

Article

Single-month and weekly Labour Force Survey estimates: September 2020

Comparison of the Labour Force Survey (LFS) headline three-month average rates for employment, unemployment and economic inactivity with their equivalent single-month estimates. Includes weekly Labour Force Survey estimates.

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Notice

15 September 2020

The effect of the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic on our capacity means we have reviewed the existing labour market releases and will be suspending some publications.

This will protect the delivery and quality of our remaining labour market outputs as well as ensuring we can respond to new demands as a direct result of the coronavirus. More details about the impact on labour market outputs can be found in our [statement](#).

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1 . Main points and information

This article contains charts that compare the Labour Force Survey (LFS) single-month estimates with their equivalent three-month average rates for employment, unemployment and economic inactivity. The single-month estimates are derived from the same data source as the headline three-month figures but are not designated as [National Statistics](#). Their use is restricted to helping to understand the movements in the headline three-month averages. For the three-month averages, the dates shown on the charts relate to the last month of the three (for example, May to July is indicated by July).

Model-based single-month estimates are now also produced and included within the [data table accompanying this article](#). The model uses single-month wave-specific time series estimates for each variable, along with estimated variances, to produce modelled seasonally adjusted time series. These are currently [Experimental Statistics](#).

This article also includes experimental estimates of labour market indicators broken down by individual weeks. While not providing robust estimates of labour market conditions, these can help users to understand the impact of the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic on a week-by-week basis during the quarter.

LFS estimates presented in this article include interviews that took place during May to July 2020. Consequently, all interviews relate to the period following the implementation of coronavirus social distancing measures (which included the government closure of schools, introduction of lockdown, and announcement of measures aimed at protecting businesses and jobs) along with the start of easing of some of those measures.

The International Labour Organization (ILO) definition of employment includes those who worked in a job for at least one hour and those temporarily absent from a job. Workers furloughed under the Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme (CJRS), or who are self-employed but temporarily not in work, have a reasonable expectation of returning to their jobs after a temporary period of absence. Therefore, they are classified as employed under the ILO definition.

Main points

- The single-month estimate for the employment rate in the UK, for July 2020, shows a decrease of 0.6 percentage points compared with the previous month.
- The single-month estimate for the unemployment rate in the UK, for July 2020, shows an increase of 0.6 percentage points compared with the previous month.
- The single-month estimate for the economic inactivity rate in the UK, for July 2020, shows an increase of 0.2 percentage points compared with the previous month.
- The weekly unemployment rate rose in each of the most recent weeks, to more than 4% in July 2020.
- Average actual hours increased for employees and self-employed workers through June and July 2020, driven by decreases in the number of people temporarily away from work throughout those months.
- In July 2020, approximately 2.5 million people had been temporarily away from paid work for three months or more, with around 80% of those earning more than half their salary.

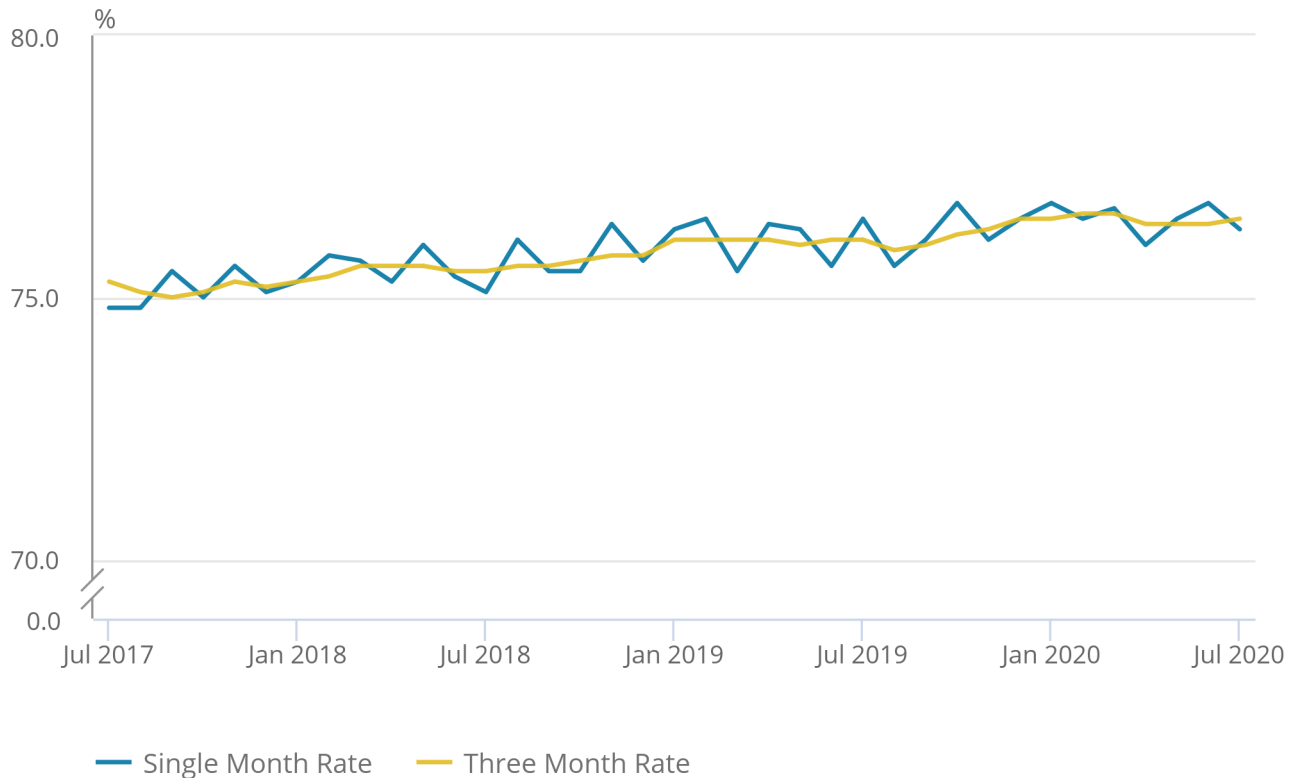
2 . Summary of Labour Force Survey single-month estimates

Figure 1: The single-month employment rate was down on the previous month

UK employment rates, ages 16 to 64 years (seasonally adjusted), between July 2017 and July 2020

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UK employment rates, ages 16 to 64 years (seasonally adjusted), between July 2017 and July 2020



Source: Office for National Statistics – Labour Force Survey

The single-month estimate of the employment rate, for people aged 16 to 64 years in the UK, for July 2020, was 76.3%. This represents a decrease of 0.6 percentage points compared with the previous month (June 2020), but an increase of 0.2 percentage points compared with three months ago (April 2020).

