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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 of Labour Market Statistics for Northern Ireland](#) against the [Code of Practice for statistics](#). 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 the 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 [quarterly labour force survey tables](#) (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 (Please note since the COVID-19 pandemic sample sizes have decreased due to difficulty of collecting survey information from households)
- Reviewed and updated [quality protocols for release](#) for LFS data
- Improved accessibility of labour market statistics by [changing the release dates of statistics to avoid public holidays](#) and amended the format and structure of reports in line with accessibility regulations.
- Temporarily changed timing of release in line with change in ONS release practices in [response to COVID-19](#).
- Included additional administrative sources of labour market data to provide a fuller picture of the labour market

1. Summary of Labour Market Statistics

Updated June 2021

Change over quarter

Seasonally adjusted LFS estimates for Northern Ireland for the period February-April 2021 showed that, over the quarter:

- the unemployment rate decreased by 0.6pps to 3.1% Not statistically significant
- the employment rate increased by 0.5pps to 69.8% Not statistically significant
- the economic inactivity rate decreased by 0.1pps to 27.9% Not statistically significant

The number of employee jobs at March 2021 was estimated at 771,410. This was:

- an increase of 0.3% (+2,020 jobs) over the quarter from the revised December 2020 estimate of 769,390.

The seasonally adjusted experimental claimant count (Jobseeker's Allowance Claimants and those claimants of Universal Credit who were claiming principally for the reason of being unemployed) showed that in May 2021, there was:

- a decrease of 3.4% (1,900) over the month to 54,300.

Experimental statistics from HMRC PAYE indicated that in April 2021:

- 745,900 people were payrolled employees, an increase of 0.7% from the previous month
- median monthly pay for employees in NI was £1,810, a decrease of 0.8% (£15) over the month.

During May 2021 there were:

- 280 confirmed redundancies notified to the Department, an increase from the previous month (120), and 150 redundancies proposed. A further 360 have been proposed in June to date.

| Table 1: Labour Market Summary | Time Period | Estimate (95% Confidence interval) | Change over quarter (95% Confidence interval) | Change over year (95% Confidence interval) |
|---|--------------|---------------------------------------|--|---|
| Unemployment ¹ | Feb-Apr 2021 | 27,000 (+/-7,000) | -5,000 (+/-7,000) | 7,000 (+/-8,000) |
| Employment ² | Feb-Apr 2021 | 843,000 (+/-22,000) | 1,000 (+/-22,000) | -19,000 (+/-29,000) |
| Economically inactive ² | Feb-Apr 2021 | 610,000 (+/-22,000) | 6,000 (+/-22,000) | 19,000 (+/-28,000) |
| Unemployment rate ¹ | Feb-Apr 2021 | 3.1% (+/-1.0pps) | -0.6pps (+/-0.8pps) | 0.8pps (+/-0.9pps) |
| Employment rate ² | Feb-Apr 2021 | 69.8% (+/-1.9pps) | 0.5pps (+/-1.8pps) | -1.4pps (+/-2.4pps) |
| Economic inactivity rate ² | Feb-Apr 2021 | 27.9% (+/-1.8pps) | -0.1pps (+/-1.8pps) | 0.8pps (+/-2.3pps) |
| Employee jobs ³ | March 2021 | 771,410 (+/-5,460) | 2,020 | -7,290 |
| | | Estimate | Change over month | Change over year |
| Experimental Claimant Count ⁴ | May 2021 | 54,300 | -1,900 | -9,400 |
| Redundancies ⁵ - Confirmed | May 2021 | 280 | 170 | 140 |
| Redundancies ⁵ - Proposed | May 2021 | 150 | * | -190 |
| Payrolled Employees ⁶ | May 2021 | 745,900 | 4,900 | 6,800 |
| Median Monthly pay ⁷ | May 2021 | £1,810 | -£15 | £141 |

[Download Table 1 data](#)

LFS data are seasonally adjusted. More information on confidence intervals is available on the [background information page](#) in the Estimating and reporting uncertainty paper.

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

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

³Employee jobs survey date for Quarter 1 was 1st March 2021, data rounded to the nearest 10 and seasonally adjusted

⁴The number of claimants on 13th May, seasonally adjusted and rounded to nearest 100.

⁵Redundancies in the calendar month, not seasonally adjusted and rounded to 10.

⁶HMRC Pay As You Earn Real Time Information, rounded to 100 and seasonally adjusted.

⁷HMRC Pay As You Earn Real Time Information, seasonally adjusted.

* Redundancy estimates with less than three business returns are suppressed.

Commentary

The latest labour market data mostly show improvements over the quarter. However, employment levels (which include furloughed jobs) remain below pre-covid levels, while measures of unemployment remain above pre-covid levels.

The HMRC payroll data is the most timely and best single, overall indicator of the labour market. The latest data show that, the number of employees has increased for six consecutive months, with an increase of 1.0% (7,600 employees) in the last two months alone. Employee numbers are now at their highest since March 2020, but remain 0.7% below the February 2020 level. Provisional HMRC data show the Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme supported approximately 90,000 jobs at the end of April (equivalent to a take-up rate of 12%). This continues the downward trend, seen in February and March, from approximately 117,000 supported jobs during January.

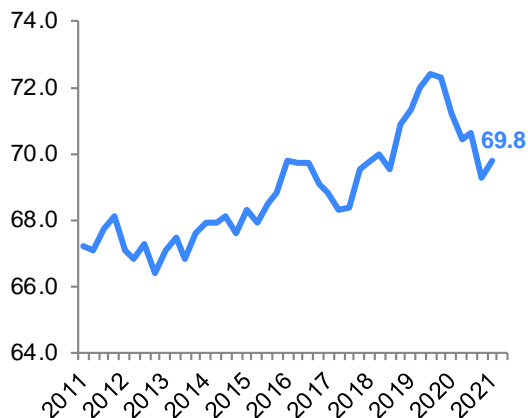
Businesses reported, via the Quarterly Employment Survey, that employee jobs increased over the quarter to 771,410 jobs in March 2021 but remained below the March 2020 total. The quarterly increase (0.3%) was the first seen since December 2019. Over the year, employee jobs decreased in all four broad industry sectors, with the services sector experiencing the largest annual decrease (-5,860 jobs).

Households reported, via the Labour Force Survey, improvements in the labour market over the quarter to February-April 2021 with an increase in the employment rate, a decrease in the unemployment rate and a marginal decrease in the economic inactivity rate. Despite these improvements, the employment rate is 1.4 percentage points (pps) below the rate one year ago and 2.5pps below the pre-pandemic rate in November-January 2020, while the economic inactivity rate is 0.8pps above one year ago and 2.0pps above November-January 2020.

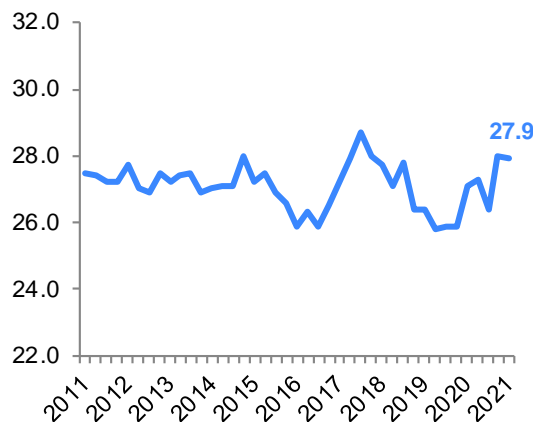
Although most indicators have shown improvements in the short-term, there has been a recent uptick in redundancy proposals with 150 redundancies proposed in May and 360 proposed in the first two weeks of June. These levels of proposed redundancies remain well below the 2020 average of 920 redundancies per month.

