

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.

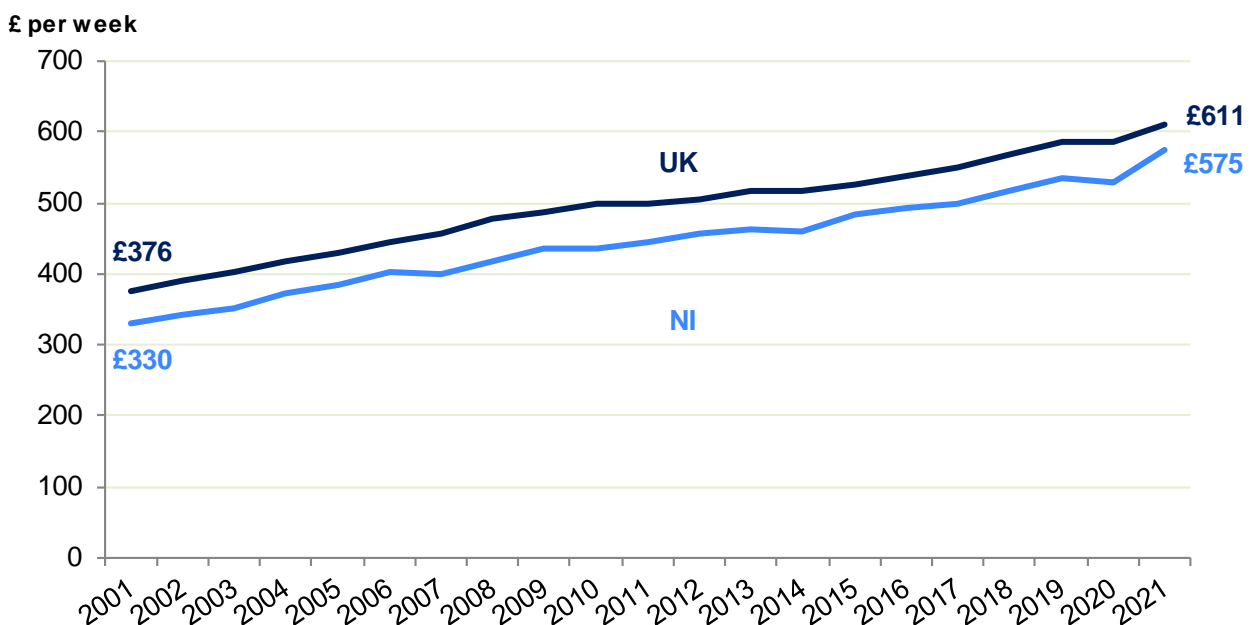
Full-time employee is defined as anyone aged 16 years or over that is directly paid from a business’s payroll for carrying out more than 30 paid hours per week (or 25 or more for the teaching professions).

Key findings

- Weekly earnings in NI increased by £46.30 (8.8%) over the year to £575
- UK weekly earnings increased by £25.00 (4.3%) to £611
- This is the largest annual increase recorded in NI over the last 20 years following the largest decrease in 2020

Largest annual increase in earnings in 20 years – due to recovery of Private sector pay

Figure 1: Median gross weekly earnings for full-time employees in NI and the UK, April 2001 to April 2021



Note: there were a number of methodological changes during the series in 2004, 2006 and 2011. See Section 5 Further information for full details.

[Download figure 1 data](#)

Over the last 20 years in NI, the median gross weekly earnings for full-time employees has increased by an average of around £12 each year. However, over the year to April 2021, weekly earnings increased by £46 to £575. This is the highest annual increase in the last 20 years, and follows the largest decrease on record in 2020 of £5.80. If we consider the average annual change between 2019 and 2021, the increase is still above average at £20 per year.

Weekly earnings increased in all 12 UK regions over the year. The increase of 8.8% in NI was the largest increase of all the regions (and the second largest between 2019 and 2021) and weekly earnings in NI is now the sixth lowest of all the UK regions.

Weekly earnings overall in the UK increased by 4.3% to £611. Although this increase is not as large as the one seen in NI, the UK saw a marginal increase (0.1%) in 2020, compared with a decrease (1.1%) in NI. (The increase in NI was 7.6% between 2019 and 2021, while it was 4.4% in the UK) Due to the steeper rise in NI earnings this year, the difference between the UK and NI median has narrowed and the two values are the closest they have ever been. NI median weekly earnings are now £36 or 5.8% below the UK median.

