jobs in NI by occupation, April 2020**



Hourly earnings for all employees is used to calculate high and low pay in line with ONS methodology. [Download in excel](#)

The highest percentage of low paid employee jobs are in ‘Sales and customer service occupations’ (55%), which has less than 1% high paid jobs, and ‘Elementary occupations’ (53%) which has no high paid jobs. In contrast, almost half of all ‘Managers, directors and senior officials’ jobs are high paid, and when considered alongside ‘Professional occupations’ make up 80% of all high paid jobs in NI.

**Figure 13: Proportion of low and high paid employee jobs by working pattern in NI, April 2020**

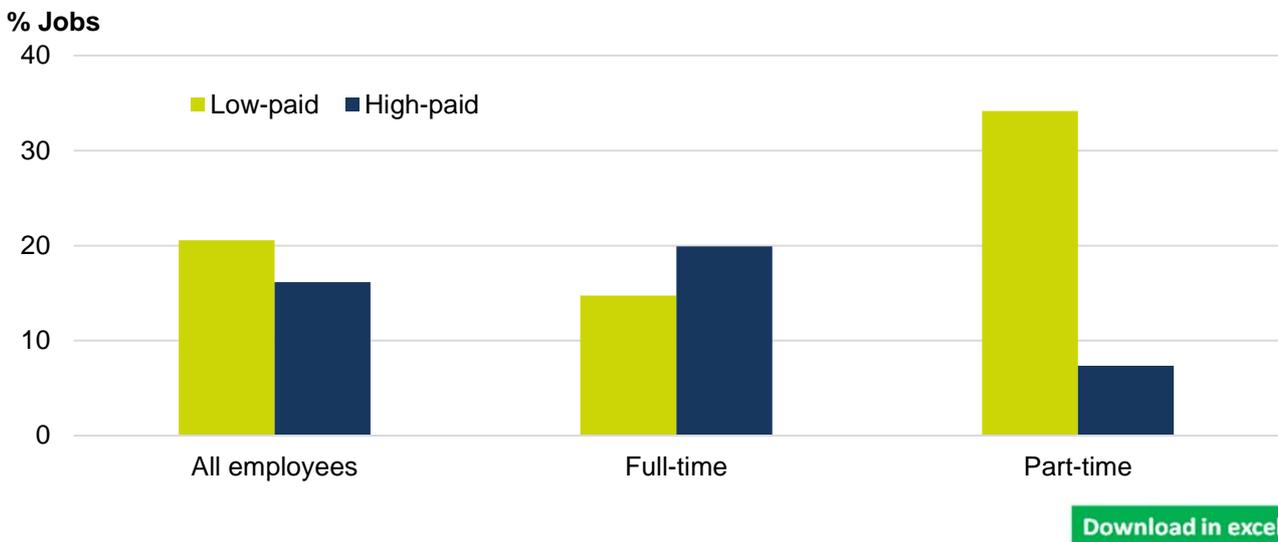
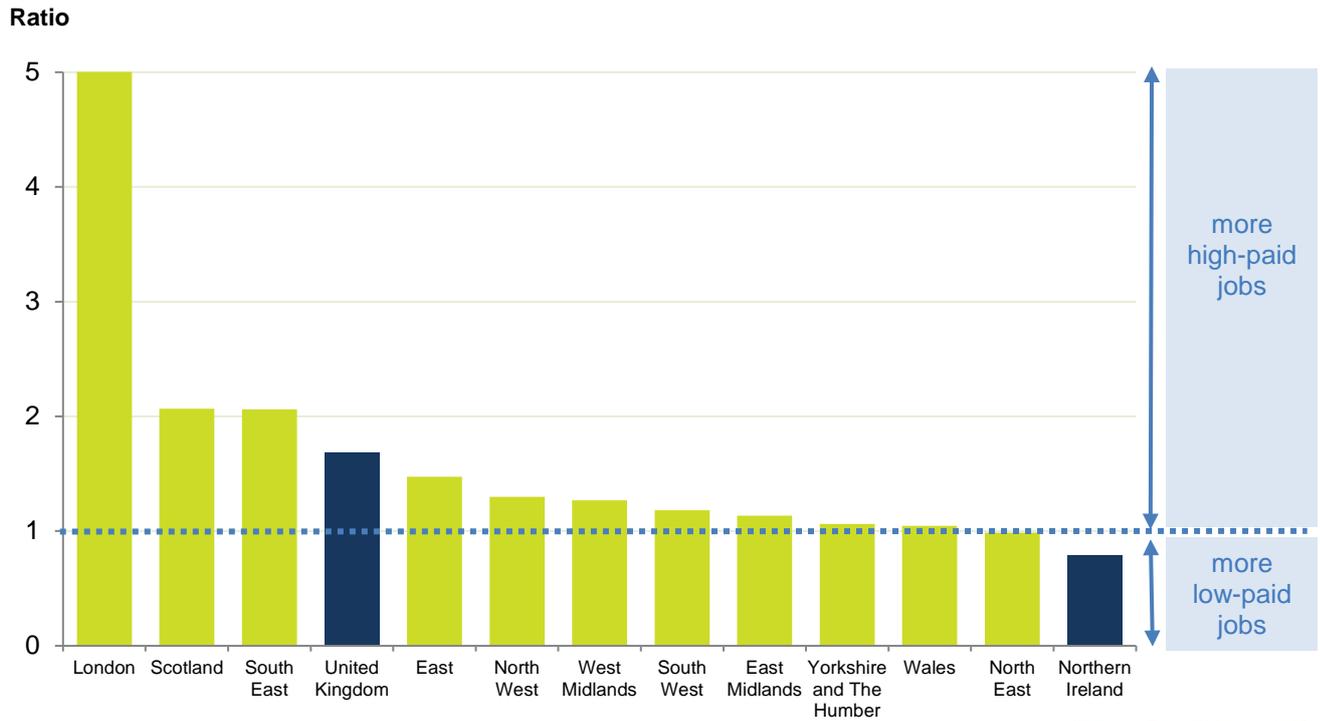


Figure 13 highlights the greater proportion of low paid part-time (34%) employee jobs, compared with full-time (15%) and similarly the lower proportion of high paid part-time jobs (7%) compared with full-time (21%).