Labour Market Statistics

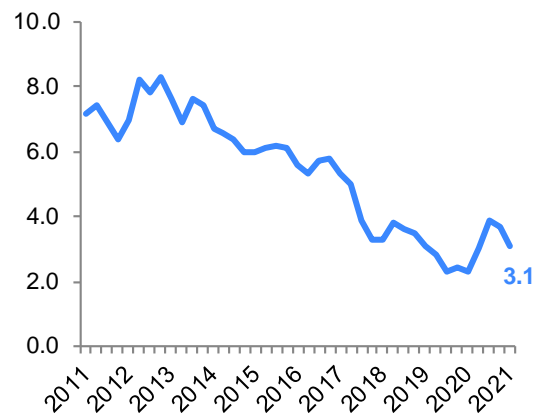
Employment – 69.8%



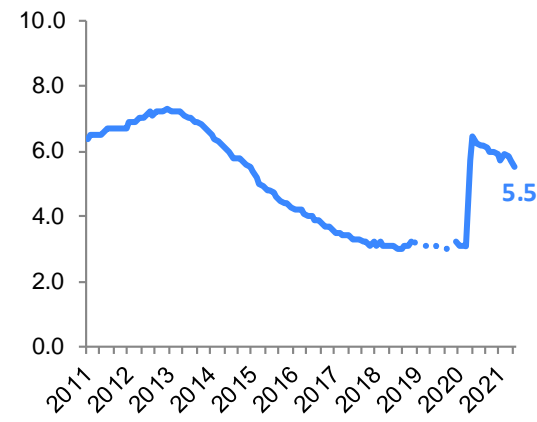
Economic Inactivity – 27.9%



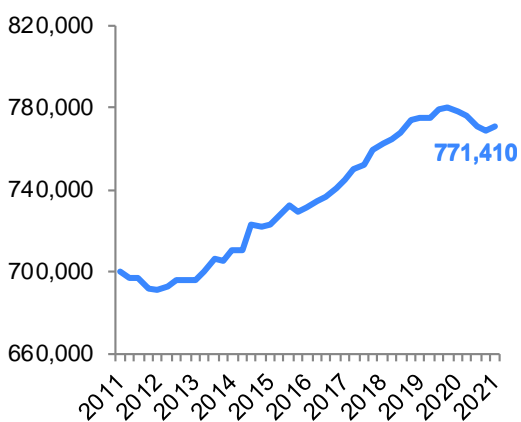
Unemployment – 3.1%



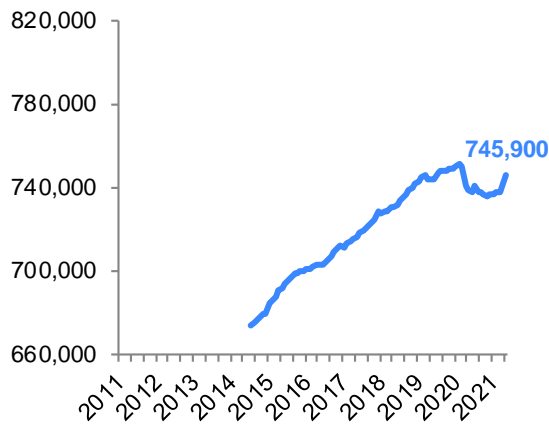
Claimant Count – 5.5%



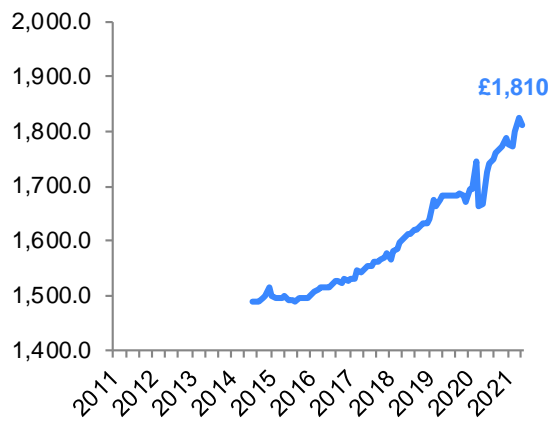
Employee Jobs – 771,410



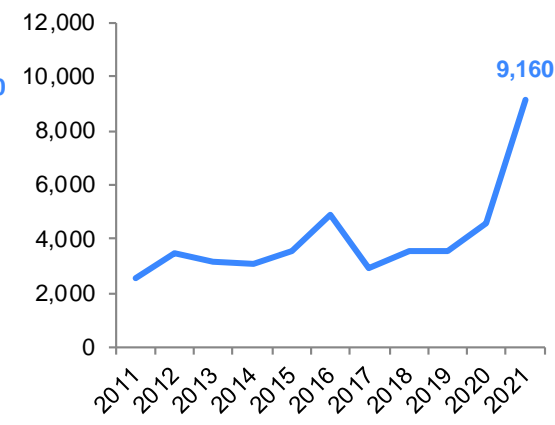
RTI Employment – 745,900



RTI Earnings – £1,810



Proposed Redundancies – 9,160



Labour Force Survey, February-April 2021, seasonally adjusted and subject to future revisions.
 Quarterly Employment Survey, March 2021, seasonally adjusted and subject to future revisions.
 Redundancies, Claimant Count and PAYE Real Time Information, May 2021

Data published – 15th June 2021

Economic Overview Dashboard - <https://data.is.nisra.gov.uk/economy-and-labour-market/economic-overview.html>

Things users need to know

Today's release contains updated labour market indicators derived from household surveys, business surveys and administrative data sources. Although the broad concepts are similar across sources, differences in reference periods, definitions and methodology exist which impact the interpretation of the statistics. Of particular note is the 'location' of the furloughed in the estimates. Those furloughed under the [Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme \(CJRS\)](#) or receiving a grant through the Self Employment Income Support Scheme (SEISS) are likely* to be included in the Labour Force Survey (LFS) estimates of employment and not within the LFS unemployment estimates. (*As labour market status is self-defined by respondents in the survey). Similarly, employees on the CJRS are included in the HMRC count of employees paid through payroll, and the Quarterly Employment Survey (QES) estimate of employee jobs. In contrast, a proportion of those receiving grants through CJRS and SEISS may be accessing Universal Credit unemployment benefits as a 'top-up' payment, and are included in the experimental Claimant Count. More information is available in the [comparison of labour market data sources](#) article by ONS.

NISRA suspended all face-to-face household interviews in the middle of March 2020 due to COVID-19 and from April 2020 all LFS interviews have been conducted by telephone. This has reduced the achieved sample size and the response rate for January-March 21 was 21%. The achieved sample size (16+) for January-March 2021 was 23% lower than the same time last year. This has impacted the precision of the estimates. For example the employment rate 95% confidence interval increased by +/- 0.3pps from January-March 2020.

COVID-19 has resulted in a decrease in coverage response rate in QES Q1 2021 when compared to 2019, primarily due to the restrictions in place for businesses. The coverage response rate for Q1 2021 (66%) was lower than the median coverage response rate for 2019 (77%) but higher than the 2020 median coverage response rate (64%). As a result, employee jobs estimates for 2020/21 are likely to be subject to higher revisions than normal over the coming quarters. These can be tracked through the [revisions triangle](#). Comparisons of provisional employee jobs estimates at lower industry levels in particular (e.g. 2 digit Standard Industrial Classification level), should be treated with caution.

[ONS recommend](#) HMRC payroll data as the best single indicator of the labour market. Experimental statistics from HMRC Pay As You Earn (PAYE) system are included and show the number of employees paid through PAYE and a measure of employee earnings. Flash estimates for April are included which are based on 85% of data and subject to revision in next month's release.

LFS data from January 2020 will be reweighted between July and October. ONS has published an article on the [new weighting methodology](#). The quarterly estimates and comparisons due to be published on 15th July will be based on revised data. Please also note the publication day (15th July) falls on a Thursday.

Base effects

Users should note that many of the annual changes in the report are based on a comparison of current data against data relating to the first month or quarter of the pandemic. Where possible a comparison with one year ago as well as a comparison against the pre-pandemic value is provided for context. An ONS blog provides examples of this across economic statistics. [Beware Base Effects | National Statistical \(ons.gov.uk\)](#)

Context

The LMR is a monthly overview of key labour market statistics for NI. It includes figures from the Labour Force Survey (LFS), the Quarterly Employment Survey, claimant count, redundancies counts and HMRC PAYE statistics. More information about the data sources can be found in Section 5. Where available, comparative UK data (produced by the ONS) have been included.

A Labour Market Outputs consultation in summer 2019 ([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.

Government Departments are key users of labour market statistics. The Labour Force Survey is used to calculate 7 of the 49 draft 2016 – 2021 Programme for Government Indicators, helping to measure progress towards three high level outcomes – We prosper through a strong competitive regionally balanced economy; We have a more equal society; We have more people working in better jobs. The Labour Force Survey is also used to provide baselines for DfE’s draft Industrial Strategy, OECD Skills Strategy for NI, and DfC’s Enabling Success Strategy. 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 [user requested](#) labour market analysis in order to monitor policies for example, equality and employment. 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. 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.

Ad-hoc data requests related to the labour market impacts of coronavirus and associated schemes are added to the [COVID-19 related analysis page](#).

For more on how COVID-19 has impacted the production of statistics please 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 page](#).

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

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

- [Employment and labour market page](#)
- [Guide to Labour Market Statistics page](#)
- [Glossary page](#)

Labour Market Statistics User Group

The next Labour Market Statistics User Group will take place on 30th September 2021. In response to feedback from last year’s event, a [Labour Market Statistics Newsletter](#) was published in June providing a summary of recent developments and upcoming plans.