1.2 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.

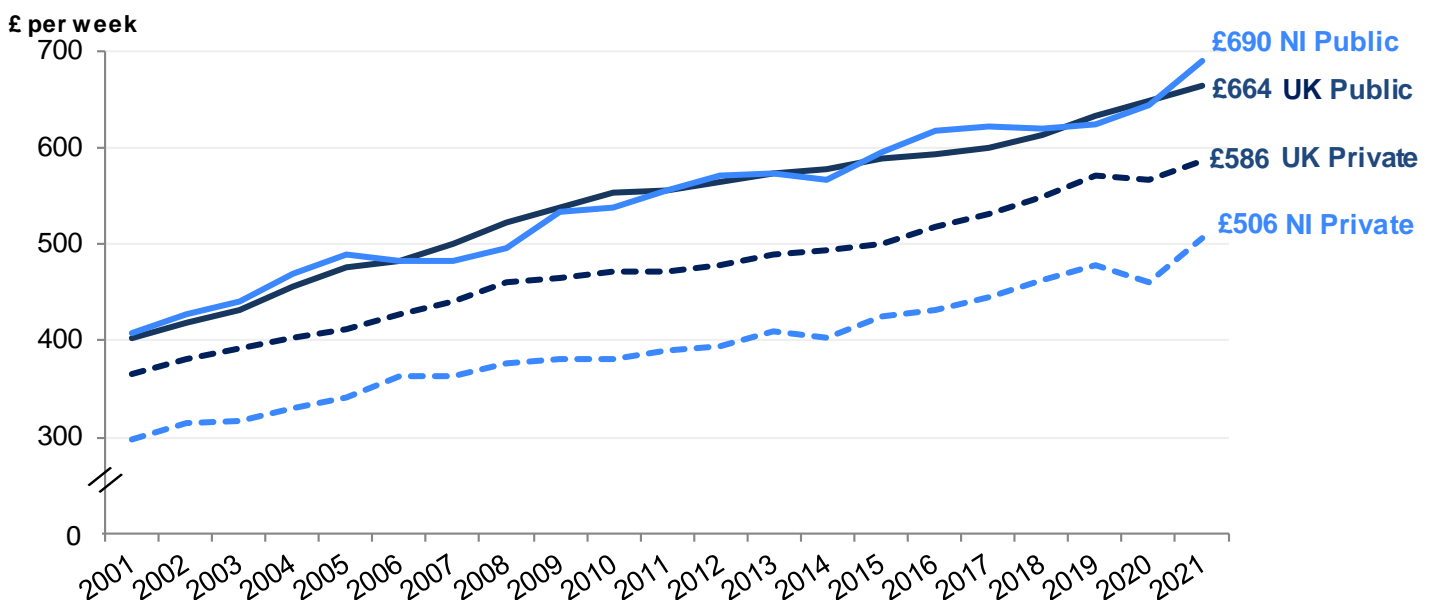
Private sector: The private sector encompasses all for-profit businesses (that are not owned or operated by the government). This does not include any non-profit body or mutual association.

Key findings

- Median public sector earnings were more than a third higher than private sector earnings
- Larger increase in private sector weekly earnings over the year than in the public sector
- Smallest percentage difference between NI and UK weekly earnings in private sector in the last 20 years

NI private sector pay recovers after decrease last year

Figure 2: Median gross weekly earnings for full-time employees in NI and the UK in the public and private sectors, April 2001 to April 2021



[Download figure 2 data](#)

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

See Section 5 Further information for full details.

Non-zero axis

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

In April 2021, weekly earnings of public sector employees (£690) in NI were 36% higher than those of private sector employees (£506). In comparison, weekly earnings in the UK were 13% higher in the public sector (£664) than in the private sector (£586). 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 2021, the NI public sector median (£690) was above the UK equivalent (£664) by £26. This follows two years of lower earnings than the UK, however, over the last two decades, the highest median earnings have changed intermittently between the NI and UK public sectors (with more variability in the NI data). The change this year resulted from an increase in UK public sector pay of 2.5% while median public sector earnings in NI increased by 7.1%.

In contrast, the NI private sector full-time median was £80 below the UK equivalent. This has been a consistent trend over time, however, while last year saw the largest gap between the two series at £105, this has now closed to the smallest difference recorded since 2007. Although both NI and UK median earnings increased over the year, the rate of increase was lower in UK at 3.6% than in NI at 10.1%.

