

# Northern Ireland Labour Market Report

Theme: Labour Market

Frequency: Monthly

Geographical Area: Northern Ireland

## Key Points

- The number of people on the NI claimant count (experimental) increased by 200 over the month to March 2020 to 29,900. (The reference date was the 12<sup>th</sup> March). The experimental Claimant Count includes Jobseeker's Allowance Claimants and those claimants of Universal Credit who were claiming principally for the reason of being unemployed.
- There were 557 proposed redundancies in March 2020 and a further 712 proposed in the current month to 20<sup>th</sup> April. The department was notified of 231 confirmed redundancies in March 2020, taking the number of confirmed redundancies to 3,050 in 12 months to end of March. This is higher than the previous 12 months (2,359).
- The latest Labour Force Survey (LFS) estimates for the period December-February 2020 indicate that, over the quarter, the unemployment rate increased, the employment rate decreased and the economic inactivity rate was unchanged.
- The LFS indicated that the NI unemployment rate (16+) increased over the quarter (0.2pps) and decreased over the year (0.5pps) to one of the lowest rates on record (2.5%) in December-February 2020. Although recent changes were not statistically significant, the unemployment rate was significantly below rates in 2018. The NI unemployment rate was below the UK rate (4.0%), the Republic of Ireland rate (4.8%) and the EU (27) rate (6.6%).
- The proportion of people aged 16 to 64 in work (the employment rate) decreased over the quarter (0.1pps) and increased over the year (1.3pps) to one of the highest rates on record (72.5%). Although recent changes were not statistically significant, the employment rate was significantly above rates in 2018. The latest employment rate recorded for the whole of the UK was the highest on record at 76.6%.
- The NI economic inactivity rate (the proportion of people aged from 16 to 64 who were not working and not seeking or available to work) was unchanged over the quarter and decreased by 0.9pps over the year to one of the lowest rates on record (25.6%). Although recent changes were not statistically significant, the economic inactivity rate was significantly below rates in 2018. The NI economic inactivity rate remained above the UK rate (20.2%), which is the lowest on record.

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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 August 2010 following a full [assessment](#) against the [Code of Practice](#). A [compliance check](#) in March 2020 recommended the continued designation of the report as a National Statistic. These statistics were considered as part of a [wider assessment](#) of UK employment and jobs statistics.

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 Labour Market Report, providing more context to results by setting recent changes within context of longer term trends;
- Removed pre-release access to enhance trustworthiness, and brought forward the publication date as a result;
- Improved timeliness of [calendar quarter data](#) (ranging from 1 week to 3 months) by incorporating quarterly tables in the main Labour Market Report Publication
- Improved quality of the LFS data by boosting the sample size and improving precision around headline estimates
- Improved accessibility of labour market statistics by [changing publication practices](#) so that reports are [no longer released on public holidays](#). Temporarily changed [timing of release](#) in line with change in ONS release practices in response to COVID-19.

# 1 Summary of Labour Market Statistics

Updated April 2020

## Change over quarter

Seasonally adjusted LFS estimates for Northern Ireland for the period December-February 2020 showed that, over the quarter:

- the unemployment rate increased by 0.2pps to 2.5% Not statistically significant
- the employment rate decreased by 0.1pps to 72.5% Not statistically significant
- the economic inactivity rate was unchanged at 25.6% Not statistically significant

The seasonally adjusted experimental claimant count (Jobseekers Allowance plus some out-of-work claimants of Universal Credit) showed that in March 2020, there was:

- an increase of 200 to 29,900

During March 2020 there were:

- 231 confirmed redundancies notified to the Department, higher than the previous month's total of 23.
- 557 proposed redundancies and a further 712 proposed in the current month to 20th April.

**Table 1: Labour Market Summary**

	Time Period	Estimate (Confidence interval)	Change over quarter (Confidence interval)	Change over year (Confidence interval)
Unemployment <sup>1</sup>	Dec-Feb 2020	22,000 (+/-5,000)	2,000 (+/-5,000)	-4,000 (+/-8,000)
Employment <sup>2</sup>	Dec-Feb 2020	877,000 (+/-19,000)	-4,000 (+/-18,000)	17,000 (+/-26,000)
Economically inactive <sup>2</sup>	Dec-Feb 2020	574,000 (+/-18,000)	4,000 (+/-17,000)	-6,000 (+/-26,000)
Unemployment rate <sup>1</sup>	Dec-Feb 2020	2.5% (+/-0.6)	0.2pps (+/-0.5)	-0.5pps (+/-0.8)
Employment rate <sup>2</sup>	Dec-Feb 2020	72.5% (+/-1.5)	-0.1pps (+/-1.3)	1.3pps (+/-2.1)
Economic inactivity rate <sup>2</sup>	Dec-Feb 2020	25.6% (+/-1.4)	0.0pps (+/-1.3)	-0.9pps (+/-2.0)
		Estimate	Change over month	
Experimental Claimant Count <sup>3</sup>	Mar 2020	29,900	200	
Redundancies <sup>4</sup>				
Confirmed	Mar 2020	231	208	
Proposed	Mar 2020	557	458	

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LFS data are seasonally adjusted

More information on understanding confidence intervals is available on the LFS Background Information section of the NISRA website – [Estimating and reporting uncertainty](#) paper

<sup>1</sup> People aged 16 and over. Unemployment rate = total unemployed as a proportion of the economically active.

<sup>2</sup> Levels for all persons aged 16 and over, rates for working age (16-64).

<sup>3</sup> The number of claimants on 12<sup>th</sup> March, seasonally adjusted

<sup>4</sup> Redundancies in the calendar month, not seasonally adjusted.

## NI Labour Market Structure: Change over year

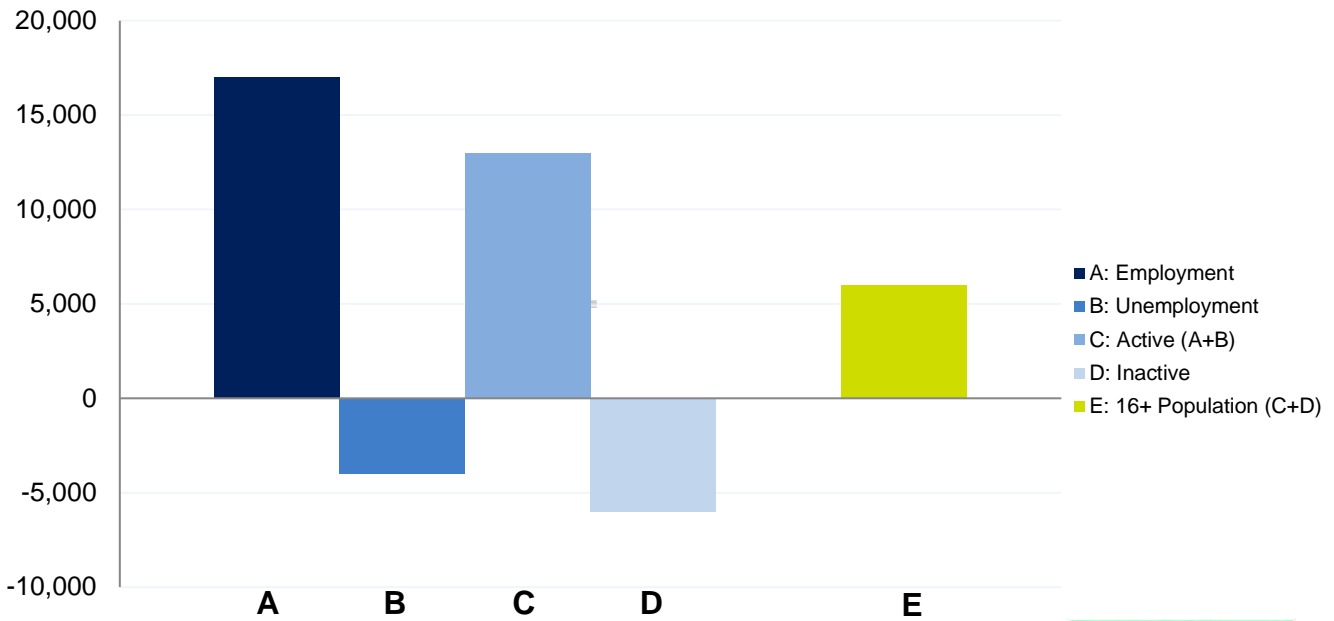
Seasonally adjusted LFS estimates for Northern Ireland for the period December-February 2020 showed that over the year:

- the unemployment rate decreased by 0.5pps to 2.5% Not statistically significant
- the employment rate increased by 1.3pps to 72.5% Not statistically significant
- the economic inactivity rate decreased by 0.9pps to 25.6% Not statistically significant

Over the latest twelve month period there were:

- 3,050 confirmed redundancies which was an increase of 29% from the previous year (2,359).

**Figure 1: NI labour market structure (16+): change over year**



Note: figures rounded so may not sum

[Download in excel](#)

## UK summary

Seasonally adjusted LFS estimates for the UK for the period December-February 2020 showed:

- the unemployment rate (4.0%) increased by 0.1pps over the quarter and was unchanged over the year
- the employment rate (76.6%) increased by 0.2pps over the quarter and by 0.4pps over the year to the highest on record
- the economic inactivity rate (20.2%) decreased by 0.3pps over the quarter and by 0.4pps over the year to the lowest on record

## **Commentary**

The Labour Force Survey estimates relate to December to February 2020 and the experimental Claimant count data refers to the 12<sup>th</sup> March. The impact of COVID-19 on the labour market is therefore not reflected in these estimates.

The number of out of work benefits' claimants (the experimental Claimant Count) showed a small increase (200 or 0.8%) over the month to March (reference date 12th March). The number of claimants increased by 1.0% in the UK as a whole.