The presentation from the Labour Market Statistics User Group 2020 is available from the [Labour Market Statistics user engagement page](#) on the NISRA website.

2 Unemployment

Updated June 2021

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 5 and the Estimating and Reporting Uncertainty paper on the background information page 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.

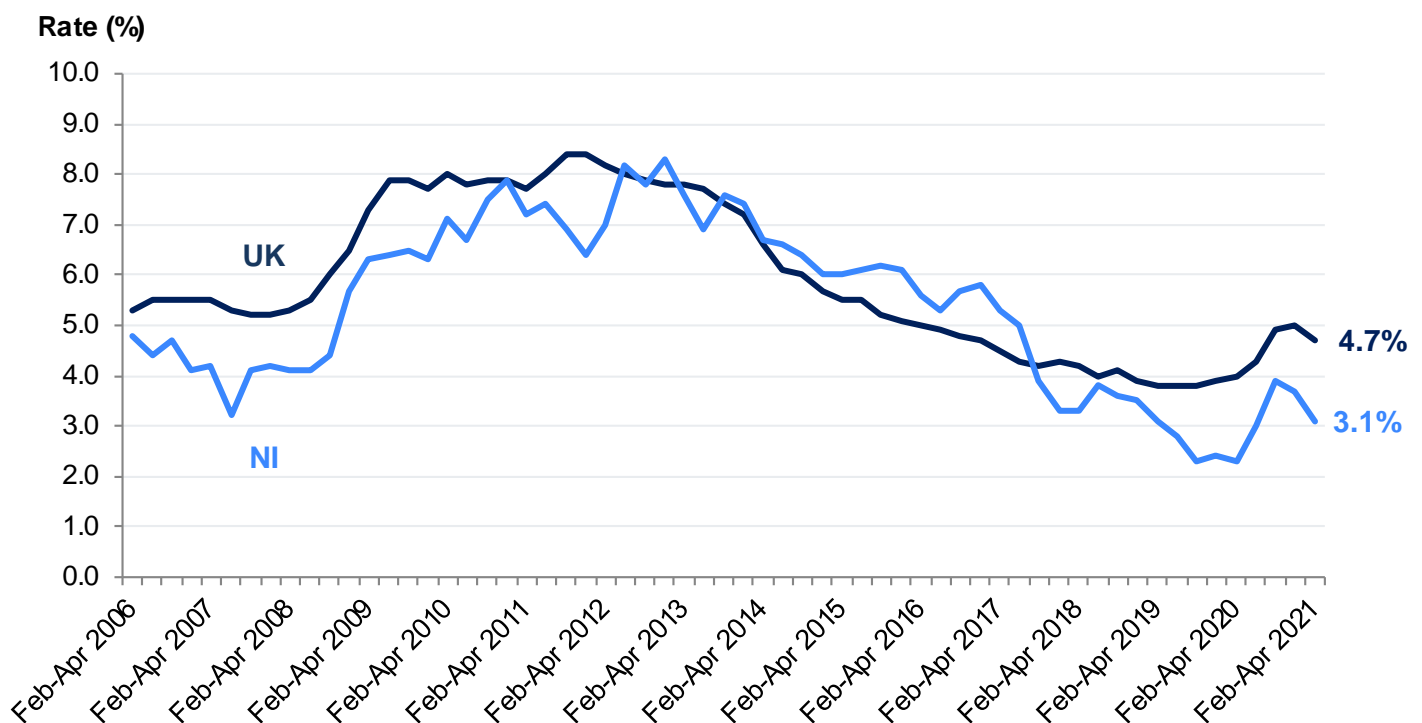
Long-Term Unemployment: those who have been unemployed for 12 months or more.

Youth Unemployment: unemployed people aged 16-24 years.

Key Findings

- LFS unemployment rate for February-April 2021 in NI decreased over the quarter and increased over the year to 3.1%
- The UK unemployment rate is estimated at 4.7%

Figure 2: Seasonally adjusted unemployment rate (16+), Feb-Apr 2006 to Feb-Apr 2021



[Download Figure 2 data](#)

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 the UK reached over 8% in 2011 while the NI rate reached 8% in 2012. The NI rate has been below the UK rate since mid-2017. The UK unemployment rate is 0.7 percentage points (pps) higher than one year ago and similarly the NI unemployment rate is 0.8pps higher than one year ago. The unemployment rate in NI one year ago was the joint lowest on record.

In May 2021, 54,300 people were recorded on the NI Claimant Count. This is 15% less than the recent peak one year earlier in May 2020, and 78% more than the count in March 2020.

Claimant count (experimental) unemployment

The NI seasonally adjusted claimant count was 54,300 (5.5% of the workforce) in May 2021, representing:

- a decrease of 3.4% over the month
- a decrease of 4.2% in males and 2.0% in females
- a decrease of 0.2pps in the claimant count rate over the month
- a decrease of 9,400 (14.8%) over the year (from the recent peak in May 2020)
- an increase of 23,900 (78%) since March 2020.

The UK seasonally adjusted claimant count decreased by 3.6% over the month to 2,495,700 (6.8%).

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

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

Redundancies

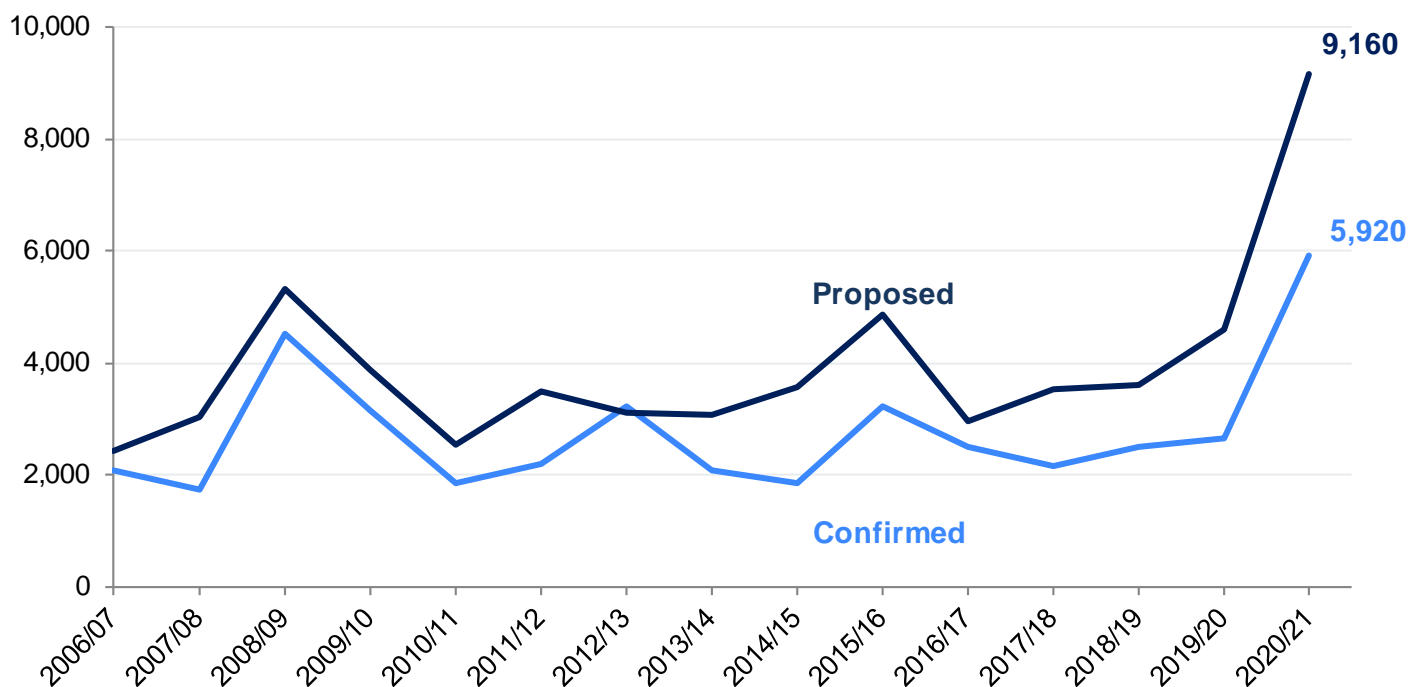
Under the Employment Rights (Northern Ireland) Order 1996 (Amended 8 October 2006) companies are only legally required to notify the Department of impending redundancies of 20 or more employees. Companies who propose less than 20 redundancies are not required to notify the Department, therefore the figures provided are likely to be an underestimate of total job losses, however, it is not possible to quantify the extent of the shortfall. Further information can be found in the [Redundancies Background Quality Report](#). To prevent potential identification of individual businesses, redundancy totals relating to fewer than 3 businesses are not disclosed. Please see the [Redundancy Data Statistical Disclosure Control Policy](#) for further information.