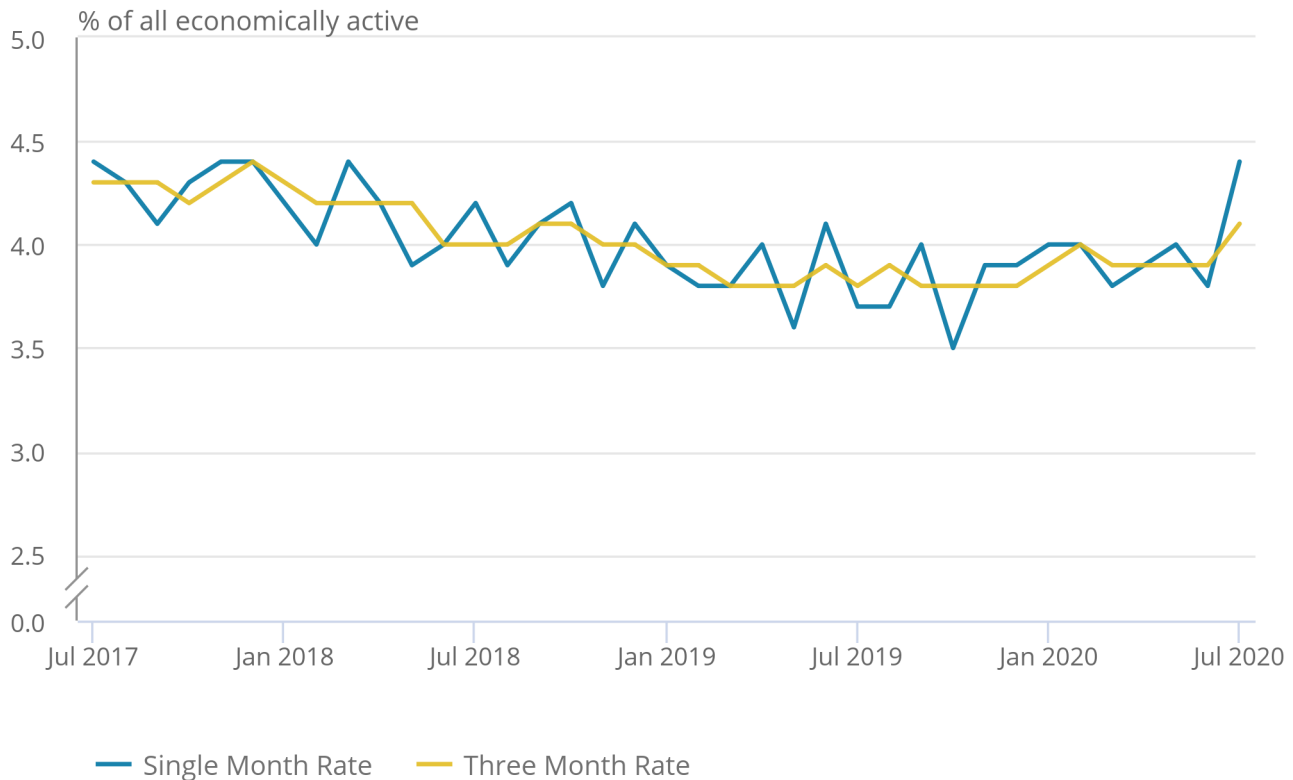
The headline estimate for the three months May to July 2020 increased 0.1 percentage points compared with the previous quarter (February to April 2020) and stands at 76.5%.

Figure 2: The single-month unemployment rate was up on the previous month

UK unemployment rates, ages 16 years and over (seasonally adjusted), between July 2017 and July 2020

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UK unemployment rates, ages 16 years and over (seasonally adjusted), between July 2017 and July 2020



Source: Office for National Statistics – Labour Force Survey

The single-month estimate for the unemployment rate, for people aged 16 years and over in the UK, for July 2020, was 4.4%. This represents an increase of 0.6 percentage points compared with the previous month (June 2020) and an increase of 0.5 percentage points compared with three months ago (April 2020).

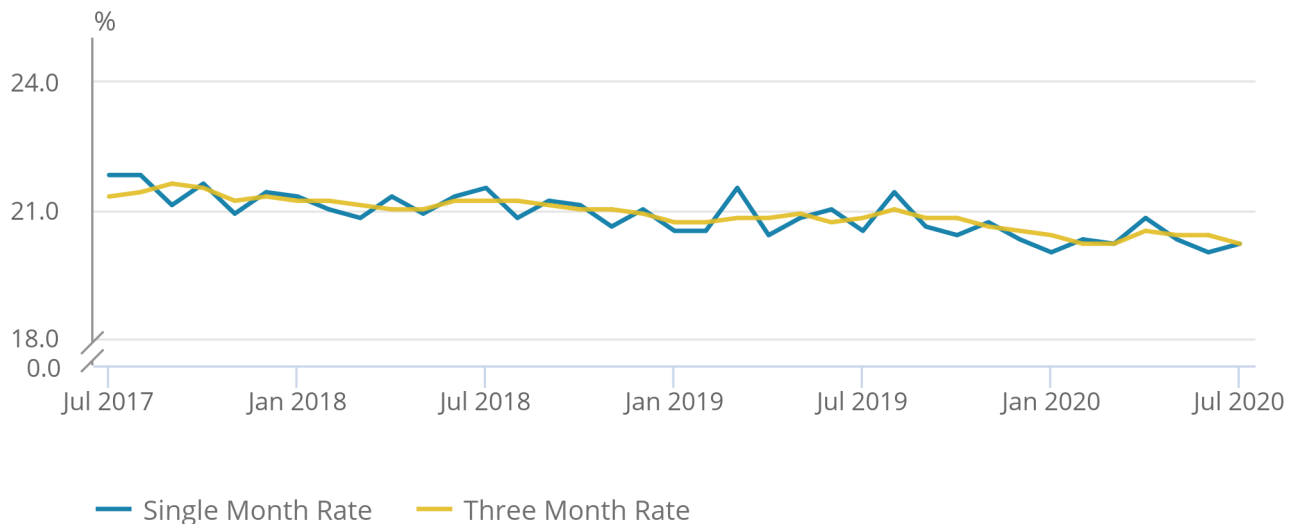
The headline estimate for the three months May to July 2020 shows an increase of 0.2 percentage points on the previous quarter (February to April 2020) and currently stands at 4.1%.