Labour Force Survey estimates showed a marginal decrease in the employment rate, a marginal increase in the unemployment rate, and no change in the economic inactivity rate over the quarter to December-February 2020. The unemployment (2.5%) and economic inactivity (25.6%) rates were both lower than one year ago while the employment rate (72.5%) was higher than one year ago. The unemployment rate in the UK was 4.0%, the economic inactivity rate was the lowest on record at 20.2% and the employment rate the highest on record at 76.6%.

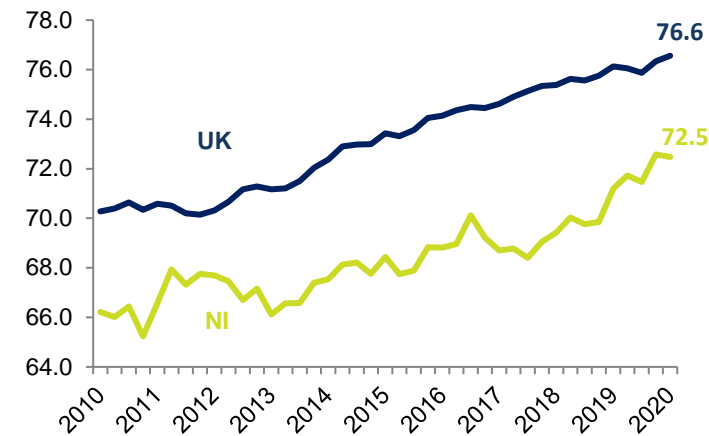
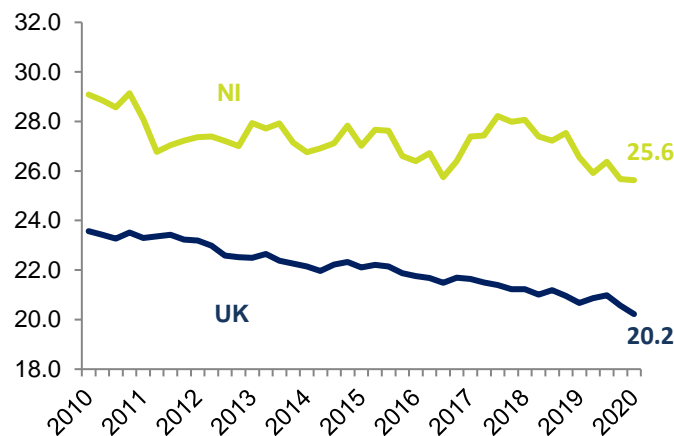
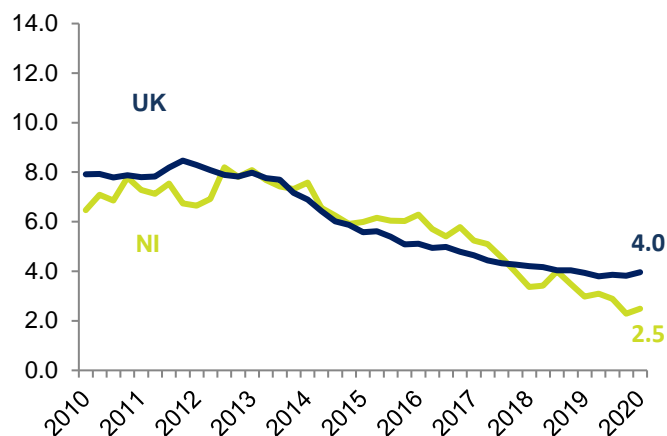
**Further information is available on the NISRA - Economic and Labour Market Statistics website: [LMR Headline Tables](#).**

# December-February 2020

## Unemployment – 2.5%

## Economic Inactivity – 25.6%

## Employment – 72.5%



### Quarterly Change

NI 0.2pps<sup>1</sup>



UK 0.1pps



NI 0.0pps



UK -0.3pps



NI -0.1pps



UK 0.2pps



### Annual Change

NI - 0.5pps



UK 0.0pps



NI - 0.9pps



UK -0.4pps



NI 1.3pps



UK 0.4pps



pps<sup>1</sup> = percentage points

Labour Force Survey, seasonally adjusted and subject to future revisions.

Data published – 21<sup>st</sup> April 2020

## Things users need to know

The Labour Force Survey data relates to December to February 2020. The data therefore pre-dates the restrictions on work and travel introduced in March to slow the spread of COVID-19.

Data from the experimental [claimant count](#) have been included in the Labour Market Report (LMR) as well as [redundancy](#) data for the first three weeks of April to provide more up-to-date indicators of the Labour Market. Users should continue to note the experimental nature of the claimant count due to the roll-out of universal credit and that redundancy notifications, although a useful indicator, provide an incomplete picture of the total number of redundancies in the economy.

NISRA suspended all face to face household interviews in the middle of March due to the coronavirus pandemic. From April all Labour Force Survey interviews were conducted by telephone. In addition an online Labour Market Survey was launched in April, designed to capture key labour market data. It is intended that this will be used to supplement the main Labour Force Survey data.

Both surveys have had questions added to assess the impact of COVID-19 on people's employment and working patterns. For further information see the [COVID-19 and the production of statistics](#) section on the NISRA website and an [ONS Statement](#) on ensuring the best possible information during COVID-19 through safe data collection.

Ad-hoc data requests related to the labour market impacts of coronavirus and associated schemes are added to the [user requested data](#) section of the NISRA website. More information on the production of LFS outputs can be found in the [Background information – LFS](#) section of the NISRA website.

## Context

The LMR is a monthly overview of Northern Ireland key labour market statistics. It includes figures from the Labour Force Survey (LFS), the Quarterly Employment Survey, the Annual Survey of Hours and Earnings, claimant count, redundancies counts and vacancies data. More information about the data sources can be found in Section 6. Where available, comparative UK data (produced by the ONS) have been included. The latest labour market statistics are available on the [ONS website](#).

A recent Labour Market Outputs consultation ([Labour Market Statistics User Engagement page](#)) showed labour market statistics are used for policy monitoring and research, academic and private sector research, service planning and delivery. Key users of Northern Ireland labour market statistics include government departments, in particular the Department for the Economy (DfE), which uses the statistics to design and monitor the impact of economic and labour market policy. Other Government departments such as the Executive Office, the Department of Finance (DoF) and the Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs (DAERA), as well as bodies such as Invest NI and Belfast City Council, regularly require specific [ad hoc](#) labour market analysis in order to monitor policies for example, equality and employment. In addition, significant 'non-governmental' users of labour market statistics (including the media, banks, academics, private consultants and the general public) use the data primarily for reporting or researching the performance of the economy in general. Labour market statistics attract widespread media coverage, with a number of broadcasters publishing articles on the labour market on a monthly basis, generally on the day of publication of the LMR.

Labour market statistics feature in the [DfE Economic Commentary](#), which provides an overview of the state of the Northern Ireland economy, in context with the UK and Republic of Ireland. The most up-to-date official statistics on the economy and labour market are available on the [Economic Overview section](#) of the NISRA website.

Further information on using labour market statistics can be found on the Office for National Statistics (ONS) website:

- [Guide to Labour Market Statistics](#)
- [Glossary](#)



## Labour Force Survey

The Labour Force Survey (LFS) is a household sample survey carried out by interviewing individuals about their personal circumstances and work. It provides a rich source of information on the labour force using internationally agreed definitions. Estimates are subject to sampling error (see section 6 and the [Estimating and Reporting Uncertainty](#) paper for details).

**LFS unemployment:** The International Labour Organisation (ILO) defines unemployed as those aged 16+ without a job who were able to start work in the two weeks following their LFS interview and had either looked for work in the four weeks prior to interview or were waiting to start a job they had already obtained.

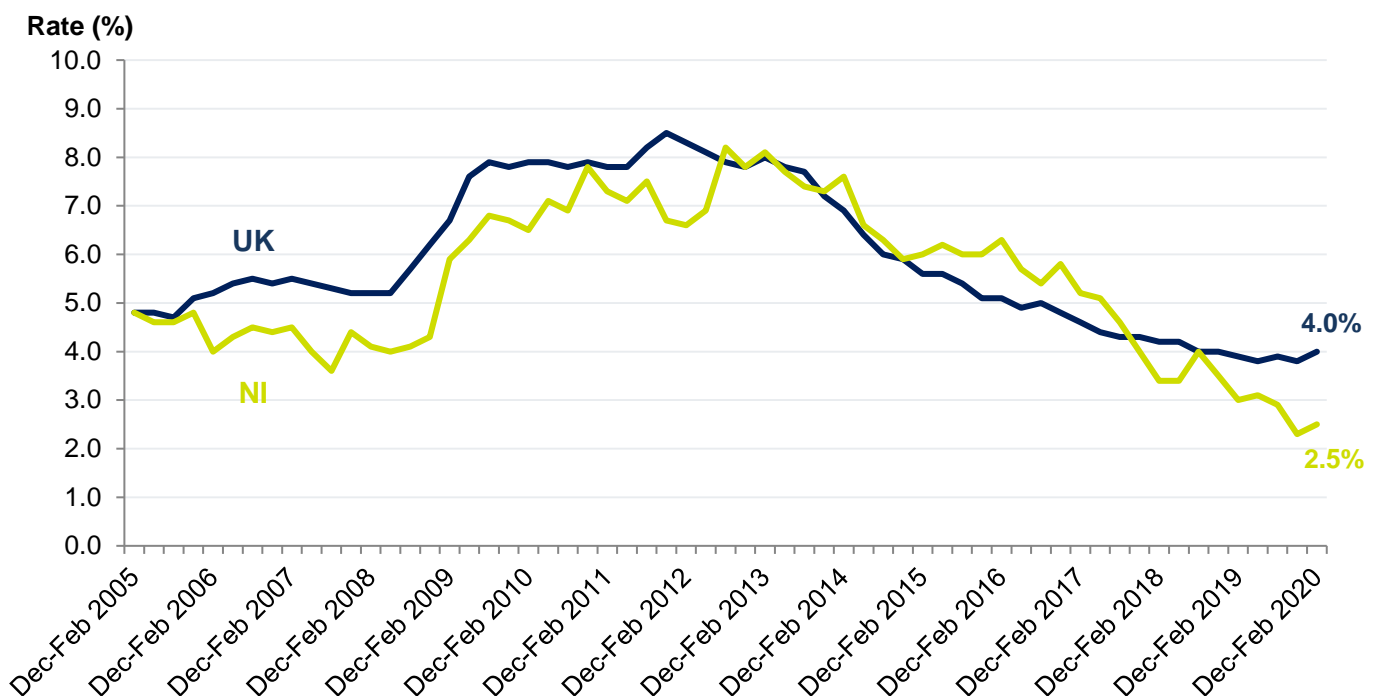
**Long-Term Unemployment:** those who have been unemployed for 12 months or more.

