Office for National Statistics

Statistical bulletin

Gender pay gap in the UK: 2021

Differences in pay between women and men by age, region, full-time and part-time, and occupation.

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Release date:
26 October 2021

Next release:
To be announced

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1 . Other pages in this release

Commentary on topics covered in the Annual Survey of Hours and Earnings (ASHE) is split between three separate bulletins. The other two can be found on the following pages:

- Employee earnings in the UK (from Annual Survey of Hours and Earnings): 2021
- Low and high pay in the UK: 2021

2 . Main points

- Interpreting average earnings data is difficult at the moment; in July we published a blog: How COVID-19 has impacted the Average Weekly Earnings data, which explains the complexities of interpreting earnings data in the current climate; compositional and base effects are likely to affect the growth rates, as the data for 2020 was affected by both the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic, in terms of wages and hours worked in the economy, and also disruption to the collection of data from businesses; this means that comparisons with 2020 need to be treated with caution and we would encourage users to focus on the longer-term trends rather than year on year changes.
- Among full time employees the gender pay gap in April 2021 was 7.9%, continuing the downward trend; this was 7.0% in April 2020 and 9.0% in April 2019 and we recommend looking at the longer-term trend.
- There remains a large difference in gender pay gap between employees aged 40 years and over and those aged below 40 years.
- Compared with lower-paid employees, higher earners experience a much larger difference in hourly pay between the sexes.
- The managers, directors and senior officials occupation group has experienced the largest fall in gender pay gap since the pre-pandemic April 2019 figure, in particular for those aged 50 years and over; this group has previously been identified as having a notable impact on the pay gap.
- The gender pay gap is higher in every English region than in Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland.
- Statistics in this bulletin relate to the pay period that includes 21 April 2021, at which time approximately 3.7 million employees were on furlough under the Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme (CJRS), this is fewer than during the period covered by last year's release when approximately 8.8 million employees were furloughed.
- The estimates in this bulletin include furloughed employees and are based on actual payments made to the employee from company payrolls and the hours on which this pay was calculated, which in the case of furloughed employees are their usual hours.

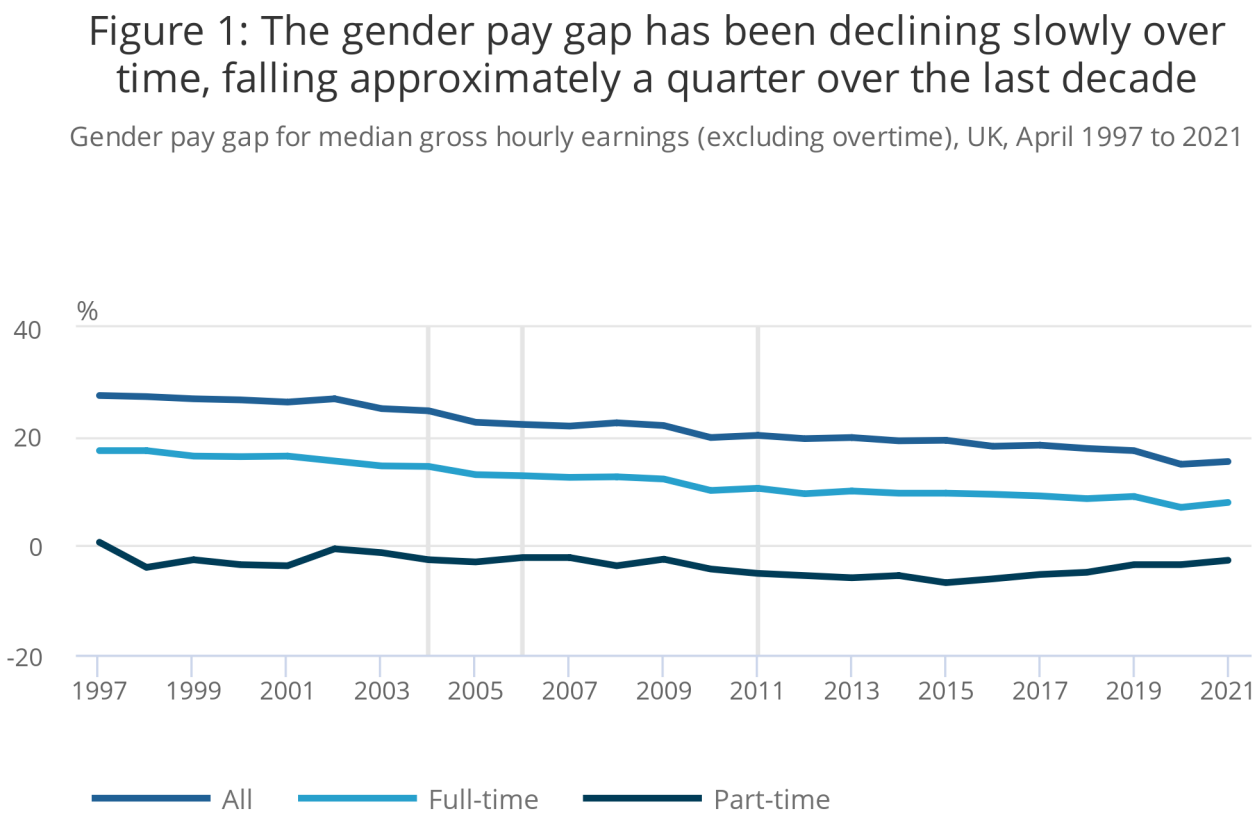
The gender pay gap is calculated as the difference between average hourly earnings (excluding overtime) of men and women as a proportion of men's average hourly earnings (excluding overtime). It is a measure across all jobs in the UK, not of the difference in pay between men and women for doing the same job.

