

## 2 Impact of furlough on weekly earnings

Following a decrease from 2019 to 2020, weekly pay has now recovered, increasing from both 2020 and also 2019 levels. Although all occupations and age groups have now recovered and are above 2019 levels, not all industries have returned to 2019 earnings levels. This section takes a closer look at the change in furlough rates and change in earnings across age, occupation, industry and sector between 2019 and 2021.

### Key findings

- **‘Skilled trade occupations’ experienced the largest recovery in weekly earnings over the year, following the largest decrease in the previous year**
- **Weekly earnings in the ‘Construction’, ‘Accommodation & food services’, ‘Arts, entertainment & recreation’ and ‘Financial & insurance activities’ industries have not yet returned to 2019 levels**
- **Public and private sector earnings in all deciles are now higher than 2019 earnings**

### Context

The 2021 ASHE reference date was within the time period for the Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme (CJRS) grant. This is the second consecutive year that the survey has included furloughed employees.

The CJRS was first introduced to support employers from 1st March 2020 whose businesses were impacted by the pandemic, and initially provided grants to employers of up to 80% of their salary to a maximum value of £2,500 per employee per month. By April 2021, the scheme had changed so that employees could be fully furloughed, or flexi-furloughed, where earnings would be no less than 80%.

Businesses were asked to include employees who were supported by the CJRS in their survey return. Final results from the survey showed that approximately 11% of all employee jobs were identified as furloughed and approximately 7% were identified as furloughed with reduced pay (i.e. earnings not topped up by their employer).

This section presents weekly earnings alongside furlough rates, both broken down by age, occupation, industry and sector. Furlough rates presented relate to the proportion of employees furloughed and on reduced pay from the ASHE results. As with weekly earnings, the furlough data only includes employees on adult rates of pay, whose earnings were not affected by absence (other than furlough) during the survey pay-period. Please note - these proportions are for contextual purposes only and should not be used as standalone furlough estimates. ([Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme statistics](#) are available online).

## 2.1 Earnings by age group

### Key findings

- Full-time employees aged 40-49 had the highest weekly earnings and the lowest furlough rate in 2021
- Those aged 18-21 had the lowest earnings in 2021 and smallest annual increase
- Employees aged 60+ saw the largest decrease in earnings in 2020, followed by the largest increase in 2021

### 40-49 year olds earn around £100 more than the median earnings

Figure 6: Median gross weekly earnings for full-time employees in NI by age group, April 2019 to April 2021