**Figure 14: Ratio of high-paid to low-paid employee jobs, by Government region, April 2020**



[Download in excel](#)

*Hourly earnings for all employees is used to calculate high and low pay in line with ONS methodology.*

The proportion of low-paid jobs has decreased marginally over the year and NI has the highest proportion of low-paid jobs of all the UK regions.

Analysis of ratios of high-paid to low-paid employee jobs in the different regions of the UK (Figure 14) shows that NI had the lowest ratio, indicating that low-paid jobs exceeded high-paid jobs to the greatest extent in the UK. London had the highest ratio, with over 5 times as many high-paid than low-paid jobs, followed by South East and Scotland, all of which were above the UK average. There is only one region (North East) other than NI where the number of low-paid jobs exceeded the number of high-paid jobs.

# 3 Gender pay gap

## Key findings

- 2020 was the 11<sup>th</sup> year where full-time females in NI earned at least as much as full-time males on average
- Full-time females earned 46p more per hour than full-time males (£13.28 compared to £12.82)
- NI is the only region in the UK where full-time females earned more than full-time males
- Considering all employees, regardless of working pattern, female hourly pay is below male pay on average due to the higher proportion of female part-time employees

Various methods can be used to measure the earnings of females relative to males. The beginning of this section is based on full-time median hourly earnings excluding overtime; including overtime can distort the picture as males work relatively more overtime than females, and using hourly earnings better accounts for the fact that males work, on average, more hours per week than females (see Figure 16). The remainder of this section considers the earnings of all female and male employees, regardless of working pattern, and also compares annual earnings for females and males.

Although median hourly pay excluding overtime provides useful comparisons of males and females earnings, it does not reveal differences in rates of pay for comparable jobs. This is because such measures do not allow for the different employment characteristics of males and females, such as the proportion in different occupations and their length of time in jobs. For example, a higher proportion of females work in professional occupations, which tend to offer higher salaries.

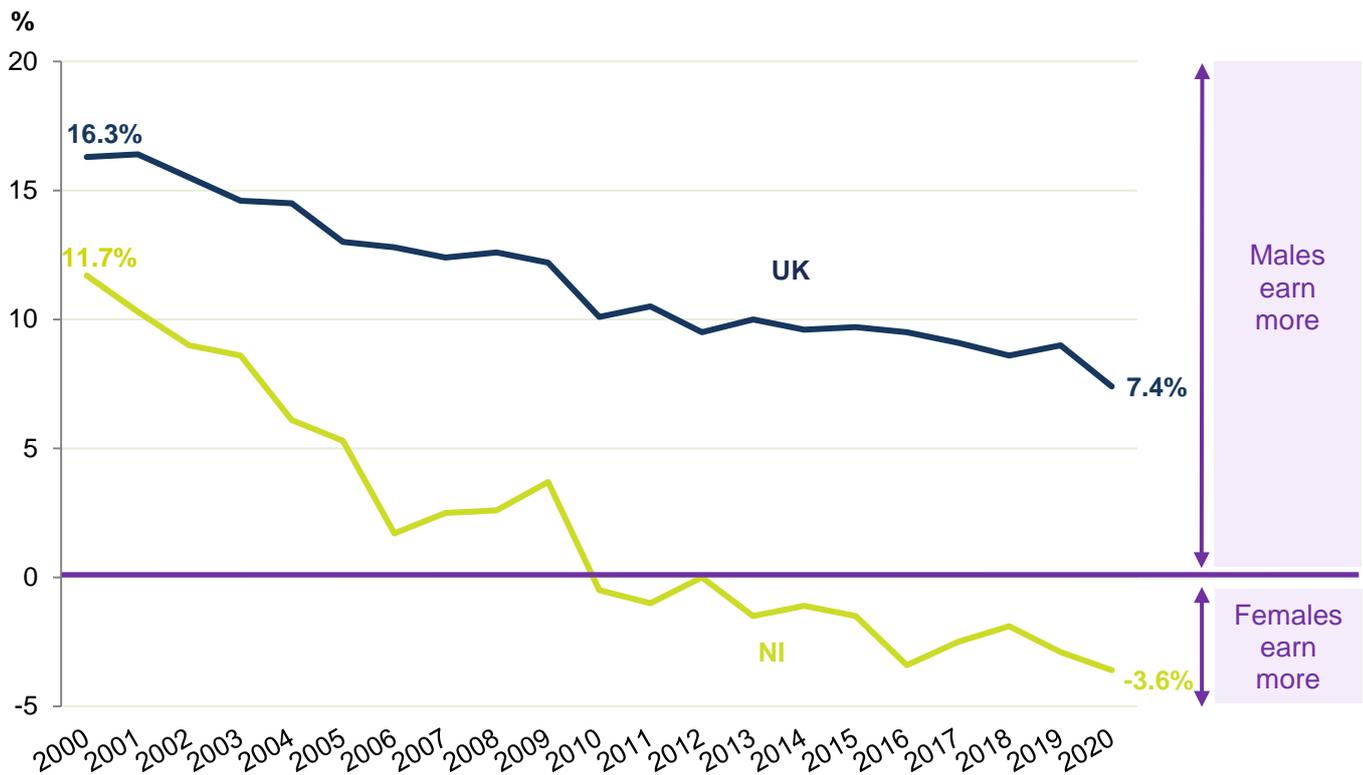
**Gross hourly earnings (excluding overtime)** includes basic pay, commissions, shift premium pay, bonus or incentive pay and allowances, and is before deductions for PAYE, National Insurance, pension schemes, student loan repayments and voluntary deductions

