

COVID-19 Fortnightly Insights Report

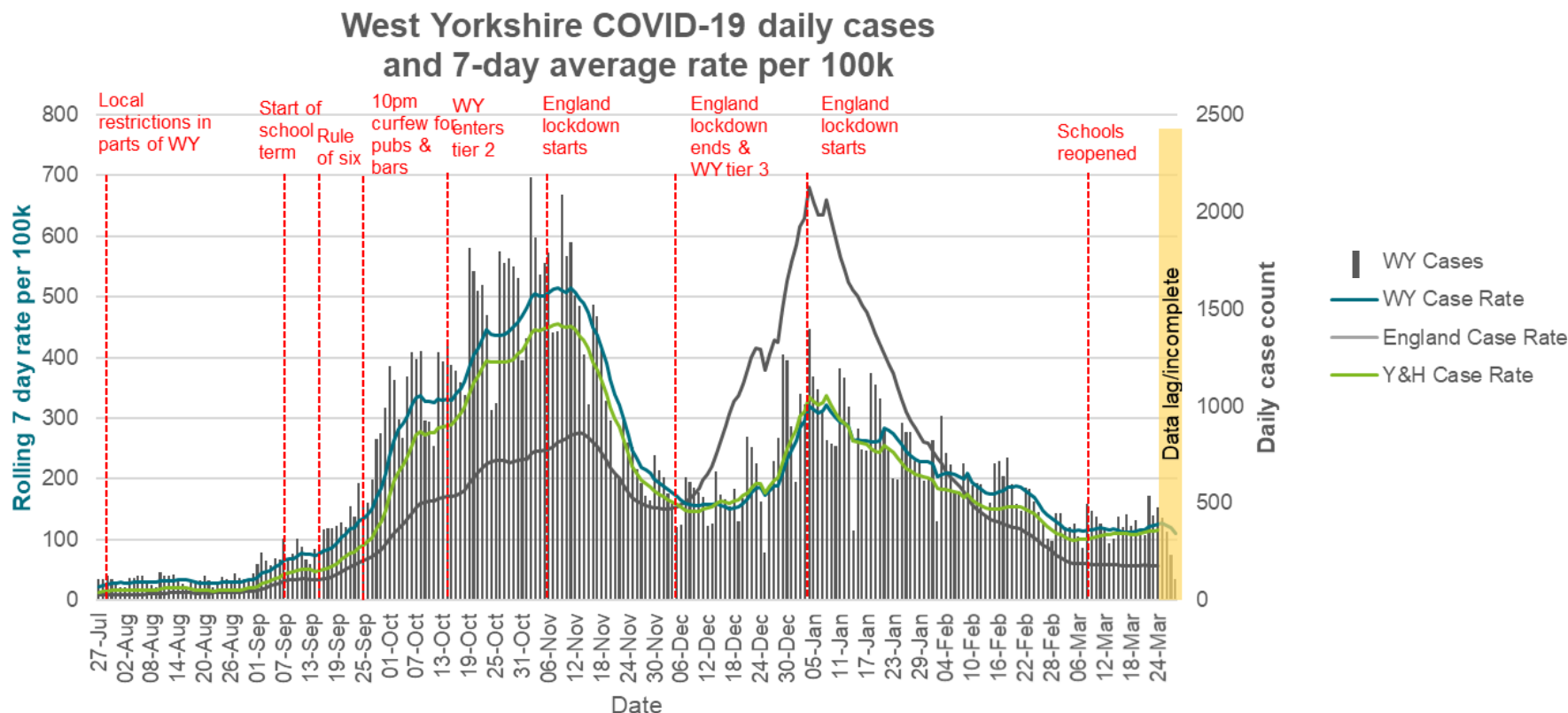
Research & Intelligence
1st April 2021



Executive Summary

- There are **signs of increased activity** in some areas of the economy, even on some indicators which pre-date the easing of lockdown restrictions. The **number of payrolled employees increased** in February, the third monthly increase and is now 6,000 above November's level. It remains 20,000 below pre-pandemic level, however.
- More recent data on vacancies shows an **11% increase in online job postings** in the week to March 27th, further suggesting activity is increasing.
- Survey data also suggests **furlough use is also decreasing in mid-March**, and there is a gradual increase in **people returning to their usual workplaces**.
- Despite this, the number of **people claiming out of work benefits increased** in February at its fastest rate since last spring, though the increase was still a relatively modest 5%.
- 2,000 West Yorkshire businesses have been liquidated or dissolved so far in March, but this likely reflects the clearing of a backlog processing activity at Companies House. Survey data suggests a **relatively stable position in terms of businesses' cash reserves**, with some slight improvement in turnover, though many more businesses still report falling turnover than increasing.
- The picture on activity in town and city centres is mixed, with some areas seeing increases and some seeing falls in the week to 18th March. This suggests **no significant uplift in activity in town and city centres following the reopening of schools**.
- Over recent weeks, **footfall in Leeds Rail Station has shown slight increases** while **bus use appears to have stabilised**. Bus use remains at a higher level than rail compared to the pre-COVID baseline. **Traffic levels appear to be increasing gradually**, both locally and nationally.