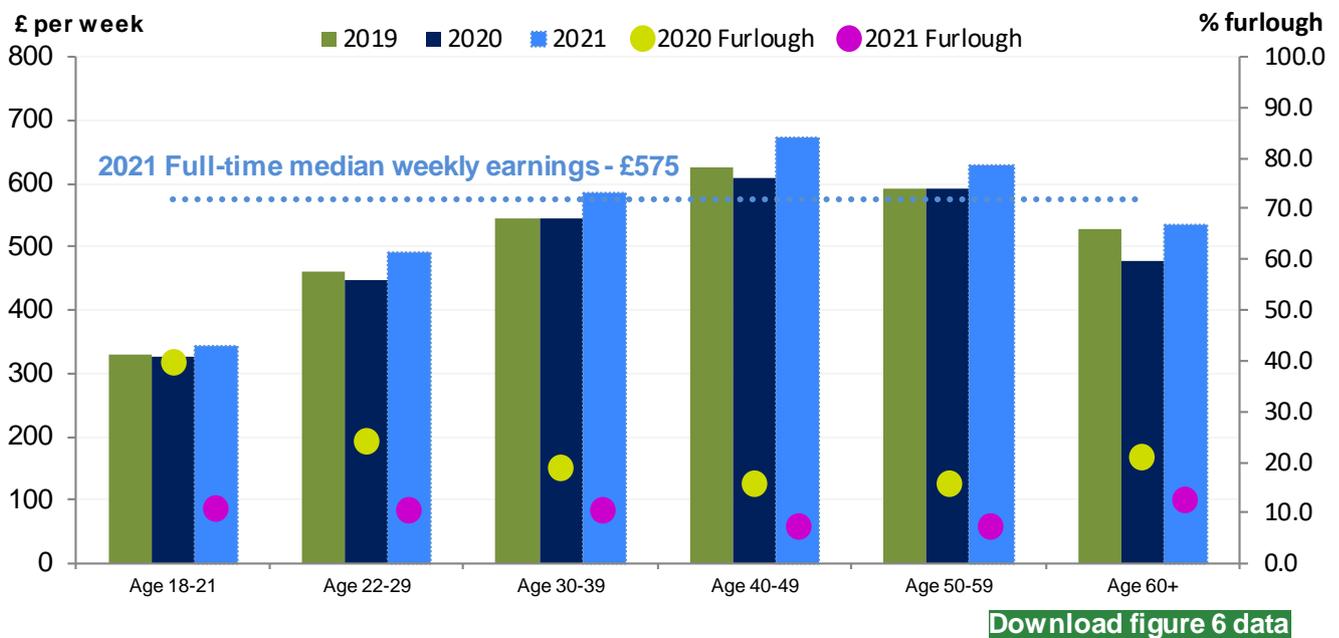


Figure 6 shows the median weekly earnings for full-time employees by age group between 2019 and 2021. Analysis of these results show that those aged 18-21 (£345) are the lowest paid age group, earning on average approximately £230 a week below the median for all full-time employees, and recording the smallest increase in full-time weekly earnings over the year. This age group had the highest percentage of employees furloughed at reduced rate of pay in 2020 and remained second highest in 2021.

Employees aged 40-49 had the highest weekly pay, earning around £100 more than the median, and they were the only age band earning more than £650 in 2021. They were also the age band with the lowest proportion of employees furloughed on reduced rate of pay in both 2020 and 2021 (less than 3.7% at the time of the 2021 survey).

The largest increase in weekly earnings over the year was recorded for the 60+ age group (12%), however, this follows the largest decrease of 9.4% in 2020. Earnings for this group, therefore are only 1.3% above their 2019 earnings. This age group had the highest rate of furloughed employees in 2021.

## 2.2 Earnings by occupation

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

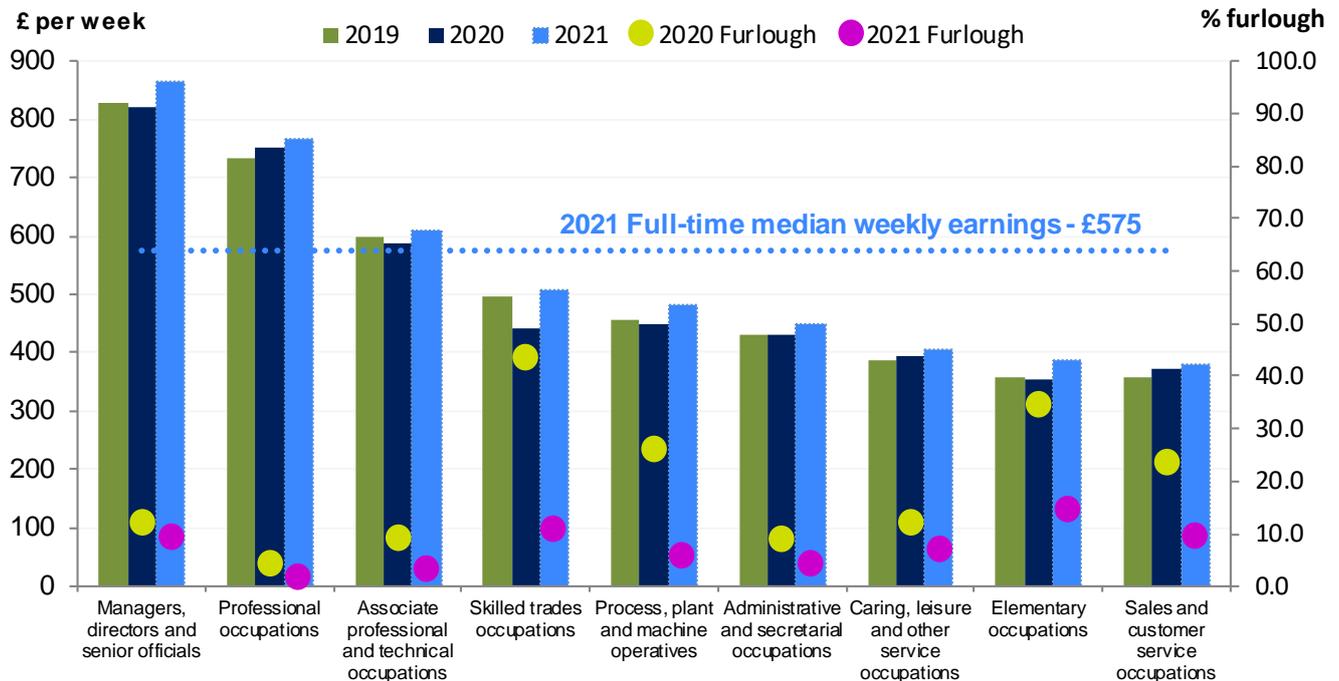
*Note: Additional results based on the new SOC20 coding will be published early 2022.*

