

March 2018

Northern Ireland Annual Survey of Hours and Earnings 2017 Pensions Results

Geographical Area: Northern Ireland
Theme: Labour Market
Frequency: Annual

Key points

- The proportion of employees in Northern Ireland who belonged to a workplace pension scheme increased over the year to over 68%. This is the 5th consecutive year of increases in pension membership.
- The increase in the proportion of employees belonging to a workplace pension scheme was due to increases in membership of Occupational Defined Contribution and Group Personal pensions.
- Occupational Defined Benefit pensions have been the most common form of workplace pension for the past ten years. However, the proportion of employees in this pension scheme has declined in the past two years to approximately a quarter of all employees in 2017.
- Nearly nine out of ten public sector employees (88%) and six out of ten (58%) private sector employees were members of a workplace pension scheme. This is an increase of 35 percentage points (pps) for private sector employees and 8pps for public sector in the last 5 years.
- Pension membership varies widely by industry with those employed in 'public administration and defence' most likely to have a pension (97%) and those in 'Accommodation and food service activities' least likely (29%).

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1 Summary of pension scheme membership in NI

Current position

The pension results from the Annual Survey of Hours and Earnings (ASHE) in 2017 showed that:

- 68% of employees in Northern Ireland (NI) belonged to a workplace pension scheme
- The most common form of workplace pension was an Occupational Defined Benefit Pension, held by approximately a quarter of employees
- A higher proportion of public sector employees (88%) than private sector employees (58%) were members of a workplace pension scheme
- Pension membership was highest for those aged 50-59 years old (77%) and lowest for those aged 18-21 years old (9%)
- Full-time employees had a higher percentage of workplace pension participation than part-time employees (78% compared with 45%)
- Those in professional occupations were most likely to have a pension (87%) whilst those in elementary occupations were least likely (45%)
- Almost all of those employed in 'Public administration and defence' belonged to a workplace pension (97%), whilst only 29% of employees in 'Accommodation and food service activities' did.

Change over year

ASHE pension results show that, over the year to 2017:

- The proportion of employees belonging to a workplace pension has increased by 7pps to 68%
- The largest increase (8pps) was recorded in Occupational Defined Contribution schemes
- The proportion of public sector employees with Occupational Defined Contribution pensions increased from 2% in 2016 to 13% in 2017
- Only one industry (of 14) saw a decline in workplace pensions; Accommodation and Food Service Activities.

Change over past five years

Automatic enrolment of all eligible employees into a qualifying workplace pension scheme was introduced in October 2012. Since April 2012:

- Pension membership has increased from 44% to 68% in 2017
- Membership of Occupational Defined Contribution and Group Personal pensions has increased (by 18pps and 8pps)
- Membership of Occupational Defined Benefit has decreased by 4pps
- The proportion of private sector employees with workplace pensions has increased from 23% in 2012 to 58% in 2017
- The 22-29 year age group has shown the largest increase since 2012, increasing by 43pps
- Process plant & machine operatives, and Sales & customer service occupations saw the largest increases in workplace pensions membership
- Administrative and support service activities has increased by almost 50pps and Agriculture, forestry and fishing by 45pps.

Commentary

The most recent results show an increase over the year in the proportion of employees belonging to a workplace pension (+7pps), to over two-thirds of employees. This is the 5th consecutive year of increases in pension membership.

The proportion of employees in Northern Ireland (NI) who belonged to a workplace pension scheme was in steady decline until 2012, however, since then the proportion has increased from 44% to 68% in 2017. This increase is consistent with pension reforms (the Automatic Enrolment of eligible employees into a workplace pension scheme) introduced in October 2012.

Although Occupational Defined Benefit has remained the most common pension scheme in the past ten years, it has been increases in Occupational Defined Contribution and Group Personal pensions that has led to the overall increase in pension membership. Over the year to 2017, there has been a notable increase in the proportion of employees on Occupation Defined Contribution schemes. Alongside a decline in the membership of Occupational Defined Benefit schemes in the past two years, this has brought membership of these schemes to more similar proportions (23% and 27%), a contrast to the proportions 5 years ago (6% and 31%).

Over the year there were increases in pension membership across all age groups and for both males and females. Similarly there were increases for both the private and public sector and most industry and occupation groups. This is broadly consistent with trends over the last five years. Of note are the larger increases in the private sector, among young people and those in lower paid occupations and industries.

Context

The Annual Survey of Hours and Earnings (ASHE) is a UK wide survey that provides a wide range of information on hourly, weekly and annual earnings by gender, work pattern, industry and occupation including public and private sector pay comparisons. This report presents provisional results from the pension's element of the 2017 Northern Ireland ASHE, which surveyed employee earnings for the pay-week (or other pay period if the employee was paid less frequently) that included 26th April 2017, the reference date for the latest survey. Full details of the Northern Ireland survey can be found on the ASHE section of the NISRA Economic and Labour Market Statistics website: [Annual Survey of Hours and Earnings](#)

ASHE collects information on employee membership of the current employer's pension scheme. This does not include preserved rights in any former employer's pension scheme or pensions paid by a former employer. Employees are defined as making contributions to a workplace pension if they have made a contribution, or had a contribution made on their behalf, in the survey reference period.