**Youth Unemployment:** unemployed people aged 16-24 years.

## Key Findings

- LFS unemployment rate in NI increased over the quarter and decreased over the year to 2.5% (one of the lowest on record)
- The NI unemployment rate has remained below the UK rate since mid-2017
- The UK unemployment rate is 4.0%

Figure 2: Seasonally adjusted unemployment rate (16+), Dec-Feb 2005 to Dec-Feb 2020



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Figure 2 shows unemployment rates on the current 3 month rolling average for NI and the UK over the last 15 years. The unemployment rate in NI reached over 8% in 2012/13 and is now at one of the lowest points at 2.5% in December-February 2020. This is in line with the recent trends in the UK unemployment, where the rate is at one of its lowest points of 4.0% in December-February 2020. The NI unemployment rate has been below the UK rate since mid-2017.

## **LFS unemployment**

The unemployment rate (16+) for the period December-February 2020 was estimated at 2.5%, this was:

- an increase of 0.2pps over the quarter
- a decrease of 0.5pps over the year

The number of unemployed persons aged 16+ was estimated at 22,000, which was:

- up 2,000 from last quarter
- down 4,000 from the same period last year

## **UK regional and international LFS comparisons**

The most recent NI unemployment rate (2.5%) was:

- below the overall UK average rate (4.0%)
- the lowest rate among the twelve UK regions
- below the European Union (27) rate (6.6%) and the Republic of Ireland rate (4.8%) for January 2020

## **Long-term and youth unemployment**

Please note that the number of long-term unemployed and youth unemployment are below the normal statistical quality threshold for release.

**Further information is available on the NISRA - Economic and Labour Market Statistics website:**

[LFS unemployment](#)

## Claimant count (experimental)

The claimant count is an administrative data source derived from Jobs and Benefits Offices systems, which records the number of people claiming unemployment-related benefits. In March 2018 the NI claimant count measure changed from one based solely on Jobseekers Allowance (JSA) to an experimental measure based on JSA claimants and out-of-work Universal Credit (UC) claimants who were claiming principally for the reason of being unemployed. The definition of out-of-work UC Claimants is close to but not exactly the same as JSA claimants. Please see Section 6 for more details. **The most recent count date was 12<sup>th</sup> March.**

### Correction note – April 2020\*

A number of claims across the UK to the UC element of the Claimant Count were coded to incorrect locations for data relating to December 2018 to November 2019. This has been corrected for December 2019 onwards, but previous periods remain affected. The impact of the revision on NI for December 2019 was an increase of less than 1,000 cases.

**Claimant count (experimental):** The NI claimant count consists of all people claiming Jobseeker's Allowance (JSA) plus out-of-work Universal Credit (UC) claimants who were claiming principally for the reason of being unemployed. They must declare that they are out of work, capable of, available for and actively seeking work during the week in which their claim is made.

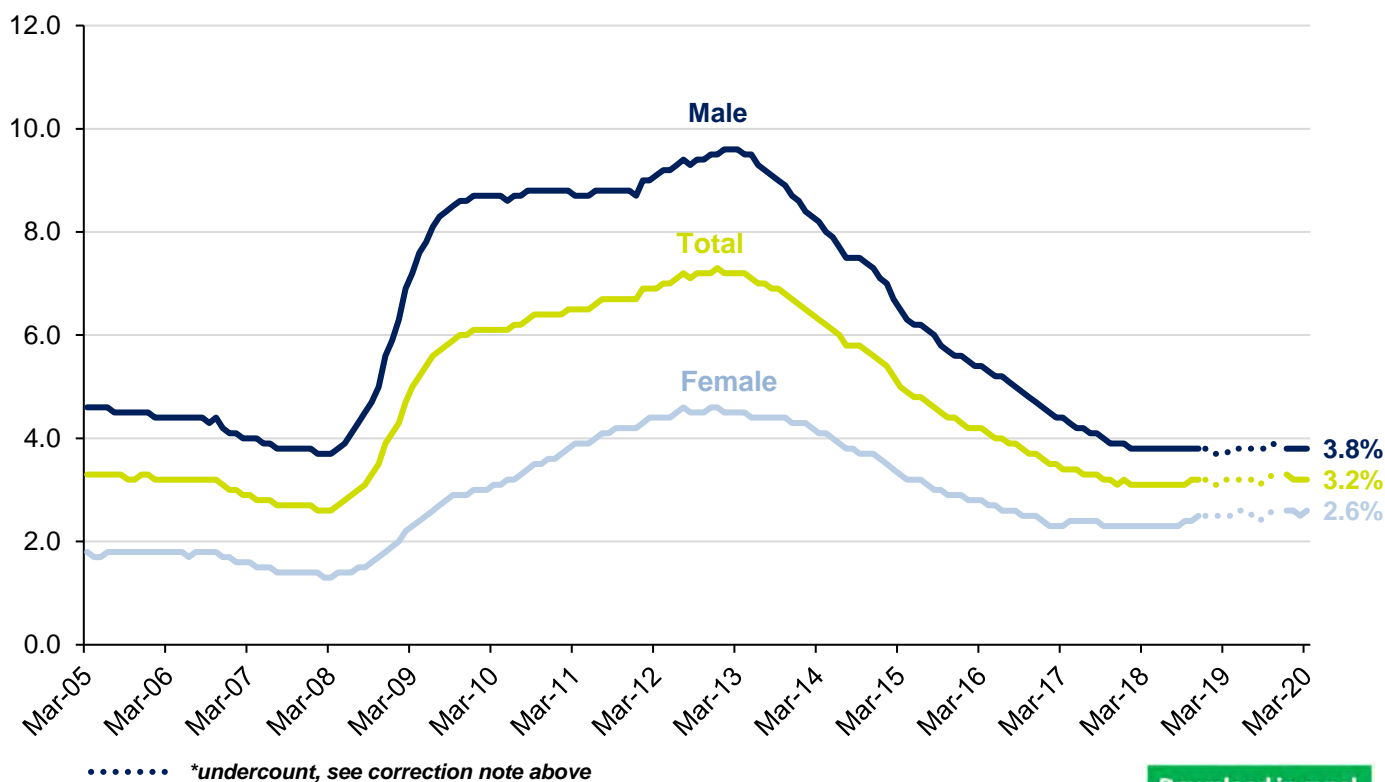
**Universal Credit:** Universal Credit was rolled out in NI for new claims of six benefits, including income-based JSA, on a phased geographical basis between September 2017 and December 2018.

**Percentage of workforce:** This measure expresses the number of claimants as a percentage of workforce jobs plus claimants. Workforce jobs are the sum of employee jobs, self-employment jobs, HM Forces, and government-supported trainees. This measure is only available at the NI level.

## Key Findings

- NI claimant count (experimental) increased over the month by 200 (0.8%)
- In March 2020, the NI claimant count (experimental) was 29,900, 3.2% of the workforce

**Figure 3: Seasonally adjusted claimant count (experimental) monthly rates, March 2005 - March 2020**



[Download in excel](#)

