
Ed Humpherson, Director General for Regulation

Laura Gilbert
Director of Data Science, 10 Downing Street

1 February 2022

Dear Laura

Statements on the number of people in work

I know you and your colleagues responsible for briefing the Prime Minister take the accuracy of those briefings very seriously. I want to raise an issue with you related to employment. We have received correspondence [from Full Fact](#) about statements on the number of people in work now compared with before the pandemic. This includes Prime Minister's Questions on [24 November 2021](#)^[1], [15 December 2021](#)^{[2][3]}, [5 January 2022](#)^{[4][5]}, [12 January 2022](#)^[6] and [19 January 2022](#)^[7].

Your colleagues told us that the Prime Minister was referring to the number of UK workers on employer payrolls. In response to a parliamentary question, the Prime Minister confirmed his statement of 5 January was referring to payroll employment from '[Pay As You Earn Real Time Information](#)' published by the Office for National Statistics (ONS).

The number of people on employer payrolls does not include everyone in work. Specifically, most of the self-employed and those whose jobs are not part of company payroll are excluded^[8].

ONS publishes data on the number of people in employment. The data for January – March 2020 estimate that 33.0m people were in employment compared with 32.5m people in employment for September – November 2021^[9]. It is therefore incorrect to state that there were more people in work at the end of this period than the start.

The most recent references have been clearer that they refer only to payroll employment. In this case, it was disappointing that some earlier statements continued to refer to payroll employment as if describing total employment, despite contact from our office and from others. When we spoke, you emphasised the efforts that your colleagues take to ensure that briefings are accurate. I would like to thank you and colleagues for these efforts, which recognise that it is important that statements made to inform public debate are unambiguous.

Yours sincerely



Ed Humpherson
Director General for Regulation

¹ “There are more people in work than there were before the pandemic began”

² “We now have 500,000 more people in work than there were when the pandemic began”

³ “We have the fastest growing economy in the G7 and 500,000 more jobs today than there were when the pandemic began”

⁴ “There are now record numbers of people in work - 420,000 more than there were before the pandemic began”

⁵ “We have 420,000 more people in jobs now than there were before the pandemic began”

⁶ “As we come out of the pandemic, as I said to the House earlier, we are seeing record numbers of people in work and youth unemployment at a record low”

⁷ “We have more people in employment and more employees on the payroll now than there were before the pandemic began”

⁸ Pay As You Earn (PAYE) Real Time Information (RTI) measures the number of people who are being paid through the PAYE system via company payrolls. It could include self-employed people if someone has both an employee job and is self-employed (regardless of which is their main job) and does not include those whose jobs are not part of a company payroll or those whose company does not pay them through a PAYE scheme.

⁹ The latest available data at the time the statements were made.