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**Director General for Regulation**

Mr Shaun Richards  
(By email)

19 March 2021

Dear Mr Richards,

**Average Weekly Earnings Flaw October to December 2020 from ONS**

Thank you for your letter expressing concerns about the Office for National Statistics (ONS) Average Weekly Earnings (AWE) statistics published on 23 February 2021 and linking to [your blog](#).

Your blog, and the questions it raises, is a very timely reminder of the ongoing need to identify and explain to users the relevant limitations arising from the data and methods used to produce statistics, particularly during the pandemic. Explaining the dynamics affecting the statistics during the pandemic is challenging and on the whole producers like ONS are doing a good job. The changes in average wages in the October to December 2020 quarter were similar to changes seen in other countries for example in Canada, Australia, New Zealand and France.

The statistics portray the distortions in the labour market during the pandemic (for example significant falls in numbers of employees particularly part time and in lower paid employment). However, having looked at the explanations for change in the statistics a simpler clearer explanation might have minimised the risk of misinterpreting the movements. ONS could also have done more to describe the context available from other statistics such as the [Labour Force Survey](#), [Labour Market Survey](#)

We have spoken with the team at ONS and expect ONS to improve the way it presents these issues in the next release of the statistics on 23 March.

Thanks for raising your concerns with me.

Yours sincerely



Ed Humpherson  
Director General for Regulation