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

- 280 redundancies were confirmed in May 2021, taking the annual total to 5,920
- 150 redundancies were proposed in May with a further 360 proposed in the first two weeks of June
- From 1st June 2020 to 31st May 2021, 9,160 redundancies were proposed, almost double the number recorded in the previous 12 months

Figure 4: Confirmed and proposed redundancies – Annual totals, Jun-May 2007 to Jun-May 2021



[Download Figure 4 data](#)

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

Over the last twelve-month period, 9,160 redundancies were proposed. At 5,920, the number of confirmed redundancies in the last year is much lower and in part reflects the advanced notification period between proposed and confirmed redundancies.

Confirmed redundancies

Employers are required by law to notify the Department of proposals to make 20 to 99 redundancies at least 30 days before the first dismissal, and, for 100 or more redundancies, 90 days before the first dismissal. This results in a time lag of at least a month between the redundancies being proposed and then being confirmed.

During May 2021, the Department was notified of:

- 280 confirmed redundancies, more than double the number confirmed in April.

Over the latest twelve month period there were:

- 5,920 confirmed redundancies, which was 121% higher than the previous year (2,670) and the highest annual total recorded since 2001
- 2,390 (or 40%) confirmed in manufacturing
- 1,400 (24% of all confirmed redundancies) in the wholesale and retail trade
- a further 490 (8% of all confirmed redundancies) in accommodation and food service activities.

Proposed redundancies

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

Recent data show there were:

- 150 proposed redundancies in May, higher than the total of the previous three months (140)
- 360 proposed redundancies between 1st and 14th June

Over the last twelve months to the end of May 2021 there were:

- 9,160 proposed redundancies, which was almost double the previous year (4,600)
- 3,200 (35%) proposed in manufacturing
- 1,560 (17%) of all proposed redundancies) in the wholesale and retail trade
- a further 1,150 (13% of all proposed redundancies) in accommodation and food service activities.

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

3 Employment

Updated June 2021

LFS employment

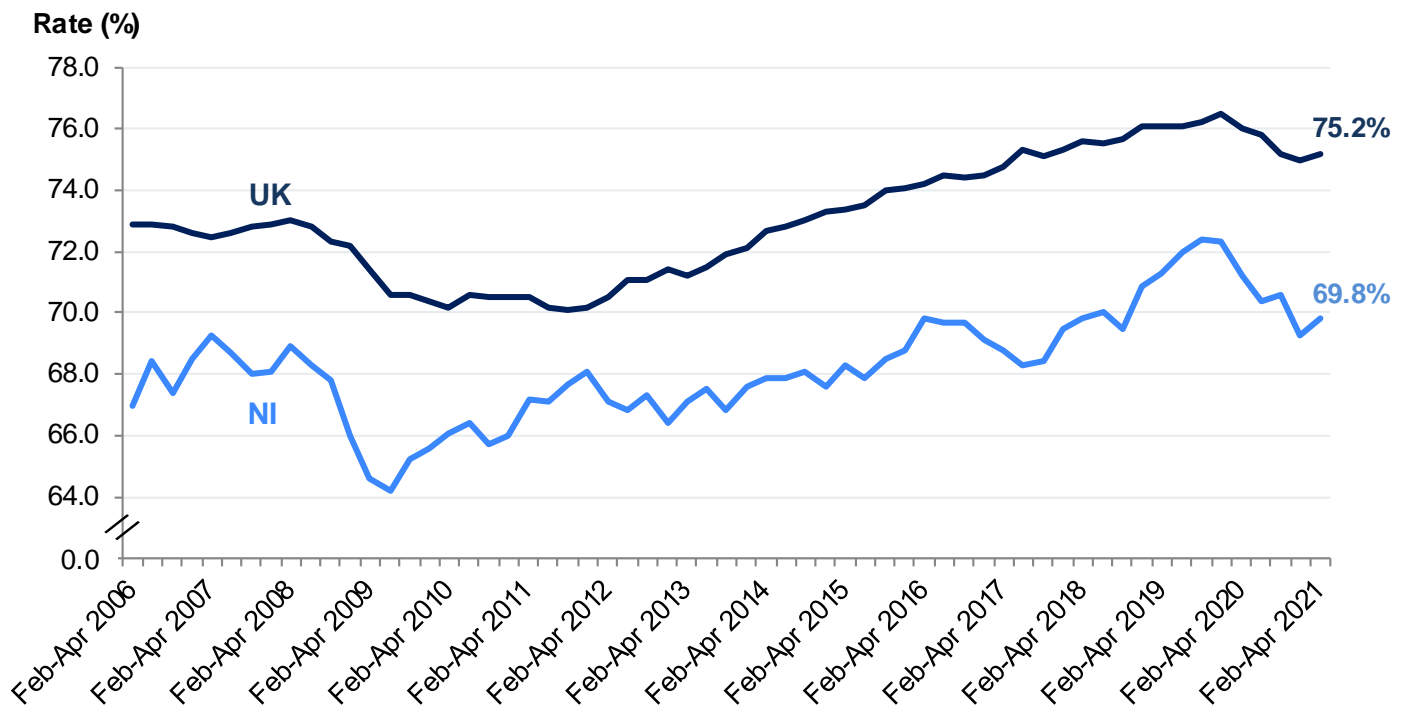
LFS employed: people aged 16 or over who did at least one hour of paid work in the reference week (whether as an employee or self-employed); those who had a paid job that they were temporarily away from; those on government-supported training and employee programmes and those doing unpaid family work.

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 increased over the quarter and decreased over the year to 69.8%
- Total weekly hours worked was estimated at 26.1 million hours per week for the period February-April 2021. This was 0.1 million hours (0.5%) higher than the same period last year. Hours figures are not adjusted for seasonality.

Figure 5: Seasonally adjusted employment rate (16-64), Feb-Apr 2006 to Feb-Apr 2021



[Download Figure 5 data](#)

Figure 5 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 4.7 percentage points) was steeper than the UK average. The most recent NI employment rate for those aged 16-64 for the period February-April 2021 was estimated at 69.8% and decreased by 1.4pps over the year. The UK employment rate for those aged 16-64 for the same period was 75.2%. The male employment rate decreased over the year, however the female employment rate increased.

Employment rate (16-64 years)

The most recent NI employment rate for those aged 16-64 for the period February-April 2021 was estimated at 69.8%. This was:

- an increase of 0.5pps over the quarter
- a decrease of 1.4pps over the year.

Annual changes by sex included:

- the male (16-64) employment rate (72.1%) decreased by 3.6pps over the year
- the female (16-64) employment rate (67.5%) increased by 0.8pps over the year.

UK Regional comparison

The employment rate in NI (69.8%) was:

- below the UK average (75.2%)
- the lowest rate among the twelve UK regions and the only region with an employment rate below 70%.

Estimates below are not adjusted for seasonality and as such differ marginally from the seasonally adjusted estimate above.

Employment by Age

The decrease in employment over the year was driven by a fall in the number of 16-24 year olds in employment, the February-April 2021 unadjusted results show:

- youth employment (16-24 years) fell by 10.9pps over the year
- a smaller decrease in 50-64 year olds (1.2pps)
- 25-34 years olds (2.4pps) and 35-49 year olds (1.0pps) both increased over the year

Worked fewer hours

Of the 841,000 aged 16+ in employment, 234,000 (28%) indicated they had worked fewer hours than usual (including those who were temporarily away from work) in the reference week.

For more information on how the coronavirus pandemic and decreased working hours are linked please see the [Employment and hours worked page](#) [□].

Total weekly hours

The total number of weekly hours worked in Northern Ireland was estimated at 26.1 million hours, this was:

- an increase of 0.1 million hours, or 0.5% from February-April 2020
- an increase of 2.0% on November-January 2021.