Detailed tables on pensions from the 2017 and 2016 (revised) surveys are published alongside this bulletin and can be found on the NISRA Economic and Labour Market Statistics website at: [Annual Survey of Hours and Earnings - Pensions](#)

Workplace pension reforms

The [Pensions Act 2008](#) put in place a framework for workplace pension reform designed to increase private pension saving in the UK. This framework was updated as part of the [Pensions Act 2011](#) and [2014](#). One of the main reforms was that, from October 2012, all eligible employees are to be automatically enrolled into a qualifying workplace pension scheme.

[Automatic enrolment](#) applies to eligible employees who are not already participating in a qualifying workplace pension scheme. When automatic enrolment was introduced in October 2012, eligible employees were those earning more than £8,105 per year (threshold increased to £10,000 in April 2016). Eligible employees are those aged between 22 and [State Pension age](#). Automatic enrolment is being introduced in [stages](#), based on the size of the employer's PAYE scheme on 1 April 2012. Automatic enrolment started in October 2012 for employers with over 120,000 employees, with staged roll-out to all employers by 2018.

Under automatic enrolment, employers select a pension scheme for their employees. Employers have a duty to enrol all eligible employees into a pension scheme meeting the qualifying requirements set out within the Pensions Act 2008 and 2011 and to make contributions to this scheme on their employees' behalf. Workers are able to opt out of their employer's scheme if they wish but, if they are still eligible, they will be re-enrolled after a 3-year period.

In order to be considered a qualifying pension scheme, schemes will, by April 2019, have to receive minimum contributions of 8% of an employee's qualifying earnings, of which at least 3% must come from the employer. However, there is a [phasing in period](#), during which lower contributions are allowed. From October 2012 to April 2018 the minimum contribution is 2% of an employee's qualifying earnings, of which at least 1% must come from the employer. These reforms represented a major change in the UK private pension system, aiming to extend coverage to the millions of employees without a private pension, in particular those in the target market of moderate to low earners.

Further information on automatic enrolment can be found on the NI Direct website at: [Enrolling into a pension at work](#)

National Statistics

The United Kingdom Statistics Authority has designated these statistics as National Statistics, in accordance with the Statistics and Registration Service Act 2007 and signifying compliance with the Code of Practice for Official Statistics.

National Statistics status means that official statistics meet the highest standards of trustworthiness, quality and public value.

All official statistics should comply with all aspects of the Code of Practice for Official Statistics. They are awarded National Statistics status following an assessment by the Authority's regulatory arm. The Authority considers whether the statistics meet the highest standards of Code compliance, including the value they add to public decisions and debate.

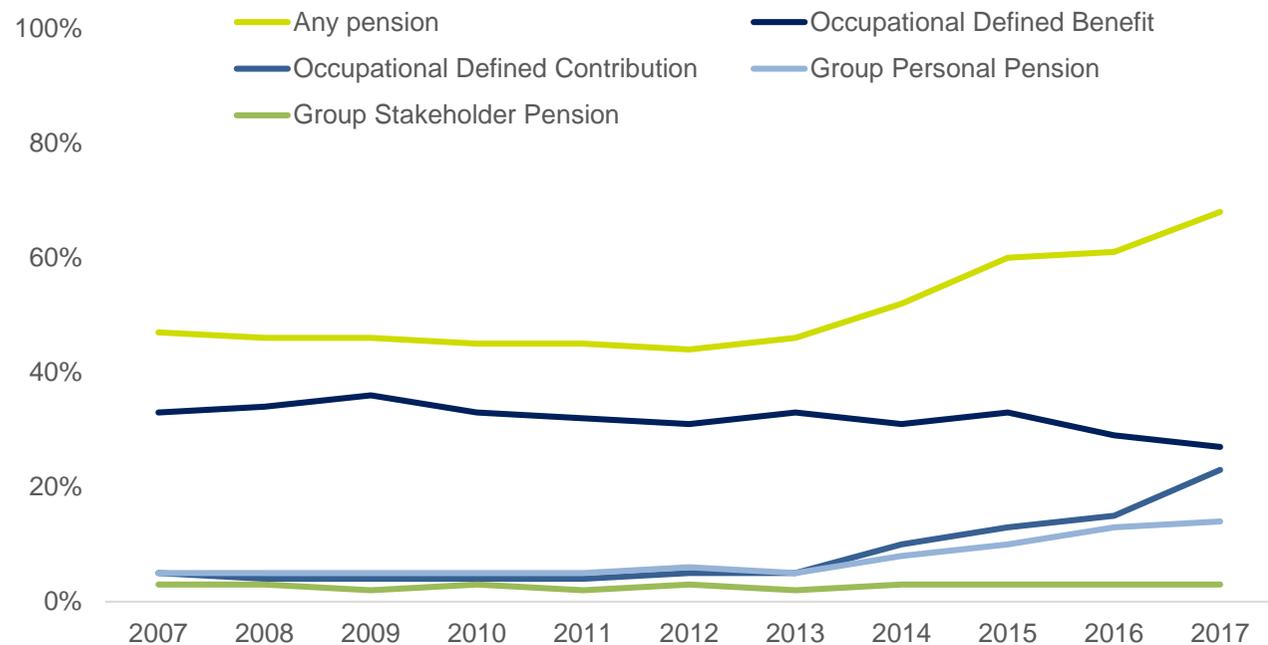
It is a producer's responsibility to maintain compliance with the standards expected of National Statistics. If we become concerned about whether these statistics are still meeting the appropriate standards, we will discuss any concerns with the Authority promptly. National Statistics status can be removed at any point when the highest standards are not maintained, and reinstated when standards are restored.