**Gender pay gap:** The headline measure is calculated as the difference between the median full-time hourly earnings (excluding overtime) of males and females, as a proportion of median full-time hourly earnings (excluding overtime) of males earnings.

$$\frac{\text{male earnings} - \text{female earnings}}{\text{male earnings}}$$

## 11<sup>th</sup> year where full-time females earned at least as much as full-time males

Figure 15: Gender Pay Gap for full-time employees in NI and the UK, April 2000 to April 2020



Note: there were a number of methodological changes during the series in 2004, 2006 and 2011. See Section 4 Further information for full details

[Download in excel](#)

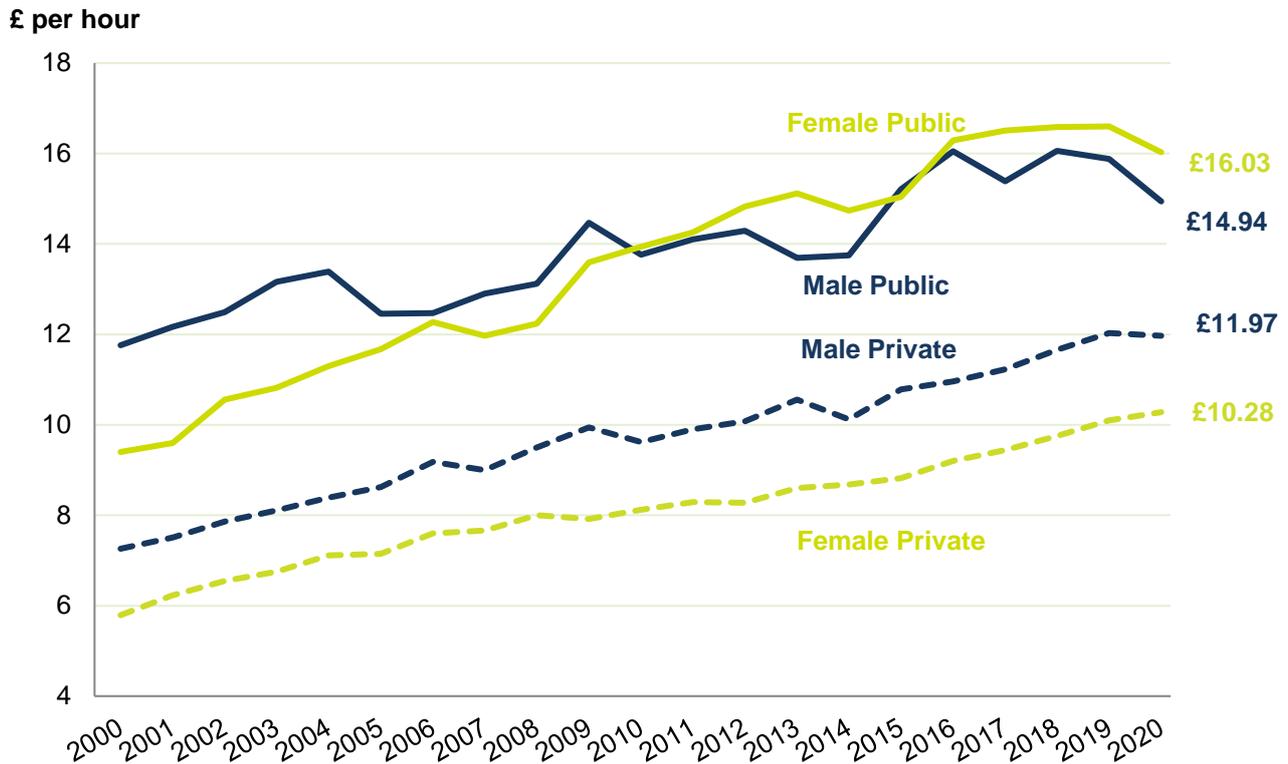
The results from the 2020 ASHE show that the gender pay gap for full-time employees in NI is negative, with females who work full-time earning 46p per hour more on average than males (£13.28 per hour compared to £12.82 per hour for males). This is equivalent to a 3.6% gender pay gap in favour of females; larger than the 2.9% gender pay gap in favour of females (equivalent to 37p per hour) recorded in 2019.

This is the 11<sup>th</sup> consecutive year where the gender pay gap has been zero or in favour of females, and NI continues to be the only region in the UK where this is the case. In the UK, full-time females (£14.37) earned less than full-time males (£15.53) on average in 2020; a gender pay gap of 7.4% in favour of males.

The following section explores beyond the headline gender pay gap measure (full-time hourly earnings excluding overtime) and considers the experience across different age groups, working patterns, occupations and sectors.

## Females in the public sector have highest average earnings

**Figure 16: Median gross hourly earnings excluding overtime for full-time employees in NI by sector and gender, April 2000 to April 2020**



Note: there were a number of methodological changes during the series in 2004, 2006 and 2011. See Section 4 Further information for full details  
Non-zero axis

[Download in excel](#)

Overall, public sector employees earned more on average than private sector employees. Within this, females earned more in the public sector on average than males, whilst they earned less in the private sector on average than males. This has been the broad trend since 2010.

When making similar comparisons with the UK earnings, full-time males earned more in both the public and private sectors than full-time females. While full-time female public sector workers in the UK (£16.77) earned slightly more (74p per hour) than the NI equivalent (£16.03), UK full-time male private sector workers (£14.66) earn significantly more (£2.69 per hour) than the NI equivalent (£11.97).