Figure 6: Total weekly hours worked (16+), Feb-Apr 2006 to Feb-Apr 2021

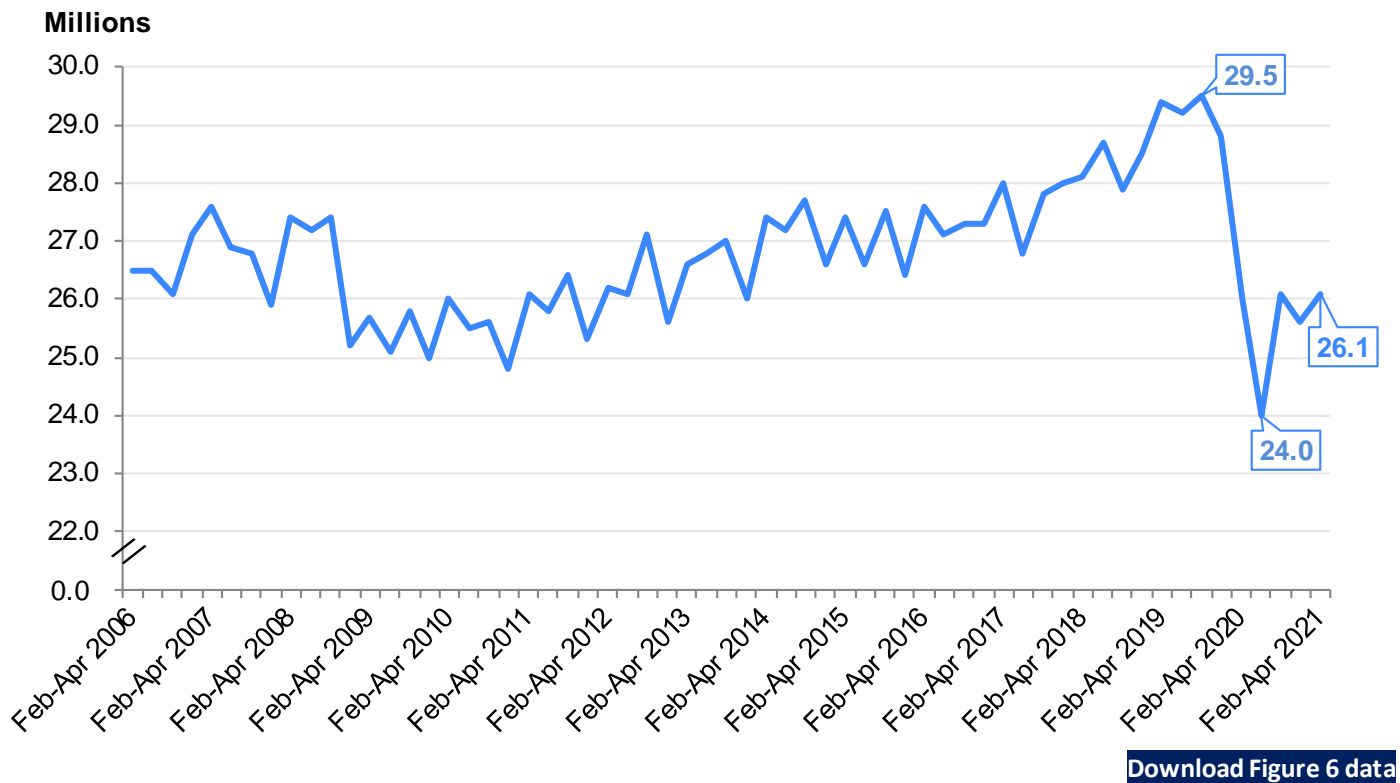


Figure 6 shows that, like many labour market indicators, total weekly hours worked shows a seasonal pattern. Outside of these seasonal variations a trend of increasing weekly hours worked can be seen between 2009 and 2020.

The total number of hours worked in February-April 2021 is similar to August-October and November-January, and 9.0% higher than the series low point of 24.0 million hours in May-July 2020.

At 26.1 million hours worked, the February-April total is 11% below the series peak in August-October 2019. The decrease in total weekly hours worked from 2019 was driven by a decrease in average hours worked and by decreases in the number of people employed.

HMRC PAYE Real Time Information

Experimental payrolled employee counts from HMRC PAYE Real Time Information System

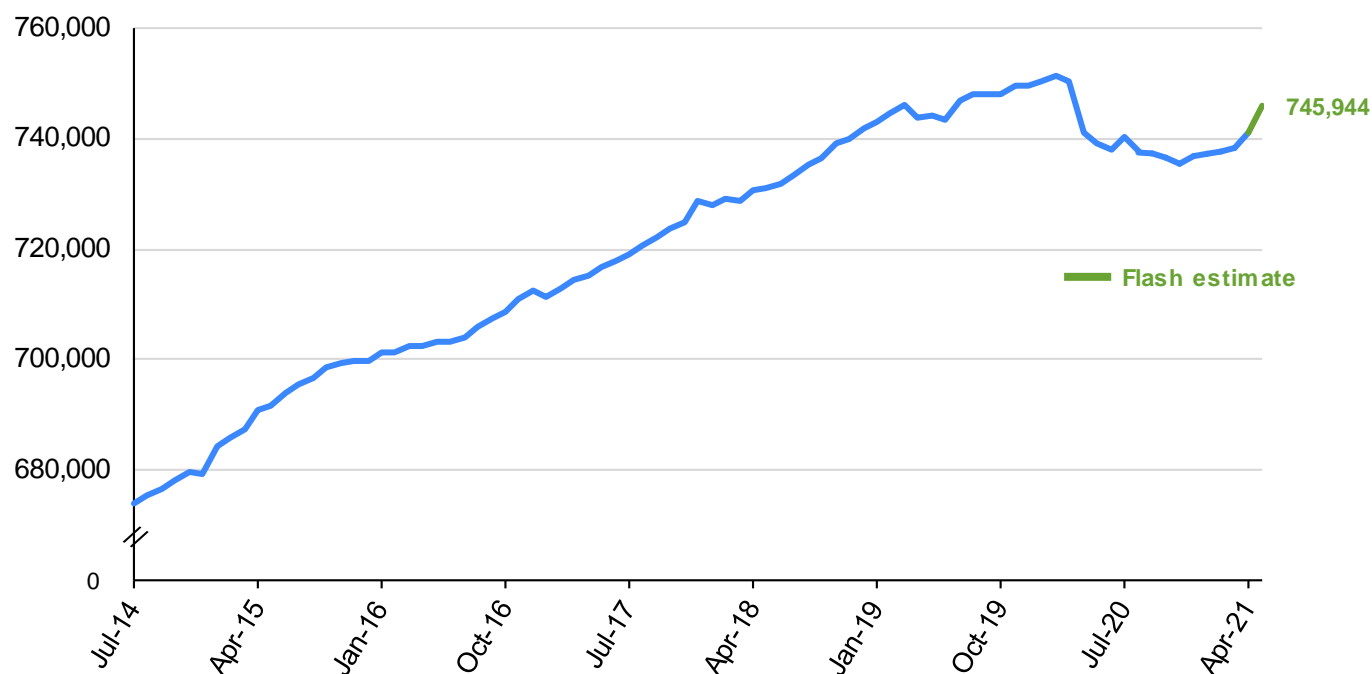
HM Revenue and Customs' (HMRC's) Pay As You Earn (PAYE) Real Time Information (RTI) system is the system employers use to take Income Tax and National Insurance contributions before they pay wages to employees. These data relate to employees paid by employers only, and do not include those who are self-employed. Data are based on where employees live and not the location of their place of work within the UK. Data are seasonally adjusted but not adjusted for inflation. As employees who are "furloughed" as part of the Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme programme should still have their payments reported through this system, they should feature in these data.

The data are classed as Experimental Statistics as the methodologies used to produce the statistics are still in their development phase. Early estimates (flash estimates) for May 2021 are based on around 85% of information and may be subject to revision in next month's release when between 98% and 99% of data will be available. Revision triangle is available [here](#).

Key Findings

- The number of payrolled employees in NI in May was 0.7% higher than April 2021 and 0.9% higher than May 2020
- In the UK, the number of employees increased by 0.7% over the month and by 0.5% over the year to May

Figure 7: Payrolled employees from PAYE RTI, July 2014 to May 2021


[Download Figure 7 data](#)

Between 2014 and 2020 the number of payrolled employees had generally been increasing each month. Payrolled employees peaked at 751,400 in February 2020 before a sharp decrease of 10,200 employees (1.4%) to April 2020. Employee numbers continued on a downward trend until November 2020.

Increases in the number of employees paid through payroll have been seen for six consecutive months with an increase of 7,600 (0.7%) in the last two months alone. The total for May was 745,900, the highest total since March 2020.

Data from the latest HMRC PAYE RTI show that:

- 745,900 people were payrolled employees in May 2021, a 0.7% increase from the previous month and a 0.9% increase from May 2020.
- In the UK, there were 28,511,400 payrolled employees at May 2021, an increase of 0.7% over the month and 0.5% over the year.
- All regions of the UK, apart from London, saw an increase over the year to May 2021, with East Midlands recording the largest increase (1.4%) and London with only decrease (1.7%).
- Between March 2020 and May 2021, all regions of the UK recorded a decrease in payrolled employees (1.7% overall), with NI recording the smallest decrease (0.6%).