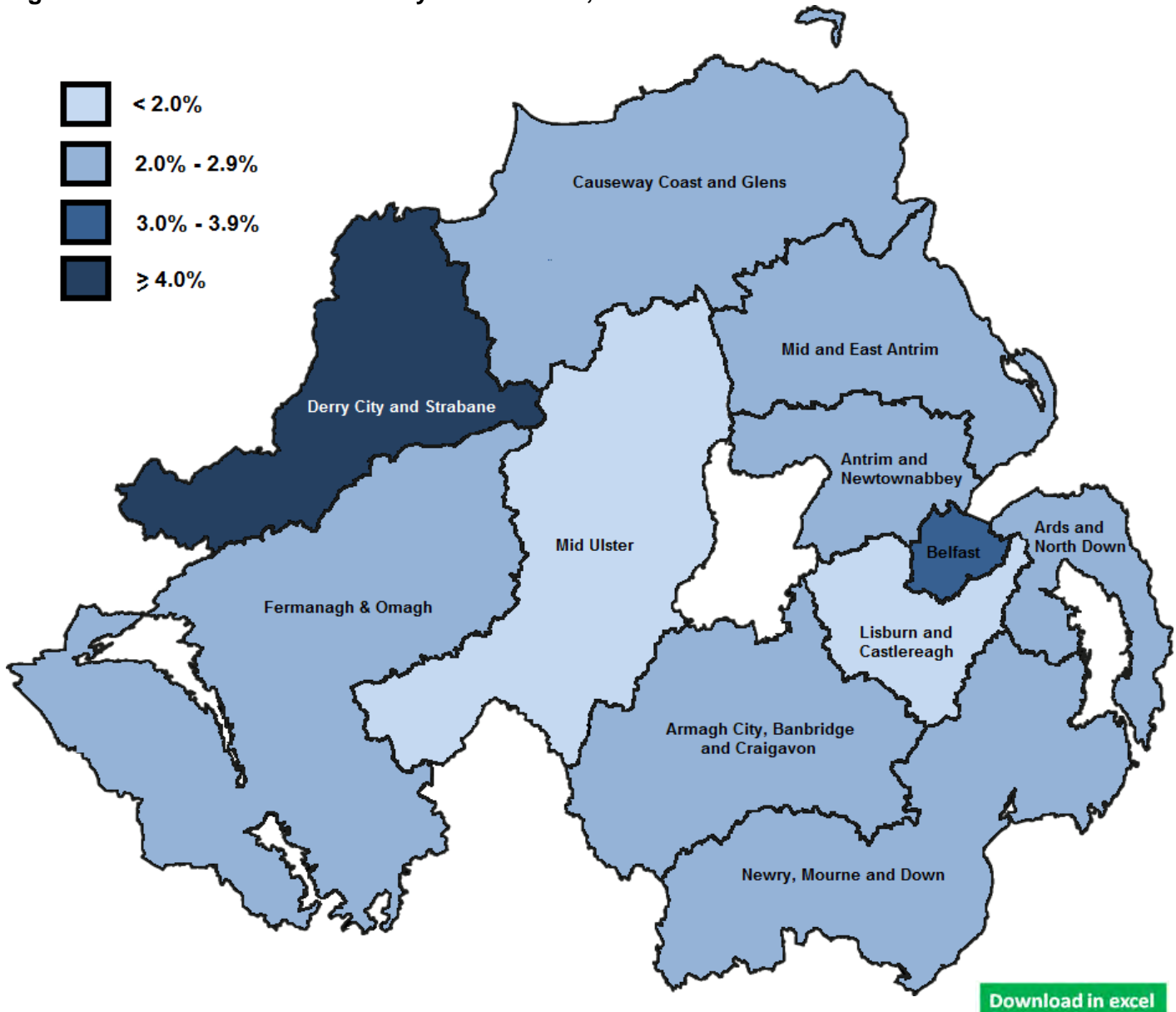
## Claimant count (experimental) unemployment

The NI seasonally adjusted claimant count stood at 29,900 (3.2% of the workforce) in March 2020, representing:

- an increase of 200 (0.8%) from last month's revised total
- an increase of 0.9% in males and 0.6% in females
- no change in the workforce unemployment rate over the month.

The UK seasonally adjusted claimant count increased by 1.0% over the month.

**Figure 4: Claimant count rate by Council Area, March 2020**



The Council Area comparison using claimant count data unadjusted for seasonality found that:

- the highest claimant count rates were in Derry City and Strabane (4.3%) and Belfast (3.3%).
- the lowest claimant count rates were in Lisburn and Castlereagh (1.6%) and Mid Ulster (1.7%).

Annual and monthly claimant count data are available on the NINIS website in the form of interactive maps for [Parliamentary Constituency](#) and [Council Area](#).

Further details on the experimental claimant count are available on the NISRA - Economic and Labour Market Statistics website: [Claimant Count](#)

## Redundancies

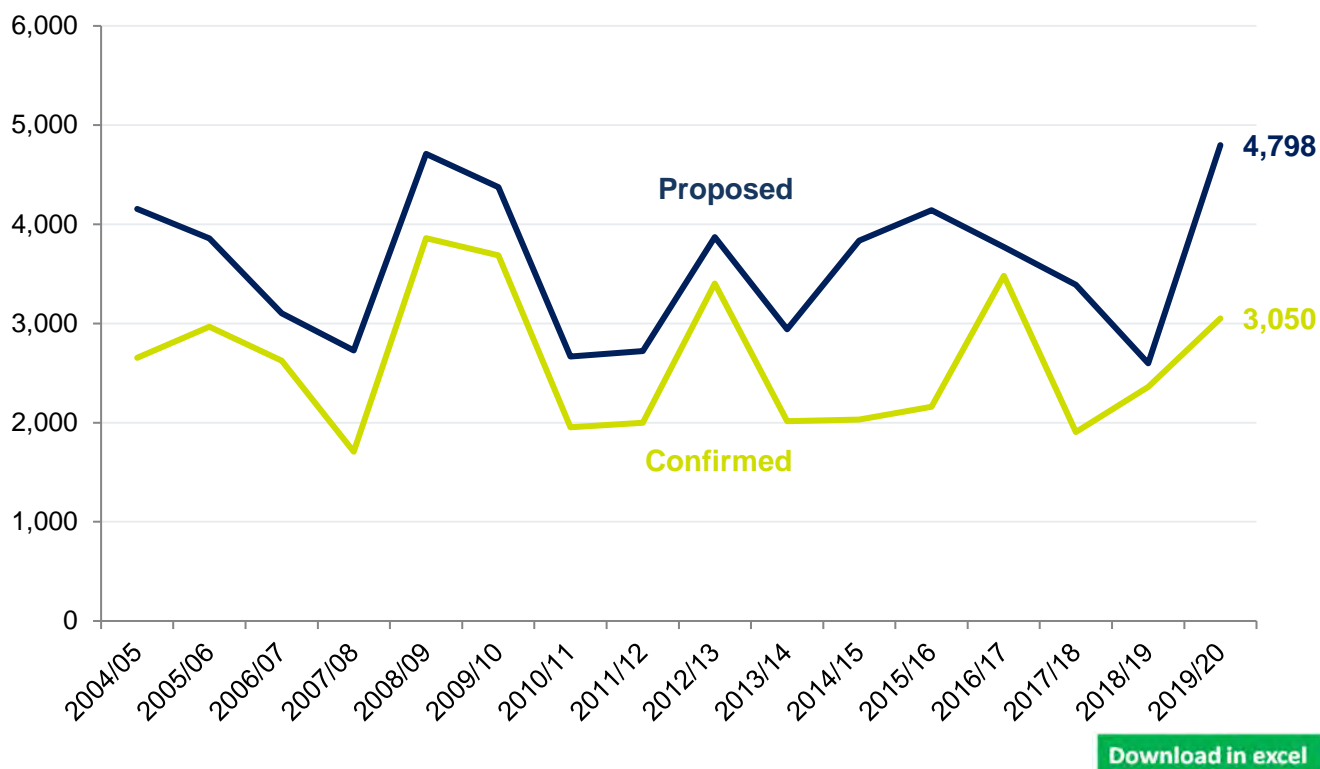
Under the Employment Rights (Northern Ireland) Order 1996 (Amended 8 October 2006) companies are only legally required to notify the Department of impending redundancies of 20 or more employees. Companies who propose less than 20 redundancies are not included in the statistics. As a result, the figures provided are likely to be an underestimate of total job losses, however, it is not possible to quantify the extent of the shortfall.

**Redundancies:** Subject to the criteria mentioned above, employers must notify the Department of (a) redundancies proposed and (b) redundancies confirmed. Since all proposed redundancies do not actually take place, the confirmed total provides a better indication of real job losses.

### Key Findings

- 231 confirmed redundancies in March 2020
- 557 redundancies were proposed in March 2020
- 712 proposed redundancies in the current month up to 20<sup>th</sup> April

**Figure 5: Confirmed and proposed redundancies – Annual totals, Apr-Mar 2005 to Apr-Mar 2020**



Redundancy notification data shows a high degree of correlation between proposed and confirmed redundancies when grouped by year. When compared on a monthly basis the correlation is lower as there is a time lag between proposing and making redundancies. The graph shows the number of proposed redundancies is higher than confirmed redundancies indicating that not all proposed redundancies take place.

The highest number of confirmed redundancies in the 15 year time period above, was recorded in 2008/09 at just under 3,900. The lowest number of confirmed redundancies took place in the previous year, 2007/08, numbering approximately 1,700. In the year to 31<sup>st</sup> March 2019 almost 2,600 redundancies were proposed – the lowest annual total in the time period shown, while in 2019/20 the highest number of proposed redundancies were recorded (approximately 4,800).

## **Confirmed redundancies**

During March 2020, the Department was notified of:

- 231 confirmed redundancies, higher than the previous monthly total of 23.

Over the latest twelve month period there were:

- 3,050 confirmed redundancies, which was an increase of 29% from the previous year (2,359)
- 1,640 (or 54%) confirmed in manufacturing, which was higher than the previous year (1,102 or 47%)
- 564 (18% of all confirmed redundancies) in the wholesale and retail trade; repair of motor vehicles and motorcycles, which was lower than the previous year (614 or 26%)
- a further 213 (7% of all confirmed redundancies) in administrative and support service activities higher than the previous year (145 or 6%).

## **Proposed redundancies**

The most recent data shows, there were:

- 557 proposed redundancies in March, compared with the previous month's total of 99 proposed redundancies.
- 712 proposed redundancies between 1<sup>st</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> April.

Over the latest twelve month period there were:

- 4,798 proposed redundancies, which was an increase of 85% from the previous year (2,598)
- 2,193 (46%) proposed in manufacturing, which was higher than one year ago (810 or 31%)
- 1,478 (31% of all proposed redundancies) in the wholesale and retail trade; repair of motor vehicles and motorcycles, higher than the previous year (560 or 22%)
- a further 285 (6% of all proposed redundancies) in transportation and storage which was higher than the previous year (81 or 3%).

It should be noted that since not all proposed redundancies actually take place, the confirmed total provides a better indication of real job losses.