Estimates for 2020 and 2021 are subject to more uncertainty than usual as a result of the challenges we faced in collecting the data under government-imposed public health restrictions in 2020 and falling response rates since the start of the pandemic. (See Measuring the data.)

3 . The gender pay gap

Figure 1: The gender pay gap has been declining slowly over time, falling approximately a quarter over the last decade

Gender pay gap for median gross hourly earnings (excluding overtime), UK, April 1997 to 2021



Source: Office for National Statistics – Annual Survey of Hours and Earnings (ASHE)

Notes:

1. Vertical lines represent discontinuities in 2004, 2006 and 2011 ASHE.
2. Estimates for 2021 data are provisional.
3. Employees are on adult rates, pay is unaffected by absence unless furloughed.
4. Full-time is defined as employees working more than 30 paid hours per week (or 25 or more for the teaching professions).
5. Figures represent the difference between men's and women's hourly earnings as a percentage of men's hourly earnings.

The gender pay gap has been declining slowly over time; over the last decade it has fallen by approximately a quarter among both full-time employees and all employees.

In 2021, the gap among full-time employees was 7.9%, up from 7.0% in 2020. This is still below the gap of 9.0% before the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic in 2019, and so the downward trend is continuing. We recommend looking at the longer-term trend. Among all employees, the gender pay gap increased to 15.4%, from 14.9% in 2020, but is still down from 17.4% in 2019.