Comparison between LFS Employment and the number of paid employees from HMRC PAYE RTI

The LFS and HM Revenue and Customs' (HMRC's) Pay As You Earn (PAYE) RTI measure different things. The LFS follows the International Labour Organization (ILO) definition of employment (anyone aged 16 years and over in paid work and those who had a job that they were temporarily away from in the reference week), this is the official measure of employment in NI but also has a time lag of six weeks between the end of data collection and the publication of estimates. LFS includes unpaid family workers who were employed but not paid, those earning below PAYE threshold and the self-employed but excludes those aged under 16 years, those in communal establishments, temporary foreign workers and employees doing certain types of seasonal work.

RTI measures the number of people who are being paid through the PAYE system via company payrolls and therefore the whole population of employees rather than a sample and not the self-employed. While those receiving pay through the PAYE scheme will include those under 16, people in communal establishments and some foreign residents it excludes those in the undeclared economy whose income is not reported via PAYE, the self-employed and those members of PAYE schemes where no employee earns above the Lower Earning Limit for National Insurance or has another job. The data are also classed as Experimental Statistics as the methodologies used to produce the statistics are still in their development phase. As a result, the series are subject to revisions. Early estimates (flash estimates) with a two week time lag are based on around 85% of information and are subject to larger revisions in the following release, when between 98% to 99% of data are available.

A [blog published by ONS](#), helps to explain the differences between LFS and HMRC payroll estimates and recommends HMRC payroll data as the most timely and best single, overall indicator of the labour market.

Experimental Median monthly earnings from HMRC PAYE Real Time Information System

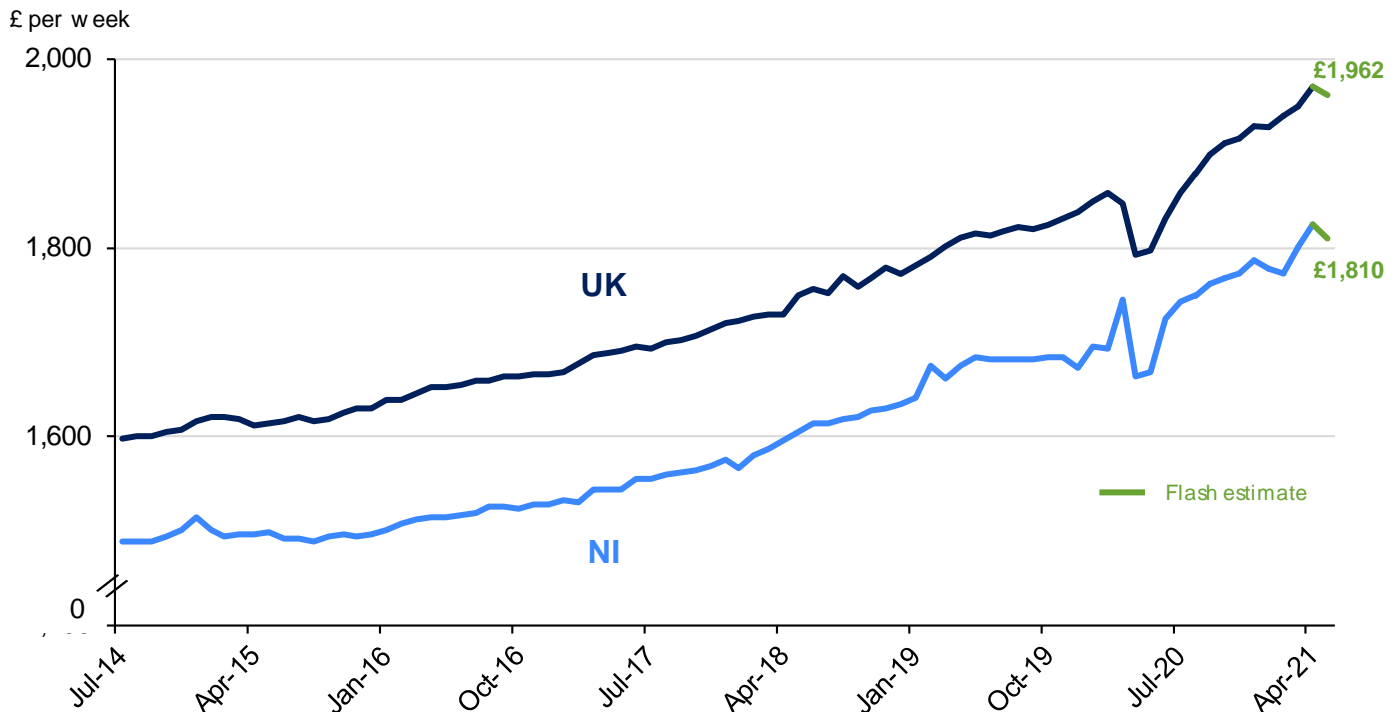
Median measures the amount earned by the average employee, i.e. the level of earnings at which half the population are above and half the population are below.

Note: The percentage change of the median has been calculated using rounded figures.

Key Findings

- Median monthly pay decreased by 0.8% (£15) over the month to May to £1,810 and was 8.4% (£141) higher than the same period last year.
- UK median monthly pay decreased by 0.5% (£9) over the month to May to £1,962 and increased by 9.1% (£164) over the year.

Figure 8: Median Monthly Pay from PAYE RTI, July 2014 to May 2021



[Download Figure 8 data](#)

Median employee pay in NI and UK was generally on an increasing trend between mid-2015 and early 2020. A sharp increase in median pay of 3.1% was seen between February and March 2020 in NI, followed by a decrease of 4.8% in NI and 2.9% in the UK between March and April 2020. This coincided with decreases in the number of paid employees between March and April.

From April until the end of 2020, median employee pay increased. Changes in median pay have been more variable in 2021. The most recent data shows the largest single monthly decrease since April 2020, although, at 0.8%, the decrease to May 2021 is considerably lower than the decrease to April 2020 (4.8%).

Data from the latest HMRC PAYE RTI show that:

- NI had a median monthly pay of £1,810 in May 2021, which was a decrease of 0.8% on the previous month and an increase of 8.4% from May 2020
- UK had a median monthly pay of £1,962 in May 2021, a decrease of 0.5% on the previous month and an increase of 9.1% from May 2020
- NI had the lowest median monthly pay (£1,810) of the 12 UK regions in April 2021 and London had the highest (£2,398)
- Since March 2020, earnings in NI have increased by 3.7%, whilst all other regions saw increases of at least 5.4% over this period (6.2% in the UK overall). This was in part due to the large increase recorded over the month to March in NI only.

Further information on UK monthly pay, UK pay distribution, methodology, data source, collection and coverage of PAYE RTI data can be found on the [Earnings and employment from PAYE page](#)

Quarterly Employment Survey (QES)

Employee jobs estimates are calculated from the Quarterly Employment Survey (QES) aspect of the Quarterly Business Survey (QBS). The QES has a sample size of approximately 6,000 companies that are asked to provide employment data for each of their business activities. **The survey date for Quarter 1 was 1st March 2021 for Northern Ireland. Those who are furloughed under the Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme (CJRS) are included in employee jobs estimates.**

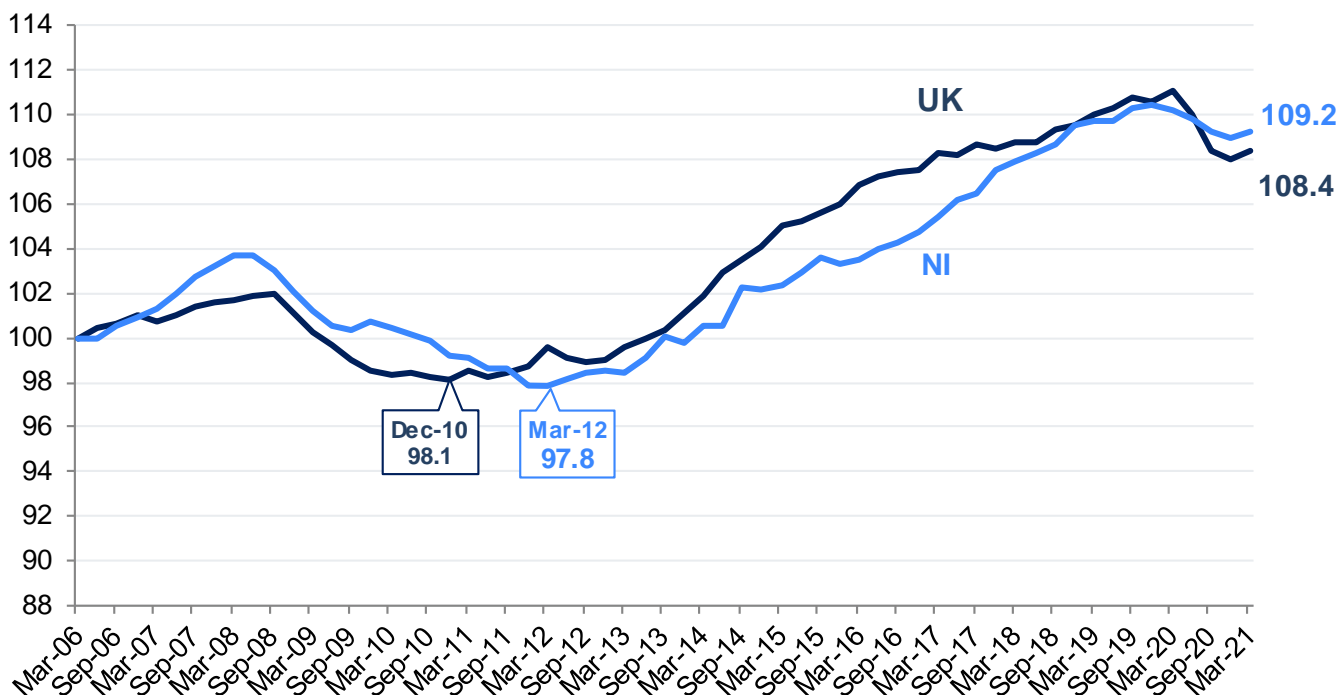
QES employee: An employee is defined as anyone aged 16 years or over that is directly paid from a business's payroll for carrying out a full-time or part-time job or being on a training scheme in Northern Ireland.

