

Annual Survey of Hours & Earnings (ASHE) questionnaire guidance

Theme: Labour Market

Introduction

This document is designed to help you complete the ASHE questionnaire. It is split into three sections:

- A. Guidance on completing the questionnaire** (pages 2-5)
- B. Frequently Asked Questions** (pages 6-7)
- C. Glossary** (pages 8-9)

Please refer to this document if you are having any difficulties with completing the questionnaire.

Where appropriate, more guidance information is also printed beneath the questions. However, if you require further assistance, please telephone the **ASHE helpdesk** on **0300 200 7832** (select option 2), or email ashehelpline@finance-ni.gov.uk.

1 Guidance on completing the questionnaire

Section 1 - Employee Details

A specific date in April is chosen so that all respondents refer to the same point in time. This **reference date** is not the same every year.

Depending on your answer to **Question 1**, you will be directed to the correct section of the form, i.e., either **Question 2a** if you answer 'Yes' or **Question 9a** if you answer 'No'.

Section 2 - Job Details

If you answered 'Yes' to **Question 1**, this section asks for the month and year that the employee started working for your organisation, the title and duties of their main job, and various details regarding their employment.

Section 3 - Workplace and Home Postcodes

Postcode information is important to the publication of the ASHE results as it allows NISRA to generate earnings statistics for different geographical breakdowns.

The employee's workplace postcode should be for their main place of work and not a central or head office address. You can give a central or head office address if the employee has no specified base.

Please check that the postcodes printed on your questionnaire are correct; if not, please provide the correct information. If there is no postcode printed, please provide one.

Please note that the completion of **Question 3b**, which asks for the employee's home postcode, is **voluntary**.

Section 4 - Hours and Earnings for the Pay Period

This section requires you to provide information for your employee's earnings and hours worked in the pay period that included the **reference date**. Please indicate the length and start date of that particular pay period in **Questions 4a** and **4b**, and then continue to relate all remaining answers in this section to that pay period. For example, if your employee is paid weekly, select 'One week' at **Question 4a** and give answers relating to the week that includes the reference date. Similarly, for a monthly paid employee, select 'Calendar Month', and give answers for that month.

Basic or overtime hours (Questions 4d and 4f)

Please answer these questions in full hours and minutes and do not use decimals, e.g., 37½ hours should be written as 37 hours 30 minutes instead of 37.5 hours (which would be read as 37 hours 50 minutes and so would be incorrect in our final results).

Basic hours for teachers

Many teachers in Northern Ireland work from a '1,265 directed hours per year' agreement. If your employee is part-time, please ensure that you state their paid basic hours and not their teaching hours. Annual leave entitlement for a '1,265' agreement should be 65 days. Further information can be found in the **Frequently Asked Questions** (see page 6 below).

Gross pay in the pay period (Question 4k)

If your gross pay amount differs from the total of your answers to **Questions 4c, e, g, i and j**, please provide an explanation in the comments box at the end of **Section 4**.

Hourly rate of pay (Question 4m)

Only answer this question if you have selected the 'Yes' box in **Question 4l**.

Section 5 - Pension Arrangements

This section asks for information on current membership and contributions to any pension scheme run by, or facilitated by, your organisation. Other types of personal pension or additional voluntary contributions (AVCs) should NOT be included. If either the employee or employer is on a 'contribution holiday', the employee is still a member of the pension scheme.

Please choose **only one** of the options in **Question 5c**, which refers to the employee's main pension scheme. If you are unsure, choose the scheme with the closest definition. Further information can be found in the **Glossary** (see pages 7-8 below).

Please provide amounts for pension contributions and pensionable pay that are for the same pay period as given in **Question 4a**. Please convert any annual figures to the pay period given in **Question 4a**. For example, to convert an annual figure where the pay period is weekly, divide the annual figure by 52.14 (precise number of weeks in a year).

Pension information should generally be available on an employee's pay and/or personnel records. If pension arrangements are organised by an insurance company, you should obtain the details from them.

What to do if...

- a) ...the employee or employer contribution is a percentage:

Convert to a monetary value by multiplying the employee's pensionable pay by the percentage. For example, if an employee has a percentage contribution of 5% and a monthly pensionable pay of £1,200, the employee contribution is $£1,200 \times 5\% = £60$ per month.