Figure 3: The single-month inactivity rate was up on the previous month

UK economic inactivity rates, ages 16 to 64 years (seasonally adjusted), between July 2017 and July 2020

Figure 3: The single-month inactivity rate was up on the previous month

UK economic inactivity rates, ages 16 to 64 years (seasonally adjusted), between July 2017 and July 2020



Source: Office for National Statistics – Labour Force Survey

The single-month estimate for the economic inactivity rate, for people aged 16 to 64 years in the UK, for July 2020, was 20.2%. This represents an increase of 0.2 percentage points on the previous month (June 2020), but a decrease of 0.6 percentage points compared with three months ago (April 2020).

The headline estimate for the three months May to July 2020 decreased by 0.3 percentage points on the previous quarter (February to April 2020), to a joint record low of 20.2%.

3 . Weekly Labour Force Survey

From the way the Labour Force Survey (LFS) data are collected, it is possible to separate out responses relating to individual weeks during the survey period. The Office for National Statistics (ONS) has developed a method for weighting the weekly LFS data to produce UK aggregates. The sample for any week is not representative, and the results are more volatile than the quarterly or monthly estimates. As such, their use is to show any large impact of a sudden change in labour market conditions and should not be used as a leading indicator.

While not providing robust estimates of labour market conditions, these can help users to understand the impact of the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic on a week-by-week basis during the quarter. They may have the potential to pick up large changes in the labour market, which is why the data have been explored and are now being made available during the coronavirus period.

The weekly LFS data, from 2008 to the latest available period, will be published monthly in this article and [Table X07](#); their usefulness and future publication will be reviewed.

Because of the experimental nature of these data, each month the seasonal adjustment is reviewed and refined to incorporate international best practice on high frequency data, and better account for the specifics of the LFS sample design. Therefore, seasonally adjusted and trend estimates will change between monthly publications. From September 2020 onwards this change will include using a forward factor method in estimation of average actual hours and people temporarily away from paid work. More information can be found in [Table X07](#).

Employment and unemployment

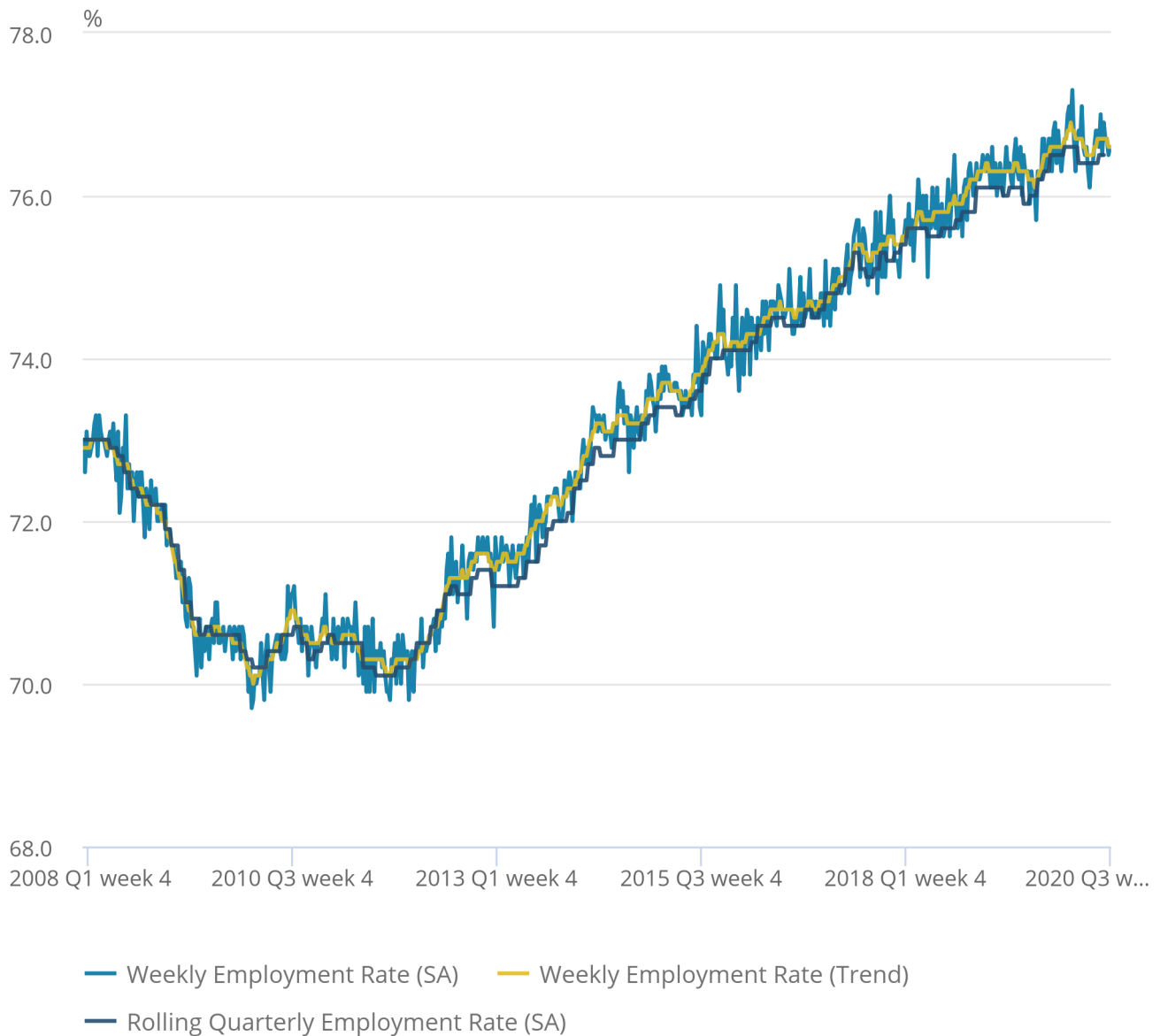
The weekly employment and unemployment rates are extremely volatile and therefore should not be used as a leading indicator of changes to the labour market but may have the potential to pick up large changes (see Figures 4 and 5). No major change to the employment rate has been observed in any of the weeks since lockdown began in Week 13 in Quarter 1 (Jan to Mar) 2020. The unemployment rate, although extremely volatile, has increased slightly to more than 4% in the most recent three weeks (July 2020).

