

Director General for Regulation
Office for Statistics Regulation
1 Drummond Gate
London
SW1V 2QQ

21 January 2022

Dear Ed Humpherson,

I write to make you aware of an incorrect claim about the number of people in employment which has been made multiple times by the Prime Minister (and repeated by others) and ask for your potential engagement around it.

The claim is that there are more people in work now than there were at the start of the pandemic. Whilst there are more payrolled employees, the total number of people in paid work, including the self-employed, is below the level seen just prior to the pandemic. The claim was therefore incorrect when the Prime Minister said it on multiple occasions, and continues to be incorrect according to the latest data.

Data published on 18 January 2022 showed that although the number of payrolled employees continued to grow past its pre-pandemic level to 29.5 million¹, the total number of workers, including the self-employed, has been 500,000 to 600,000 below its pre-pandemic level in the last three data releases.² The employment rate, the ONS's headline measure of employment, has fallen from 76.6% to 75.5% in this period.³

We published a fact check⁴ on this claim when the Prime Minister said the following during PMQs on 24 November: *"There are now more people in work in this country [...] than there were before the pandemic began"*.⁵ Mr Johnson has repeated this claim in Parliament on at least three occasions.

¹<https://www.ons.gov.uk/employmentandlabourmarket/peopleinwork/earningsandworkinghours/bulletins/earningsandemploymentfrompayasyouearnrealtimeinformationuk/latest#:~:text=the%20previous%20bulletin.-,Figure%201%3A%20The%20number,the%20pre-coronavirus%20level,-Image%0A%0A.csv%0A%0A%0A.xls>

²<https://www.ons.gov.uk/employmentandlabourmarket/peopleinwork/employmentandemployeetypes/timeseries/mgrz/lms>

³<https://www.ons.gov.uk/employmentandlabourmarket/peopleinwork/employmentandemployeetypes/timeseries/lf24/lms>

⁴ <https://fullfact.org/economy/employment-november-2021/>

⁵<https://hansard.parliament.uk/commons/2021-11-24/debates/C44218D0-4FD5-4841-94E9-8218FAE2B9AB/Engagements#contribution-83166653-D7E2-49A0-B5DC-84DF1C3D6C58>

On 1 December Mr Johnson said: “We have more people in work now [...] than we had before the pandemic began”.⁶ On 15 December, Mr Johnson said: “We now have 500,000 more people in work than there were when the pandemic began”.⁷ Then on 5 January Mr Johnson said: “We have 420,000 more people in jobs now than there were before the pandemic began”.⁸

Two Conservative MPs repeated this claim in Parliament on 11 January. Lee Rowley said: ‘There are over 400,000 more people in employment than before the pandemic’⁹ and Paul Scully said: “We now have 400,000 more people in work than before the pandemic”.¹⁰ Then on 12 January Mark Spencer and Suella Braverman both made the claim on Twitter: “400,000 more jobs than there were pre-Covid”¹¹, and on 13 January Nadine Dorries did the same thing: “400,000 more back in work than at start of pandemi”.¹² We have written to all of these MPs and asked them to correct their claims.

The Prime Minister repeated this incorrect claim as recently as yesterday in an interview with Sky News when he said: “We now have 420,000 more people in employment than there were before the pandemic began”.¹³ Although he did use the statistics correctly during Prime Minister’s Questions on 19 January, saying “we have more people, more employees on the payroll now, than there were before the pandemic began”.¹⁴

We ask you to step in and clarify that this inaccurate claim should not be repeated in this form and should be corrected where necessary.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Will Moy", with a horizontal line underneath.

Will Moy, Chief Executive, Full Fact

⁶<https://hansard.parliament.uk/commons/2021-12-01/debates/A0E282CF-039D-4F26-8F16-946B8C6E2ABC/Engagements>

⁷<https://hansard.parliament.uk/commons/2021-12-15/debates/9FC7E88F-A7F2-47F7-9DDB-4A7252E40778/Engagements>

⁸<https://hansard.parliament.uk/commons/2022-01-05/debates/F0DD6E66-0813-4A93-814D-B6FAAFDC8A16/Engagements>

⁹<https://hansard.parliament.uk/commons/2022-01-11/debates/7EFC8B42-69ED-4F81-B9A7-FB4738A30C5E/ReducingCostsForBusinesses>

¹⁰<https://hansard.parliament.uk/commons/2022-01-11/debates/5F77A74E-8F10-4160-8D78-1BEF5AFB7008/Night-TimeEconomy>

¹¹ https://twitter.com/Mark_Spencer/status/1481376205739859970

<https://twitter.com/SuellaBraverman/status/1481357272047665153>

¹² <https://twitter.com/NadineDorries/status/1481545968415821834>

¹³ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7upXsB4ztkE&t=843s>

¹⁴ <https://parliamentlive.tv/event/index/e0060f50-48a2-43c4-a7a6-e731b78a43d1?in=12:10:52>