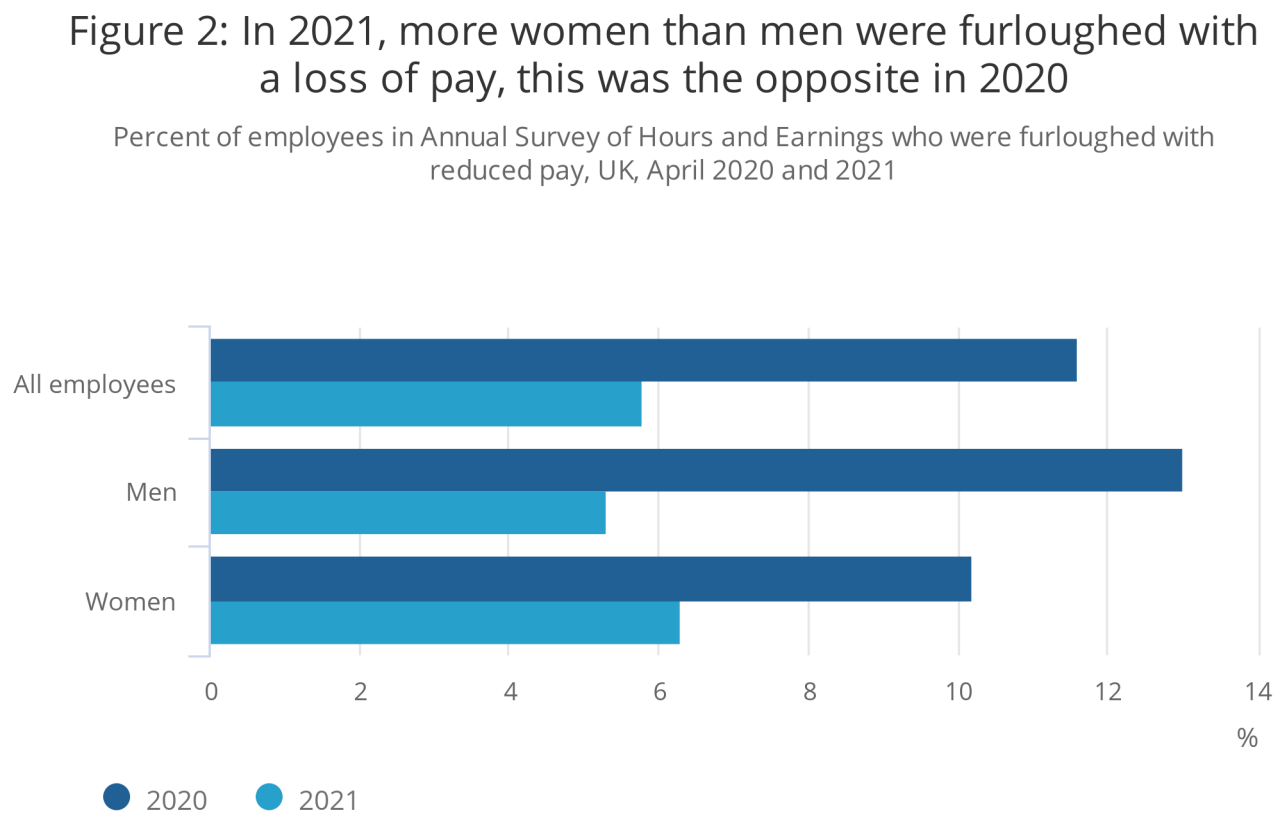
The gender pay gap reported by Office for National Statistics is a long time-series, calculated from the Annual Survey of Hours and Earnings (ASHE) which samples from all employee jobs in all sizes of company. The ASHE gender pay gap analysis is different from the gender pay gap based on compulsory reporting; since 2017, organisations employing 250 or more employees have been required by the UK government to publish and report specific figures about their gender pay gap. This is done across all their employees, not differentiated by full-time and part-time status. No findings from that initiative are reported in this publication.

The gender pay gap for part-time employees also reduced from negative 3.5% to negative 2.7%. The upward trend in the part-time gender pay gap, seen since 2015, is continuing.

The gender pay gap is higher for all employees than it is for full-time employees or part-time employees. This is because women fill more part-time jobs, which in comparison with full-time jobs have lower hourly median pay.

Figure 2: In 2021, more women than men were furloughed with a loss of pay, this was the opposite in 2020

Percent of employees in Annual Survey of Hours and Earnings who were furloughed with reduced pay, UK, April 2020 and 2021



Source: Source: Office for National Statistics – Annual Survey of Hours and Earnings (ASHE)

Notes:

1. Percent of employees in ASHE 2020 and 2021 who were furloughed and whose pay was reduced due to absence.

2. Estimates for 2021 data are provisional.

3. Employees are on adult rates, pay is unaffected by absence unless furloughed.

The Annual Survey of Hours and Earnings (ASHE) collects information from employers about pay, hours and aspects such as whether pay was reduced because of absence. This information was supplemented in 2020 by details of whether employee jobs were furloughed at 22 April, drawn from the Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme (CJRS) which resulted in the furlough estimates for 2020 ASHE showing an undercount of approximately 20% against the CJRS. However, in 2021 the survey asked employers whether an employee was on furlough during the pay period of 21 April 2021 and was not supplemented by official CJRS data. Therefore, estimates of furlough in 2020 and 2021 will be on a slightly different basis.