2 Workplace pension scheme membership

Key findings

- In 2017, 68% of all employees were members of a workplace pension scheme
- Occupational Defined Benefit pensions were the most common schemes in the last ten years (27% in 2017)
- Sharp increase in pension membership in the last five years, likely due to the introduction of automatic enrolment
- The increases over recent years have been driven by Occupational Defined Contribution and Group Personal Pension schemes

Figure 1: Proportion of employees with workplace pensions by type of pension, 2007-2017



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The proportion of employees in Northern Ireland who belonged to any type of workplace pension scheme was in steady decline until 2012. From 2012 onwards, the proportion of employees who belonged to a workplace pension scheme showed significant increases, driven by Occupational Defined Contribution and Group Personal Pensions increases. The introduction of Automatic Enrolment in 2012 is likely to have been a key factor in this increase. (Further information on automatic enrolment can be found in the Workplace pension reforms section on page 4.)

1. The Occupational Defined Contribution category includes employees who have pensions with the National Employment Savings Trust (NEST).
2. Data for Group Self-Invested Personal Pensions (GSIPP) are included within the Group Personal Pension (GPP) category.

3 Pension membership by public and private sector

Key findings

- Workplace pension participation continues to differ significantly between the public and private sector, although the gap is closing
- In the last five years private sector pension membership has more than doubled
- Nearly 9 out of 10 public sector employees has a workplace pension

Figure 2: Proportion of employees with workplace pensions by sector and type of pension, 2012 and 2017



Figure 2 shows that in 2017:

- 88% of public sector employees had a workplace pension, with 63% having an Occupational Defined Benefit Pension
- 58% of employees within the private sector had a workplace pension, with 29% having an Occupational Defined Contribution pension
- Occupational Defined Contribution and Group Personal or Stakeholder pensions were more common in the private sector than in the public sector.

[Download in excel](#)

1. The Occupational Defined Contribution category includes employees who have pensions with the National Employment Savings Trust (NEST).

2. Data for Group Self-Invested Personal Pensions (GSIPP) are included within the Group Personal Pension (GPP) category.

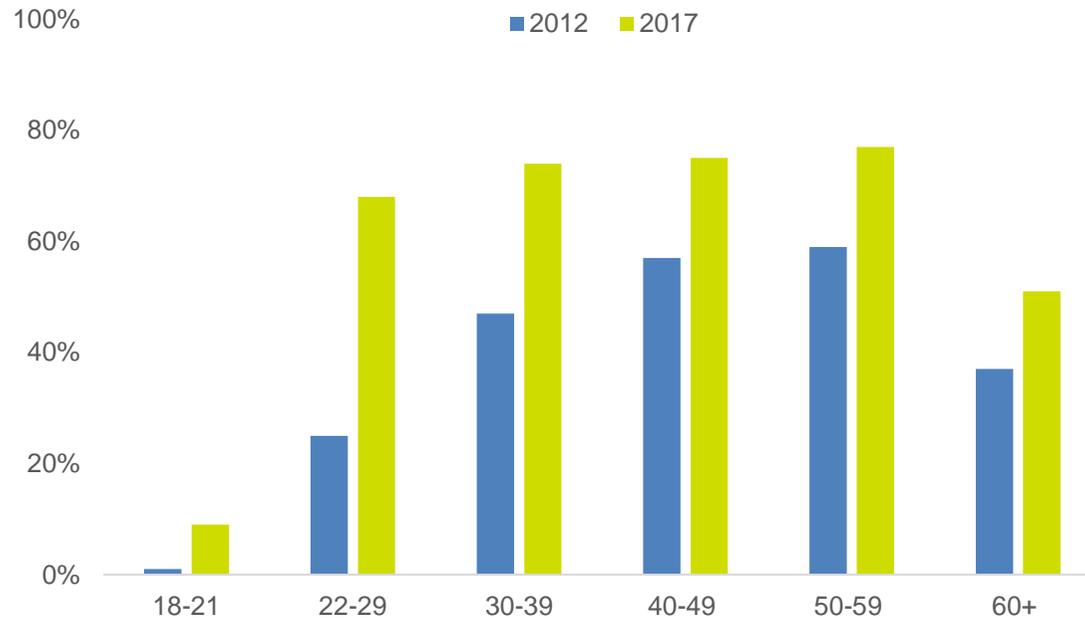
x = Coefficient of variation too large to provide a reliable estimate.

4 Pension membership by age

Key findings

- Workplace pension scheme membership increases with age
- Those aged 50-59 years had the largest proportion of workplace pension scheme membership (77%) in 2017
- The largest increases in the last five years have occurred for under 40's

Figure 3: Proportion of employees with workplace pensions by age band, 2012 and 2017



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Figure 3 shows that in 2017:

- 22-29 years olds have had the largest increase in workplace pension membership since 2012, with an increase of 43 pps, to 68%
- This is followed by 30-39 years old, who increased by 27 pps, to 74% over the 5 year period
- Although pension membership for employees in their 40's and 50's increased at a lesser rate (both 18 pps), these two age bands still recorded the highest proportion of membership (75% and 77% respectively)
- Those age 18-21 had the smallest membership (9%), however this is up nine fold from 2012 (1%)
- Just over half (51%) of all employees aged 60 or over were enrolled in a workplace pension.

