Office for National Statistics

Hours Worked in the Labour Market, 2011

Coverage: **UK**
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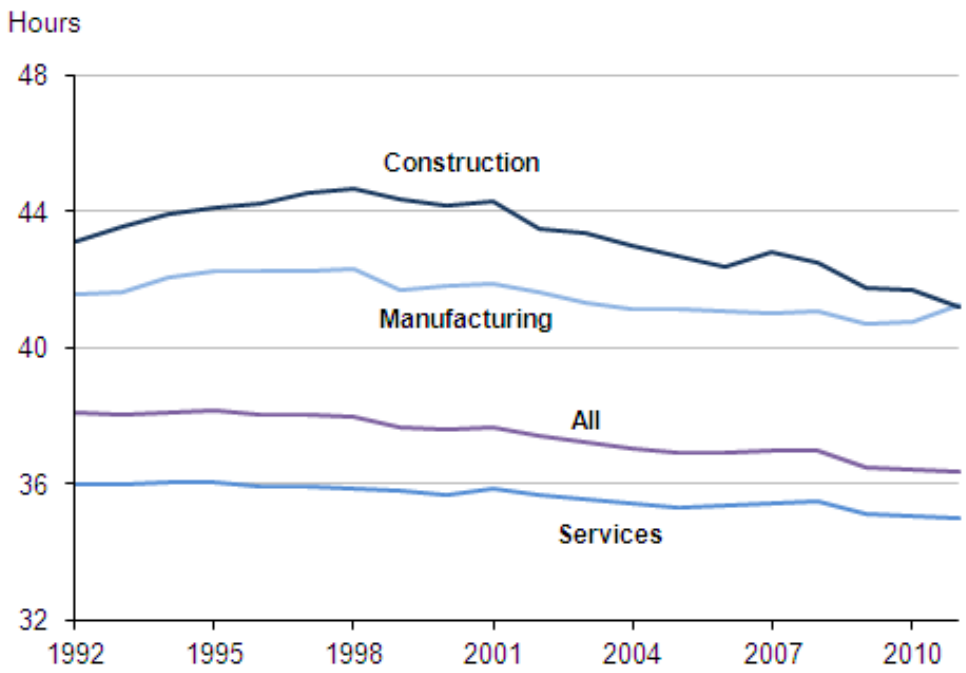
Geographical Area: **UK and GB**
Theme: **Labour Market**

Animated YouTube video

4.7 per cent fall in average hours worked in the UK since 1992

In the second quarter of 2011 the average number of usual hours worked in the UK stood at around 36.3 per week, down 4.7 per cent from 38.1 hours per week in 1992. This change was driven by a mixture of structural changes in the economy, and more flexibility in the hours chosen by employees or offered by employers (including more part-time working).

Average usual hours worked by sector, April to June 1992-2011, UK



Source: Labour Force Survey - Office for National Statistics

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Looking at the major sectors within the UK:

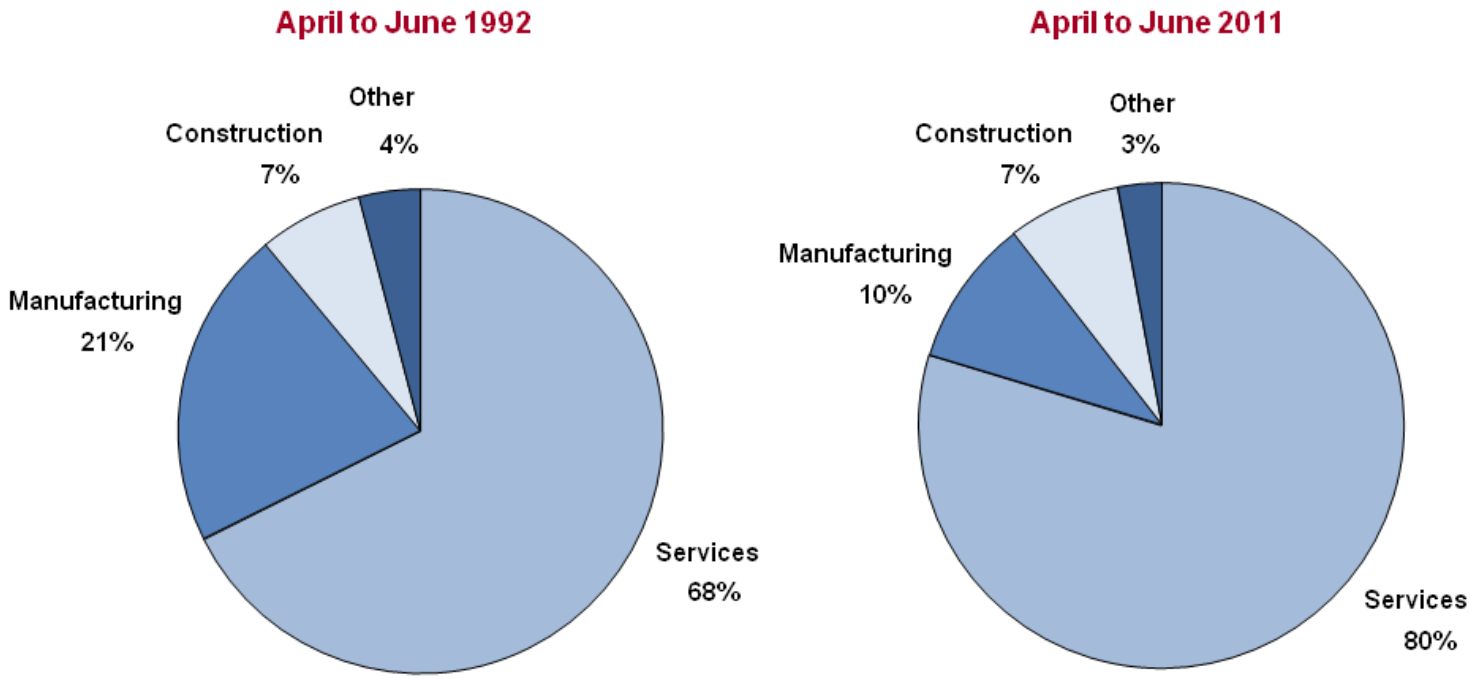
- The average number of hours worked in the manufacturing sector was reasonably constant over the period, standing at around 41.2 hours per week in 2011 (41.6 hours per week in 1992)
- Average usual weekly hours in the construction sector stood at 41.2 hours in 2011 (43.1 hours in 1992)
- In the service sector (the largest sector in the UK) there was a fall in the number of average hours usually worked from 36.0 hours per week in 1992 to around 35.0 hours in 2011

So, those working in construction tend to work the longest hours in the UK, although, because over the period average hours have fallen more for workers in construction than in manufacturing, they worked similar hours in 2011.

Change in the structure of the UK economy

Average hours in the UK have been affected by changes to the structure of the UK economy.
The fall in average hours has occurred while the service sector has increased its share of total employment from around 68 per cent in 1992 to around 80 per cent in 2011. Over the same period the share of total employment in the UK for the manufacturing sector has fallen from 21 per cent to around 10 per cent.

Percentage share of workforce by sector, April to June 1992 and 2011, UK



Source: Labour Force Survey - Office for National Statistics

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On average, people in the service sector work fewer hours than those in manufacturing so the shift in the UK economy over the past 20 years has impacted on the overall average hours in the UK. To assess this impact, if it is assumed that individuals in 2011 worked the same average hours across each industry as those in 1992, average hours for the UK as a whole would have been 37.5 hours per week in 2011, a fall of 1.7 per cent. However, as shown earlier, there has also been a fall in average hours across each of the sectors. Therefore, the remaining 3 per cent fall in average hours worked since 1992 is attributed to either workers choosing to work fewer hours or employers offering fewer hours.

Increase in part-time work in the UK

The fall in average hours worked in the UK can in part be explained by the increase in the proportion of the UK workforce employed in part-time jobs, from 24 per cent in 1992 to around 27 per cent in 2011.