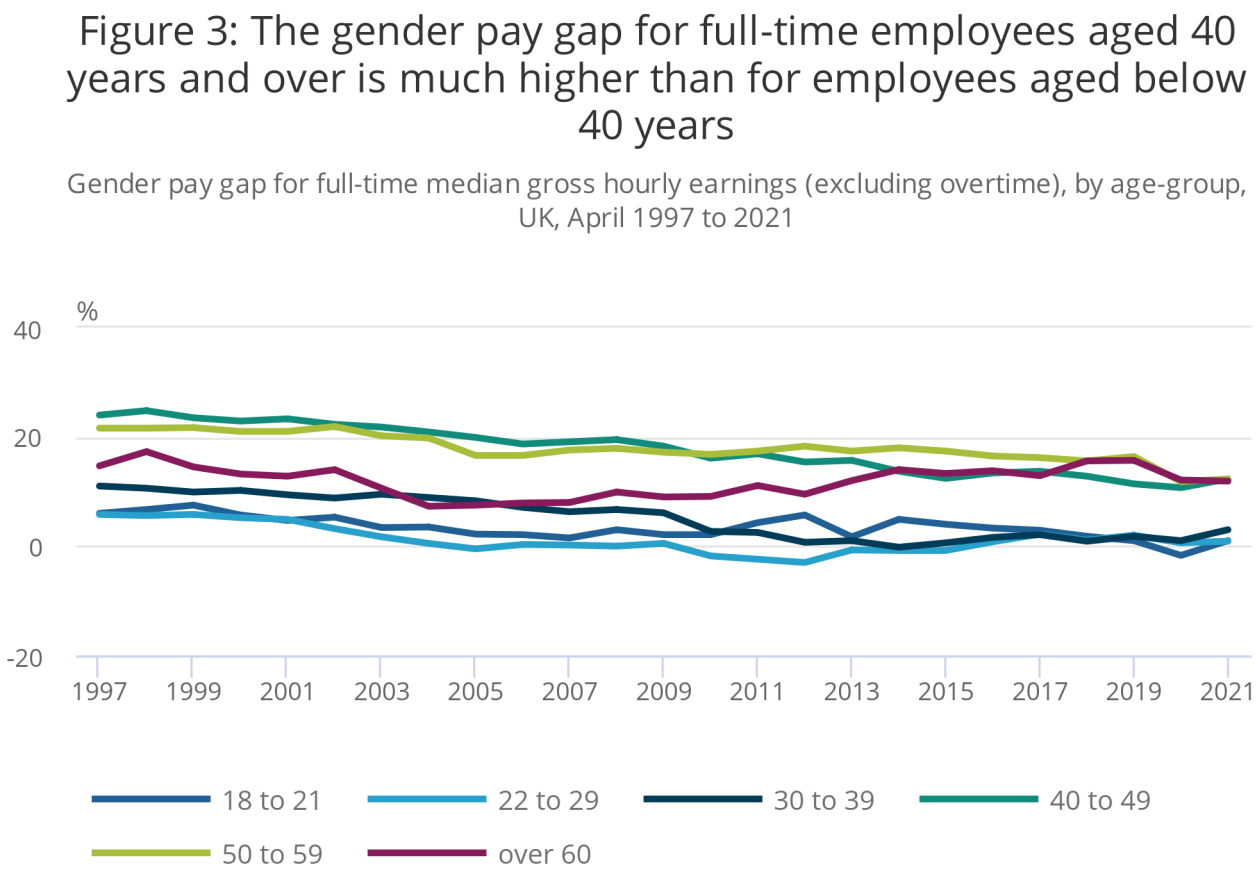
The data collected in ASHE 2021 relates to the pay period covering 21 April 2021, at which point approximately 3.7 million employees were furloughed under the Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme. The data for 2020 refers to the pay period covering 22 April 2020, when approximately 8.8 million employees were furloughed. For both years, approximately a half of these furloughed employees received reduced pay. This has the potential to artificially affect the gender pay gap estimates in for both years. For example, if a notably higher proportion of men than women (or vice versa) were furloughed with reduced pay, the headline gender pay gap estimates would be more likely to reflect short-term labour market conditions rather than underlying pay trends.

A slightly higher proportion of women than men were furloughed with reduced pay in April 2021 (Figure 2). The opposite was true in April 2020, where a higher proportion of men than women were furloughed with reduced pay, which could partly explain why the gender pay gap is slightly larger in 2021.

For both men and women, the vast majority of furloughed employees were in the lowest-paying jobs; the 10% lowest-earners were substantially more likely than the average employee to fall into this definition. This is illustrated by Figure 3 in the Low and High Pay: 2021 bulletin.

Figure 3: The gender pay gap for full-time employees aged 40 years and over is much higher than for employees aged below 40 years

Gender pay gap for full-time median gross hourly earnings (excluding overtime), by age-group, UK, April 1997 to 2021



Source: Office for National Statistics – Annual Survey of Hours and Earnings (ASHE)

Notes:

1. Age group 16 to 17 years has been excluded from this chart because of sample size volatility.
2. Estimates for 2021 data are provisional.
3. Employees are on adult rates, pay is unaffected by absence unless furloughed.
4. Full-time is defined as employees working more than 30 paid hours per week (or 25 or more for the teaching professions).
5. Figures represent the difference between men's and women's hourly earnings as a percentage of men's hourly earnings.