5 Pension membership by gender

Key findings

- The proportion of males and females with workplace pensions was equal in 2017 (68%)
- The greatest proportion of males are in Occupational Defined Contribution schemes
- The majority of females are in Occupational Defined Benefit schemes.

Figure 4: Proportion of employees with workplace pensions by gender and type of pension, 2012 and 2017

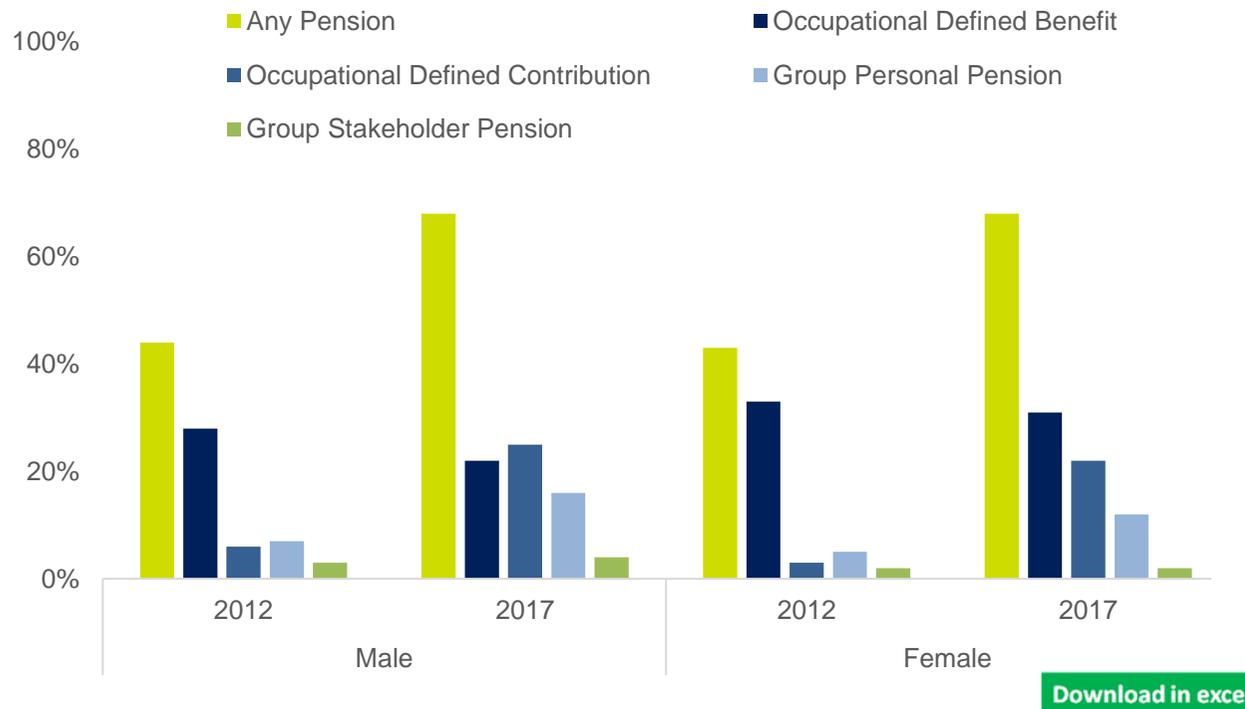


Figure 4 shows that:

- There was an increase in the percentage of both males and females who had a pension in the last five years
- Pension uptake amongst both males and females increased by 7pps over the year to 68% in 2017
- Over five years, the proportion of employees belonging to a pensions scheme increased by 24pps for males and 25pps for females
- Occupational Defined Benefit was still the most popular pension type for females, however in 2017 Occupational Defined Contribution became the most popular pension type for males.

1. The Occupational Defined Contribution category includes employees who have pensions with the National Employment Savings Trust (NEST).
2. Data for Group Self-Invested Personal Pensions (GSIPP) are included within the Group Personal Pension (GPP) category.

6 Pension membership by work pattern

Key findings

- Workplace pension participation was higher among full-time than part-time employees in 2017
- In 2017, 78% of all full-time employees were members of a workplace pension scheme (increasing from 53% in 2012)
- In comparison, 45% of all part-time employees were members of workplace pension schemes (increasing from 25% in 2012)

Figure 5: Proportion of employees with workplace pensions by working pattern, 2012 and 2017