Figure 4: The weekly employment rate did not show any large increases or decreases since March 2020

UK weekly employment rate, ages 16 to 64 years (seasonally adjusted and trend), 2008 to the end of July 2020

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UK weekly employment rate, ages 16 to 64 years (seasonally adjusted and trend), 2008 to the end of July 2020



Source: Office for National Statistics – Labour Force Survey

Notes:

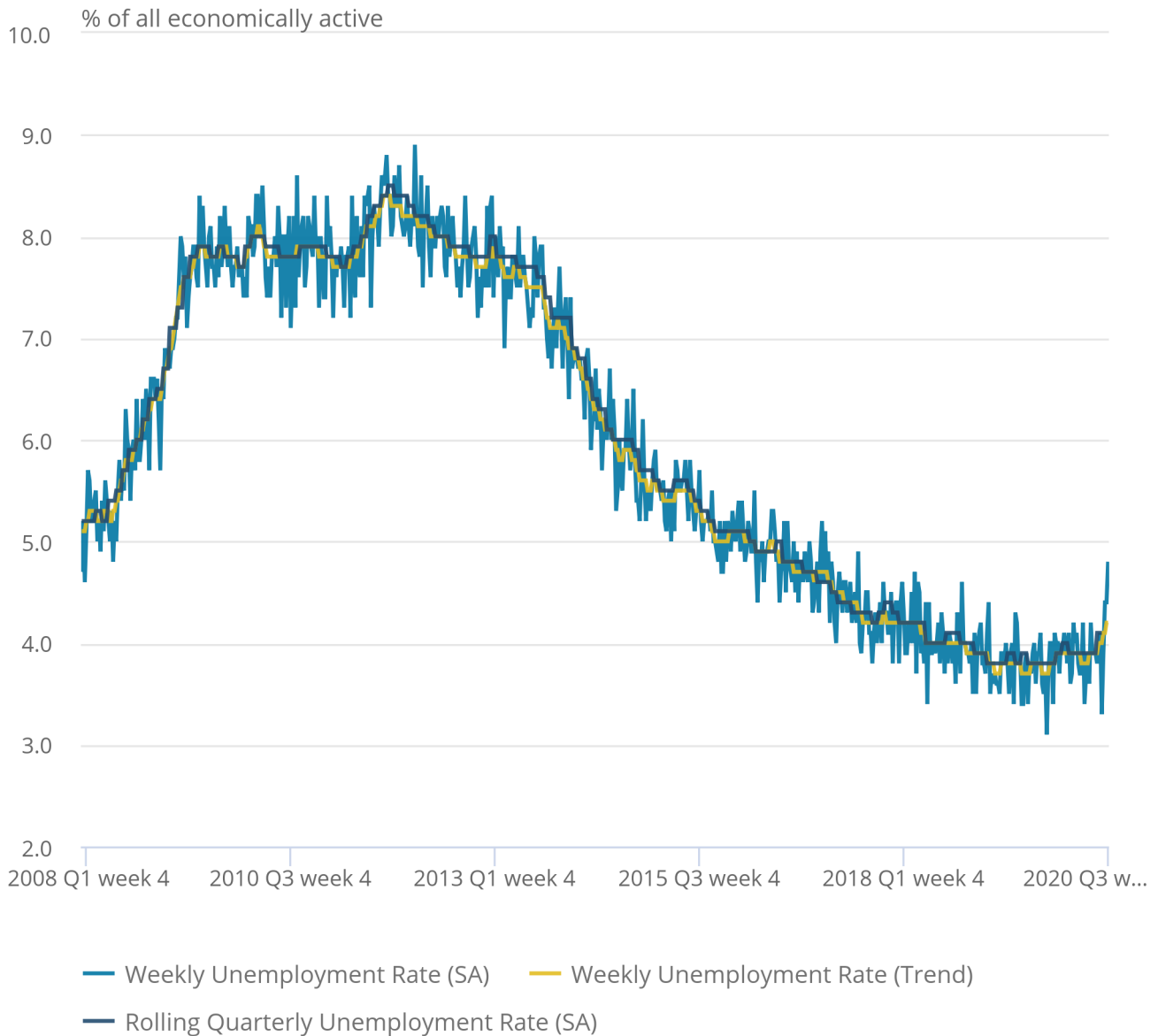
1. Weeks 1 to 4 refer to first month in the quarter (for example, January, April, July and October), weeks 5 to 9 refer to second month of the quarter (for example, February, May, August and November), and weeks 10 to 13 refer to third month of the quarter (for example, March, June, September and December). Rolling quarterly estimates are centred on the middle month of the quarter (for example, May to July 2020 is centred on June 2020, on weeks 10 to 13 of Quarter 2 2020).

Figure 5: The weekly unemployment rate rose to more than 4% in July 2020

UK weekly unemployment rate, ages 16 years and over (seasonally adjusted and trend), 2008 to the end of July 2020

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UK weekly unemployment rate, ages 16 years and over (seasonally adjusted and trend), 2008 to the end of July 2020



Source: Office for National Statistics – Labour Force Survey

Notes:

1. Weeks 1 to 4 refer to first month in the quarter (for example, January, April, July and October), weeks 5 to 9 refer to second month of the quarter (for example, February, May, August and November), and weeks 10 to 13 refer to third month of the quarter (for example, March, June, September and December). Rolling quarterly estimates are centred on the middle month of the quarter (for example, May to July 2020 is centred on June 2020, on weeks 10 to 13 of Quarter 2 2020).

Actual hours

Lockdown measures were introduced on 23 March 2020 (during Week 13 of Quarter 1), where we saw the largest falls in average actual hours (Figure 6). This change is observed in both the employees and self-employed data, with the largest decrease seen for those identifying as self-employed.

Since May 2020 we have seen hours for all groups start to increase slowly, however we are yet to see any group reach their pre-lockdown level. Self-employed hours has been more volatile than employee hours throughout the lockdown period and is not yet back in line with employee hours as was seen pre-lockdown.