- b) ...there are no contributions:

If a contribution is nil (for instance, if the pension scheme is non-contributory or the employer or employee is on a 'contribution holiday'), please enter a single zero in **Question 5d** or **5e**. If values are unknown, please leave blank.

c) ...the employer pension contribution or part of it covers more than one employee:

Please do not include any lump sum figures that cover more than one employee. If contributions are a mixture of payments to individuals and lump sums paid to the scheme to cover more than one employee, please give the individual amount for the employee but exclude any amounts that cover more than one employee. If no individual amount is known, please leave blank.

d) ...the employee is not a member of any pension scheme run or facilitated by the employer:

Please answer 'No' to **Question 5b** and go straight to **Question 6a**.

Section 6 - Annual Earnings

Please note that, unlike the previous sections of the form, this section deals with **annual** information.

We ask for information relating to the most recent tax year prior to the survey reference date.

If your employee is part of any type of salary sacrifice scheme, please answer 'Yes' to **Question 6c** and enter figures corresponding to the value of goods or services they receive in **Question 6d**.

Section 7 - Annual Leave Entitlement

Annual leave should be recorded in **days**. Please enter the number of whole days before the decimal point and any fractions after the decimal point, to 2 decimal places. For example, if the employee is entitled to 30½ days paid annual leave, enter "30.50" days.

Section 8 - Pay Agreement

This section is to establish whether your employee's pay has reference to a collective agreement, and at what level this exists. See the **Glossary** (page 7 below) for definitions of the different types of collective agreements.

Section 9 - Employee History

This section only needs to be completed if you selected 'No' at **Question 1**. If the person named was a former employee who has left your organisation, then you will need to provide the month and year that they left. If they have never been employed by your organisation, then simply answer 'No' to **Question 9a**.

Section 10 - Comments and Contact Details

This section has a box for comments where you can tell us anything you think might help us regarding the information you have provided.

We also ask for contact information so that we can get in touch with you, should we have any queries.

For further assistance, please telephone the **ASHE helpdesk** on **0300 200 7832** (select option 2), or email ashehelpline@finance-ni.gov.uk.

2 Frequently asked questions

Why do I need to provide this information?

Providing accurate information for this survey is a statutory requirement under The Statistics of Trade and Employment (Northern Ireland) Order 1988 (the 1988 Order). The ASHE information collected by the Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency (NISRA), an agency within the Department of Finance (DoF), is used to compile annual statistics which illustrate the distribution of earnings and paid hours for employees within industries, occupations and regions. This analysis is used extensively by government departments, professional organisations, the media and the general public. Users of ASHE data include: the Low Pay Commission, which advises the Government about minimum wage levels; and the Gender Policy Unit within the Department for Communities, which analyses changes in the gender pay gap. Data are never given out in a form that identifies an individual employee or employer. It is an offence under the 1988 Order for NISRA to disclose any individual data relating to a return.

What if I can't provide the information required?

If data are not available by the return date, please make every effort to derive this information from records kept, or give informed estimates. Leaving a section blank may prompt a representative from NISRA to contact you in order to clarify information. If there is no alternative, please give a full explanation in the comments box in **Section 10**.

Why does the questionnaire refer to the past if the employee still works for the company?

The ASHE questionnaire is written in the past tense because it refers to a reference date that is in the past. You are required to fill in this questionnaire if the specified person was employed by you on the reference date, even if they are not employed by you at present.

For what period should I provide information?

The reference period for which you should provide information changes throughout the questionnaire and is summarised below:

- **Sections 1 to 3** – information should be provided for the survey reference date in April specified on the questionnaire.
- **Sections 4 and 5** – hours, earnings and pension contributions information provided should relate to the employee's pay period that includes the reference date in April, i.e., the pay period given in answer to **Question 4a**.
- **Sections 6 and 8** – annual information provided should relate to the most recent tax year (ending 5 April) prior to the survey reference date.

Why do some of the questions have 'Go to...' instructions? (Paper form)

Why do some questions suddenly appear or disappear? (Online form)

Paper form:

Where a 'Go to...' instruction appears, you are directed to the question specified depending on your answer.

Online form:

Questions appear or disappear depending on your answers to certain filter questions.

Both the paper and the online questionnaire have been designed in such a way to try to prevent you from answering unnecessary questions and to reduce the amount of contradictory information collected by NISRA.

If the employee is a teacher on a '1,265 directed hours' agreement, how do I calculate their basic hours?

If you are having trouble calculating your employee's basic hours for the pay period specified in **Question 4a**, the following information may be helpful:

- Basic WEEKLY hours should be 32 hours and 24 minutes (1,265 divided by 39 working weeks = 32.4 hours).
- Basic MONTHLY hours should be 140 hours and 53 minutes (32.4 weekly hours multiplied by 4.348 average weeks in a calendar month = 140.88 hours).