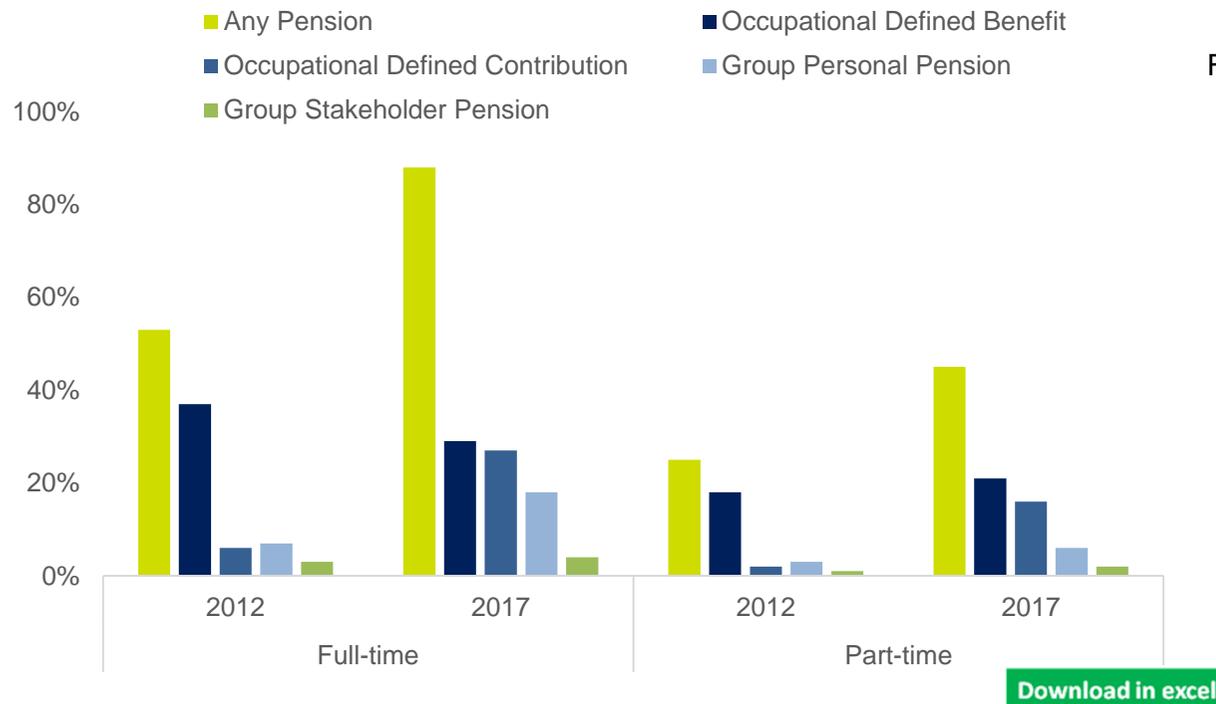


Figure 5 shows that:

- The proportion of full-time employees who are members of a workplace pension scheme has increased by 25 pps over the last five years
- This is higher than the growth of part-time employees with pensions, which has increased by 20 pps since 2012
- These changes have been driven by increasing membership of Occupational Defined Contribution and Group Personal Pension schemes
- Together, these schemes have increased by 32 pps for full-time employees and 17 pps for part-time employees.

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1. The Occupational Defined Contribution category includes employees who have pensions with the National Employment Savings Trust (NEST).
2. Data for Group Self-Invested Personal Pensions (GSIPP) are included within the Group Personal Pension (GPP) category.

7 Pension membership by occupation

Key points

- Employees in professional occupations were the most likely to have a workplace based pension, while those in elementary occupations were least likely to have a workplace pension.
- Employees in process, plant and machine operatives and sales and customer service occupations have seen the largest increase in pensions participation since 2012.

Figure 6: Proportion of employees with workplace pensions by occupation, 2012 and 2017

