Statistical bulletin

Low and high pay in the UK: 2026

The distribution of earnings of high-paid and low-paid employee jobs and employee jobs paid below the UK minimum wage.

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1 . Overview

The proportion of low-paid employee jobs has been generally decreasing in the UK since 2013, although it increased slightly to 2.8% in April 2026. The proportion of high-paid employee jobs has remained broadly stable since 2021 at approximately 23% to 24% compared with the proportion between 1997 and 2020, which was approximately 25% to 26%. The proportion of high-paid employee jobs slightly increased from 23.4% in April 2025 to 23.7% in April 2026.

The highest-paid employee jobs (those in the top earning deciles) experienced the largest growth rate between April 2025 and April 2026.

In April 2026, the highest proportions of low-paid employees were found in elementary occupations, the hospitality industry, and among employees aged 16 to 21 years. Employees earning high pay were concentrated in managerial and professional occupations, information and communication and finance, insurance service industries, and among employees aged 45 to 49 years. These trends are all consistent with the patterns seen in recent years.

The number of jobs paid below the National Living Wage and National Minimum Wage in April 2026 was estimated to be 346,000, or 1.1% of the total. This figure is not a measure of non-compliance with legislation.

The analysis in this statistical article looks at the distribution of pay based on hourly rates. This is particularly relevant for policy around the National Minimum Wage and National Living Wage rates.

Upcoming revisions

All estimates for 2026 are provisional. The final 2026 data will be published in October 2027 as per our annual revision policy.

2 . How to use these statistics

With these statistics, you can:

- learn about pay in low- and high-paid employee jobs and the characteristics of the employees in these jobs; the Annual Survey of Hours and Earnings (ASHE) collects information on employee jobs rather than employees, but because most employees have one job only (97% in April 2026), we use the terms "employee" and "employee job" interchangeably

With these statistics, you cannot:

- compare them to or use them as a measure of non-compliance with minimum wage legislation, because it is not possible to determine from the survey data whether an individual is eligible for the minimum wage; find more information in Section 6: Definitions

- attribute all the differences in levels and growth rates in pay to changes in earnings only, because ASHE is a sample-based survey and its estimates are also affected by the composition of the employee workforce (both in the UK population and in the ASHE sample), which varies year on year; find more information on the quality of ASHE in Section 8: Quality, methods and data sources

3 . Low- and high-paid employee jobs

What we mean by low and high pay

We define low pay as pay that is less than two-thirds of median hourly earnings. In April 2026, low pay was defined as pay below £12.67 (median hourly earnings were £19.00).

We define high pay as pay that is greater or equal than 1.5 times median hourly earnings. In April 2026, high pay was defined as pay above £28.50. View more information in Section 6: Definitions.