Virus prevalence – West Yorkshire trend











The chart above reveals the trend in the number of daily COVID-19 cases in West Yorkshire and the 7-day rolling rate per 100k population. As of the 24th March 2021, the 7-day moving average **West Yorkshire COVID-19 rate was 125 cases per 100k, a increase (+11%) in the last week** (from 112.4 per 100k). In the same period, the rate in Yorkshire and the Humber increased slightly by 5% to 114.8 per 100k, but rates overall in England saw a slight fall (-2%) to 56 per 100k. For the latest data please see the [West Yorkshire COVID-19 dashboard](#).

Source: Secure COVID-19 PHE data portal. Note there is a lag in the very latest data PHE COVID-19 data to account for all test results to be processed and recorded.

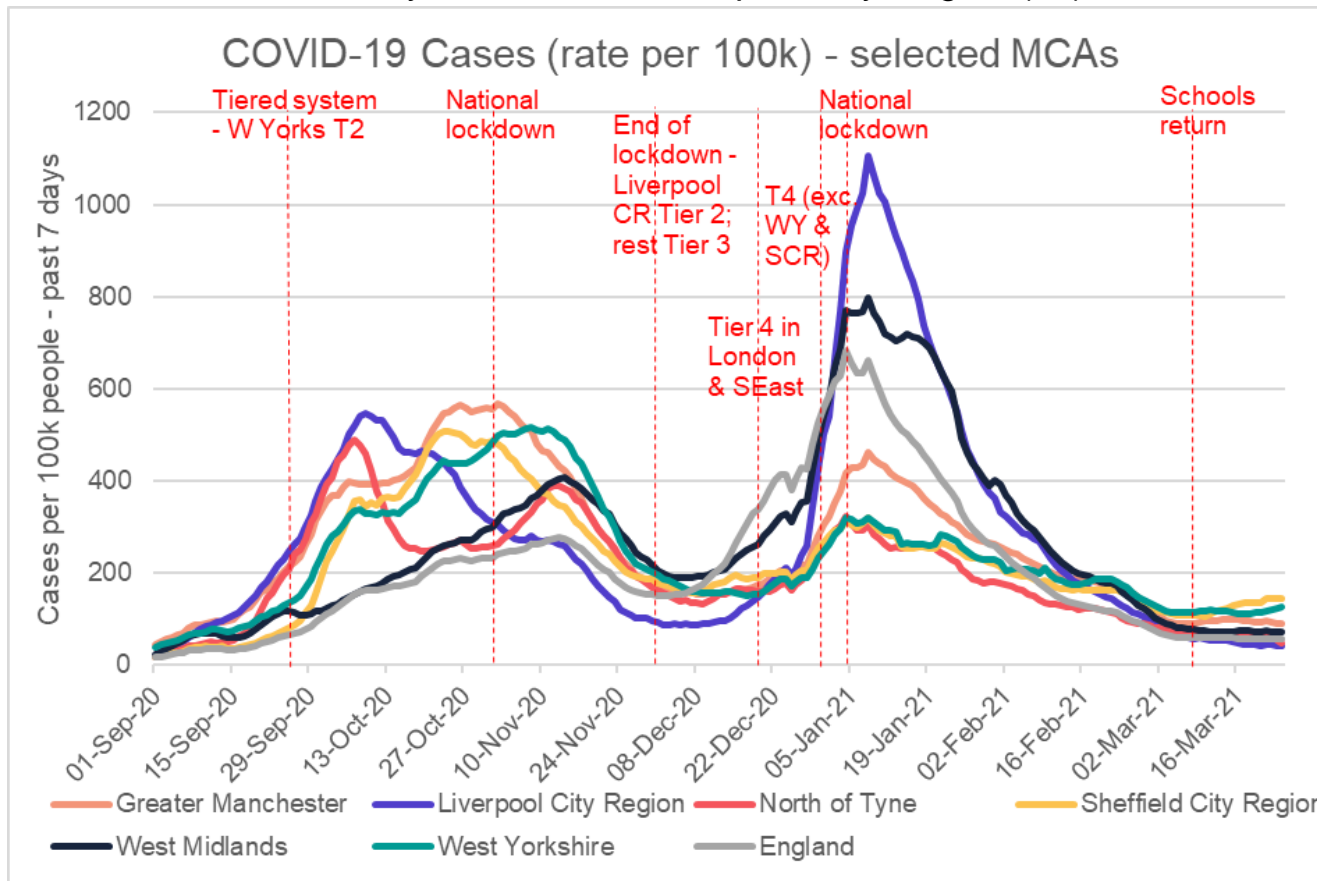
Virus prevalence – West Yorkshire

Table shows the most recent COVID-19 case data from Public Health England's (PHE) secure data portal. Note due to reporting delays for comparison between Local Authorities the most recent 4 days are excluded from the calculations of rates and moving averages.