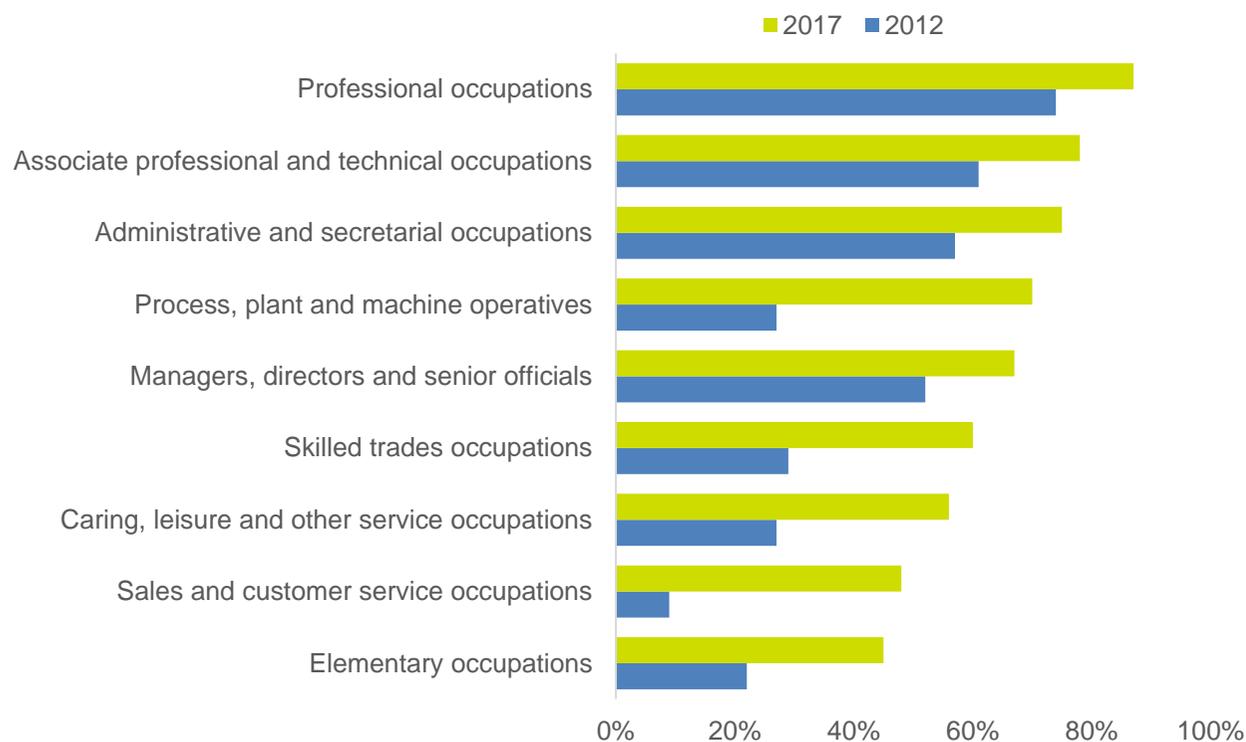


Figure 6 shows that:

- 87% of employees in professional occupations belonged to workplace pension schemes in 2017, an increase from the 74% recorded in 2012
- Although the proportion of employees in elementary occupations belonging to a pension has more than doubled over the last five years (from 22% in 2012 to 45% in 2017), it still remains the occupation with the lowest participation
- Process, plant and machine operatives saw the largest increase of 43pps in the last five years
- Professional occupations had the smallest increase since 2012 (13 pps).

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8 Pension membership by industry

Key points

- Public administration and defence had the largest participation in a workplace pension
- Accommodation and food services had the lowest
- The largest increase occurred in administrative and support service activities

Figure 7: Proportion of employees with workplace pensions by industry, 2012 and 2017

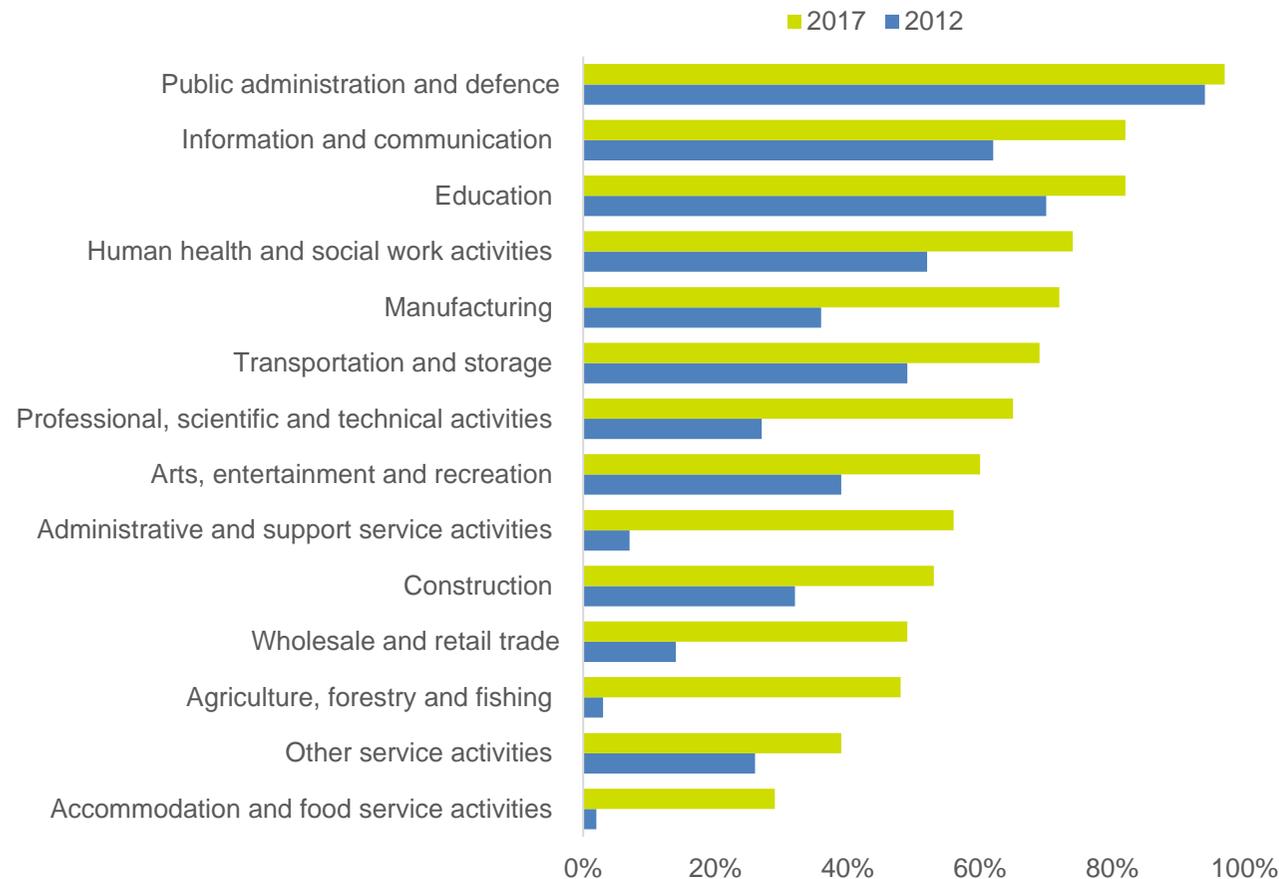


Figure 7 shows that:

- 97% of employees in public administration and defence had a workplace based pension in 2017
- 29% of employees in accommodation and food service activities had a workplace based pension in 2017
- Administrative and support service activities had the largest increase of 49pps in the last five years, closely followed by Agriculture, forestry and fishing (45pps)
- Public administration and defence had the small increase since 2012 with 3 percentage points.