1.3 Real earnings

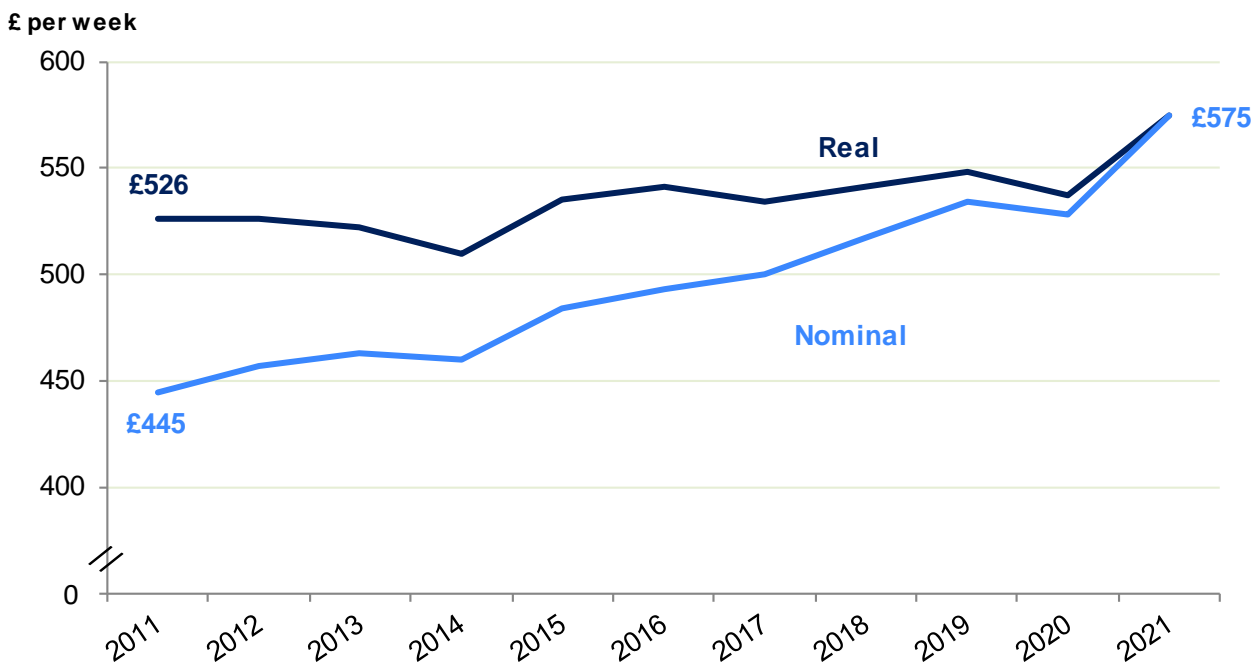
Real earnings are earnings with the effects of inflation removed. This provides a comparison of the amount of goods and services that can be bought over time (also known as purchasing power). Real earnings are calculated by adjusting historic earnings data using the Consumer Price Index including owner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

Key findings

- Real earnings show largest annual increase (7.0%) on record
- This followed a decrease in 2020 in both nominal and real earnings

Approximately £50 increase in real earnings since 2011

Figure 3: Median gross weekly earnings for full-time employees in nominal and real (2021) terms, April 2011 to April 2021



[Download figure 3 data](#)

Note: there was a methodological change during the series in 2011. See Section 5 Further information for full details.

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 2021 were approximately £130 more than in 2011. Real earnings have increased by £50 during the same period with most of that growth recorded in the last year.

Over the year to 2021, real weekly earnings increased by 7.0%, in contrast to a decrease of 2.0% recorded the previous year. This compares with an annual increase of 2.6% in the UK, following a decrease of 0.8% over the year to 2020.