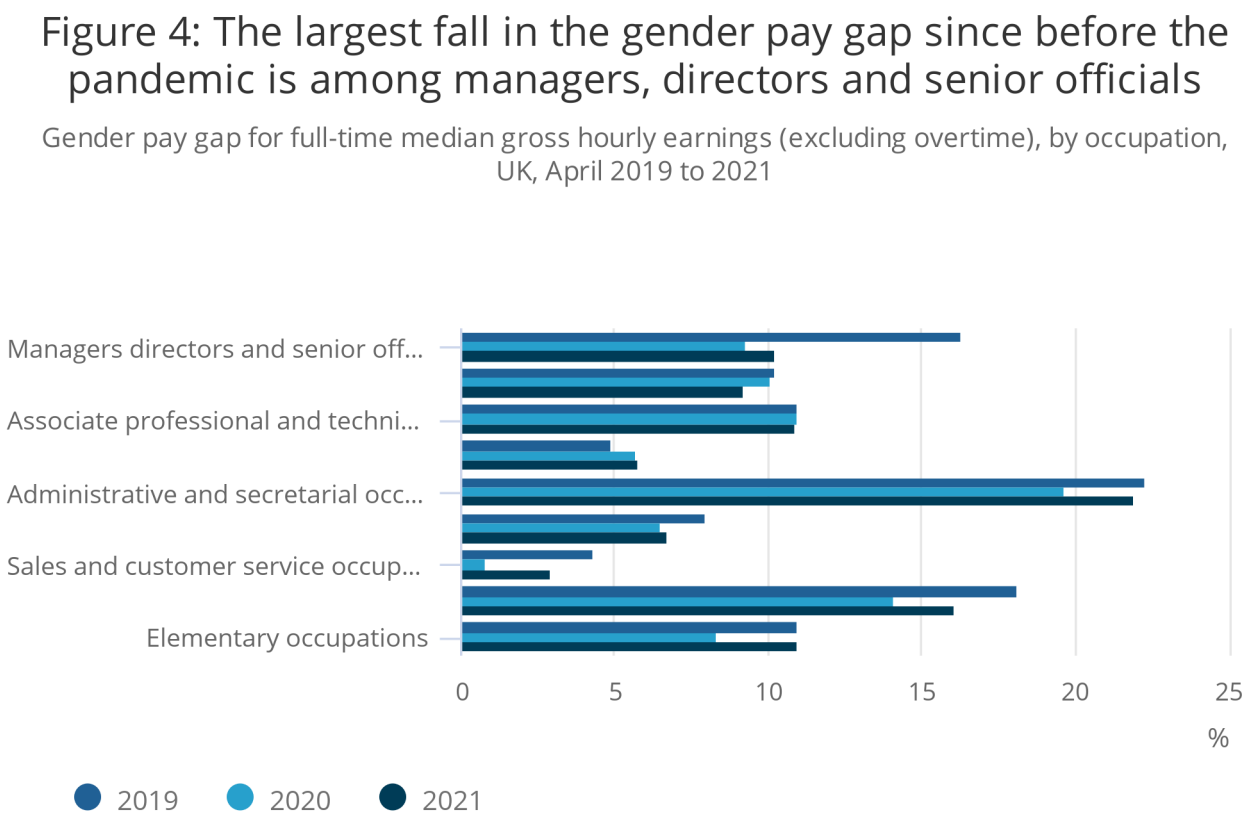
The clearest insight into the gender pay gap is provided by analysis across age groups. For age groups under 40 years, the gender pay gap for full-time employees (which is a more homogenous basis than all employees for measuring differences in hourly pay) is low, at 3% or below. This has been the case since 2017.

However, for age groups 40 to 49 years and older, the gender pay gap for full-time employees is much higher, at approximately 12%. Our 2019 analysis explored the types of occupation that men and women work in, by age group. In particular, it flagged a lower incidence of women moving into higher-paid managerial occupations after the age of 39 years, at which point pay in these occupations increases.

All age groups experienced a decrease in gender pay gap in 2020; this was largest for employees aged 50 to 59 years and 60 years and over. The gap for most age groups increased in 2021 (although still in line with the previous downward trend); however, it remained at a similar level for employees in these two highest age groups (50 years and over).