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9 Definitions

Automatic enrolment: Under reforms brought in by the Pensions Act 2008, with updates in the Pensions Acts 2011 and 2014, employers must enrol all eligible employees into a qualifying private pension. Workers can opt out but will be re-enrolled every 3 years and would need to opt out each time. Automatic enrolment has a staged implementation to 2019 and started with the larger employers in 2012. (See also [Pension Trends, Chapter 6: Private Pensions, 2013 edition](#), and [Department for Work and Pensions: Automatic Enrolment Evaluation Review 2017](#)).

Contributions: Payments into a pension by employees (and other individuals) or by employers.

Coefficient of variation (cv): The ratio of the standard error of an estimate to the estimate, expressed as a percentage. The smaller the cv, the higher the quality of the estimate.

Full-time employees: Those working more than 30 hours each week excluding overtime and main meal breaks (25 hours for teachers and academics).

Group personal pension (GPP): An arrangement made for the employees of a particular employer or group of employers to participate in a personal pension on a group basis. This is a collecting arrangement only; the contract is between the individual and the pension provider, normally an insurance company. In ASHE, this category also includes group self-invested personal pensions. GPPs are a form of workplace pension.

Group self-invested personal pension (GSIPP): An arrangement made for the employees of a particular employer, or group of employers, to participate in a personal pension on a group basis. The GSIPP is similar to the group personal pension except that it is the policy holder rather than the pension provider who chooses the investments. GSIPPs are a form of workplace pension. In ASHE, GSIPPs are not collected separately from group personal pensions.

Group stakeholder pension: An arrangement made for the employees of a particular employer or group of employers to participate in a stakeholder pension on a group basis. This is a collecting arrangement only; the contract is between the individual and the pension provider, normally an insurance company. Group stakeholder pensions are a form of workplace pension.

Inter-Departmental Business Register: Introduced in 1994, the Inter-Departmental Business Register (IDBR) is the sampling frame for surveys of businesses carried out by the ONS and by other government departments. It is also a key data source for analysis of business activity.

Occupational defined benefit scheme: An occupational pension scheme in which the rules specify the rate of benefits to be paid. The most common defined benefit scheme is a salary-related scheme in which the benefits are based on the number of years of pensionable service, the accrual rate and either the final salary, the average of selected years' salaries or the best year's salary within a specified period before retirement.

Occupational defined contribution scheme: A pension scheme in which the benefits are determined by the contributions paid into the scheme, the investment return on those contributions, and the type of annuity (if any) purchased upon retirement. It is also known as a money purchase scheme. Defined contribution pensions may be occupational, personal or stakeholder pensions.

Occupational pension scheme: An arrangement (other than accident or permanent health insurance) organised by an employer (or on behalf of a group of employers) to provide benefits for employees on their retirement and for their dependants on their death. In the private sector, occupational schemes are trust-based. Occupational pension schemes are a form of workplace pension.

Pension scheme: A legal arrangement offering benefits to members upon retirement. Schemes are provided by employers and are differentiated by a wide range of rules governing membership eligibility, contributions, benefits and taxation. Pension schemes in the private sector have trustees. Personal pensions and stakeholder pensions offered by insurance companies may also be referred to as schemes, but technically they are individual accounts rather than schemes.

Personal pension: An arrangement where the contract to provide contributions in return for retirement benefits is between an individual and an insurance company. Such plans may be taken out by individuals on their own initiative – for example, to provide a primary source of retirement income for the self-employed, or to provide a secondary income to employees who are members of occupational schemes. These would not be covered in the ASHE results. Alternatively they may be facilitated by an employer. These pensions are covered by ASHE and include group personal pensions and group stakeholder pensions. Personal pensions are a form of defined contribution pension.

Private sector schemes: Schemes covering the part of the economy consisting of individuals, firms and other institutions. In ASHE, the public and private sectors are classified using the legal status from the Inter-Departmental Business Register. ‘All employees’ categories include employees from the public and private sectors plus employees working for organisations classified as non-profit bodies.

Public sector schemes: Schemes covering the part of the economy that is state-provided, including central and local government, schooling, health and social services, policing and the armed forces. In ASHE, the public and private sectors are classified using the legal status from the Inter-Departmental Business Register. ‘All employees’ categories include employees from the public and private sectors plus employees working for organisations classified as non-profit bodies.

Stakeholder pension: Available since 2001, a flexible, portable, personal pension arrangement (provided by insurance companies) with capped management charges, that must meet the conditions set out in the Welfare Reform and Pensions Act 1999 and be registered with The Pensions Regulator. They can be taken out by an individual or facilitated by an employer. Stakeholder pensions are a form of defined contribution pension.

Standard Occupational Classification (SOC): The classificatory system used in the UK to place individuals into occupational groups.