Key Findings

- Employee jobs in NI increased over the quarter but decreased over the year to 771,410 jobs in March 2021. This was the first quarterly increase since December 2019, following four quarters of decline.
- The quarterly increase in employee jobs in March 2021 was largely driven by the services industry sector (+2,240 jobs), which had previously experienced four consecutive quarters of decline.
- The annualised growth rate has fallen every quarter between March 2018 (2.3%) and March 2021 (-0.8%). March 2021 marked the second consecutive quarter of negative annualised growth since December 2012.
- The annual decline in private sector jobs (-1.6%) was the fourth consecutive annual decrease. Following a period of annual decline in public sector employee jobs between June 2015 and June 2017, since September 2017 there have been fifteen consecutive quarters of annual growth in public sector jobs to March 2021.

Figure 9: Index of Employee Jobs, March 2006 to March 2021

Index: Mar 06 = 100



[Download Figure 9 data](#)

Figure 9 shows estimated seasonally adjusted employee jobs, indexed to allow comparison between NI and the UK. The UK reached a low point in December 2010, more than a year before the NI low in March 2012. There are now 80,120 more employee jobs in NI since the lowest point in March 2012, and 2,856,000 more jobs in the UK since December 2010.

Employee Jobs

The seasonally adjusted employee jobs total in Northern Ireland at March 2021 was 771,410, which was:

- an increase of 0.3% (+2,020 jobs) over the quarter from the revised December 2020 estimate of 769,390.
- a decrease of 0.9% (-7,290 jobs) over the year from the revised March 2020 estimate of 778,710.
- 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 (+0.4% or +2,240 jobs) and manufacturing (+0.3% or +280 jobs) sectors.
- decreases in the construction (-0.9% or -330 jobs) and other industries (-0.7% or -170 jobs) sectors.
- an increase of 0.1% (+400 jobs) in the private sector.
- an increase of 0.3% (+600 jobs) in the public sector.

Over the year to March 2021:

- decreases were seen in all sectors; services (-0.9% or -5,860 jobs), manufacturing (-0.8% or -710 jobs), construction (-2.0% or -700 jobs) and other industries (-0.1% or -20 jobs).
- the private sector decreased by 1.6% (-9,260 jobs).
- the public sector increased by 0.9% (+1,890 jobs).

Private sector jobs increased over the quarter (+0.1% or +400 jobs) but decreased over the year (-1.6% or -9,260 jobs). The annual decrease in private sector jobs was the fourth consecutive annual decrease.

Following a period of annual decline in public sector employee jobs between June 2015 and June 2017, since September 2017 there have been fifteen consecutive quarters of annual growth in public sector jobs to March 2021. There are 14,900 fewer public sector jobs (-6.5%) than the series peak in September 2009.

Further information is available on the [Quarterly Employment Survey page](#) and further breakdowns of employee jobs by geography and industry are available from the [Business Register and Employment Survey page](#).

Impact of COVID-19 on data collection and estimates

COVID-19 impacted on the data collection and the validation of employee jobs data, which are collected on the Quarterly Business Survey. As a result, the employee jobs estimates for 2020/21 are likely to be subject to higher revisions than normal over the coming quarters. These can be tracked through the revisions triangle which is published alongside the QES publication on the [QES revisions page](#). Comparisons of employee jobs estimates at lower industry levels in particular (eg 2 digit Standard Industrial Classification level), should be treated with caution.

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.

4 Economic Inactivity

Updated June 2021

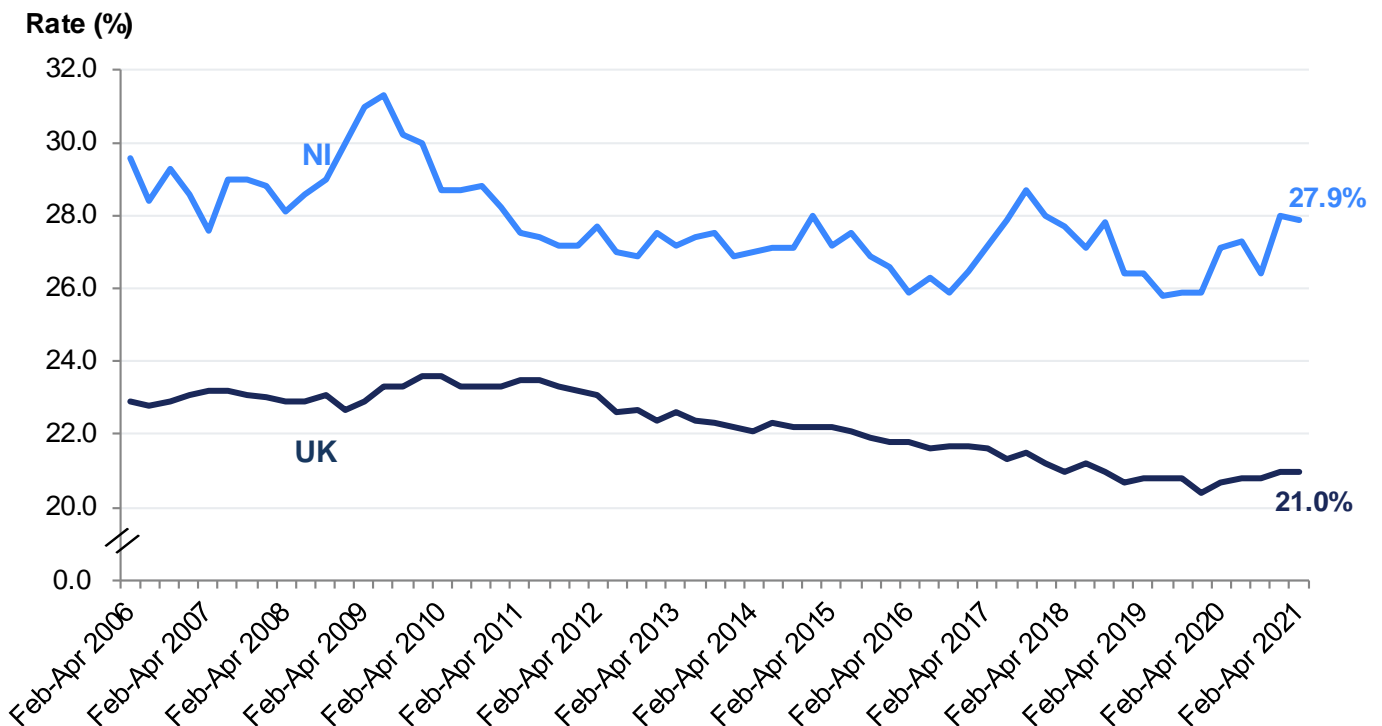
LFS economic inactivity

Economically inactive: People not in employment who have not been seeking work within the last 4 weeks and/or are unable to start work within the next 2 weeks.

Key Findings

- The economic inactivity rate decreased over the quarter and increased over the year to 27.9%
- NI economic inactivity remains the highest of the twelve UK regions

Figure 10: Seasonally adjusted economic inactivity rates (16-64), Feb-Apr 2006 to Feb-Apr 2021



[Download Figure 10 data](#)

Figure 10 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 over 31%, compared to the peak in the UK rate of 23.6% at the beginning of 2010.