Percentage of part-time workers and the percentage of part-time workers who could not find a full-time job, April to June 1992-2011, UK

Source: Labour Force Survey - Office for National Statistics

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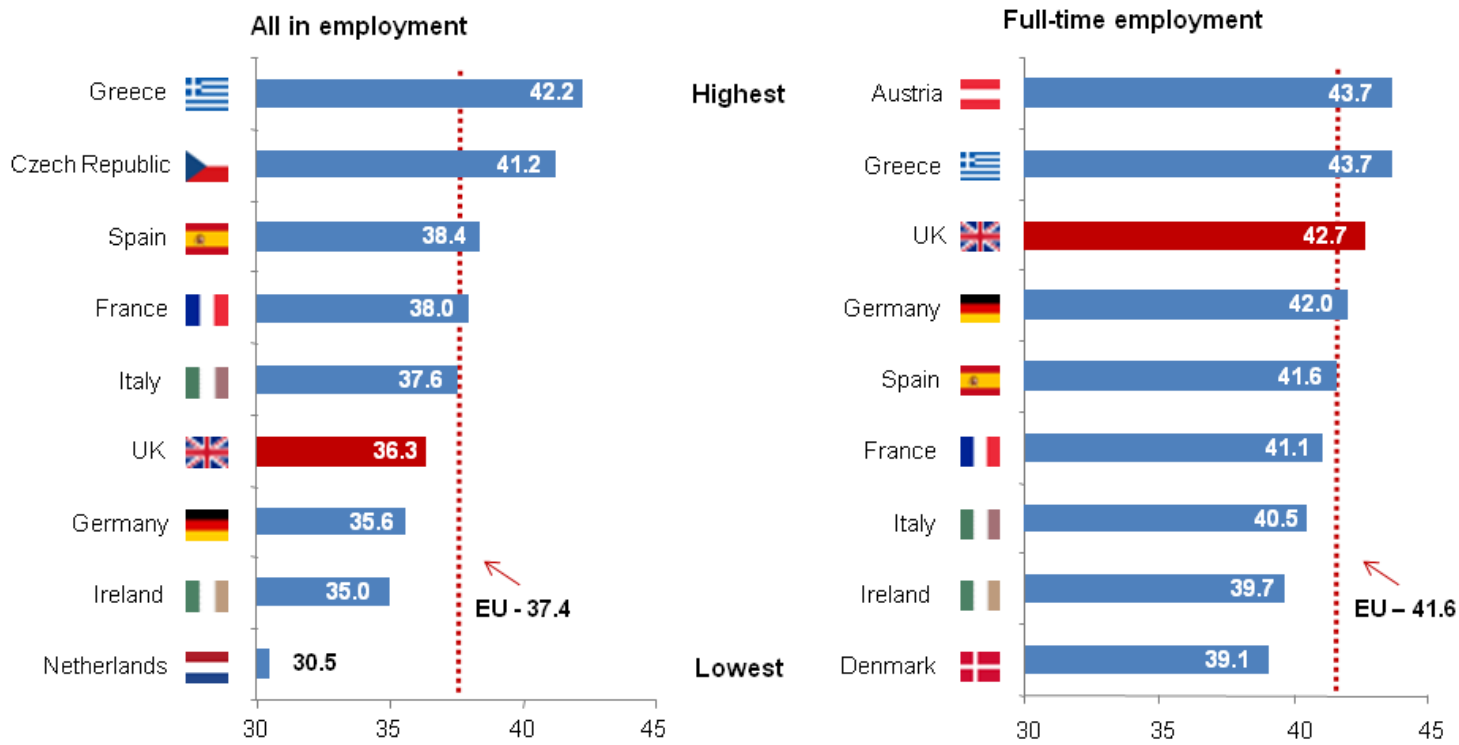
As shown previously, the service sector has increased its share of total employment since 1992 while the manufacturing sector's share of total employment has declined. The service sector is made up of a relatively high proportion of part-time jobs (31 per cent in April to June 2011). In contrast, the manufacturing sector is made up of a low percentage of part-time jobs (around 8 per cent in April to June 2011). So, the shift away from manufacturing towards services and the increase in part-time employment have both acted to reduce average hours worked in the UK.

The percentage of part-time workers who were part-time because they could not find a full-time job has tended to increase following periods of economic contraction and decrease in periods of economic growth. It stood at around 14 per cent in April to June 1993 following the recession in the early 1990s. It then declined over the next decade as the economy improved, standing at around 7 per cent in April to June 2004. The percentage of part-time workers who could not find a full-time job increased following the recent recession and stood at around 16 per cent in April to June 2011.