Half of full-time females worked in the public sector compared to approximately a quarter of full-time males. Therefore, due to the composition effect of a higher relative proportion of females than males (50% compared with 26% respectively) working in the public sector, where earnings were higher on average, median earnings for full-time females were higher than males.

## Full-time and part-time females earn more than males, but overall males earn more

**Full-time employee** is defined as anyone aged 16 years or over that is directly paid from a business's payroll for carrying out more than 30 paid hours per week (or 25 or more for the teaching professions).

**Part-time employee** is defined as anyone aged 16 years or over working 30 or less paid hours a week (or less than 25 for the teaching professions).

Figure 17: Median gross hourly earnings excluding overtime by gender in NI, April 2020



Note: Non-zero axis

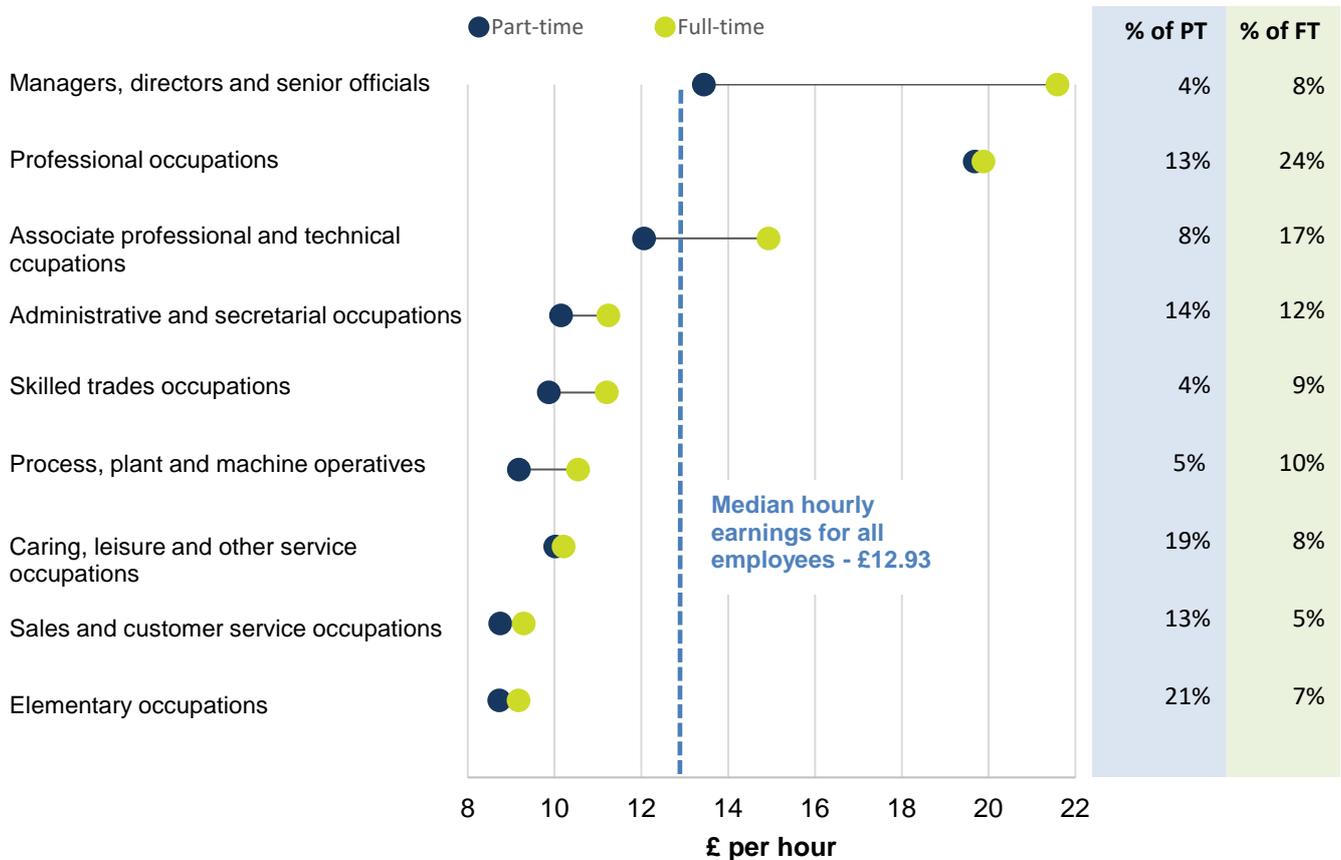
[Download in excel](#)

Figure 17 presents hourly earnings for males and females disaggregated by working pattern and shows that part-time earnings for females (£9.87) were greater than part-time earnings for males (£9.63), and full-time earnings for females (£13.28) were greater than full-time earnings for males (£12.82). However, hourly earnings for males (£12.30), regardless of working pattern, were £1.01 higher than for females (£11.29), and hourly earnings for part time workers were lower than full-time workers regardless of gender.

The higher earnings for 'all' males, regardless of working pattern, is illustrated in the [Gender Pay Gap explanation](#) on the NISRA website. These higher earnings are primarily due to a larger proportion of males (84% compared with 57% of females) in full-time work, which has higher hourly rates of pay on average than part-time employment and proportionately fewer low paid jobs.