Workplace pension: A workplace pension is a pension which is provided or facilitated via a workplace, principally for employees. It includes both occupational pension schemes and all forms of group personal and group stakeholder pensions.

10 Further information

Methodology

The Annual Survey of Hours and Earnings (ASHE) is a UK wide survey that provides a wide range of information on earnings and hours worked. The Office for National Statistics (ONS) carries out ASHE in Great Britain, and it is carried out by the NI Statistics and Research Agency (NISRA) in NI. ASHE replaced the New Earnings Survey (NES) from 2004, and ASHE comparisons are therefore only available on a consistent basis from that year onwards. This release contains summary statistics from the pension's element of the 2017 Northern Ireland survey.

The survey information related to the pay-week (or other pay period if the employee was paid less frequently) which included 26th April 2017, the reference date for the latest survey. The results are therefore not necessarily representative of pay over a longer period. They do not take account of subsequent changes in rates of pay which have become effective since April or changes which have been introduced with retrospective effect since the survey returns were completed.

Since the 2004 survey, supplementary information has been collected in order to improve coverage and hence make the survey more representative. This includes employees who have either moved jobs or entered the labour market between February, when the main ASHE sample is identified from Her Majesty's Revenue and Customs (HMRC) records, and April, when the survey is conducted. In 2007, ONS also introduced a small number of methodological changes (to the sample design) to improve the quality of the results.

The ASHE results since 2004 are therefore discontinuous with earlier results, as are those since 2007. However, for 2004 two sets of results

are available (the first exclude supplementary information and the second include this information), and similarly for 2006 (the first set not reflecting the methodological changes to the sample design and the second set consistent with the new methodological changes).

In 2009, in line with the major revision to the European Union's industrial classification system, NACE, ASHE moved from using the SIC 2003 categorisation of business activities to the new SIC 2007 activity codes. The UK is required by European legislation to revise the SIC in parallel with NACE so that both systems remain identical down to and including the 4 digit class level.

These revisions are motivated by the need to adapt the classifications to changes in the world economy. The revised classifications reflect the growing importance of service activities in the economy over the last fifteen years, mainly due to the developments in information and communication technologies (ICT).

[More information on the extent of the revisions and correspondence between SIC 2007 and the former SIC 2003](#)

With the aim of improving the alignment with the new International Standard Classification of Occupations (ISCO 08), from 2013 the Standard Occupational Classification 2000 (SOC 2000) used for ASHE has been replaced by the Standard Occupational Classification 2010 (SOC 2010). Since the SOC forms part of the methodology by which ASHE data are weighted to produce estimates for NI, this has caused a discontinuity in the ASHE time series. Therefore, two sets of results are available for 2011. Moreover, the revised estimates for 2011, and

all subsequent provisional and revised estimates, are not directly comparable to earlier results.

[The major differences between the SOC 2000 and SOC 2010 classifications are summarised in this document, starting at page 62.](#)

Coverage and sampling

As in previous years, the sample used for the survey included approximately 1% of all employees in NI who were covered by PAYE schemes, and therefore is subject to an associated level of sampling error. Someone who is in more than one PAYE scheme may appear more than once. Information on earnings and hours is obtained in confidence from employers under the authority of The Statistics of Trade and Employment (NI) Order 1988. Information collected is treated as strictly confidential and is used only for statistical purposes. The resulting analyses do not show information about identifiable people or private businesses.

The ASHE estimates are based on a sample and are therefore subject to an associated level of variability. The coefficient of variation (cv) indicates the quality of an estimate. The cv is the ratio of the standard error of an estimate to the estimate, expressed as a percentage. The smaller the CV, the higher the quality of the estimate.

ASHE coverage change in 2014

In 2013, HM Revenue and Customs (HMRC) changed the criteria which determine how businesses are obliged to report employees' earnings via their Pay as You Earn (PAYE) schemes. The PAYE system is the frame for the ASHE sample. Until this change, businesses were only required to operate PAYE for employees whose earnings were above the Lower Earnings Limit (LEL) for National Insurance contributions (currently £111 per week) and they did not report all new jobs until the end of the tax year. The new rules require employers to report the details of all of their employee jobs via their PAYE schemes, whatever their earnings, provided that they have at least one employee earning

above the LEL. In addition, employers must report for all jobs in 'real-time', meaning that they cannot wait until the end of the tax year. This new system is known as 'Real-Time Information' (RTI).

In theory, ONS judges that the impact of the move to RTI on the estimates for ASHE in 2014 is negligible. It is possible that at some lower levels of disaggregation, there may be a more pronounced effect, perhaps because RTI has resulted in different behavioural changes for employers in particular regions or in particular sectors.

Response

A total of 6,865 returns were received by NISRA (93% of those sampled). ASHE responses are weighted to the number of jobs measured by the Labour Force Survey (LFS) and this weighting is carried out by ONS. The weighting factors include age, sex, occupation and workplace and take account of differing response rates.

Further information

If you require further information about the figures contained in this publication or the accompanying tables, please contact the Annual Survey of Hours and Earnings section using the details below:

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Headline Results and Coefficients of Variation

Pension Type by Industry

Pension Type by Occupation

Pension Type by Age

Pension Type by Public/Private Sector

Headline Statistics for the years 2004 to 2015 are available on request from ashehelpline@finance-ni.gov.uk.