**Further information is available on the NISRA - Economic and Labour Market Statistics website:**  
[Redundancies](#)

## LFS employment

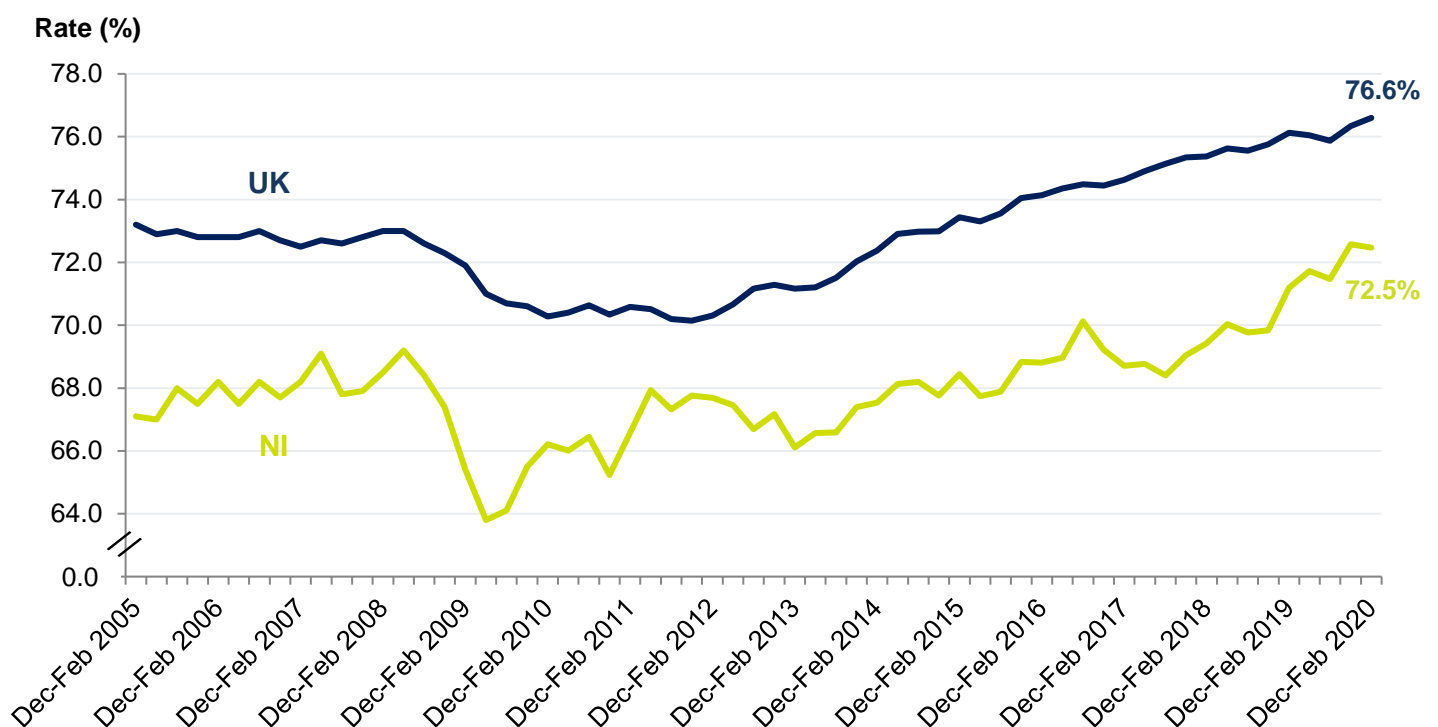
**LFS employed:** people aged 16 or over who did at least one hour of paid work in the reference week (whether as an employee or self-employed); those who had a paid job that they were temporarily away from; those on government-supported training and employee programmes and those doing unpaid family work.

**Note:** For analysis purposes, numbers refer to people aged 16 and over while rates relate to people aged between 16 and 64 years

### Key Findings

- The employment rate decreased over the quarter and increased over the year to 72.5% (one of the highest rates on record)
- NI employment rate remained below the UK average and was the joint lowest (with the North East) of the twelve UK regions
- UK employment rate is at 76.6% (the highest on record)

Figure 6: Seasonally adjusted employment rate (16-64), Dec-Feb 2005 to Dec-Feb 2020



[Download in excel](#)

Figure 6 shows that, over the last 15 years, the NI employment rate has been consistently below the UK average. Although showing a similar trend, the fall in the employment rate in NI between 2008 and 2009 (decrease of over 5 percentage points over one year) is steeper than the UK average.

The most recent NI employment rate for those aged 16-64 for the period December-February 2020 was estimated at 72.5%, one of the highest rates on record. Similarly, the UK employment rate for those aged 16-64 was at a record high of 76.6%. Increases were experienced in both male and female employment rates over the year.

## Employment 16-64

The most recent NI employment rate for those aged 16-64 for the period December-February 2020 was estimated at 72.5%. This represents:

- a decrease of 0.1pps over the quarter
- an increase of 1.3pps over the year.

Annual changes by gender included:

- the male (16-64) employment rate (76.6%) increased by 2.2pps over the year
- the female (16-64) employment rate (68.5%) increased by 0.4pps over the year.

## UK Regional comparison

The employment rate in NI (72.5%) was:

- below the UK average (76.6%)
- the joint lowest rate among the twelve UK regions (with the North East at 72.5%)

## Employment 16+

The number of persons in employment (16+) during the period December-February 2020 was estimated at 877,000, which was:

- a decrease of 4,000 over the quarter
- an increase of 17,000 over the year.

## Employment by gender

Of those aged 16+ in employment, 52% (460,000) were male and 48% (417,000) were female. Annual changes by gender included:

- the number of males who were employed increased over the year by 12,000 to 460,000
- the number of females who were employed increased over the year by 4,000 to 417,000.

## Self-Employment<sup>5</sup>

Of those aged 16+ in employment, 15.5% (136,000) were self-employed. Annual changes by gender included:

- the number of males who were self-employed increased over the year by 10,000 to 105,000
- the number of females who were self-employed decreased over the year by 3,000 to 31,000.

**Further information is available on the NISRA - Economic and Labour Market Statistics website:**  
[LFS employment](#)

<sup>5</sup> Please note that self-employment figures are not adjusted for seasonality and the % of self-employed is calculated as a percentage of the unadjusted total number aged 16+ in employment



## Quarterly Employment Survey (QES) – First published March 2020

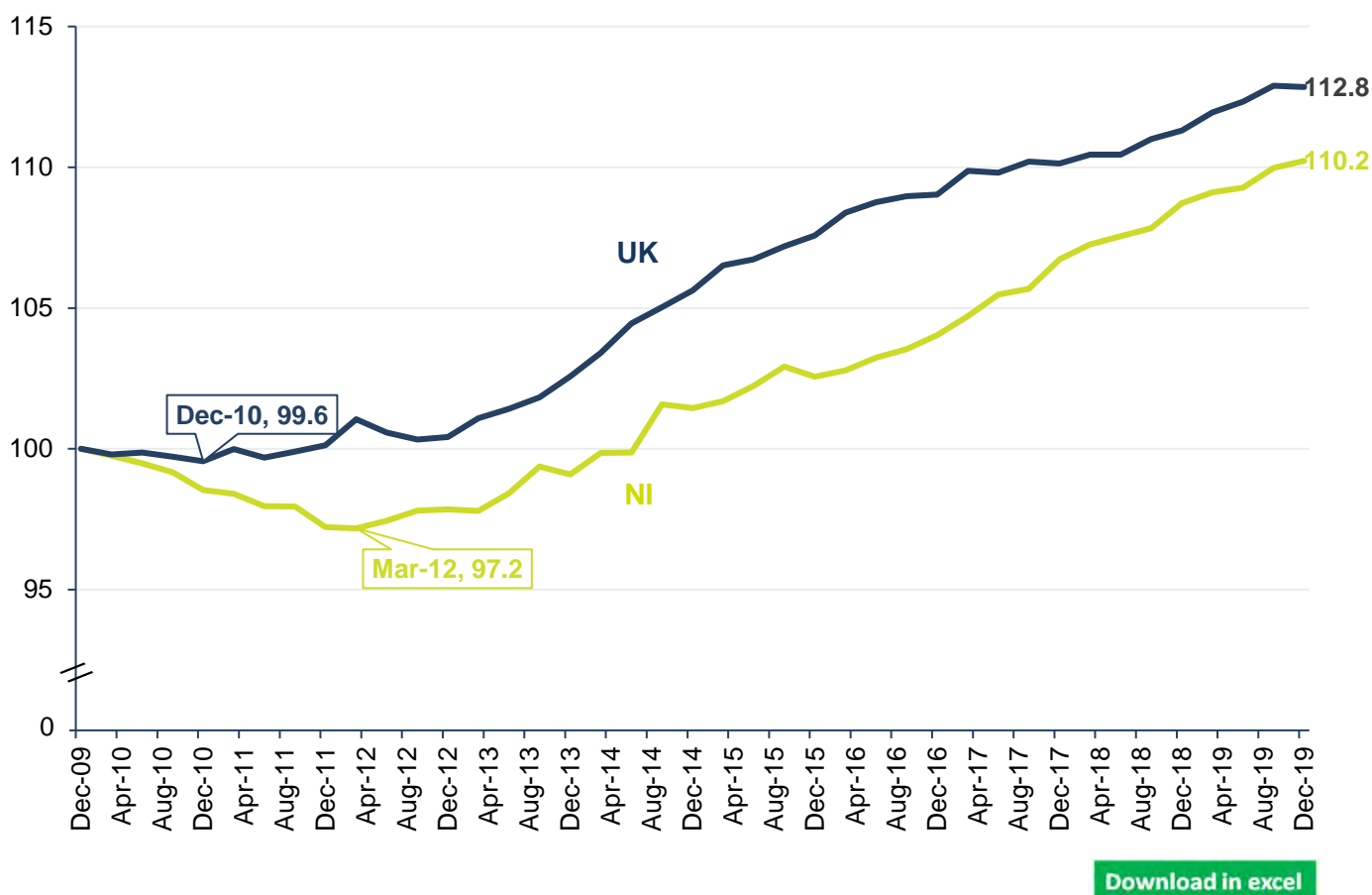
The QES is a business survey of approximately 6,000 companies that are asked to provide employment data for each of their business activities.