## Part-time workers earn less on average in all occupation groups

**Figure 18: Median gross hourly earnings excluding overtime by working pattern and Occupation in NI, April 2020**



Note: Non-zero axis

[Download in excel](#)

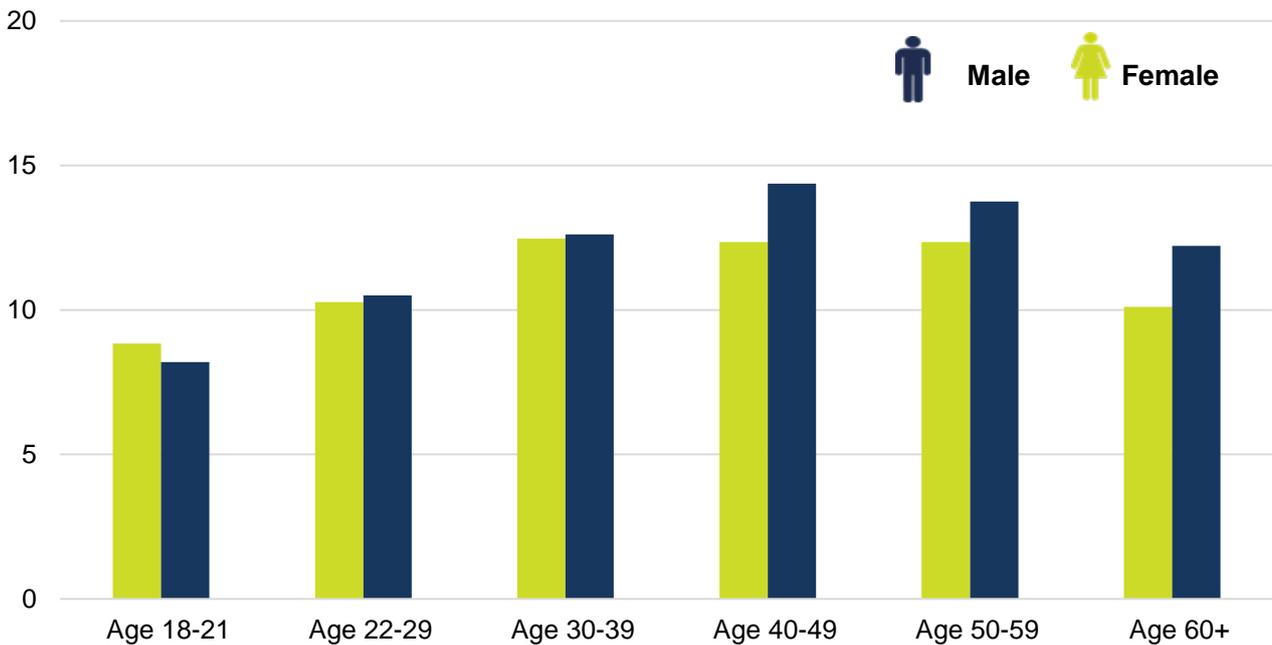
A closer examination of the pay difference between part-time and full-time jobs shows that, not only are part-time jobs more likely in lower paid occupation groups but, even within occupation groups, part-time workers' hourly pay rates are, on average, lower than full-time hourly pay rates.

Figure 18 shows that approximately a third of all part time jobs were in the two lowest paid occupation groups ('Elementary Occupations' and 'Sales and customer service occupations'), while only 12% of full-time jobs were in these occupation groups. At the other end of the pay scale, approximately a third of full-time jobs were in the top two paying occupation groups ('Managers, directors and senior officials' and 'Professional occupations'), compared to under a fifth of part time jobs.

Comparing part-time and full-time hourly rates within occupations shows that part-time workers earned less, on average, in every occupation group, with the difference ranging from £8.15 per hour in 'Managers, directors and senior officials' to 19p per hour in 'Caring, leisure and other service occupations'.

## Largest gender pay gap in the 40+ age groups

Figure 19: Median gross hourly earnings excluding overtime for all employees in NI by age and gender, April 2020



[Download in excel](#)

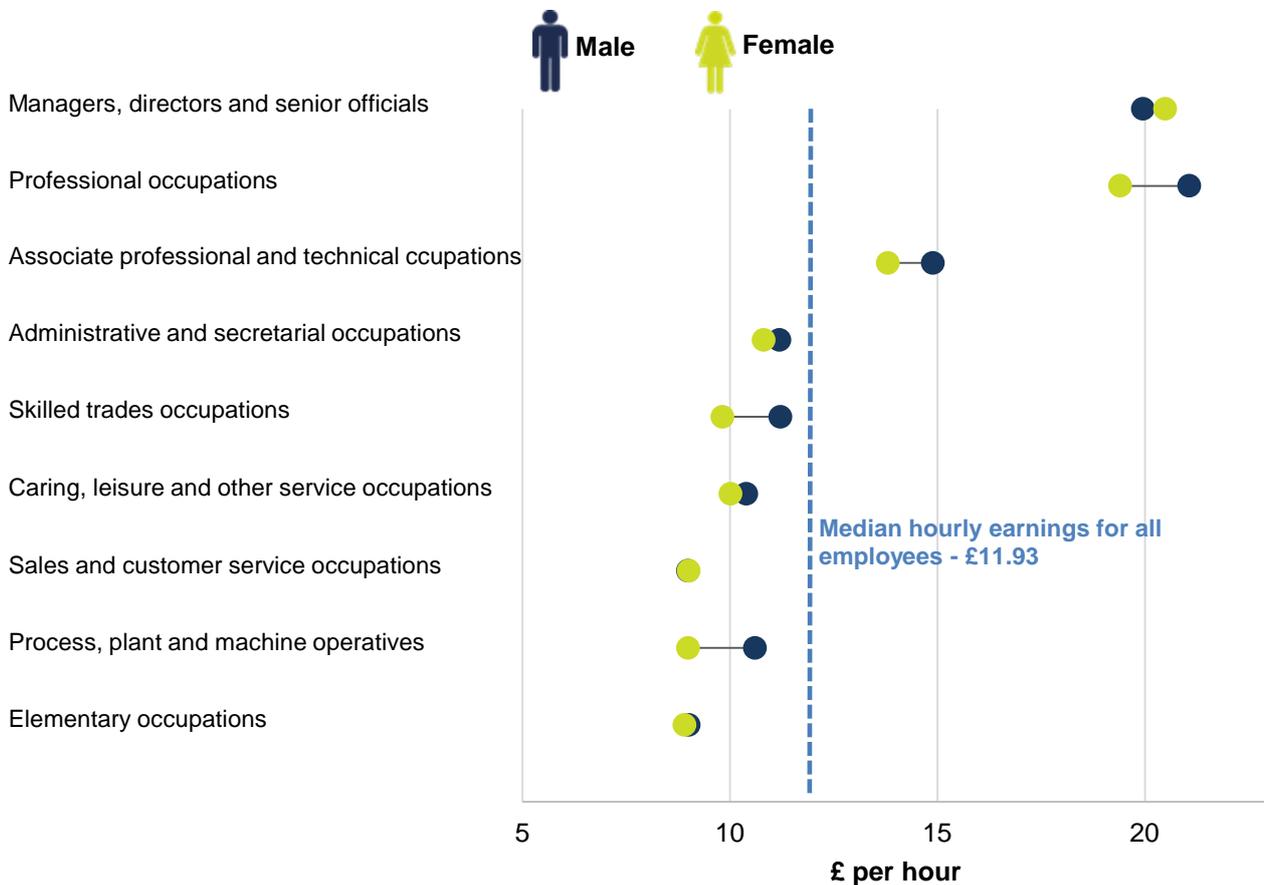
The ASHE 2020 data show that males and females have similar median hourly earnings (excluding overtime) for all age groups under 40. However, males earned over £2 per hour more in the 40 to 49 and 60+ age groups, and £1.40 per hour more in the 50 to 59 age group.