Employee jobs in low and high pay

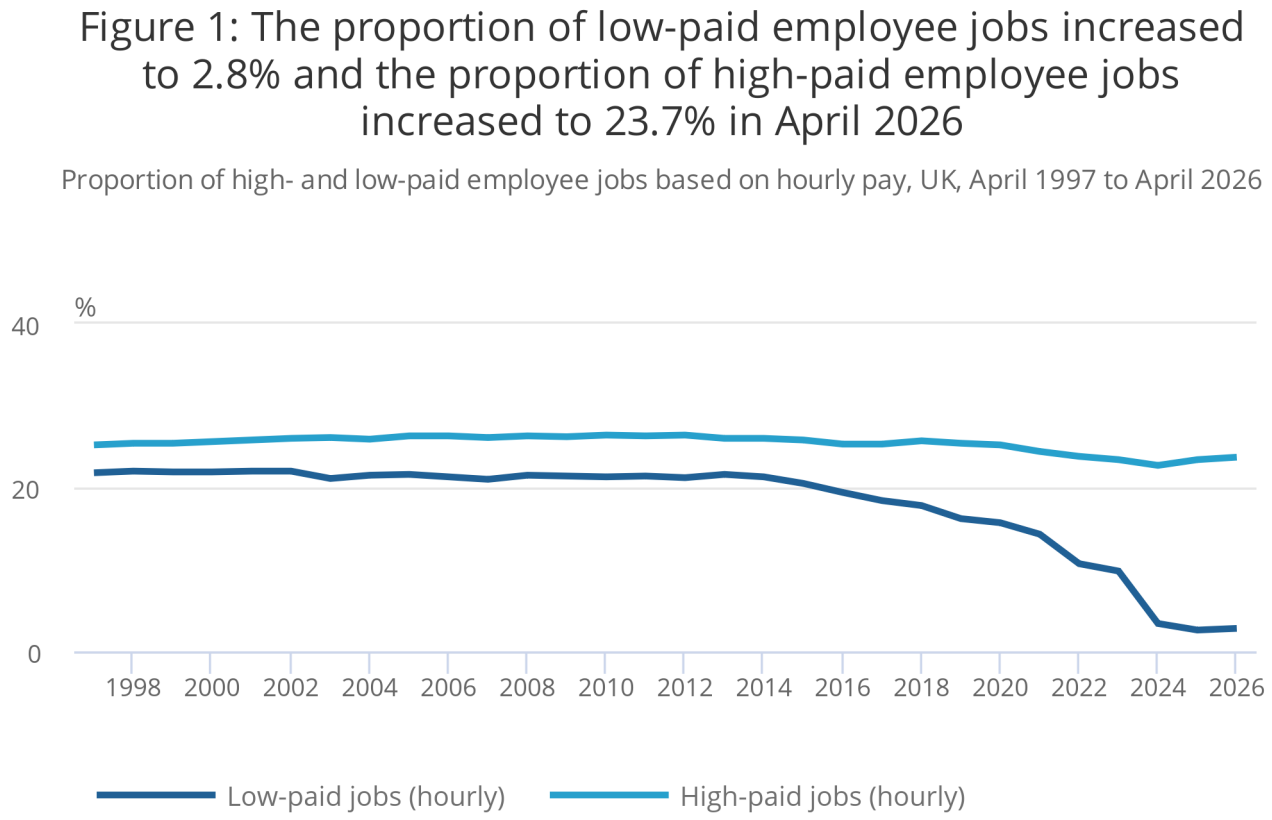
The proportion of employee jobs in low pay has been generally decreasing in the UK since 2013. The proportion increased slightly from 2.6% in April 2025 to 2.8% in April 2026.

The proportion of high-paid employee jobs was 23.7% in April 2026, up from 23.4% a year earlier. This measure has remained broadly stable since 2021 at approximately 23% to 24% compared with 25% to 26% between 1997 and 2020.

In April 2026, there were estimated to be around 346,000 employee jobs with employees aged 16 years and over who were paid below the National Minimum Wage (NMW) or National Living Wage (NLW) rates (1.1% of employee jobs).

Figure 1: The proportion of low-paid employee jobs increased to 2.8% and the proportion of high-paid employee jobs increased to 23.7% in April 2026

Proportion of high- and low-paid employee jobs based on hourly pay, UK, April 1997 to April 2026



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

Notes:

1. Estimates for 2026 data are provisional.
2. Employee jobs include those on adult rates with pay unaffected by absence.
3. Full-time is defined as employees working more than 30 paid hours per week (or 25 or more for the teaching professions).
4. Low pay is defined as the value that is two-thirds of median hourly earnings and high pay is defined as the value that is 1.5 times median hourly earnings.
5. Because of methodological changes, data from 2023 onwards might not be directly comparable with data for 2022 (see Section 8: Quality, methods and data sources).
6. Data for 2020 and 2021 are subject to more uncertainty and should be treated with caution because of the impact of the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic on the data and collection.