**QES employee:** An employee is defined as anyone aged 16 years or over that is directly paid from a business's payroll for carrying out a full-time or part-time job or being on a training scheme in Northern Ireland.

### Key Findings

- Employee jobs increased over the quarter and year to a record high in December 2019
- Private sector employee jobs decreased marginally over the quarter and increased over the year
- Public sector employee jobs increased over both the quarter and the year

Figure 7: Index of Employee Jobs, December 2009 to December 2019



Figures are indexed to December 2009

Figure 7 shows the estimated seasonally adjusted employee jobs, indexed to allow comparison between NI and the UK.

The UK reached its lowest point in December 2010, more than a year before the NI low in March 2012. There are now 92,860 more employee jobs in NI since March 2012, and 3,645,000 more jobs in the UK since December 2010.

## Employee Jobs

The seasonally adjusted employee jobs total in Northern Ireland at December 2019 was 784,140, which was:

- an increase of 0.2% (1,790 jobs) over the quarter from the revised September 2019 estimate of 782,350.
- an increase of 1.4% (10,730 jobs) over the year from the revised December 2018 estimate of 773,410.
- Neither the quarterly nor the annual changes in employee jobs were statistically significant.

## Employee jobs by sector

The seasonally adjusted quarterly change consisted of:

- increases in the services (0.5% or 3,330 jobs) and other industries sectors (0.5% or 110 jobs).
- decreases in the manufacturing (-1.4% or -1,210 jobs) and construction sectors (-1.3% or -450 jobs).
- a decrease of 0.1% (-430 jobs) in the private sector.
- an increase of 0.5% (960 jobs) in the public sector.

Over the year to December 2019:

- increases were seen in the manufacturing (0.4% or 380 jobs), services (1.6% or 9,980 jobs) and other industries sectors (1.8% or 420 jobs).
- the construction sector decreased by 0.2% (-50 jobs).
- the private sector increased by 1.2% (6,810 jobs).
- the public sector increased by 1.8% (3,710 jobs).

Private sector jobs decreased marginally over the quarter (-0.1% or -430 jobs) and increased over the year (1.2% or 6,810 jobs).

Public sector jobs increased over the quarter (0.5% or 960 jobs) and the year (1.8% or 3,710 jobs). There are now 16,510 fewer public sector jobs than the series peak in September 2009 (-7.2%).

**Further information is available on the NISRA - Economic and Labour Market Statistics [website](#) and further breakdowns of employee jobs by geography and industry are available from the [Business Register and Employment Survey](#).**

## Comparisons between LFS Employment and QES Employee Jobs

The concept of employment (measured by the LFS as the number of people in work) differs from the concept of jobs, since a person can have more than one job, and some jobs may be shared by more than one person.

The LFS and QES measure employment in different ways. The LFS is a sample survey carried out by interviewing individuals about their personal circumstances and work. The QES is a quarterly survey of businesses which provides short term employee jobs estimates for Northern Ireland. It surveys all public sector jobs, all private sector firms with 25 or more employees, all businesses with more than one industry activity and a representative sample of smaller firms. LFS employment figures are based on a rolling three month period and QES measures the number of jobs on a particular day.

LFS employment includes those who are employed, self-employed, unpaid family workers and those on Government supported training programmes. QES employee jobs include full-time and part-time jobs and those on a training scheme and excludes self-employed.

## Vacancies – First published February 2020

Headline figures are presented for vacancies notified to the Department for Communities (DfC). A small proportion of vacancies notified are based in the UK mainland or in the Republic of Ireland. The statistics do not represent the total unsatisfied demand for staff by employers. This provides a partial picture of the true number of vacancies, as employers may advertise by other means and do not have to notify DfC of their vacancies. The 2016 Employer Skills Survey (ESS) estimated that administrative data sources account for approximately 55% of vacancies.

Vacancies in a given month relate to those on the count date, are not seasonally adjusted and are subject to revision in the following periods.

**Full-time vacancies:** Full-time vacancies include any vacancy 30 hours or over per week.

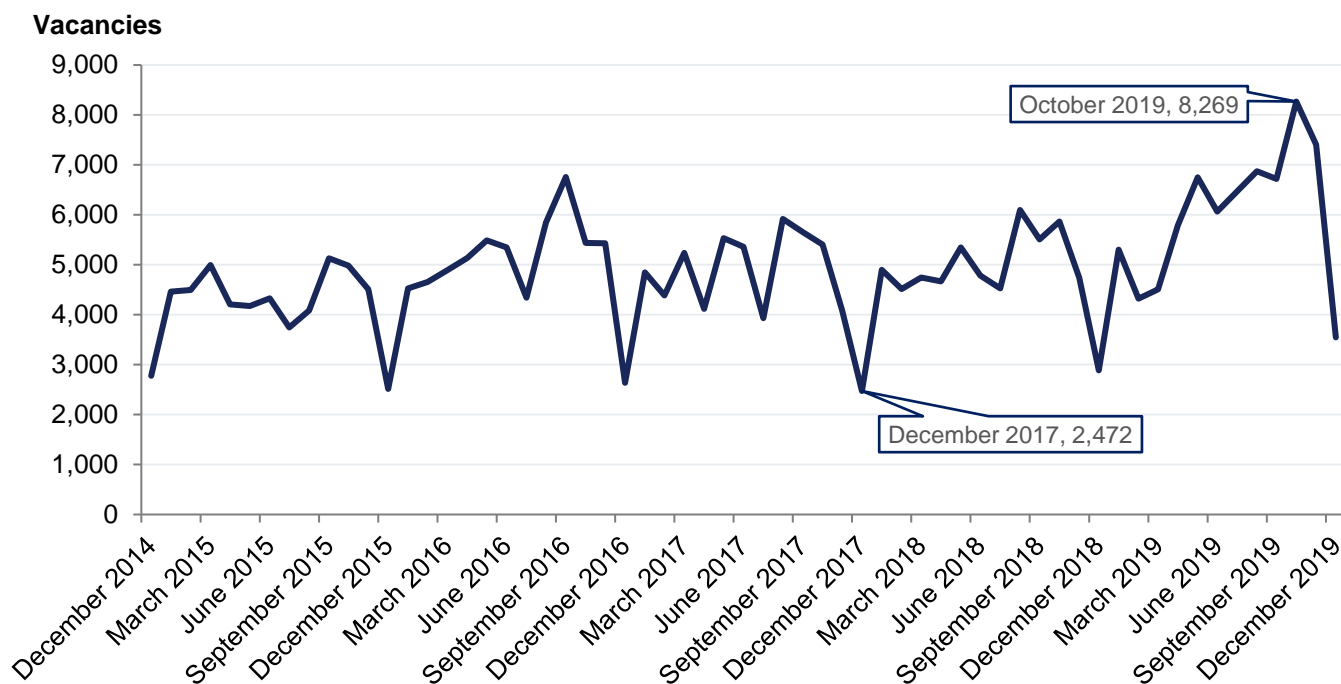
**Part-time vacancies:** Part-time vacancies include any vacancy between 1 and 29 hours per week.

**Casual vacancies:** Casual vacancies are vacancies where no regular hours are guaranteed.

### Key Findings

- There were 19,221 vacancies notified during October-December 2019. This includes full-time, part-time and casual vacancies.
- 71% of vacancies were full-time

**Figure 8: Monthly Notified Vacancies, December 2014 to December 2019**



[Download in excel](#)

Figures in the above graph are not National Statistics.

(1) Monthly notified vacancies are all new vacancy positions notified to Department for Communities. All statistics are derived from data extracted from the Department for Communities Client Management System (CMS).

(2) Vacancies data is published quarterly and reported by financial year. Data for October-December 2019 was published in January 2020.

The number of vacancies notified to Jobs and Benefits Offices/ Job Centres/ DfC display a seasonal trend, with peaks in the months preceding December and troughs in December each year. Despite these seasonal fluctuations, the number of vacancies between 2014 and 2018 centred around 5,000 per month.

An upward trend is evident in the number of vacancies notified during most of 2019, with the predicted seasonal trough occurring in December. Caution should be taken when comparing these figures to the previous year due to centralisation of the vacancy management process which began on 1<sup>st</sup> January 2019.

**Further breakdowns and background notes are available on the DfC website: [DfC Statistics](#)**

### **UK-wide Vacancy Statistics**

UK-level statistics are available on the ONS website: [ONS Statistics](#) and [ONS Vacancy Survey Methodology](#).

Vacancy statistics at the UK level are based on a business survey. Estimates show the number of vacancies had been generally increasing in the UK since 2012, however, the number has been falling since early 2019.

The most recent figures (for the January-March period) were released on the 21<sup>st</sup> April 2020 and are available from the [ONS website](#).

## LFS economic inactivity

**Economically inactive:** people who are neither in employment nor unemployed on the ILO measure. This group includes all those who are looking after a home, long term sick or disabled, students and retired.