### Key findings

- With almost £500 difference, ‘Managers, directors and senior officials’ had the highest full-time weekly earnings and ‘Sales and customer service occupations’ had the lowest
- ‘Skilled trade occupations’ experienced the largest increase in weekly earnings over the year, however this followed a large decrease in the previous year
- ‘Sales and customer service occupations’ recorded the smallest increase, following the largest increase in 2020

### Almost £500 difference between highest and lowest earning occupation groups

**Figure 7: Median gross weekly earnings for full-time employees in NI by occupation, April 2019 to April 2021**



[Download figure 7 data](#)

Analysis of full-time weekly earnings by occupation group shows that ‘Sales and customer service occupations’ (£381) is the lowest paid group, earning on average approximately £190 a week below the median for all full-time employees.

‘Managers, directors and senior officials’ (£865) remained the highest paid group, at £290 a week above the median for all full-time employees and more than double that of the three lowest paid occupational groups. ‘Professional occupations’ (£767) and ‘Associate professional and technical occupations’ (£611) also earned above the median value and had the lowest rates of furlough on reduced pay.

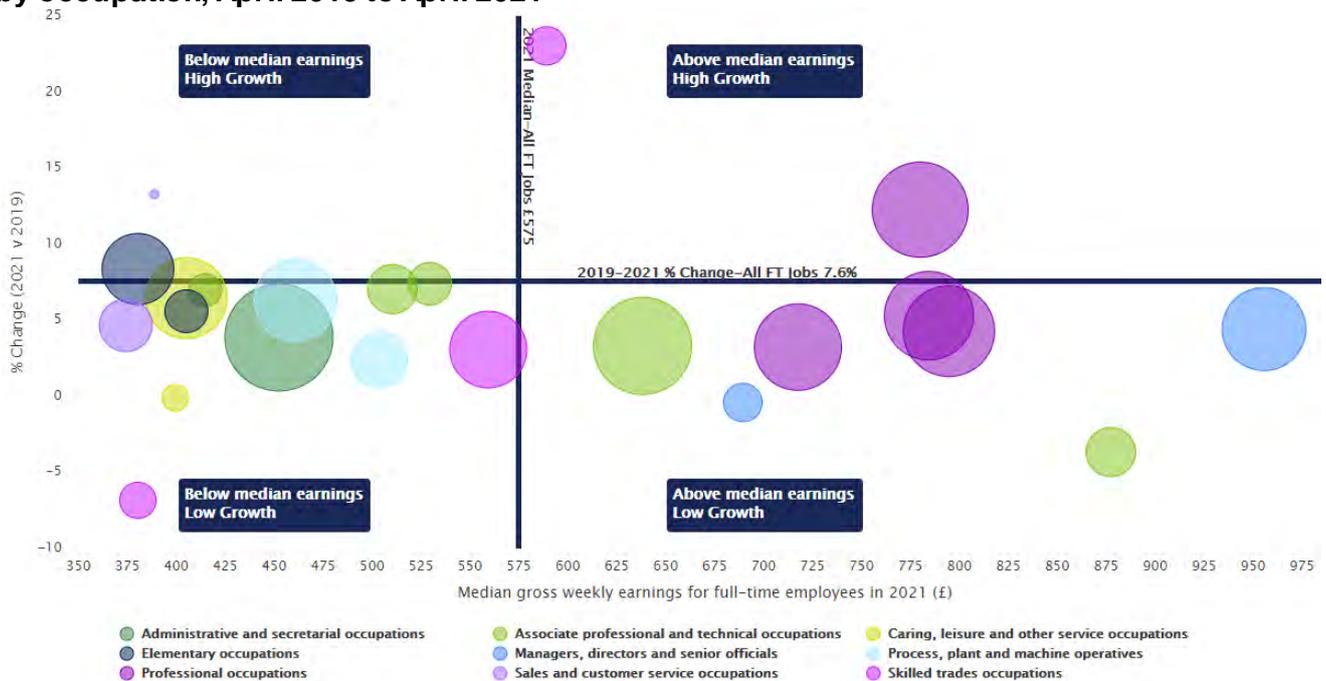
Weekly earnings increased across all nine occupation groups over the year (and when compared to 2019) following decreases in five occupation groups last year.