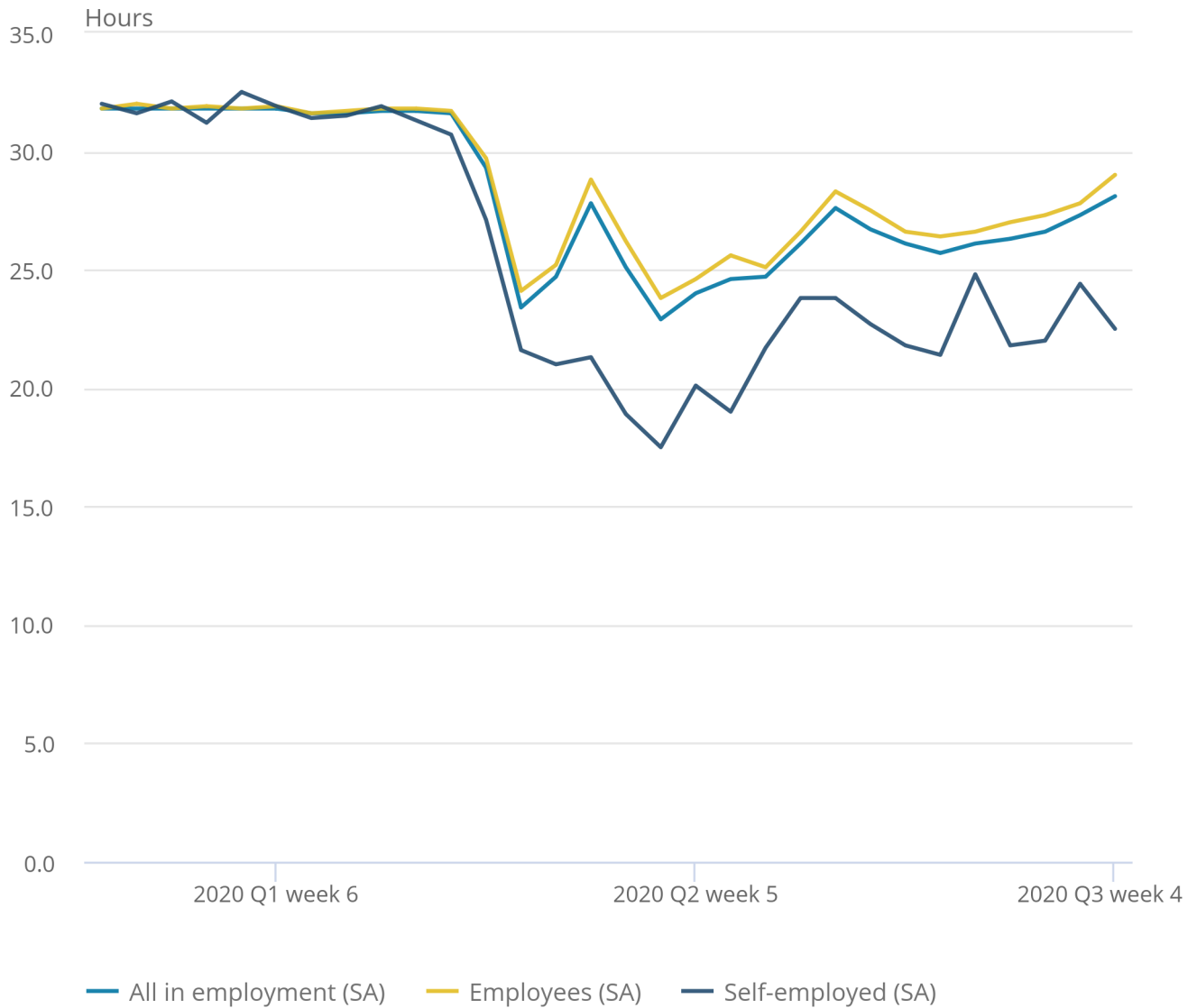
The LFS also collects information on the reasons why people have worked fewer hours in the reference week. Since lockdown was announced, working fewer hours because of "Economic conditions" saw large increases (this category is where LFS interviewers were advised to code those on the Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme (CJRS)). The estimated number in this category rose from fewer than 100,000 people in the long-term trend to over 5 million people by the end of April. Throughout May, June and July 2020, the number of people working fewer hours because of "Economic conditions" has remained around 5.5 million on average.

Figure 6: Average actual hours has shown small increases in May to July 2020, since the sharp decrease at the end of March

Average actual hours, all people, employees and self-employed, seasonally adjusted, UK, Jan to July 2020

Figure 6: Average actual hours has shown small increases in May to July 2020, since the sharp decrease at the end of March

Average actual hours, all people, employees and self-employed, seasonally adjusted, UK, Jan to July 2020



Source: Office for National Statistics – Labour Force Survey

Those temporarily away from a job

The LFS collects information on those temporarily away from paid work that they expect to return to. Of those temporarily away from paid work, we gather a range of data -- including whether they are temporarily away from work short-term (less than three months) or long-term (three months or more), and whether those away long-term are earning more or less than half their usual salary.

Figure 7 shows a large increase, in both March and April 2020 (not seen in the previous three years), in those stating that they are temporarily away from paid work. While this has started to decrease in the most recent weeks, the level is still high with over 5 million people temporarily away from work in July 2020.

Figure 7 also shows a large increase, in both March and April 2020, in those temporarily away from paid work for less than three months. There was also an increase in those temporarily away from paid work for three months or more toward the end of June 2020 where a shift can be seen from the last two weeks of June between those away short-term and those away long-term.