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3 Glossary

- **Additional voluntary contributions (AVCs)** – a pension top-up arrangement where an employee pays additional amounts into a pension run by their employer in order to increase their pension entitlement. Normally, the contributions are deducted from the employee's pay.
- **Benefits in kind** – benefits which employees receive from their employment, but which are not included in their salaries or wages. They include things like company cars, private medical insurance paid for by the employer, and cheap or free loans.
- **Collective agreement** – an agreement between one or more employers and one or more trade unions/workers' committees concerning aspects of employment such as pay and conditions. Types of agreement include:
 - **National or industry** – an agreement at UK level, or an agreement for a particular industry as a whole. This is the most common type of agreement and exists mostly for occupations such as teachers, health professionals and protective service occupations.
 - **Sub-national** – an agreement at regional level, this can cover more than one employer and more than one industry. This type of agreement is quite rare but exists for some public service professionals, childcare services and some teaching occupations.
 - **Organisational** – a single employer agreement that covers some or all of its employees. This type of agreement is common in retail and sales companies, and general administrative occupations.
 - **Workplace** – an agreement applying only to employees in one workplace or site. Agricultural occupations and transport companies sometimes have this type of agreement.
- **Contribution holiday** – a temporary period during which the employer or employee takes a break in making pension contributions because of a surplus in a defined benefit pension fund.
- **Pensionable pay** – the earnings on which benefits and/or contributions are calculated under the pension scheme rules. One or more elements of earnings (e.g., overtime) may be excluded.
- **Pension scheme types:**
 - **Defined benefit** – a pension in which the rules of the scheme specify the rate of benefits to be paid. The most common defined benefit (DB) scheme is a final salary scheme in which the benefits are based on the number of years of pensionable service, the accrual rate, and on the final salary. Other DB schemes calculate benefits using the average of selected years' salaries, or the best year's salary within a specified period before retirement. Career Average Revalued Earnings (CARE) schemes are becoming increasingly common; this is a form of DB scheme where the pension is based on salary multiplied by the accrual rate in each year of an individual's working life. Entitlements that are built up each year are revalued until retirement in line with inflation or earnings.

- **Defined contribution** – a pension scheme in which the benefits are determined by the contributions paid into the scheme, the investment return on those contributions, management charges and the type of annuity purchased upon retirement. Such schemes are also known as money purchase schemes.
- **National Employment Savings Trust (NEST)** – a workplace pension scheme set up at the end of 2011 that all employers can use to automatically enrol their UK-based workers. NEST was set up to meet the criteria of a qualifying scheme under new employment duties outlined in the Pensions Acts 2008 and 2011. NEST is an occupational defined contribution scheme with fixed levels of minimum contributions (specified as a percentage of a member's earnings). The benefits received from NEST will be determined by the contributions paid into the scheme, the investment return on those contributions (less management charges) and the type of annuity purchased upon retirement.
- **Group personal pension (GPP)** – an arrangement made for the employees of a particular employer (or group of employers) to participate in a personal pension scheme (provided by insurance companies) on a group basis. This is a collecting arrangement only; the contract is between the individual and the pension provider, normally an insurance company. The benefits received from GPPs are determined by the contributions paid, the investment return on those contributions (less management charges) and the type of annuity purchased upon retirement.
- **Stakeholder pension** – available since 2001, a flexible, portable, personal pension arrangement (provided by insurance companies) with capped management charges, that must meet the conditions set out in the Welfare Reform and Pensions Act (1999) and be registered with The Pensions Regulator. A stakeholder pension can be taken out by an individual or facilitated by an employer. You should only select this option if the employee is a member of any stakeholder pension that has been arranged through the employer. The benefits received from stakeholder pensions are determined by the contributions paid into the scheme, the investment return on those contributions (less management charges) and the type of annuity purchased upon retirement.
- **Group Self Invested Personal Pension (SIPP)** – a specialised type of group personal pension scheme under which employees make their own investment decisions. You should only select this option if the employee is a member of any SIPP that has been arranged through the employer.
- **Salary sacrifice scheme** – where an employee agrees to receive goods or services in place of some of their basic pay. The employee agrees to new employment terms with a new level of basic pay. The goods and services received can be any non-cash benefit, but common examples are child-minding services, health or dental plans, use of a company car, changes in pension contributions, etc.

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