Male earnings notably peak higher and later than female earnings. Median hourly earnings for males peaked within the 40-49 age group at £14.37, whilst female's median hourly earnings peaked at £12.47, almost £2.00 lower and in the earlier age category of 30-39 years.

## Females earned less on average than males in seven of the nine occupation groups

**Occupation:** Results are collated using the 2010 Standard Occupation Classification (SOC10).

**Figure 20: Median gross hourly earnings excluding overtime for all employees in NI by occupation and gender, April 2020**



Note: Non-zero axis

[Download in excel](#)

The gender pay gap is in favour of males when considering all employees. Disaggregating the data into occupation groups shows that this holds in seven out of nine occupation groups.

The occupation groups in which females earned more on average were 'Managers, directors and senior officials' (54p per hour more) and 'Sales and customer service occupations' (a small difference of 1p per hour). Females however, made up only a third of employees within 'Managers, directors and senior officials', which is the highest paying group, and only 5% of all females worked in this occupation group.

The largest difference between male and female average pay was in the 'Professional occupations' group, where, on average, for every pound earned by males, females earned 92p (£21.07 compared to £19.40 per hour). Median earnings for males were highest in 'Professional occupations' and 40% of employees within this occupation group were male.

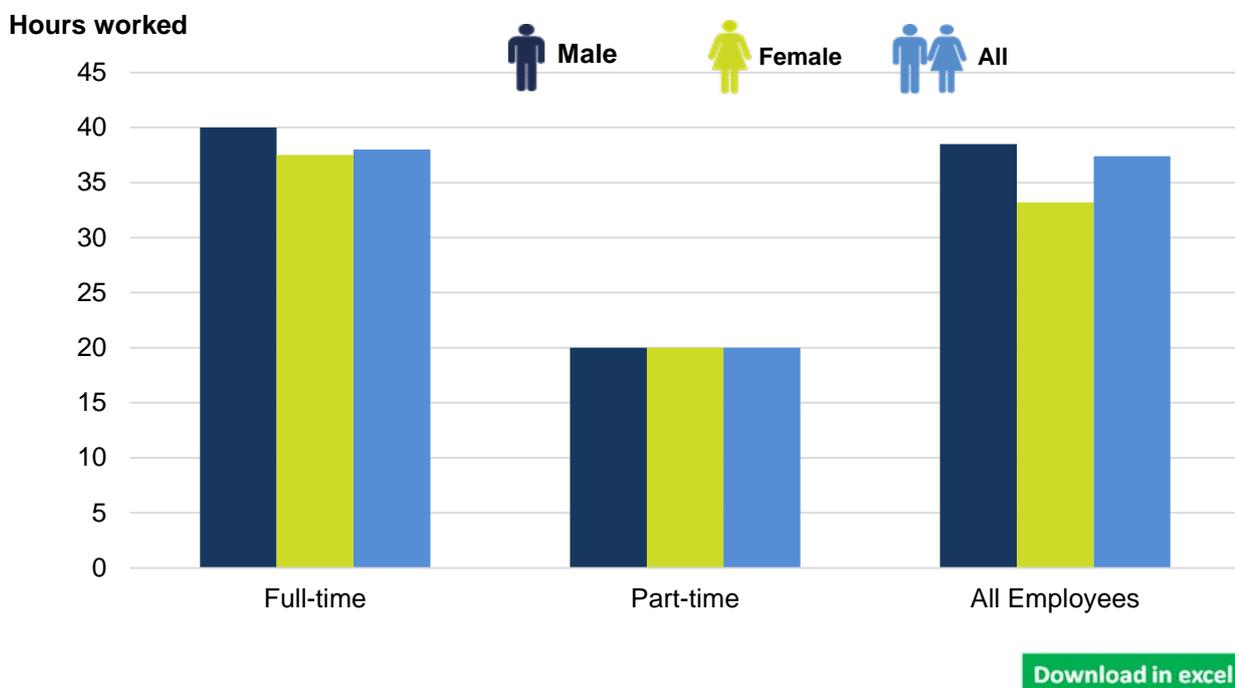
## Median annual pay higher for males due to longer working hours

**Total paid hours worked** is made up of paid basic hours and paid overtime hours. It is calculated using employees on adult rates whose pay was unaffected by absence.