4 . Distribution of pay

Figure 2: The proportion of people earning at or below the minimum wage has slightly decreased in 2026

Distribution of hourly earnings (excluding overtime) for all employees, from 2025 to 2026, UK (proportion of jobs within plus or minus 20 pence of shown pay rate)

Notes:

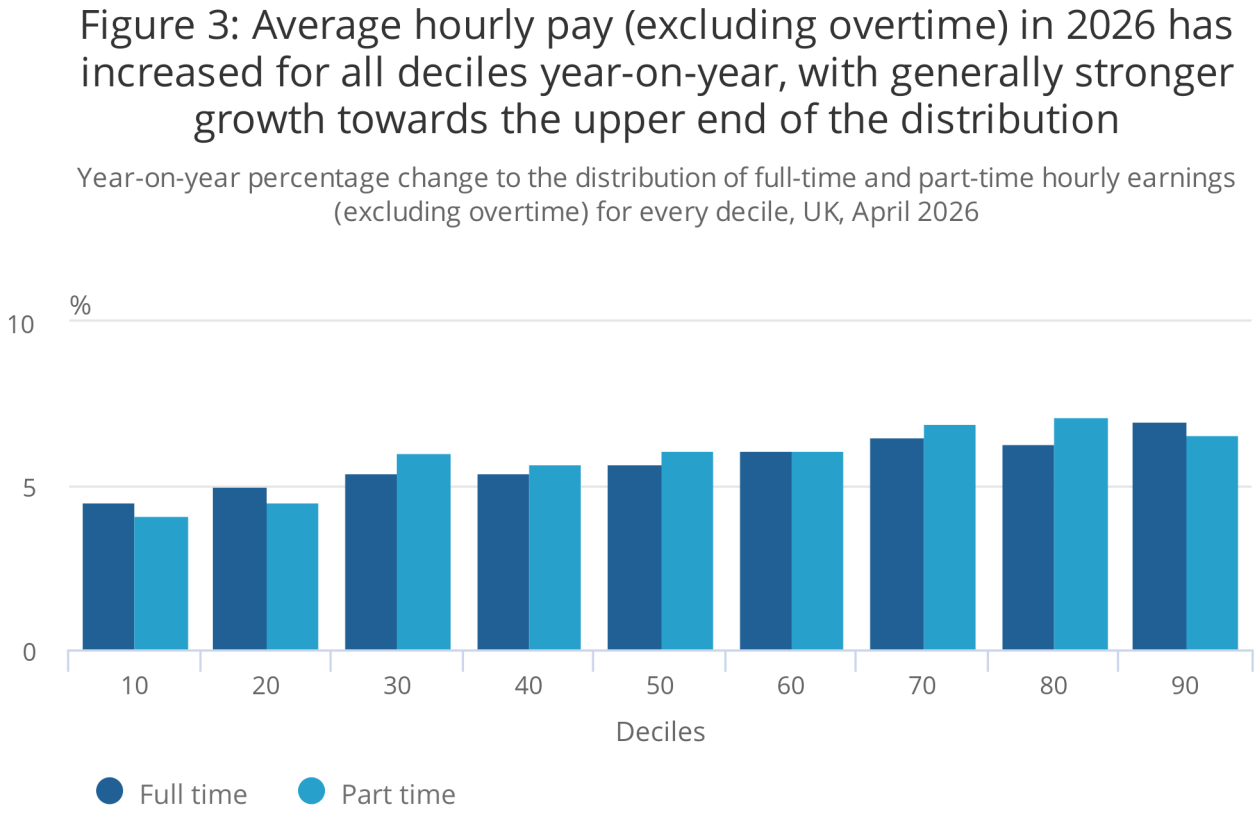
1. Estimates for 2026 data are provisional.
2. Employee jobs include those on adult rates with pay unaffected by absence.

There is a large concentration of jobs paid within 20 pence of the National Living Wage (NLW) in both April 2026 and April 2025. In April 2026, the NLW was £12.71 for those aged 21 years and over, and in April 2025, it was £12.21 for those aged 21 years and over.