Area	Total cases per 100k people (18 - 24 March)	Total cases per 100k people (11 – 17 March)	Absolute Difference		% Weekly Change
	Most recent data week	Previous week			
Bradford	152.8	136.9	15.9		12%
Calderdale	112.6	91.3	21.3		23%
Kirklees	107.6	104.6	3		3%
Leeds	111.3	102.0	9.3		9%
Wakefield	142.4	120.6	21.8		18%
West Yorkshire	125.0	112.4	12.6		11%
Yorkshire & the Humber	114.8	109.3	5.5		5%
England	56	57.1	-1.1		-2%

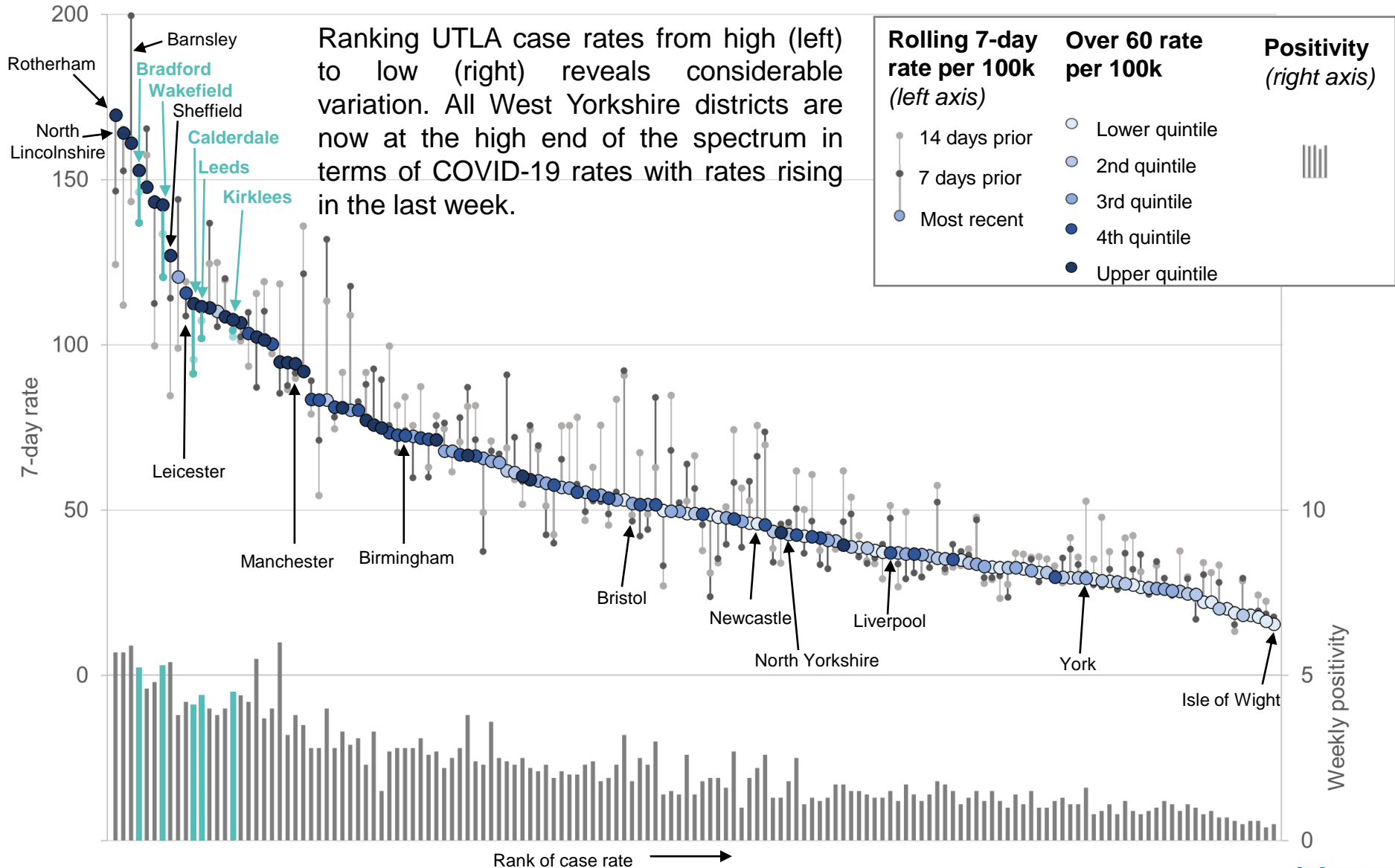
Gradual fall in case rates in MCAs outside Yorkshire