Figure 4: The largest fall in the gender pay gap since before the pandemic is among managers, directors and senior officials

Gender pay gap for full-time median gross hourly earnings (excluding overtime), by occupation, UK, April 2019 to 2021



Source: Office for National Statistics – Annual Survey of Hours and Earnings (ASHE)

Notes:

1. Estimates for 2021 data are provisional.
2. Employees are on adult rates, pay is unaffected by absence unless furloughed.
3. Full-time is defined as employees working more than 30 paid hours per week (or 25 or more for the teaching professions).
4. Figures represent the difference between men's and women's hourly earnings as a percentage of men's hourly earnings.

A positive gender pay gap among full-time employees exists in each of the nine main occupation groups, but it has fallen since 2019 in all except two: the skilled trade occupation saw a small increase and elementary occupations has returned to its 2019 level.

Similarly, compared with 2020, the gender pay gap in 2021 increased for the majority of occupation groups, with only professional occupations and associate professional and technical occupations experiencing decreases.

The largest fall since before the pandemic is among managers, directors and senior officials, from 16.3% in 2019 to 10.2% in 2021, reflecting some signs of more women holding higher-paid managerial roles. This occupation group has one of the highest median pay - £22.01 per hour (excluding overtime) for full-time employees, compared with £15.59 among all full-time employee jobs - and it therefore has a strong impact on the gender pay gap.

The large decrease in the managers, directors and senior officials' occupation since 2020 can be partly attributed to the decrease in gender pay gap for employees aged 50 years and over (Figure 3). When looking at managers, directors and senior officials by age group, those aged 50 to 59 years decreased by over 11 percentage points and for 60 years and over by over 5 percentage points and remained at similar level in 2021.

Figure 5: Explore the gender pay gap by occupation

Gender pay gap for median gross hourly earnings (excluding overtime), all, full-time, and part-time employees, by occupation, UK, April 2021

Notes:

1. Estimates for 2021 data are provisional.

2. Employees are on adult rates, pay is unaffected by absence unless furloughed.

3. Full-time is defined as employees working more than 30 paid hours per week (or 25 or more for the teaching professions).

4. Figures represent the difference between men's and women's hourly earnings as a percentage of men's hourly earnings.

5. Some occupations can be included in more than one grouping.

6. Some data is unavailable as considered unreliable (small sample size).

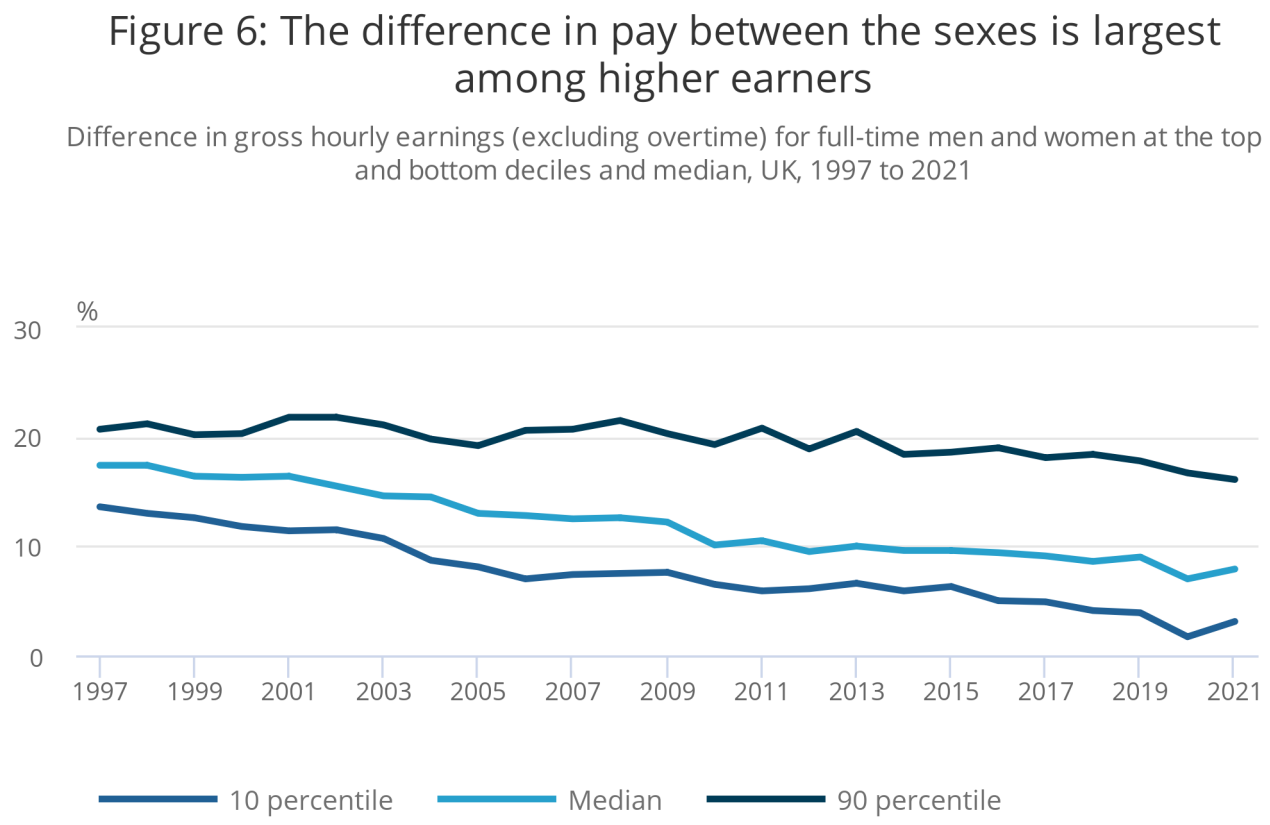
7. The quality of earning estimates vary by occupation - quality measures are available in the accompanying published data tables.