The highest point of the hourly earnings distribution in 2026 was around £12.90, reflecting a large concentration of jobs paid close to the NLW. The second largest concentration of earnings is observed at around £13.35 per hour, close to the voluntary real Living Wage (the "real Living Wage" is defined by the Living Wage Foundation). In April 2026, the real Living Wage was £13.45 for workers outside of London, and £14.80 for workers in London.

Figure 3: Average hourly pay (excluding overtime) in 2026 has increased for all deciles year-on-year, with generally stronger growth towards the upper end of the distribution

Year-on-year percentage change to the distribution of full-time and part-time hourly earnings (excluding overtime) for every decile, UK, April 2026



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

Notes:

1. Estimates for 2026 data are provisional.
2. Employee jobs include those on adult rates with pay unaffected by absence.
3. Full-time is defined as employees working more than 30 paid hours per week (or 25 or more for the teaching professions).

There has been an increase in pay across all deciles in the pay distribution in April 2026 compared with April 2025, both for full-time employee jobs and part-time employee jobs. Earning growth increased towards the upper end of the distribution, with the largest increase observed in the highest deciles.

The highest increases for full-time employee jobs were observed in the:

- 90th decile (7.0% increase on-the-year)
- 70th decile (6.5%)
- 80th decile (6.3%)

For part-time roles, the largest increases were seen in the:

- 80th decile (7.1%)
- 70th decile (6.9%)
- 90th decile (6.6%)

5 . Characteristics of employees in low- and high-paid jobs

Figure 4: Low-paid employees tend to be younger, working part-time, and in elementary occupations and the hospitality industry

Low-paid, high-paid, and middle-paid employees broken down by various characteristics, UK, April 2026

Notes:

1. Estimates for 2026 data are provisional.
2. Employee jobs include those on adult rates with pay unaffected by absence.
3. Low pay in April 2026 is defined as pay lower than £12.67 (two-thirds of median hourly pay (excluding overtime)) and high-pay is defined as pay higher than £28.50 (1.5 times the median hourly pay (excluding overtime)).

Downloac

Low pay for employee jobs in April 2026 was defined as pay lower than £12.67 (two-thirds of median hourly pay). In April 2026, the share of employee jobs in low pay was highest in elementary occupations (11.5%) and the accommodation and food service industry (16.3%).

Part-time employees were more likely to be in low pay than full-time employees (6.6%) of part-time employees were in low pay in April 2026, compared with 1.3% of full-time employees).

Low-paid employees were more concentrated among:

- the youngest age group (33.6% of employees aged 16 to 21 years were in low pay)
- women (3.2% of women were in low pay, compared with 2.5% of men)
- people working in Northern Ireland (4.0%) in April 2026

The share of employees who were in high pay (higher than £28.50 in April 2026) was highest in:

- managerial and professional occupations (50.4% and 46.8%, respectively)
- The information and communication industry (47.1%)
- the finance and insurance industry (52.9%)

Full-time employees were more likely to be in high pay than part-time employees (28.0% compared with 13.0%).

High paid employees were more concentrated among:

- the age group 45 to 49 years (33.3%)
- among men (28.1% of men were in high pay, compared with 19.3% of women)
- people working in London (42.5% in April 2026)

6 . Definitions

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.

Low and high pay

In this statistical article, low and high pay are calculated using the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) definitions. Low pay is defined as pay below two-thirds of median hourly earnings, and high pay is defined as pay that is higher than 1.5 times median hourly earnings.

In April 2026, low pay was pay below £12.67 (two-thirds of median hourly pay) and high pay was pay higher than £28.50 (1.5 times the median hourly pay).

National Minimum Wage and National Living Wage

The National Minimum Wage (NMW) and National Living Wage (NLW) are a minimum amount per hour that most workers in the UK are entitled to be paid.

The minimum wage legislation was established in the National Minimum Wage Act 1998. The National Minimum Wage and National Living Wage are defined on 1 April every year, based on this legislation.

There are different rates of minimum wage depending on a worker's age and whether they are an apprentice. In April 2026, the NLW applied to employees aged 21 years and over, and the NMW applied to employees aged between 16 and 20 years.