1.4 Total paid hours

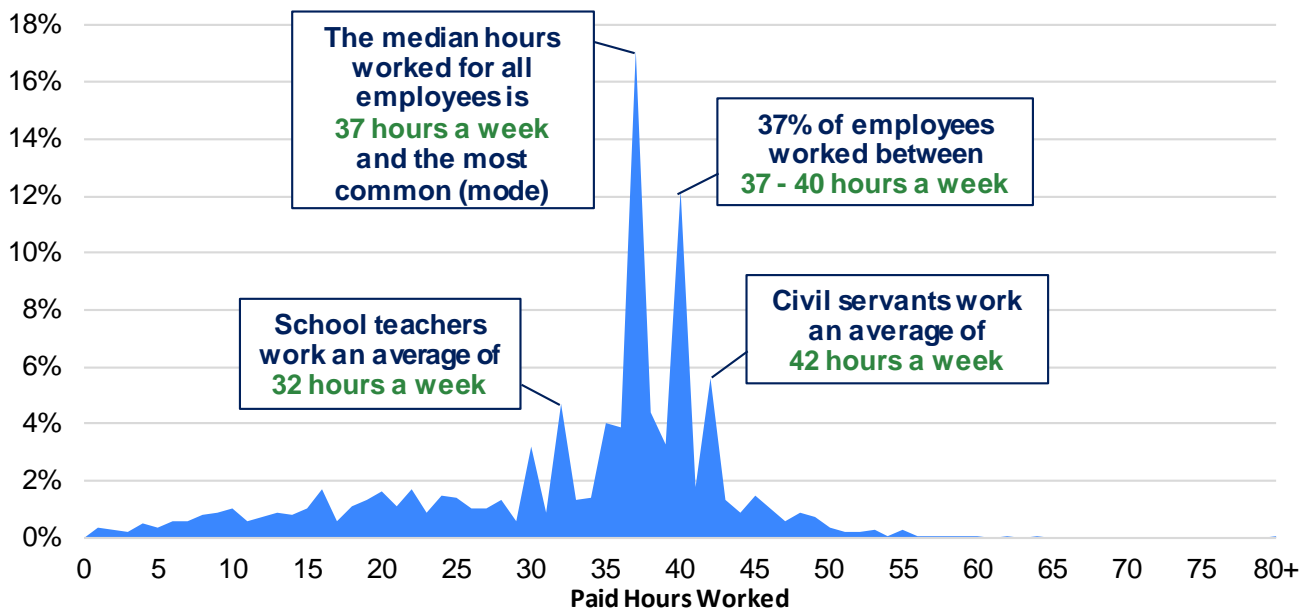
Total weekly paid hours worked is made up of paid basic hours and paid overtime hours. It is calculated using employees on adult rates whose pay was unaffected by absence. It includes people on paid leave and furloughed staff who were paid for hours they didn't work, but excludes people on statutory 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 0.4 hours greater in NI than the UK

No notable change in total paid hours worked over the year

Figure 4: Distribution of total weekly paid hours for all employees in NI, April 2021



[Download figure 4 data](#)

Although approximately 9% of employees were furloughed in April 2021 and were working reduced hours, their *paid* hours were unaffected.

In 2021, full-time employees in NI worked an average of 37.9 hours per week, a decrease of 0.1 hours (0.3%) over the year, 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.

When compared to the UK, the median paid hours in NI in 2021 were 0.4 hours higher for full-time employees (37.9 hours compared with 37.5 hours), 0.5 hours higher for part-time employees (20.0 hours compared with 19.5 hours) and the same for all employees (37.0 hours).

Approximately 37% of employees worked between 37 and 40 hours per week, equivalent to a five-day '9 to 5' working pattern. 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.

Compared with last year, the proportion working under 30 hours per week remained unchanged (30%), whilst the proportion working over 42 hours decreased slightly from 8.5% to 8.3%.