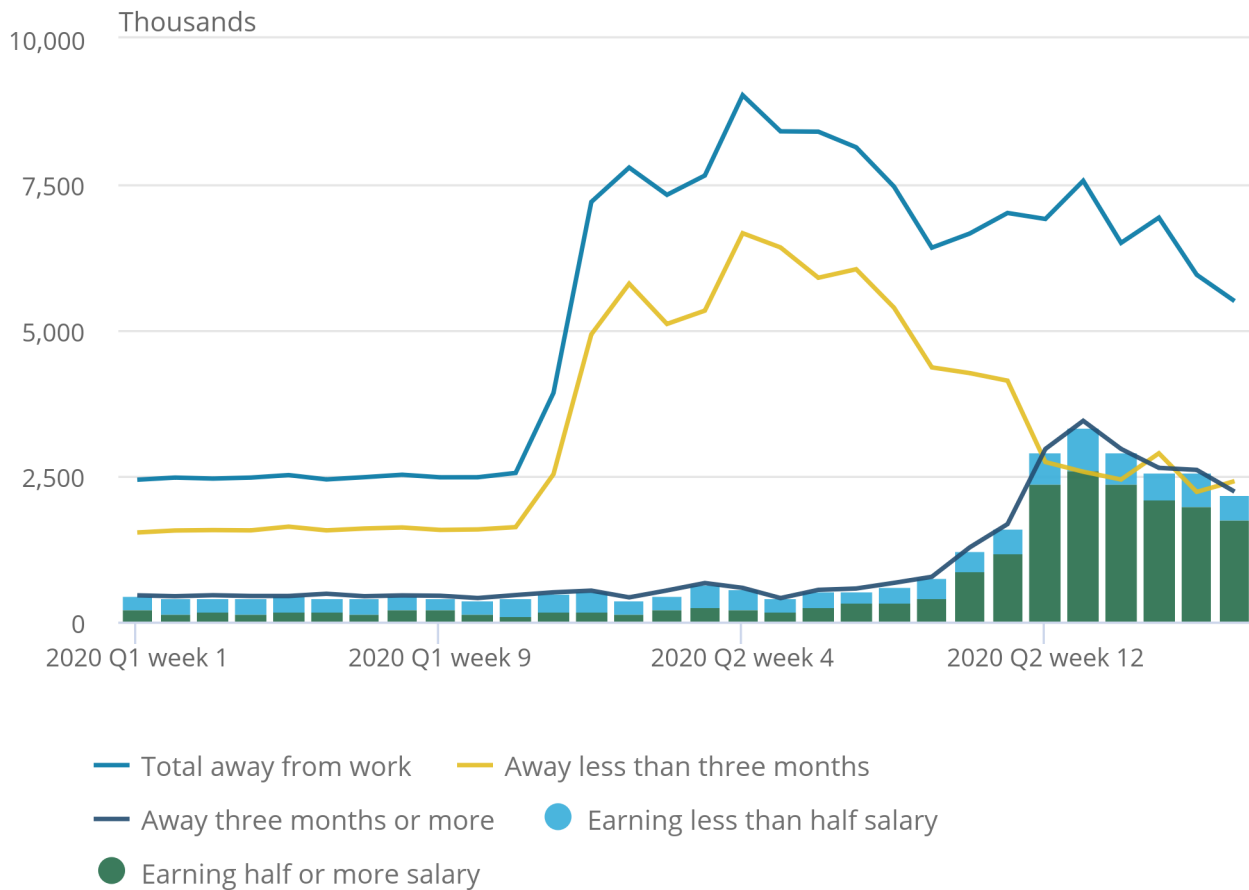
In the most recent weeks, approximately 2.5 million of those temporarily away from work had been so for three months or more. Of those away for three months or more, in July 2020, around 80% were earning half or more of their salary.

Figure 7: Of the more than 5 million people temporarily away from paid work in July 2020, approximately 2.5 million people were away for three months or more

Total number of people temporarily away from paid work, including their time away and amount of wage receiving if away for three months or more, seasonally adjusted, UK, Jan to July 2017 to Jan to July 2020 (1000s)

Figure 7: Of the more than 5 million people temporarily away from paid work in July 2020, approximately 2.5 million people were away for three months or more

Total number of people temporarily away from paid work, including their time away and amount of wage receiving if away for three months or more, seasonally adjusted, UK, Jan to July 2017 to Jan to July 2020 (1000s)



Source: Office for National Statistics – Labour Force Survey

Notes:

1. Time respondent has been temporarily away from paid work was asked to all in employment who were temporarily away from paid work in the reference period.
2. Amount of wage received was asked to all in employment who were temporarily away from paid work for three months or more in the reference period.
3. Estimates will not to sum to totals because of missing responses and limited constraining in the seasonal adjustment.

Further information on the characteristics of those temporarily away from work, for the period April to June 2019 and April to June 2020, can be seen in [People temporarily away from paid work in the UK: August 2020](#).

Those still being paid while their job is on hold and/or affected by the coronavirus

In April 2020, a number of questions were added to the LFS questionnaire to gather additional information on the situation in the labour market during the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic. One such question asks whether an employee is still being paid while their job is on hold and/or affected by the coronavirus pandemic; everyone answering this question will be defined as in employment.

Figure 8 shows approximately half a million employees received no pay while their job was on hold and/or affected by the coronavirus pandemic in April and May; this figure has decreased to approximately 250,000 in July. Those whose job was affected by the coronavirus pandemic and received full pay also decreased in July, with less than 2 million in the final week of July 2020.