The largest annual increases were reported for ‘Skilled trade occupations’, ‘Elementary occupations’ and ‘Process, plant and machine operatives’. These three occupational groups had the highest rates of furlough pay in 2020 and recorded the largest decrease in their rates of furloughed employees on reduced pay in 2021. Each recorded decreases in excess of 20pps with the largest drop occurring in ‘Skilled trades occupations’ (from 43% in 2020 to 10% in 2021).

Changes in rates of furloughed employees within occupational groups appear to be the driver for change in median pay, as, despite a proportion of each occupational group remaining on reduced rate of pay due to furlough, median pay has increased in all occupation groups when compared to 2019 (pre-furlough).

To note, 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.

**Figure 8: Median gross weekly earnings for full-time employees and change in earnings in NI by occupation, April 2019 to April 2021**



Note: number of jobs is illustrated by the size of the data point

[Click here for interactive chart](#)

Figure 8 presents weekly earnings and their change over the last two years, broken down by more detailed occupation groups. An interactive version can be viewed online - [Employee earnings in 2021 and their change from 2019](#).

These data show that ‘Skilled construction and building trades’ experienced the greatest increase (23%) in earnings since 2019, and, with average earnings of £590 in 2021, were the only group within ‘Skilled trades occupations’ to earn above the median (£575). In contrast, ‘Textiles, printing and other skilled trades’ was one of the lowest paid occupation groups (£381) and it experienced the greatest drop in earnings over the last two years (6.8%). Of note also is the 12% increase in earnings of ‘Health professionals’, who averaged weekly earnings of £781 in 2021.