8. Please note that the percentages in this visual may differ to the figures in the accompanying published data tables by 0.1% due to the effects of rounding. When conducting any analyses, please use the data from the tables.

Download the data

Figure 6: The difference in pay between the sexes is largest among higher earners

Difference in gross hourly earnings (excluding overtime) for full-time men and women at the top and bottom deciles and median, UK, 1997 to 2021



Source: Office for National Statistics – Annual Survey of Hours and Earnings (ASHE)

Notes:

1. Estimates for 2021 data are provisional.
2. Employees are on adult rates, pay is unaffected by absence unless furloughed.
3. Full-time is defined as employees working more than 30 paid hours per week (or 25 or more for the teaching professions).
4. Figures represent the difference between men's and women's hourly earnings as a percentage of men's hourly earnings.

The 90th percentile male employee (that is, one who earns more than 90% of other male employees, but less than the other 10%) earns substantially more than the equivalent woman employee. The difference in pay, expressed in gender pay gap terms, is 16.1% for full-time employees. This is much higher than the gap among median earners (7.9%) and the bottom 10% of earners (3.1%).

Following a decrease in the gender pay gap across all deciles in 2020, all but the highest-earning employees have experienced an increase in gender pay gap in 2021. The highest-earning employees were less affected by furlough, and so the downward trend continued as normal for this group.

Figure 7: The gender pay gap is higher in all English regions than in Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland

Gender pay gap for median gross hourly earnings (excluding overtime) for full-time employees, by work region, UK, April 1997 and 2021

Notes:

1. Estimates for 2021 data are provisional.
2. Employees are on adult rates, pay is unaffected by absence unless furloughed.
3. Full-time is defined as employees working more than 30 paid hours per week (or 25 or more for the teaching professions).
4. Figures represent the difference between men's and women's hourly earnings as a percentage of men's hourly earnings.

Download the data

The gender pay gap varies substantially between regions. In every region of England, it is higher than in each of Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales.

This is a very different pattern from 1997, when the gender pay gap was quite equal between the regions of the UK.

In the case of Northern Ireland in particular, the gender pay gap is affected by a higher proportion of women working in the public sector where pay rates for some jobs are higher than in the private sector.

London stands out as being the only region where the gender pay gap is very similar now to its 1997 level. This is not a new development and has been highlighted previously. Drivers of the gender pay gap are numerous and although jobs in London have a greater skew to higher-skilled occupations, the relative change in proportion of full-time jobs by occupation since 1997 shows a similar pattern in London to that of the whole UK, meaning that factors beyond this need to be considered.

Analysis conducted by Office for National Statistics (ONS) based on ASHE 2017 data concluded that only 36% of the difference between men and women's pay could be explained by the attributes modelled from ASHE (with occupation being the highest, explaining 23% of the difference). This highlights the need for additional investigation, for example, separate ONS analysis has identified that - when changing job - women are more likely than men to accept lower pay in favour of a shorter commute. This is particularly noticeable in parts of the South East where commuting time to London is a consideration and is likely to affect the number of women moving into managerial positions.