During the past 10 years, the UK inactivity rate has mostly been on a downward trend while there was a trend of decreasing economic inactivity in NI from mid-2017 until early 2019 when it reached 25.5%. Since then a trend of increasing economic inactivity is visible. The current rate at 27.9% is 0.8pps above the inactivity rate one year ago.

Economically inactive

The seasonally adjusted economic inactivity rate (aged 16-64) for February-April 2021 was estimated at 27.9%, which was:

- a decrease of 0.1pps over the quarter
- an increase of 0.8pps over the year

Annual changes by sex:

- the male (16-64) economic inactivity rate (25.0%) increased by 2.8pps over the year
- the female (16-64) economic inactivity rate (30.7%) decreased by 1.1pps over the year

UK Regional comparison

The NI economic inactivity rate for those aged 16-64 was 27.9%. This was:

- higher than the UK average rate (21.0%)
- the highest of the twelve UK regions

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

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

[Women in Northern Ireland 2020 page](#)

5 Further Information

Updated June 2021

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.

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.

LFS economic inactivity

Economic inactivity is defined as those individuals who are neither in employment nor unemployed as determined by the ILO measure. The definition of employment rate is the percentage of all working age (16-64) people who are employed.

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 February-April 2021 and the quarter previous to that (i.e. November-January 2021). 'Over the year' refer to comparisons between the latest quarterly estimates for the period February-April 2021 and those of the corresponding quarter one year previously (i.e. February-April 2020).

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 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

| February-April 2021 | 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 |
|---|----------|-------------------------------------|---------------------|---|------------------|--|-----------------------------------|
| Unemployment¹ | 27,000 | +/-7,000 | -5,000 | +/-7,000 | 7,000 | +/-8,000 | +/-8,000 |
| Employment² | 843,000 | +/-22,000 | 1,000 | +/-22,000 | -19,000 | +/-29,000 | +/-30,000 |
| Economically inactive² | 610,000 | +/-22,000 | 6,000 | +/-22,000 | 19,000 | +/-28,000 | +/-29,000 |
| Unemployment rate¹ | 3.1% | +/-0.8pps | -0.6pps | +/-0.8pps | 0.8pps | +/-0.9pps | +/-1.0pps |
| Employment rate² | 69.8% | +/-1.9pps | 0.5pps | +/-1.8pps | -1.4pps | +/-2.4pps | +/-2.5pps |
| Economic inactivity rate² | 27.9% | +/-1.8pps | -0.1pps | +/-1.8pps | 0.8pps | +/-2.3pps | +/-2.4pps |

[Download Table 2 data](#)

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

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

Response Rates – Updated quarterly (last updated 18/05/2021)

The total eligible sample for the January-March 2021 LFS consisted of 9,551 addresses (2,573 chosen at random from the Land and Property Services (LPS) list of domestic properties and 6,978 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, January-March 2021

| | |
|---------------------------------------|-------|
| Fully and partially responding | 2,011 |
| Eligible sample | 9,551 |
| Response rate (%) | 21.1% |

*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 February-April 2021 should be compared with the estimates for November-January 2021. This provides a more robust estimate than comparing with the estimates for January-March 2021, as the February and March data are included within both estimates. Effectively, observed differences are those between the individual months of January 2021 and April 2021. 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. Estimates below a grossed value of 8,000 were previously suppressed however this has been reviewed and tables accompanying this release have been subsequently updated. Now, only estimates based on fewer than 3 events are suppressed to prevent disclosure. Shading is used to draw attention to lower statistical quality/precision of estimates that are based on a smaller sample size. These give the best estimate of the size of a group but comparison across time or between groups with similar values should be avoided. Unshaded estimates are based on a larger sample size. This is likely to result in estimates of higher precision, although they will still be subject to some sampling variability. Further information is available on the NISRA website in the reporting reliability in user requested data guidance. Please note that estimates for youth unemployment and long term unemployment have been included in the report however they are based on a smaller sample size and are therefore shaded in the accompanying tables. As such, associated confidence intervals for these estimates are wide and comparisons over time and with other regions are not encouraged as differences are not likely to be statistically significant.

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 on the background information page of the NISRA website.

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 policies for labour market statistics page](#)

The Labour Force Survey estimates from January-March 2020 to May-July 2020 were revised in October 2020. Please see LFS revision note – October 2020 on the background information page of the NISRA website detailing the size of revisions.

Impact of COVID-19 on Labour Force Survey – field operations, imputation, population estimates

NISRA suspended all face to face household interviews in the middle of March due to COVID-19 and from April all LFS interviews were conducted by telephone. This change in mode for first interviews has changed the non-response bias of the survey, affecting interviews from March 2020 onwards. In particular, the proportion of households where people own their homes in the sample has increased and rented accommodation households has decreased. As such, in October 2020 ONS revised the weighting methodology to include tenure type and provided a consistent reweighted time series back to January-March 2020. The impact on the NI results has generally been to increase the unemployment rate and economic inactivity rate and decrease the employment rate. More information can be found in the [Coronavirus and its impact on the labour force survey page](#) or in the LFS Revision note on the background information page of the NISRA website.

Imputation used for the Labour Force Survey (LFS) was not designed to deal with the changes experienced in the labour market in recent months. Experimental work by ONS with adjusted methodology suggests the use of the existing methodology has little impact on the employment rate (less than 0.2 percentage points). Further information can be found on the ONS website [ONS – Measuring the data](#)

Labour Force Survey (LFS) responses are weighted to official population projections. As the current projections are 2018-based they are based on demographic trends that pre-date the COVID-19 pandemic. ONS plan to reweight the LFS data from January-March 2020 beginning in July 2021. '[Labour Force Survey weighting methodology](#)' details the reweighting methodology and includes release dates for reweighted estimates. Until then, ONS advise that rates published from the LFS remain robust; however, levels and changes in levels should be used with caution.

Further background information has been released by ONS in two blogs [Understanding the impact of Covid-19 on UK population](#) and [Painting the full picture: what our statistics tell us about the labour market](#)

Temporary change in release time

Due to a change in ONS release and briefing practices in light of COVID-19, from April 2020 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](#), and more detail on the change in ONS practices is available on the [Changes to publication times for market-sensitive statistics page](#).

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](#)' page and an FAQ document explaining the difference between the two measures is available on the [changes to the claimant count page](#) on the NISRA website.

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

Claimant count correction note

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 fewer than 1,000 cases.

Claimant count revisions

Seasonally adjusted estimates are revised on a regular basis. Each month the previous estimate is revised in line with the current seasonal adjustment model, giving the best estimate of change for the latest period. During the Covid-19 outbreak the seasonal adjustment parameters for the Claimant Count will be under constant review and may result in revisions to the seasonally adjusted Claimant Count. The most recent longer-term revisions were published in April 2021 and related to figures from January 2017 to January 2021. Further details and previous seasonal adjustment revisions are available from the [changes to the claimant count page](#).

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 required to notify the Department so there is likely to be an undercount.

To prevent the potential identification of individual businesses, redundancy totals relating to fewer than 3 businesses are not disclosed. The [Statistical Disclosure Control Policy](#) is available on the NISRA website.

HMRC PAYE

Experimental Statistics on earnings and number of payrolled employees from HM Revenue and Customs' (HMRC's) Pay As You Earn (PAYE) Real Time Information (RTI) system are included in Section 3. HMRC PAYE RTI is the system employers use to take Income Tax and National Insurance contributions before they pay wages to employees. Data relate to employees paid by employers only, and do not include self-employment income or income from pensions, property rental or investments. Data are based on where employees live and not the location of their place of work within the UK. Data are seasonally adjusted but not adjusted for inflation. The HMRC PAYE covers the whole population rather than a sample of employees or companies. The data are classed as Experimental Statistics as the methodologies used to produce the statistics are still in their development phase. As a result, the series are subject to [revisions](#). Background information including the methodology used to compile the statistics, strengths and limitation and a

comparison with other labour market sources is available on the [Earnings and employment from PAYE page](#) on the ONS website. Detail is also available [on the guide to experimental statistics page](#).

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 December 2020 seasonally adjusted estimate first published in March 2021 has subsequently been revised down 0.2%. For further details please see the [Quarterly Employment Survey revisions page](#).

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.

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- 5.11 [Northern Ireland Employee Jobs by broad industry sector September 1978 to March 2021](#)
- 5.12 [Northern Ireland Employee Jobs for public sector December 2007 to March 2021](#)
- 5.13 [Northern Ireland Seasonally Adjusted Employee Jobs by Section Level March 2005 – March 2021](#)

HMRC PAYE RTI

- 1.1 [Median Monthly Pay from PAYE RTI - Seasonally Adjusted](#)
- 1.2 [Median Monthly Pay from PAYE RTI - Non-Seasonally Adjusted](#)