## 2.3 Earnings by industry

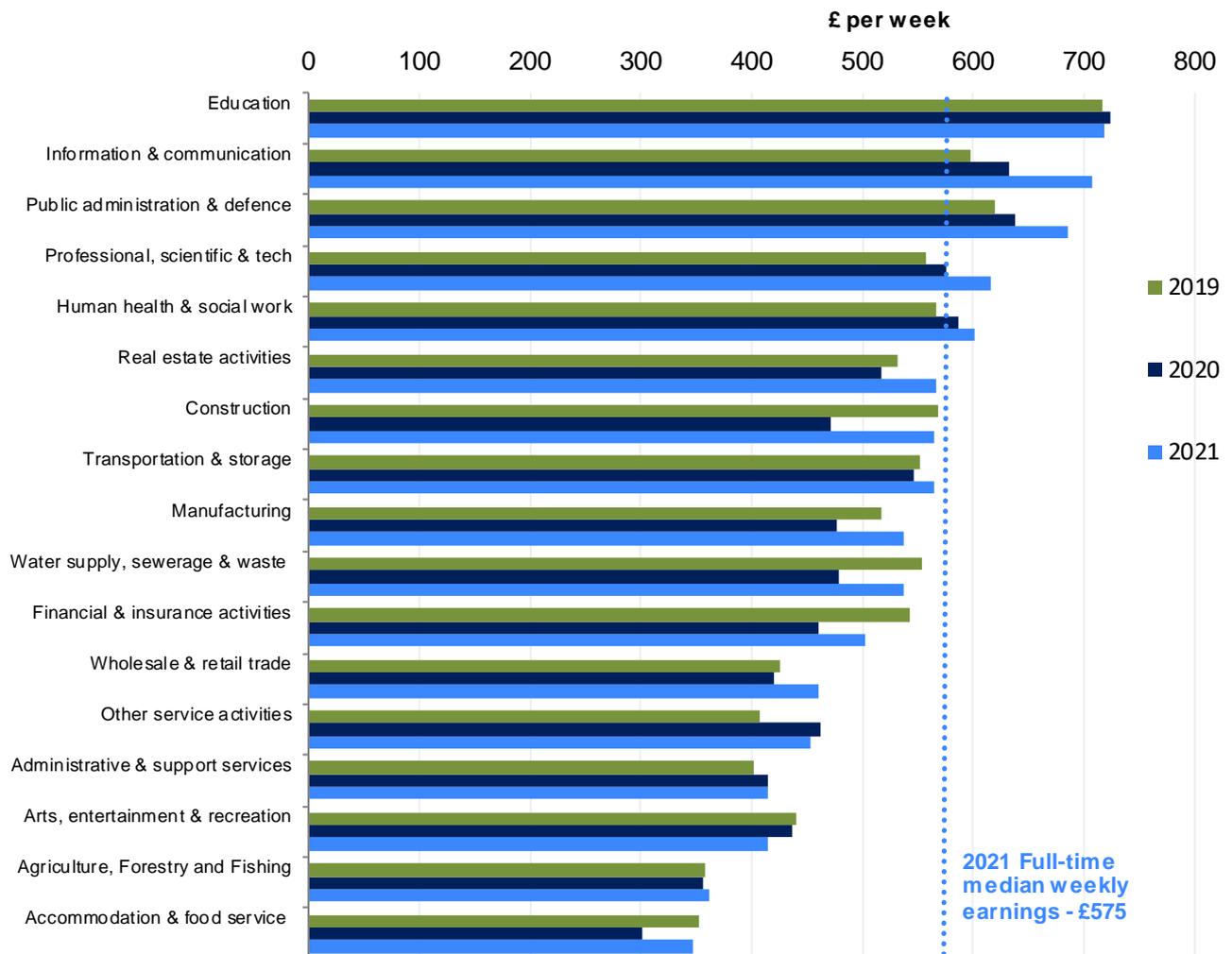
**Industry:** Results are collated using the 2007 Standard Industrial Classification (SIC07).

### Key findings

- Average earnings in 2021 for ‘Construction’, ‘Accommodation & food services’, ‘Arts, entertainment & recreation’ and ‘Financial & insurance activities’ below 2019 levels
- ‘Construction’ experienced the largest increase in weekly earnings over the year, but is still below the level recorded in 2019

### Increases in full-time earnings were reported in over three quarters of industries

**Figure 9: Median gross weekly earnings for full-time employees in NI by industry, April 2019 to April 2021**



[Download figure 9 data](#)

In NI, weekly earnings for full-time employees at April 2021 were highest in ‘Education’ (£719) and lowest in ‘Accommodation and food service activities’ (£347). Increases were recorded in 14 of the 17 sectors that were reported for full-time employees<sup>1</sup>. Changes in earnings across the industry sectors ranged from a decrease of 4.8% in ‘Arts, entertainment & recreation’ (to £415), to an increase of 20% in ‘Construction’ (to £565).

<sup>1</sup> Full-time estimates were not published for 4 of the 21 industry sectors due to small sample sizes in those sectors