Full-time workers in the UK work longer hours than the EU average

Average usual hours worked, all in employment and full-time workers, April to June 2011, selected European countries



Source: Labour Force Survey - Office for National Statistics, Eurostat

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Comparing hours worked in the UK with countries in the EU, focusing on the largest economies and our nearest neighbour, Ireland, for all people in employment the average working week (36.3) was lower than the EU overall (37.4). However, the UK has a higher percentage of part-time workers than the EU overall, 27 per cent compared to 20 per cent. Workers in Greece had the longest average usual hours at 42.2 hours per week. The lowest average usual hours was in the Netherlands at 30.5, although almost half (49 per cent) of people in the Netherlands worked part-time.

Focusing on full-time workers to account for differences in the percentages working part-time, average usual hours worked in the UK (42.7) were higher than the average for everyone in the EU (41.6). Only Austria and Greece had longer average usual hours of all EU countries, both at 43.7 hours per week. The lowest full-time hours were in Denmark at 39.1 hours per week.

Lower skilled jobs work the longest paid hours while managers work the most unpaid overtime

Employees working in lower skilled jobs, including crane drivers, heavy goods vehicle drivers, and mobile machine drivers and operatives, on average worked the longest paid hours per week in the UK in 2011. People in these occupations, on average, work longer than the 48 hour limit set out in the EU Working Time Directive for which UK employees have a right to opt out.

Using data from the Annual Survey of Hours and Earnings (ASHE), which collects data on the number of paid hours that employees work in the reference period, the three occupations with a sufficient sample for a reliable estimate that worked the longest average hours in the UK in 2011 were:

- Crane drivers at 52.8 hours per week
- Heavy goods vehicles drivers at 48.4 hours per week
- Mobile machine drivers and operatives at 48.0 hours per week

However, certain occupations are more likely to work unpaid overtime and this overtime will not be collected on ASHE, meaning that the average usual weekly hours worked by certain occupations will be underestimated.

Occupations can be split in to 9 broad groups, for example the group “professional occupations” includes engineers, solicitors, and teachers. The average weekly paid hours (including paid overtime) worked by employees of these groups using ASHE data can be compared with average usual hours worked by employees (including paid and unpaid overtime) using Labour Force Survey (LFS) data.

Although the datasets are not directly comparable due to them being based on different samples (and, therefore, the average hours worked may differ), it is possible to draw inferences regarding which groups are likely to work unpaid overtime. Again, this only looks at full-time employees due to some occupational groups being made up of a higher percentage of part-time workers.

Table 1- Average hours of employees by major SOC 2010 occupational classification, April to June 2011, UK

Occupational group	ASHE average hours worked	LFS average hours worked	Difference
Managers and Senior officials	38.5	46.2	7.6
Professional	36.6	43.4	6.8
Associate professionals and technical	38.4	42.0	3.6
Administrative and secretarial	37.4	38.5	1.0
Skilled trades	42.1	43.0	0.9
Personal service	38.7	38.4	-0.3
Sales and customer service	38.3	39.7	1.4
Process, plant and machine operatives	44.2	44.0	-0.2
Elementary	41.4	41.3	-0.1

Table source: Office for National Statistics

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Table 1 shows that there are differences with the ASHE and LFS samples with some groups working fewer paid hours on the ASHE dataset than the average hours worked (including unpaid overtime) on the LFS dataset.

However, even when comparing within the LFS dataset, “managers and senior officials” worked the longest hours per week on average in April to June 2011 at 46.2 hours per week, 7.6 hours more

than this group's paid hours on the ASHE survey. "Professional" occupations also worked more hours (6.8 hours more) on the LFS dataset compared with the ASHE dataset.

Those occupational groups with high average paid hours, for example, the group "Process, plant and machine operatives", worked a similar number of hours, even when unpaid hours are taken in to account on the LFS survey. This suggests that certain occupations are more likely to work unpaid overtime than other occupations meaning that ASHE paid hours may not fully account for differences by occupation in the average number of hours that employees usually work in the UK.

Background notes

1. The analysis focuses on April to June of each year.

2. Usual weekly hours worked by people aged 16 and over in main job includes paid and unpaid overtime.

3. The split between full-time and part-time employment is based on respondents' self-classification.

4. The Annual Survey of Hours and Earnings (ASHE) is based on a 1 per cent sample of employee jobs taken from HM Revenue & Customs PAYE records. It does not include the self-employed, or employees not paid during the reference period.

5. Details of the policy governing the release of new data are available by visiting www.statisticsauthority.gov.uk/assessment/code-of-practice/index.html or from the Media Relations Office email: media.relations@ons.gsi.gov.uk

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