1.5 Earnings by Local Government District

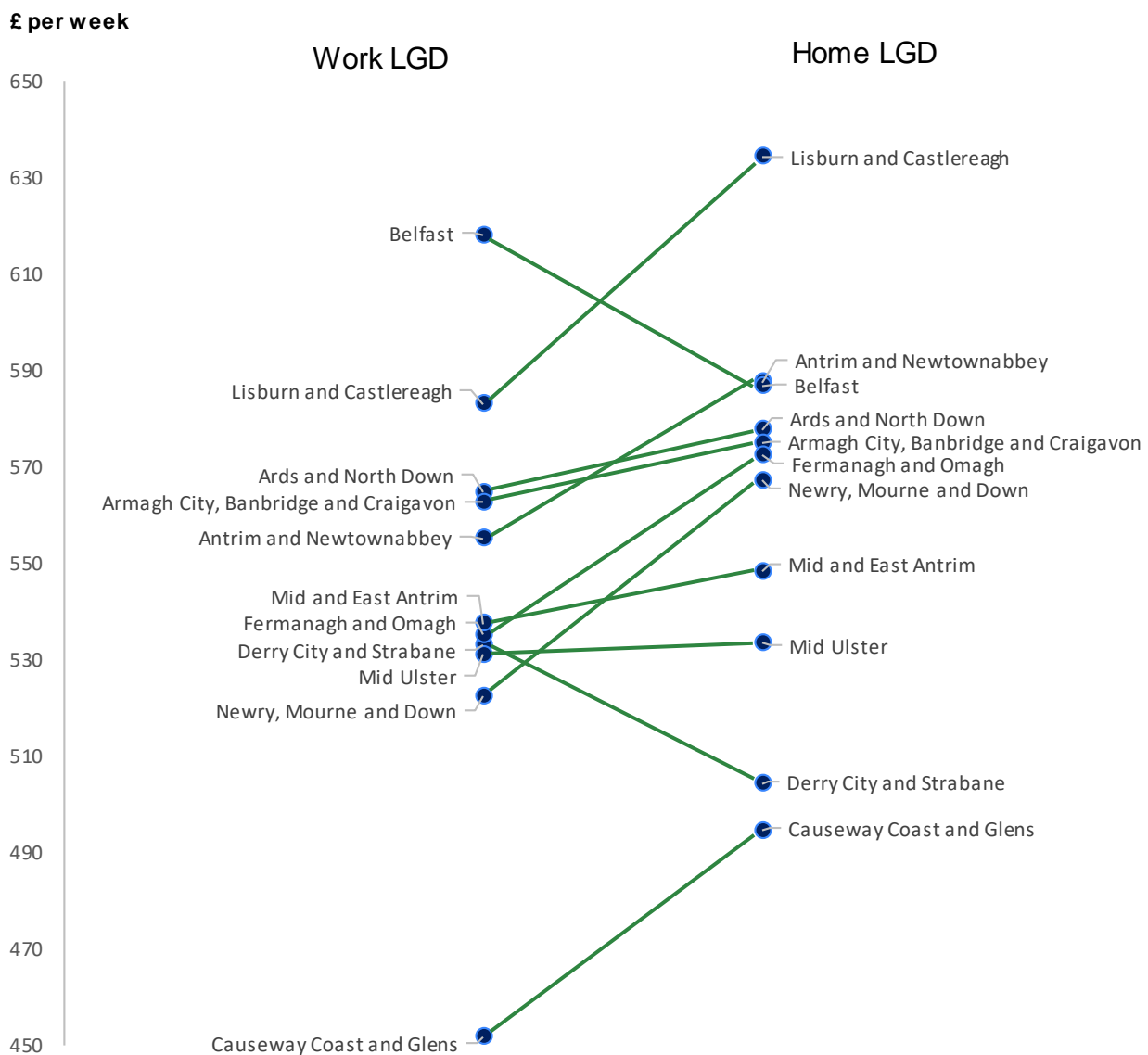
Place of work refers to the employee's usual local site or office. Employees working from home are recorded at their usual local site or office.

Key findings

- Weekly earnings by place of work were highest in Belfast
- Causeway Coast and Glens had the lowest weekly earnings by both place of work and home address
- All areas saw an increase in full-time earnings by place of work over the year

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

Figure 5: Median gross weekly earnings for full-time employees in NI by work and home LGD, April 2021



[Download figure 5 data](#)

In April 2021, full-time employees whose usual place of work was in Belfast earned £618 on average per week. This was £166 more than the median weekly earnings for those whose usual place of work was in the Causeway Coast and Glens (£452).

Not only did Causeway Coast and Glens have the lowest earnings of the local government districts in 2021, but it also saw the smallest increase in median weekly pay for full-time employees (0.2%) over the year. The largest increase in earnings (18%) was recorded in Ards and North Down (to £565) and in Mid Ulster (to £531). All 11 council areas reported an increase in median weekly earnings on a place of work basis.

When earnings by place of residence are considered, the ranking of the LGDs changes, reflecting pre-COVID commuting patterns. Median weekly pay was highest for residents in Lisburn and Castlereagh (£634, up 6.8% over the year) and lowest for residents in Causeway Coast and Glens (£495, up 7.1% over the year). Similar to work location, 10 of the 11 council areas reported an increase in median weekly earnings based on place of residence. Derry City and Strabane was the only council area which saw a decrease over the year (2.6%).

Weekly earnings were lowest in Causeway Coast and Glens, while Lisburn and Castlereagh had the highest or second highest earnings when both usual place of work and residence were considered.