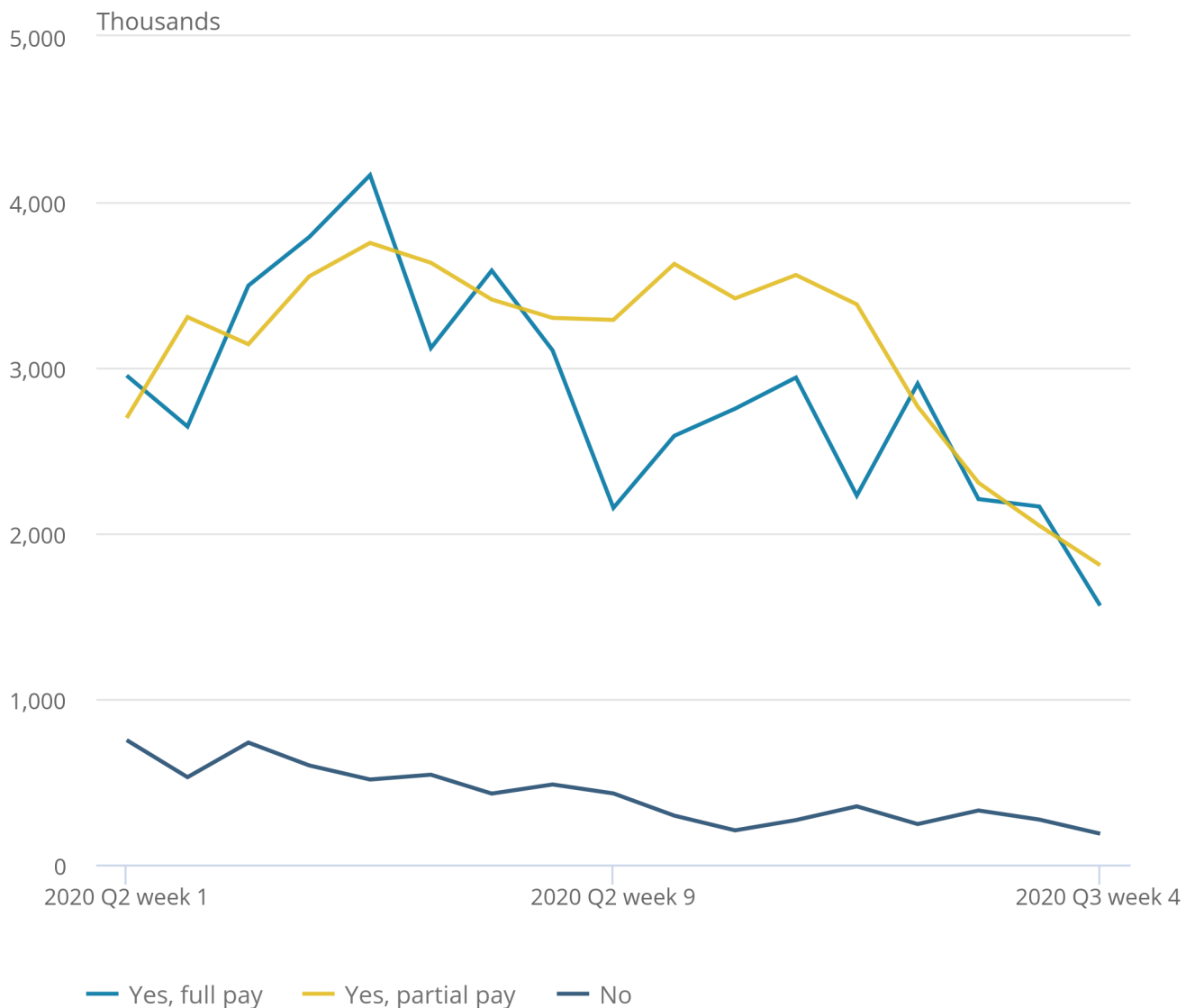
Those whose job was affected by the coronavirus pandemic and received partial pay has fluctuated between 3 and 4 million since April 2020 but has also decreased in the most recent periods.

Figure 8: The number of people receiving full, partial or no pay while their job is on hold and/or affected by coronavirus pandemic declined in July

Total number of people receiving full, partial or no pay while their job is on hold and affected by coronavirus pandemic, not seasonally adjusted, UK, April to July 2020 (1000s)

Figure 8: The number of people receiving full, partial or no pay while their job is on hold and/or affected by coronavirus pandemic declined in July

Total number of people receiving full, partial or no pay while their job is on hold and affected by coronavirus pandemic, not seasonally adjusted, UK, April to July 2020 (1000s)



Source: Office for National Statistics – Labour Force Survey

Notes:

1. This question was asked to employees who were temporarily away from work or did fewer hours than usual in the reference week, and who identified their reason for being away to be because of the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic.

Those who have applied for the coronavirus Self-employment Income Support Scheme

A question was also asked to those self-employed who were temporarily away from work because of the coronavirus pandemic on whether they had applied for the coronavirus Self-employment Income Support Scheme. This question was changed in July 2020 to two categories: "Yes" and "No", from three categories: "Yes", "No I haven't applied", and "No I am not eligible".

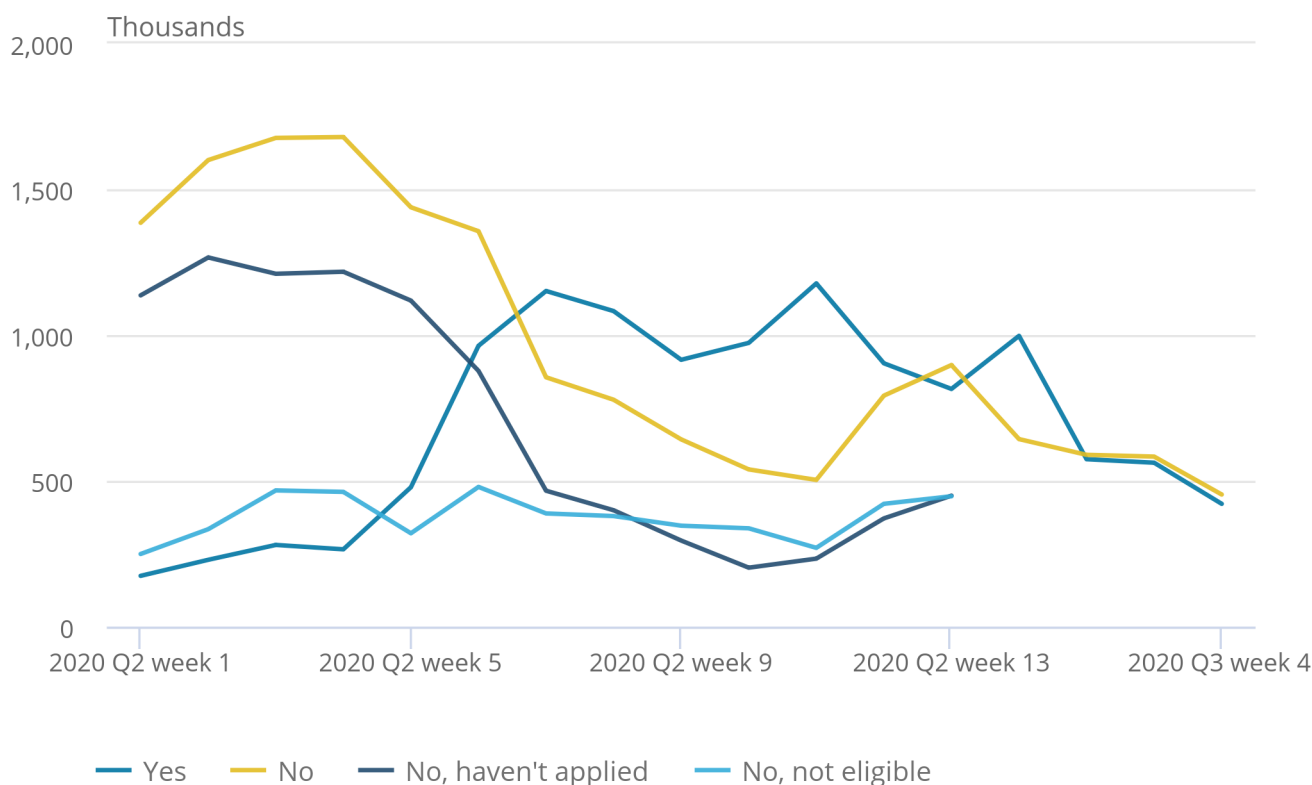
By the middle of May 2020, it is estimated that over 1 million self-employed people had applied or benefited from the coronavirus Self-employment Income Support Scheme (SEISS), a figure which has decreased through June and July to just below half a million in the last week of July 2020. Approximately 400,000 people said they were not eligible for the scheme, a figure that remained fairly constant throughout April to June.