## Average earnings for 2021 in construction, accommodation, arts and finance below 2019 levels

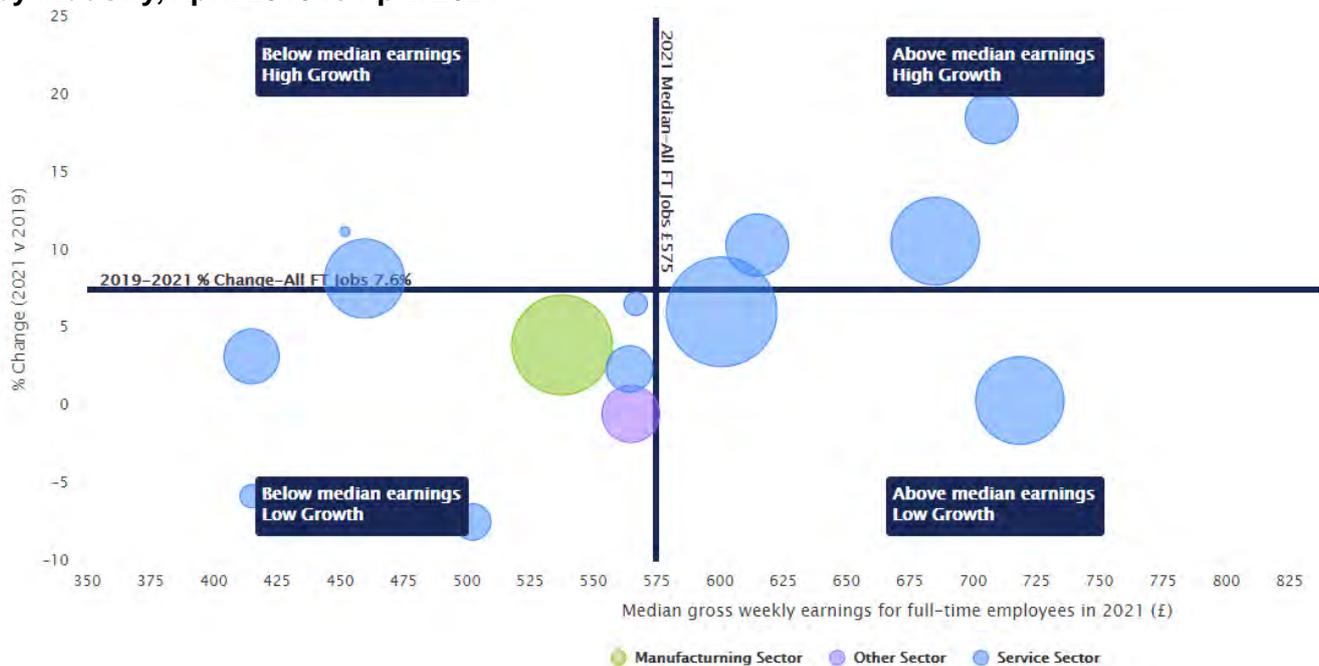
Although 'Construction' had the largest increase in weekly earnings for full-time employees (20%), this followed the largest decrease across all industries in the previous year (17%). This means that earnings in April 2021 remained just below the weekly earnings reported in April 2019 (£568). 'Construction' was the industry most affected by furlough in 2020, with 48% of employees furloughed with reduced rates of pay. Although this had dropped significantly by April 2021, it still had the fifth highest furlough rate of all the industries.

Similarly, 'Accommodation and food service activities' had a large increase in weekly earnings for full-time employees (15%) following a large decrease in the previous year (14%), resulting in lower average earnings in 2021 than in 2019 (1.7% below £353). This was the sector with the highest percentage of furloughed staff on reduced pay (59%) in April 2021, down from 69% in April 2020.

'Arts, entertainment and recreation' had the largest decrease in weekly earnings for full-time employees (4.8%). This is the second consecutive year in which earnings have fallen within this sector, after a decrease of 1.0% in April 2020. Both years have seen over 30% of employees in this sector furloughed on reduced pay.

'Financial and insurance activities' is the only private sector industry to record no furloughed staff with reduced pay in the 2021 survey. Although average pay has increased in this sector over the year financial and insurance activities has seen the biggest drop in pay over the last two years. Average earnings are now 7.4% below those recorded in 2019 (£502 compared to £543).

**Figure 10: Median gross weekly earnings for full-time employees and change in earnings in NI by industry, April 2019 to April 2021**