The government's NLW was introduced on 1 April 2016 and applied to employees aged 25 years and over. The maximum age for the NLW has changed over the years. From 2024 onwards, it applies to employees aged 21 years and over.

On the ASHE reference date in April 2026, the NMW and NLW rates were:

- £12.71 for employees aged 21 years and over
- £10.85 for employees aged 18 to 20 years
- £8 for employees aged 16 to 17 years
- £8 for apprentices aged 16 to 18 years and those aged 19 years or over who are in the first year of their apprenticeship

The statistics in this statistical article cannot be used as a measure of non-compliance with minimum wage legislation. This is because it is not possible to determine from the survey data whether an individual is eligible for the minimum wage. For example, if employees receive free accommodation, employers are entitled to offset hourly rates.

The Annual Survey of Hours and Earnings (ASHE) data informs the government's policy around the National Minimum Wage and National Living Wage rates.

Standard Occupational Classification

The Standard Occupational Classification (SOC) is a common classification of occupational information for the UK. The current SOC for the UK is SOC 2020, and it has been used in the Annual Survey of Hours and Earnings (ASHE) data since the ASHE 2021 revised estimates.

Information on the impact of the change from SOC 2010 to SOC 2020 is available in our Measures of employee earnings based on SOC 2020, UK: 2021 bulletin.

Percentiles

The Xth percentile indicates the value at which X% of the population falls under. For example, the fifth percentile means that 5% of the population earn under this amount and 95% of the population earn above this amount. The median corresponds to the 50th percentile, that is, the value at which half the population falls under.

7 . Data on low and high pay

Jobs paid below minimum wage by category
Dataset | Released 22 October 2026
Number of UK jobs paid below minimum wage by sex, age, occupation and industry, and region. Annual estimates, 1998 to 2025. Annual Survey of Hours and Earnings.

Number and proportion of employee jobs with hourly pay below the living wage
Dataset | Released 22 October 2026
Estimates of the number and proportion of UK employee jobs with hourly pay below the living wage, as defined by the living wage foundation. Estimates are provided by parliamentary constituency and local authority.

8 . Quality, methods and data sources

Quality and methodology

Information on data sources, and the quality and methodology of Annual Survey of Hours and Earnings (ASHE) data, can be found in our Employee earnings in the UK: 2026 statistical article.

Uncertainty

Sampling variability for ASHE estimates is provided in our accompanying datasets.

Accredited official statistics

These accredited official statistics were independently reviewed by the Office for Statistics Regulation in June 2013. They comply with the standards of trustworthiness, quality, and value in the Code of Practice for Statistics and should be labelled "accredited official statistics".

9 . Related links

Low Pay Commission Report 2025
Report | Released 2 February 2026
The Low Pay Commission's annual report sets out in full the evidence and analysis which informed recommendations for minimum wage rates from April 2026.

Average weekly earnings in Great Britain: October 2026
Bulletin | Released 20 October 2026
Estimates of growth in earnings for employees before tax and other deductions from pay.

Labour market overview, UK: October 2026
Bulletin | Released 20 October 2026
Estimates of employment, unemployment, economic inactivity, and other employment-related statistics for the UK.

Earnings and employment from Pay As You Earn Real Time Information, UK: October 2026
Bulletin | Released 20 October 2026
Monthly estimates of payrolled employees and their pay from HM Revenue and Customs' (HMRC's) Pay As You Earn (PAYE) Real Time Information (RTI) data. This is a joint release between HMRC and the Office for National Statistics (ONS).

Distribution of earnings in the UK: 2017
Article | Released 2 November 2018
Distribution of earnings analysis using Annual Survey of Hours and Earnings (ASHE) provisional 2017 data and previous ASHE datasets, with a focus on earnings growth for those in employment between two consecutive years.

10 . Cite this statistical article

Office for National Statistics (ONS), released 22 October 2026, ONS website, statistical article, Low and high pay in the UK: 2026