### Key Findings

- The economic inactivity rate was unchanged over the quarter and decreased over the year to 25.6% (one of the lowest rates on record)
- NI economic inactivity remains the highest of the twelve UK regions

**Figure 9: Seasonally adjusted economic inactivity rates (16-64), Dec-Feb 2005 to Dec-Feb 2020**

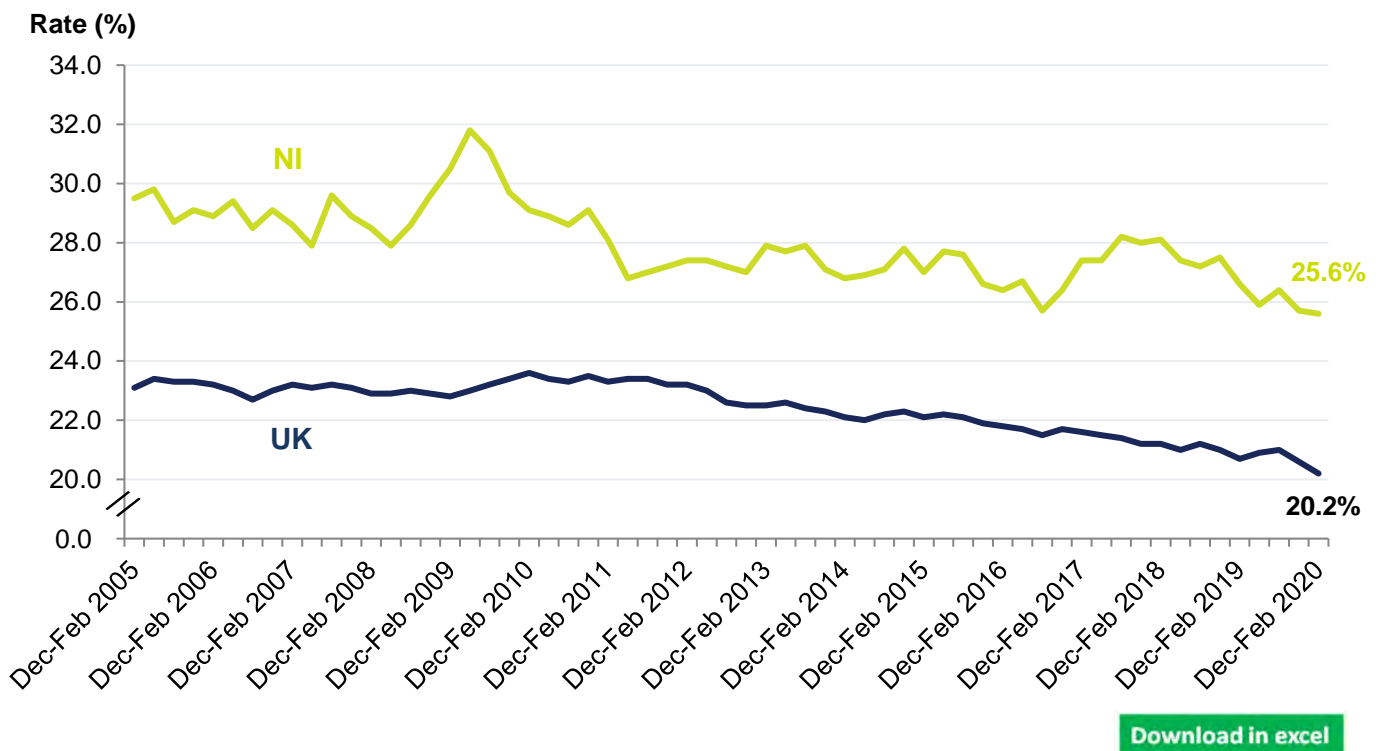


Figure 9 shows that, over the last 15 years, economic inactivity in NI has been consistently higher than the UK average. Economic inactivity peaked in NI during this time period in 2009 at almost 32% compared to the peak in the UK as a whole at 23.6% in 2010. During the past 10 years, the UK inactivity rate has mostly been on a downward trend while there is a clear trend of decreasing economic inactivity in NI since 2017.

## **Economically inactive**

The seasonally adjusted economic inactivity rate (aged 16-64) for December-February 2020 was estimated at 25.6%, which was:

- unchanged over the quarter
- a decrease of 0.9pps over the year.

The number of economically inactive persons (aged 16-64) was estimated at 299,000, which was:

- unchanged over the quarter
- a decrease of 11,000 over the year.

## **UK Regional comparison**

The NI economic inactivity rate for those aged 16-64 stood at 25.6%. This was:

- higher than the UK average rate (20.2%)
- the highest of the twelve UK regions.

**Further information is available on the NISRA - Economic and Labour Market Statistics website:**

[LFS Economic Inactivity](#)

[Economic Inactivity in Northern Ireland topic paper](#)

[Women in Northern Ireland](#)

## Annual Survey of Hours and Earnings (ASHE)

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.

**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.

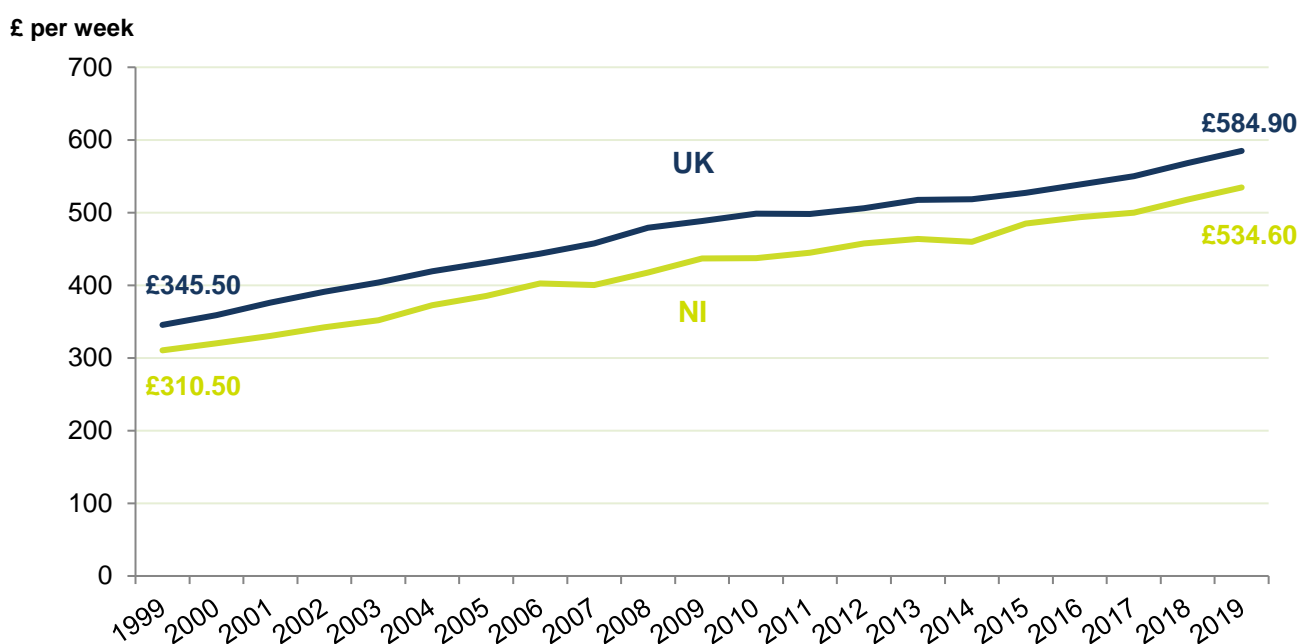
**Full-time employee** is defined as anyone aged 16 years or over that is directly paid from a business's payroll for carrying out more than 30 paid hours per week (or 25 or more for the teaching professions).

**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.

### Key Findings

- Weekly earnings in NI increased by £16.80 (3.3%) over the year and by £16.60 (2.9%) in the UK
- Real earnings increased over the year (1.2%) and have almost returned to 2009 levels
- Median public sector earnings were almost a third higher than private sector earnings
- 2019 was the tenth year where full-time females in NI earned at least as much as full-time males on average

Figure 10: Median gross weekly earnings for full-time employees in NI and the UK, April 1999-April 2019



Note: there were a number of methodological changes during the series in 2004, 2006 and 2011 – see Section 4 of the [Annual Survey of Hours and Earnings](#) publication for further information

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Over the last 20 years, the median gross weekly earnings for full-time employees has increased by an average of £11 each year in NI. At April 2019, weekly earnings:

- were £535, £50 (8.6%) lower than the UK median (£585)
- were the second lowest of the 12 UK regions
- increased by more (3.3%) than the equivalent UK median (2.9%), however, had the joint third smallest increase of the UK regions over the year.
- when adjusted for inflation, increased by 1.2%, similar to the increase of 1.3% recorded the previous year and larger than the increase in the UK (0.9%)
- in the private sector increased by 3.4% over the year, while public sector weekly earnings increased by 0.7%
- in the public sector (£625) were 31% higher than in the private sector (£479).

Hourly earnings (excluding overtime) from the 2019 ASHE show that:

- the gender pay gap for full-time employees in NI is negative (2.9% in favour of females)
- females who work full-time earned 37p per hour more on average than males (£13.13 per hour compared to £12.76 per hour for males)
- in the UK full-time females (£13.97) earned less than full-time males (£15.34) on average; a gender pay gap of 8.9% in favour of males.

**Further information is available on the NISRA - Economic and Labour Market Statistics website:**  
[Annual Survey of Hours and Earnings](#)



## LFS unemployment

The definition of unemployment used in the Labour Force Survey (LFS) is in accordance with that of the International Labour Organisation (ILO). The ILO unemployed includes those without a job who were able to start work in the two weeks following their LFS interview and had either looked for work in the four weeks prior to interview or were waiting to start a job they had already obtained.

The definition of unemployment rate is the percentage of economically active people who are unemployed.

Please note that it is possible for the number of unemployed to increase and the unemployment rate to fall during the same period, as the latter measure is a ratio e.g. if the number of economically active has increased at a faster rate than the number unemployed, the unemployment rate will fall.

## LFS employment

The definition of ILO employed applies to anyone (aged 16 or over) who has carried out at least one hour's paid work in the week prior to interview, or has a job they are temporarily away from (e.g. on holiday). Also included are people who do unpaid work in a family business and people on Government-supported employment training schemes.