Figure 9: The number of people applying for the coronavirus Self-employment Income Support Scheme decreased throughout June and July

Total number of people that had applied for the coronavirus Self-employment Income Support Scheme, not seasonally adjusted, UK, April to July 2020 (1000s)

Figure 9: The number of people applying for the coronavirus Self-employment Income Support Scheme decreased throughout June and July

Total number of people that had applied for the coronavirus Self-employment Income Support Scheme, not seasonally adjusted, UK, April to July 2020 (1000s)



Source: Office for National Statistics – Labour Force Survey

Notes:

1. This question was asked to self-employed who were temporarily away from work or did fewer hours than usual in the reference week, and who identified their reason for being away to be because of the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic.
2. This question was added to the LFS questionnaire in April 2020, before the scheme opened for application on 13 May 2020, therefore some respondents may have answered the question in foresight.
3. From July 2020, the question changed to identify who has benefited from the scheme rather than those who are eligible, or have applied, therefore “No, haven't applied” and “No, not eligible” responses have been combined.

4 . Coronavirus and measuring the labour market

In June 2019, we released additional new [experimental](#) versions of the single-month estimates alongside the current estimates. The new estimates are based on time series models using single-month wave-specific time series estimates.

In December 2019, we also started to publish new experimental single-month wave estimates, alongside the current wave estimates, based on the new time series models.

Coronavirus (COVID-19)

In response to the developing coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic, we are working to ensure that we continue to publish economic statistics. For more information, please see [COVID-19 and the production of statistics](#).

We have reviewed all publications and data published as part of the labour market release in response to the coronavirus pandemic. This has led to the [postponement of some publications and datasets](#) to ensure that we can continue to publish our main labour market data. This will protect the delivery and quality of our remaining outputs as well as ensuring we can respond to new demands as a direct result of the coronavirus.

For more information on how labour market data sources, among others, will be affected by the coronavirus pandemic, see the [statement](#) published on 27 March 2020. A further [article](#) published on 6 May 2020, detailed some of the challenges that we have faced in producing estimates at this time.

Our latest data and analysis on the impact of the coronavirus on the UK economy and population is now available on our dedicated [COVID-19 webpage](#). This will be the hub for all special coronavirus-related publications, drawing on all available data.

5 . Quality and methodology

Uncertainty in this data

The estimates presented in this bulletin contain [uncertainty](#).

The Labour Force Survey (LFS) single-month estimates provide additional information about the latest quarterly movements in the headline three-monthly aggregates of employment, unemployment and economic inactivity. The production and evaluation of the estimates is an important part of our quality assurance of the three-monthly averages published in the [Labour market overview](#).

Single-month estimates are based on one-third of the sample of the three-monthly series; this is approximately 15,000 households. Consequently, sampling variability of the changes in the single-month estimates is higher in relative terms than those of the headline aggregates, and so any interpretation of them can only be in fairly broad terms.

The LFS sample is designed so that the data collected for any three consecutive monthly reference periods (or rolling quarters) are representative of the UK population. However, the data for any given single month are unlikely to be representative of the UK. These sampling effects can cause movements in the single month that are a consequence of the survey nature of the LFS and are not a true reflection of change in the wider economy. The movement in the latest single-month figures is, in theory, a better indication of the latest change in the labour market than the difference between the latest two overlapping three-month periods, but it must still be treated with caution.

The sample design of the LFS often produces clear patterns in the single-month series, which can aid interpretation of the LFS aggregates. The estimates help users determine how closely the movements in the headline aggregates reflect changes in the UK labour market and how far they reflect the survey nature of the LFS, in particular sampling variability. For example, 80% of the households surveyed in one month will also have been surveyed three months ago. This means the comparison between the latest month and three months ago usually provides a better indicator of the latest underlying change than the comparison with the previous month, for which there is no sample overlap.

The single-month estimates are regarded as an [official statistic](#) and are not considered National Statistics because they do not have sufficient methodological robustness.

A methodological article explaining the [background to the LFS single-month estimates and describing how they are calculated](#) is available.

The model-based single-month LFS estimates are derived from a state-space model and aim to improve on the current single-month estimates. The model uses single-month wave-specific time series estimates for each variable, along with estimated variances, to produce modelled seasonally adjusted time series. These new model-based estimates are considered to be [Experimental Statistics](#).

A [methodological article](#) giving more detail regarding the new series is available.

A new weighting methodology has been used specifically for the weekly LFS, using age, sex and region in the calibration groups.

Weekly LFS estimates have been seasonally adjusted using a modified version of TRAMO-SEATS to handle higher frequency time series. The seasonally adjusted estimates have the seasonal frequencies removed and frequencies at a 13-week lag to account for seasonality resulting from the survey design. The trend is simply a smoothed estimate of the seasonally adjusted series, the weights of which are determined by the ARIMA model and as such are "tailored" to the series. Each month, the seasonal adjustment is reviewed and refined to incorporate international best practice on high frequency data and better account for the specifics of the LFS sample design. Therefore, seasonally adjusted and trend estimates may change between monthly publications.

More information can be found in the Background and methodology sheet within [Table X07](#).

6 . Other quality information

More quality and methodology information on strengths, limitations, appropriate uses, and how the data were created is available in the [Labour Force Survey \(LFS\) QMI](#). A set of [LFS performance and quality monitoring reports](#) is available.

Further information about the LFS is available from the [LFS – user guidance](#).

After EU withdrawal

As the UK leaves the EU, it is important that our statistics continue to be of high quality and are internationally comparable. During the transition period, those UK statistics that align with EU practice and rules will continue to do so in the same way as before 31 January 2020.

After the transition period, we will continue to produce our labour market statistics in line with the UK Statistics Authority's [Code of Practice for Statistics](#) and in accordance with International Labour Organization (ILO) definitions and agreed international statistical guidance.