4 . Gender pay gap data

Gender pay gap
Dataset | Released 26 October 2021
Annual gender pay gap estimates for UK employees by age, occupation, industry, full-time and part-time, region and other geographies, and public and private sector. Compiled from the Annual Survey of Hours and Earnings.

5 . Glossary

The gender pay gap

The gender pay gap is calculated as the difference between average hourly earnings (excluding overtime) of men and women as a proportion of average hourly earnings (excluding overtime) of men's earnings.

Full-time and part-time

Full-time is defined as employees working more than 30 paid hours per week (or 25 or more hours for the teaching professions). Part-time is defined as employees working less than or equal to 30 paid hours per week (or less than or equal to 25 hours for the teaching professions).

Standard Occupational Classification (SOC)

The Standard Occupational Classification is a common classification of occupational information for the UK.

6 . Measuring the data

The estimates in this bulletin are based on information gathered from a sample of 1% of employees in the UK. Prior to the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic, the achieved sample size of the Annual Survey of Hours and Earnings (ASHE) was approximately 180,000 each year. However, given the challenges to data collection during the pandemic period and response rates not recovering, the final achieved sample size was 144,000 for 2020 and 140,000 for 2021. As such, ASHE estimates for 2020 and 2021 are subject to more uncertainty than usual.

All estimates for 2021 are provisional and relate to the pay period that includes 21 April 2021, at which time 3.7 million employees were furloughed under the Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme (CJRS). For 2020 this was 8.8 million. Furloughed employee jobs received 80% of normal pay from the scheme, to a maximum £2,500 a month. Employers were able to top up employees pay, but they were not required to; the Office for National Statistics (ONS) has estimated that approximately a half of employees had their pay topped up for both years.

ASHE collected actual payments made to the employee and the hours on which this pay were calculated, which in the case of furloughed employees would be their usual hours.

As with 2020 we have revised the exclusion criteria for the 2020 and 2021 data tables to be "those employees who were not furloughed but whose pay was affected by absence". This results in the ASHE data tables excluding 4.4% of employee jobs in 2021 and 6.0% in 2020 (compared with approximately 5% in previous years).

The 2020 and 2021 ASHE estimates have been weighted using the new reweighted Labour Force Survey (LFS) weights from July 2021. There is more information available on the reweighting of the LFS.

An explanation for the difference in the gender pay gap estimate between full-time and all employees can be found in the Guide to interpreting ASHE estimates. It also addresses common questions about the data.

Further information on ASHE methodology can be found in the ASHE methodology and guidance and the ASHE Quality and Methodology Information report.

7 . Strengths and limitations

The gender pay gap is the percentage difference between men and women's median hourly earnings, across all jobs in the UK; it is not a measure of the difference in pay between men and women for doing the same job.

The gender pay gap estimates presented here do not include overtime. Overtime can skew the results because men work relatively more overtime than women and using hourly earnings better accounts for the fact that men work on average more hours per week than women.

The strengths and limitations of the Annual Survey of Hours and Earnings (ASHE) can be found in the Quality and Methodology Information report and the Guide to sources of data of earnings and income.

8 . Related links

[The commuting gap: women are more likely than men to leave their job over a long commute]
Article | Released 4 September 2019
When deciding whether to leave their job, women are more likely than men to accept lower pay in favour of a shorter commute, contributing to the overall gender pay gap.

[Understanding the gender pay gap in the UK]
Article | Released 17 January 2018
This analysis builds on the raw gender pay gap, using regressions techniques to provide more insight into the factors that affect men's and women's pay.

[London had the lowest gender pay gap 20 years ago but now has the largest]
Article | Released 27 November 2017
The pay gap between men and women working in London has barely changed in over two decades, new ONS analysis shows.

[Decoding the gender pay gap]
Blog | Released 16 April 2019
This ONS blog post explores the paradox found in the gender pay gap and how occupation and type of employment affect the statistics.

[Labour market overview]
Bulletin | Released 12 October 2021
Estimates of employment, unemployment, economic inactivity and other employment-related statistics for the UK.

[Ethnicity pay gaps in Great Britain: 2020]
Article | Released 12 October 2020
Earnings and employment statistics for different ethnic groups in Great Britain, using regression analysis to provide more insight into factors that affect pay.