The definition of employment rate is the percentage of all working age (16-64) people who are employed.

The ILO measures are particularly useful for examining short term and long term trends over time and key LFS time series data are available both seasonally adjusted and unadjusted.

## LFS economic inactivity

Economic inactivity is defined as those individuals who are neither in employment nor unemployed as determined by the ILO measure. This economic status includes all those who are looking after a home, are long term sick or disabled, are students or are retired.

## Reporting Change and Sampling variability

Reported change is calculated using unrounded data and is presented to 1 decimal place. When a change is less than 0.05pps, it is rounded to 0.0pps and the data is reported as unchanged. 'Over the quarter' refer to comparisons between the latest quarterly estimates for the period December-February 2020 and the quarter previous to that (i.e. September-November 2019). 'Over the year' refer to comparisons between the latest quarterly estimates for the period December-February 2020 and those of the corresponding quarter one year previously (i.e. December-February 2019).

The LFS is a sample survey and, as such, estimates obtained from it are subject to sampling variability. If we drew many samples, each would give a different result. Table 2 shows the sampling variability of the estimates, and quarterly and annual changes using 95% confidence intervals. We would expect that in 95% of samples the range would contain the true value. The final column contains the confidence interval that can be used when assessing change between two independent samples. Due to the LFS five wave structure, this means it can be used to assess changes over six quarters or more. The confidence intervals have been calculated using data that are not seasonally adjusted, with the relevant sampling errors produced then applied to the seasonally adjusted data.

If the 'quarterly or annual change' of an estimate is larger than the 'confidence interval around the change', the change is statistically significant. If none of the reported changes over the year or the quarter were statistically significant, then the recorded changes did not exceed the variability expected from a sample survey of this size.

**Table 2: Sampling variability of labour market estimates**

December-February 2020	Estimate	Confidence interval around estimate	Change over quarter	Confidence interval around quarterly change	Change over year	Confidence interval around annual change	Confidence interval around change
Unemployment <sup>1</sup>	22,000	+/-5,000	2,000	+/-5,000	-4,000	+/-8,000	+/-8,000
Employment <sup>2</sup>	877,000	+/-19,000	-4,000	+/-18,000	17,000	+/-26,000	+/-28,000
Economically inactive <sup>2</sup>	574,000	+/-18,000	4,000	+/-17,000	-6,000	+/-26,000	+/-27,000
Unemployment rate <sup>1</sup>	2.5%	+/-0.6pps	0.2pps	+/-0.5pps	-0.5pps	+/-0.8pps	+/-0.9pps
Employment rate <sup>2</sup>	72.5%	+/-1.5pps	-0.1pps	+/-1.3pps	1.3pps	+/-2.1pps	+/-2.2pps
Economic inactivity rate <sup>2</sup>	25.6%	+/-1.4pps	0.0pps	+/-1.3pps	-0.9pps	+/-2.0pps	+/-2.1pps

<sup>1</sup> People aged 16 and over. Unemployment rate = total unemployed as a proportion of the economically active.

<sup>2</sup> Levels for all persons aged 16 and over, rates for working age (16-64).

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Please see link for further LFS notes and definitions: [LFS Background Information](#)

### Response Rates – Updated quarterly (last updated 18/02/2020)

The total eligible sample for the October-December 2019 LFS consisted of 3,846 addresses (1,205 chosen at random from the Land and Property Services (LPS) list of domestic properties and 2,641 carried forward from the previous quarter). A random start, fixed interval sampling technique of the addresses, which are ordered by Council Area and Ward, is used. This ensures a proportional representation across the Council Areas in Northern Ireland.

Only private household addresses were eligible, since the LFS is a survey of the private household population. Every selected address is interviewed on five successive occasions, such that in any one quarter, a fifth of the sample will be receiving their first interview, one fifth their second and so on, with one fifth receiving their fifth and final interview. This results in an 80% sample overlap between quarters.

**Table 3: Response rates, October-December 2019**

Fully and partially responding	2,773
Eligible sample	3,846
Response rate (%)	72.1%

\*Of the addresses sampled, a small number contained more than one household and some contained households which moved during the quarter. Residents in NHS hospital accommodation (formerly called nurses' homes) and students living in halls of residence or boarding schools are included to improve the coverage of young people.

### LFS Comparisons

Estimates of employment, unemployment, and economic inactivity are derived from the LFS. The most robust estimates of short-term movements in these estimates are obtained by comparing the estimates over separate three month periods. For example, estimates relating to December-February 2020 should be

compared with the estimates for September-November 2019. This provides a more robust estimate than comparing with the estimates for November-January 2019, as the December and January data are included within both estimates. Effectively, observed differences are those between the individual months of November 2019 and February 2020. The LFS is sampled such that it is representative of the NI population over a three month period, not for a single month period.

### **Seasonal adjustment**

All estimates discussed in this Statistical Bulletin are seasonally adjusted unless otherwise stated. Like many economic indicators, the labour market is affected by factors that tend to occur at around the same time every year, for example, school leavers entering the labour market in July and whether Easter falls in March or April. To compare over months or quarters, the data are seasonally adjusted to remove the effects of seasonal factors and the arrangement of the calendar.

### **Thresholds**

Thresholds are used to determine whether LFS data are suitably robust for publication. The threshold used for the quarterly LFS datasets is 8,000. As such, data below 8,000 are suppressed.

### **LFS revisions**

Estimates derived from the Labour Force Survey (including estimates of employment, unemployment and economic inactivity) are calculated using 2016 based population projections and the 2017 mid-year population estimates. LFS microdata are routinely revised to incorporate the latest population estimates. The latest revisions were published in February 2019 and affect LFS data from the period June-August 2011 onwards. In addition, data from November-January 2018 onwards also reflects a boost to the LFS sample that has been rolled out from January 2018 beginning with wave 1 and was fully implemented through all 5 waves by April-June 2019. To illustrate this boost in sample size, the November-January 2017 eligible sample was 2,394 (with 1,517 of those fully or partially responding), while the December-February 2020 sample size was 3,846 (with 2,773 of those fully or partially responding). More information on the increased sample size is available in a [separate paper](#).

A review of seasonal adjustment methodology also took place in February 2019 and affected seasonally adjusted data from June-August 2011 onwards. The majority of revisions to the unemployment rate fell within +/-0.1 percentage points and the largest revision was -0.3pps; the working age employment rate mostly fell within +/- 0.1 percentage points and the largest revision was 1.0pps. More information on the revision policy concerning labour market statistics can be found through the following link: [Labour market statistics revisions policy](#)

### **Data collection changes due to COVID-19**

Data collection methods for the Labour Force Survey changed in March 2020 with the suspension of all face-to-face household interviews. From April, all face-to-face interviews have been replaced by telephone interviews. In addition, from April, an online Labour Market Survey has been rolled out, designed to capture key labour market variables and to supplement main Labour Force Survey data.

For further information on the impacts of COVID-19 to collection and production of statistics see the [COVID-19 and the production of statistics](#) section on the NISRA website and an [ONS Statement](#) on ensuring the best possible information during COVID-19 through safe data collection.

### **Temporary change in release time**

Due to a change in ONS release and briefing practices in light of COVID-19, from April NISRA market sensitive statistics are released at 7am and not the standard release of 9.30am. NISRA requested the temporary change in time from the Office for Statistics Regulation. Correspondence between [NISRA](#) and [OSR](#) is available on the OSR website [here](#), and more detail on the change in ONS practices is available on the ONS website [here](#).

## **Experimental Claimant Count (Jobseekers Allowance claimants plus some out-of-work Universal Credit claimants)**

In March 2018, the NI JSA-only claimant count was replaced by an experimental measure based on JSA claimants plus out-of-work UC claimants who were claiming principally for the reason of being unemployed. The measure is categorised as experimental as the statistics are in the testing phase and not yet fully developed. ONS have produced a useful '[Guide to Experimental Statistics](#)' and an FAQ document explaining the difference between the two measures is available on the [NISRA website](#).

Additional data tables are published on the [NISRA](#) website and counts are available from [NOMIS](#).

## **Redundancy Legal Requirements**

Under the Employment Rights (Northern Ireland) Order 1996 (amended 8 October 2006), companies are only legally required to notify the Department of impending redundancies of 20 or more employees. Companies who propose less than 20 redundancies are not included in the statistics, so there is likely to be an undercount.

## **Annual Survey of Hours and Earnings (ASHE)**

Please note, changes in NI earnings over the year and relative to the UK can be influenced by a range of factors including the timing of pay settlements, the extent of overtime and differences in the composition of the workforce. As ASHE is a sample survey, results are also subject to an associated level of sampling variability. Further information is available at: [Northern Ireland Annual Survey of Hours and Earnings](#)

## **Quarterly Employment Survey (QES)**

All QES data contained in the LMR are adjusted for seasonality. The seasonally adjusted series started in 2005. Public sector and private sector series are seasonally adjusted separately to the industry breakdowns. As such, the two series may differ at the NI level.

## **QES Revisions**

QES estimates are revised quarterly to reflect the latest information provided to the Department by employers. The September 2019 seasonally adjusted estimate first published in December 2019 has subsequently been revised down 0.04%. For further details of QES revisions please see the following link: [QES Revisions](#)

***The Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency wishes to thank the participating households and businesses for their co-operation in agreeing to take part in the surveys and for facilitating the collection of the relevant data. For further information contact:***

Sarah Fyffe  
Economic & Labour Market Statistics Branch  
Floor 1  
Colby House  
Stranmillis Court  
BT9 5RR

Tel: (028) 905 29449  
Email: [LFS@finance-ni.gov.uk](mailto:LFS@finance-ni.gov.uk)  
Web: [Labour Force Survey](#)  
Twitter: [@NISRA](#)

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