Median full-time gross annual earnings in NI in 2020 was £28,324 for all employees, £26,149 for female employees, and £29,862 for males. This was an increase of 1.9% for females over the year, and a 3.3% increase for males.

The gender pay gap for full-time employees is in favour of males when calculated on annual earnings (whereas it is in favour of women when calculated on hourly pay). The difference between the annual and hourly earnings pay gap measure can be attributed to males working more hours on average and receiving higher bonuses than females.

**Figure 21: Median weekly paid hours worked by working pattern and gender, NI, April 2020**



In April 2020, males in full-time employment worked 2.5 more paid hours per week than females (40 hours compared with 37.5 hours). For those in part-time employment, males and females worked the same amount of paid hours (20 hours).

Overall, males (38.5 hours) worked 5.3 hours more than females (33.2 hours), highlighting that a greater proportion of males (87%) work full-time compared with females (57%).

## 4 Further information

### Alternative sources of employee earnings information - HMRC PAYE

Monthly experimental statistics on payrolled employees and their earnings from HM Revenue and Customs' (HMRC) Pay As You Earn (PAYE) Real Time Information (RTI) system are available on the [NISRA](#) and [ONS](#) websites. HMRC PAYE RTI is the system employers use to take Income Tax and National Insurance contributions before they pay wages to employees. Data relate to employees paid by employers only, and do not include self-employment income or income from pensions, property rental or investments. Data are based on where employees live and not the location of their place of work within the UK. Data are seasonally adjusted but not adjusted for inflation. The HMRC PAYE covers the whole population rather than a sample of employees or companies. The data are classed as Experimental Statistics as the methodologies used to produce the statistics are still in their development phase. As a result, the series are subject to revisions.

Estimates from ASHE remain the principal source of employee earnings information and are National Statistics. While estimates from PAYE provide a more timely indication of employee earnings trends, they are still in the development stage and are classed as Experimental Statistics.

PAYE does not differentiate based on full-time or part-time job status, and includes those whose work was affected by absence. It also measures pay per person which can include pay from more than one job, while ASHE measures pay per job.

The most comparable statistic to median earnings from PAYE is ASHE data on median gross weekly earnings of all employees surveyed, including those who work part-time. A comparison of ASHE and PAYE data based on April data in both sources shows that PAYE is typically lower, though both show the same trend. Likely reasons for this is that ASHE excludes workers whose pay is affected by absence and those not on adult rates of pay, while PAYE includes these. Further details have been published by [HMRC and ONS](#).

### Methodology

The Annual Survey of Hours and Earnings (ASHE) is a UK wide survey that provides a wide range of information on earnings and hours worked. The Office for National Statistics (ONS) carries out ASHE in Great Britain and it is carried out by the Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency (NISRA) in NI.

The survey information related to the pay-week (or other pay period if the employee was paid less frequently) which included 22<sup>nd</sup> April 2020, the reference date for the latest survey. The results are therefore not necessarily representative of pay over a longer period. They do not take account of subsequent changes in rates of pay which have become effective since April or changes which have been introduced with retrospective effect since the survey returns were completed.

The survey reference date was during the early stages of the Coronavirus Pandemic and was within the time period for the first Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme (CJRS) grant. The CJRS was introduced to support employers from 1st March whose businesses were impacted by the pandemic. The first CJRS worked by providing grants to employers of up to 80% of the salary to a maximum value of £2,500 per employee per month, while covering some of the cost of employer pension and National Insurance Contributions. Businesses were asked to include employees who were supported by the CJRS in their ASHE responses, and during statistical processing the achieved sample was linked to an extract of the CJRS to classify furloughed jobs receiving reduced pay. This resulted in

approximately 25% of responses being identified as furloughed jobs and approximately 15% of jobs identified as furloughed with reduced pay (i.e. earnings not topped up by their employer). However as not all jobs could be matched it is likely to be an undercount of approximately 20%.

When sub-groups (e.g. age groups, industries, occupations) are considered throughout the publication, the proportion of employees furloughed and on reduced pay in *the ASHE sample* is provided for context. The proportions should not be used as standalone furlough estimates. HMRC statistics on CJRS are the official statistics and are available [here](#)

## Coverage and sampling

As in previous years, the sample used for the survey included approximately 1% of all employees in NI who were covered by PAYE schemes. Someone who is in more than one PAYE scheme may appear more than once. Information on earnings and hours is obtained in confidence from employers under the authority of The Statistics of Trade and Employment (Northern Ireland) Order 1988. Information collected is treated as strictly confidential and is used only for statistical purposes. The resulting analyses do not show information about identifiable people or private businesses.

The ASHE estimates are based on a sample and are therefore subject to an associated level of variability. The coefficient of variation (CV) indicates the quality of an estimate. The CV is the ratio of the standard error of an estimate to the estimate, expressed as a percentage. The smaller the CV, the higher the quality of the estimate. The CVs are published alongside the estimates, and CVs for the key ASHE estimates are shown in Table 1 below.

**Table 1: Coefficient of variation (%) for key NI ASHE estimates, 2020**

		Full-time	Part-time
<b>Median gross weekly earnings</b>	Males	2.8	6.8
	Females	2.7	3.2
	All	1.7	2.6
<b>Median gross hourly earnings (excluding overtime)</b>	Males	1.8	2.2
	Females	2.9	1.2
	All	1.7	1.0

## Weighting

ASHE responses are weighted to the number of jobs measured by the Labour Force Survey (LFS), and this weighting is carried out by ONS. The weighting factors include age, sex, occupation and workplace, and take account of differing response rates.