Note: number of jobs is illustrated by the size of the data point

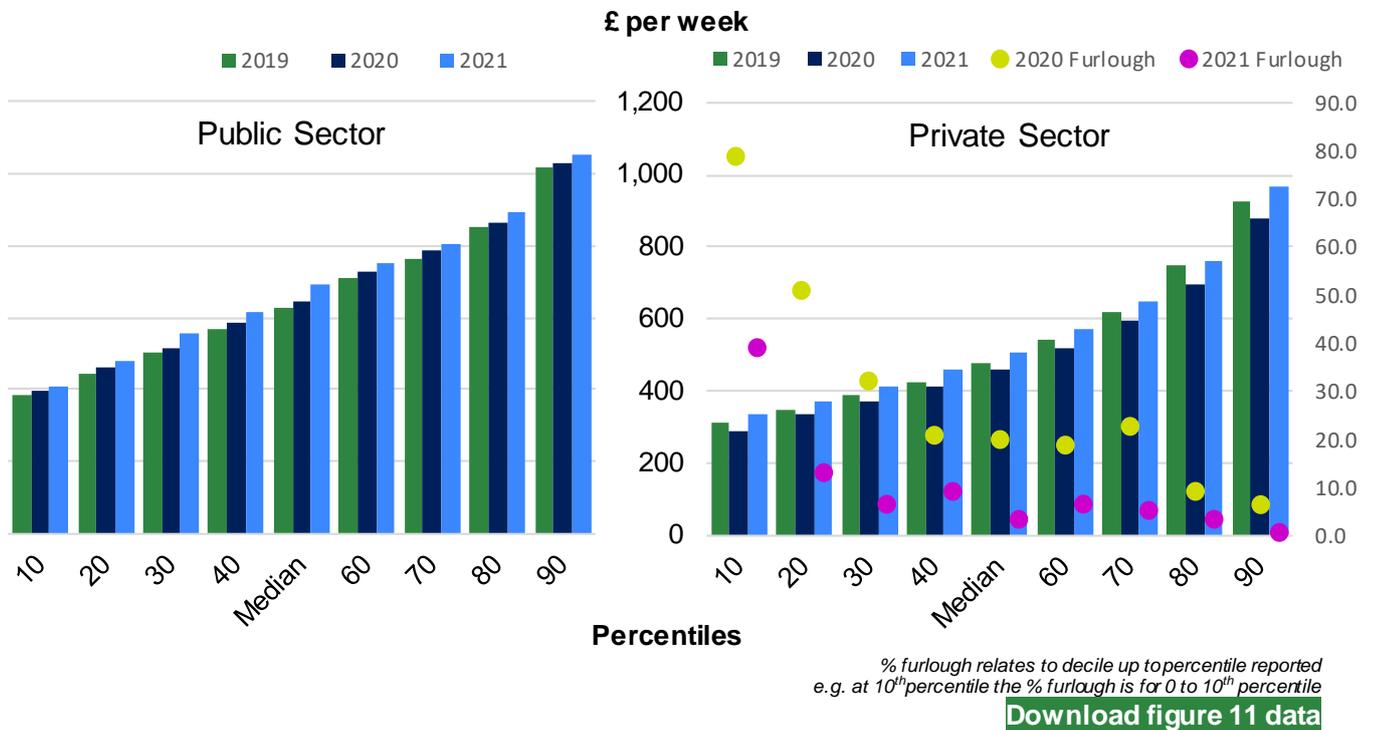
[Click here for interactive chart](#)

Figure 10 shows that the largest growth (19%) over the two year period was seen in the 'Information & communication' industry, with average earnings increasing to £708. In contrast, 'Arts, entertainment & recreation' experienced the second greatest drop (5.8%) in earnings (after 'Financial and insurance activities') and was the second lowest paid industry group (after 'Accommodation & food service activities') in 2021 (£415). Of note also is the increase in earnings of 'Public administration & defence', which saw an increase of 11%, averaging weekly earnings of £685 in 2021. An interactive version of this chart can be viewed at [Employee earnings in 2021 and their change from 2019](#).

## 2.4 Public/private sector comparison

### Increases across the distribution in the Public and Private sector

Figure 11: Median gross weekly earnings for public and private sector full-time employees, April 2019 and April 2021



Increases were experienced right across the distribution of full-time NI private sector employees, both over the year, and between 2019 and 2021. Approximately 9% of these employees were furloughed on reduced pay, down from 26% recorded in 2020. Those in the lowest 10% earnings group experienced the largest increase in earnings over the year (16%); within this grouping, over three-quarters received furlough pay at a reduced rate in 2020, which fell to 40% in 2021. The pay at the 90<sup>th</sup> percentile increased by 9.9% following a 5.1% decrease the previous year.

In the public sector, which was not affected by furlough, increases were seen across all percentiles in the last two years. Those in the lower percentiles had the largest increases, with those at the 30<sup>th</sup> percentile increasing the most (7.5%) over the year to 2021. The smallest increase (2.2%) occurred in the 70<sup>th</sup> percentile.