

Pensions - Further information

Context

The Annual Survey of Hours and Earnings (ASHE) is a UK wide survey that provides a wide range of information on earnings, including workplace pension type by age, gender, occupation and industry. The most recent release contains summary statistics from the pension's element of the 2020 Northern Ireland survey. The survey information related to the pay-week (or other pay period if the employee was paid less frequently) which included 22nd April 2020, the reference date for the 2020 survey.

ASHE collects information on employee membership of the current employer's pension scheme. This does not include preserved rights in any former employer's pension scheme or pensions paid by a former employer. Employees are defined as making contributions to a workplace pension if they have made a contribution, or had a contribution made on their behalf, in the survey reference period.

Workplace pension reforms

The [Pensions Act 2014](#) was an update of the [Pensions Act 2008](#), which put in place a framework for workplace pension reform designed to increase private pension saving in the UK. One of the main reforms was that, from October 2012, all eligible employees were to be automatically enrolled into a qualifying workplace pension scheme (although workers were able to opt out of their employer's scheme if they wish). This bulletin provides comparative analysis between the most recent year and 2012, the reporting period prior to the initial introduction of automatic enrolment.

[Automatic enrolment](#) applies to eligible employees aged between 22 years and [State Pension age](#) who are not already participating in a qualifying workplace pension scheme. When automatic enrolment was introduced in October 2012, eligible employees were those earning more than £8,105 per year (threshold increased to £10,000 in April

2016). It was introduced in [stages](#), based on the size of the employer's PAYE scheme on 1 April 2012, beginning with those employers with 250 or more employees and rolling-out to all employers by February 2018. At the time of the ASHE 2018 survey, the roll-out of automatic enrolment was complete.

Further information on automatic enrolment can be found on the NI Direct website at: [Enrolling into a pension at work](#)



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:

- Removed pre-release access to enhance trustworthiness.
- Created a new ASHE Pensions web page to make it more accessible for users.
- Reduced respondent burden by providing the option to respond electronically to the survey.

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Methodology

The Annual Survey of Hours and Earnings (ASHE) is a UK wide survey that provides a wide range of information on earnings, including workplace pension type by age, gender, occupation and industry. The Office for National Statistics (ONS) carries out ASHE in GB, and it is carried out by the NI Statistics and Research Agency (NISRA) in NI.

In 2009, ASHE moved from using the SIC 2003 categorisation of business activities to the new SIC 2007 activity codes.

[More information on the extent of the revisions and correspondence between SIC 2007 and the former SIC 2003](#)

The Standard Occupational Classification 2000 (SOC 2000) used for ASHE was replaced by the Standard Occupational Classification 2010 (SOC 2010) in 2013. Since the SOC forms part of the methodology by which ASHE data are weighted to produce estimates for NI, this has caused a discontinuity in the ASHE time series. Therefore, the revised estimates for 2011, and all subsequent provisional and revised estimates, are not directly comparable to earlier results.

[The major differences between the SOC 2000 and SOC 2010 classifications are summarised in this document, starting at page 62.](#)

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, and therefore is subject to an associated level of sampling error. Someone who is in more than one PAYE scheme may appear more than once.

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.

ASHE coverage change in 2014

In 2013, HM Revenue and Customs (HMRC) changed the criteria which determine how businesses are obliged to report employees' earnings via their Pay as You Earn (PAYE) schemes. The PAYE system is the frame for the ASHE sample. Until this change, businesses were only required to operate PAYE for employees whose earnings were above the Lower Earnings Limit (LEL) for National Insurance contributions (currently £111 per week) and they did not report all new jobs until the end of the tax year. The new rules require employers to report the details of all of their employee jobs via their PAYE schemes, whatever their earnings, provided that they have at least one employee earning above the LEL. In addition, employers must report for all jobs in 'real-time', meaning that they cannot wait until the end of the tax year. This new system is known as 'Real-Time Information' (RTI).

In theory, ONS judges that the impact of the move to RTI on the estimates for ASHE in 2014 is negligible. It is possible that at some lower levels of disaggregation, there may be a more pronounced effect, perhaps because RTI has resulted in different behavioural changes for employers in particular regions or in particular sectors.

Response

A total of 6,207 ASHE returns were received by NISRA in 2020 (80% of those sampled). 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.

Confidentiality

Information on earnings and hours is obtained in confidence from employers under the authority of The Statistics of Trade and Employment (NI) 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.