## Revisions

In line with normal practice, this release contains revised estimates from the 2019 survey results published on 29<sup>th</sup> October 2019. These results take account of some corrections to the original 2019 data that were identified during the validation of the results for 2020, as well as late returns. The 2020 results presented in this report are provisional and will be revised alongside next year's results. The largest revisions are expected in the 'Education' sector as a significant number of returns were received after the survey closed. These will be included in the 2020 revised figures due to be published along with the 2021 results in Autumn 2021.

## Methodology Changes 2004 to date

The ASHE bulletin presents the most recent data in the context of a 20 year time trend. As such it is worth noting a number of methodological changes that have taken place since the survey was introduced, in particular in 2004, 2007 and 2012. For 2004 and 2006 two sets of results are available based on the existing and updated methodologies at the time. Users should note that data used in the report relate to the updated methodology and superseded data has not been included in the time series charts.

The impact of the changes increases as the size of the group being considered decreases. For example, conclusions can be drawn when considering broad time trends over the 20 year period, but caution should be taken when comparing across occupations and industries.

**Table 2: Methodology changes to the ASHE Survey**

Year	Change	Impact
2004	ASHE replaced the New Earnings Survey	Coverage improved
2007	Sample design improvements	Results between 2004-2007 not directly comparable
2009	Change in industry classification from SIC 2003 to SIC 2007	Industries not directly comparable More info on impact <a href="#">here</a>
2012	Change in occupation coding from SOC2000 to SOC 2010	Occupations are used to weight ASHE results. Estimates before 2011 not directly comparable with later estimates. More info on impact <a href="#">here</a> (from page 62)
2013	Change in sample frame from PAYE to RTI PAYE	Small impact on coverage

## Mean, Median and Percentiles

The mean and the median measure different things and either can be appropriate depending on what the user is trying to measure. The mean measures the average amount earned by individuals, but in a skewed distribution such as earnings this measure is susceptible to small numbers of very high earners. The median measures the amount earned by the average individual, i.e. the level of earnings at which half the population are above and half the population are below. A visual explanation of this is available on the [NISRA website](#). Please note that changes in median values for sub-sectors of the population are not necessarily additive at the population level.

A percentile is a statistical measure which shows the value below which a given percentage of observations fall, i.e. the 10<sup>th</sup> percentile is the value below which the lowest earning 10% of employees fall, and the 50<sup>th</sup> percentile (median) is the value below which 50% of employees fall.

## National Living Wage (NLW) and National Minimum Wage (NMW)

The NLW rate that applied in April 2020 was £8.72 per hour for employees aged 25 and over. The NMW rates that applied in April 2020 were: £8.20 per hour for employees aged 21 to 24, £6.45 for employees aged 18 to 20, £4.55 for employees aged under 18, and £4.15 for apprentices aged 19 and older and in the first year of their apprenticeship and those aged under 19. The following table provides a breakdown of NLWs and NMWs since April 2008.

**Table 3: National Living Wage, 2016 to 2019 and National Minimum Wage, 2010 to 2020**

Year	25+	21 to 24	18 to 20	Under 18	Apprentice
2020	£8.72	£8.20	£6.45	£4.55	£4.15
2019	£8.21	£7.70	£6.15	£4.35	£3.90
2018	£7.83	£7.38	£5.90	£4.20	£3.70
2017	£7.50	£7.05	£5.60	£4.05	£3.50
2016 (Oct 16 to Mar 17)	£7.20	£6.95	£5.55	£4.00	£3.40
2016 (Apr 16 to Sep 17)*	£7.20	£6.70	£5.30	£3.87	£3.30
		21+	18 to 20	Under 18	Apprentice
2015		£6.70	£5.30	£3.87	£3.30
2014		£6.50	£5.13	£3.79	£2.73
2013		£6.31	£5.03	£3.72	£2.68
2012		£6.19	£4.98	£3.68	£2.65
2011		£6.08	£4.98	£3.68	£2.60
2010		£5.93	£4.92	£3.64	£2.50
		22+	18 to 21	Under 18	
2009		£5.80	£4.83	£3.57	
2008		£5.73	£4.77	£3.53	

\*Introduction of National Living Wage for 25 and over

More information on the [National Minimum Wage and National Living Wage rates](#) can be found on the Gov.uk website.

### Simpson's Paradox

A trend that appears in groups of data but not when the groups are combined is referred to as Simpson's Paradox. In particular this phenomenon is apparent when NI earnings data is split by gender and other characteristics. For example, gender and working pattern, and gender and occupation. The following [slideshow](#) explains the occurrence within the NI earnings data and an ONS blog describes it [here](#).

### Further information

If you require further information about the figures contained in this publication or the accompanying tables, or would like to provide feedback on the content, please use the contact details below:

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Website: [Annual Survey of Hours and Earnings](#)

# 5 Index of tables

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## Reporting Periods:

2020 (provisional)  
2019 (revised)

## Data available:

[Weekly pay – Gross \(£\)](#)  
[Weekly pay – Excluding overtime \(£\)](#)  
[Weekly pay – Basic including other \(£\)](#)  
[Weekly pay – Overtime \(£\)](#)  
[Hourly pay – Gross \(£\)](#)  
[Hourly pay – Excluding overtime \(£\)](#)  
[Annual pay – Gross \(£\)](#)  
[Annual pay – Incentive \(£\)](#)  
[Hours worked – Total](#)  
[Hours worked – Basic](#)  
[Hours worked – Overtime](#)

## Breakdowns provided:

[Headline Statistics](#)  
[Headline Coefficients of Variation](#)  
[Industry](#)  
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[SOC 4-digit\\*](#)  
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These data, along with Headline Statistics for the years 1997 to 2018 can be found on the [Annual Survey of Hours and Earnings](#) section on the NISRA website.

*\*These tables will be available in the week after publication*