Most Mayoral Combined Authority areas have seen small falls in COVID-19 case rate in the week to 24th March, ranging from -2.9% in the West Midlands to -30% in North of Tyne. The exceptions are the two MCAs in Yorkshire. Sheffield City Region saw a 7.6% increase in cases, and West Yorkshire an 11.2% rise. Rates in Sheffield City Region are now the highest among comparator areas at 144 cases per 100,000 people, followed by West Yorkshire at 125. They are lowest in Liverpool City Region (40) and North of Tyne (45).



COVID-19 Rates for Upper Tier Local Authorities (UTLA's)

7-day average COVID-19 rate per 100k population, change compared to the previous week, over 60 rate & positivity



Blue points show latest COVID-19 case rate per 100k across UTLAs as of the 24th March (left Y-axis). Vertical bars connected to these points denote rate last week (dark grey) and the week before (light grey). Point colour denotes the COVID-19 rate per 100k in the over 60s. Grey bars at the bottom denote positivity (%) up to the 24th March (right Y-axis).

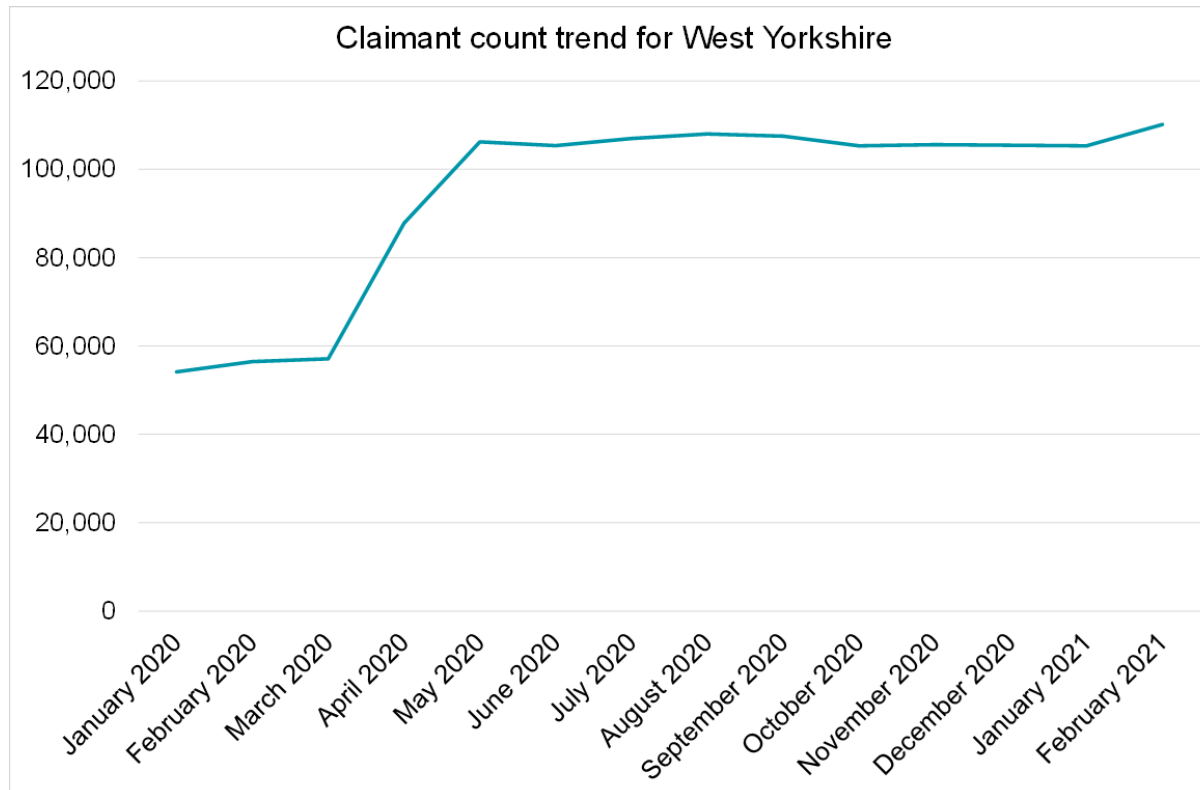
Economic Insights



Claimant count increases modestly after period of stability

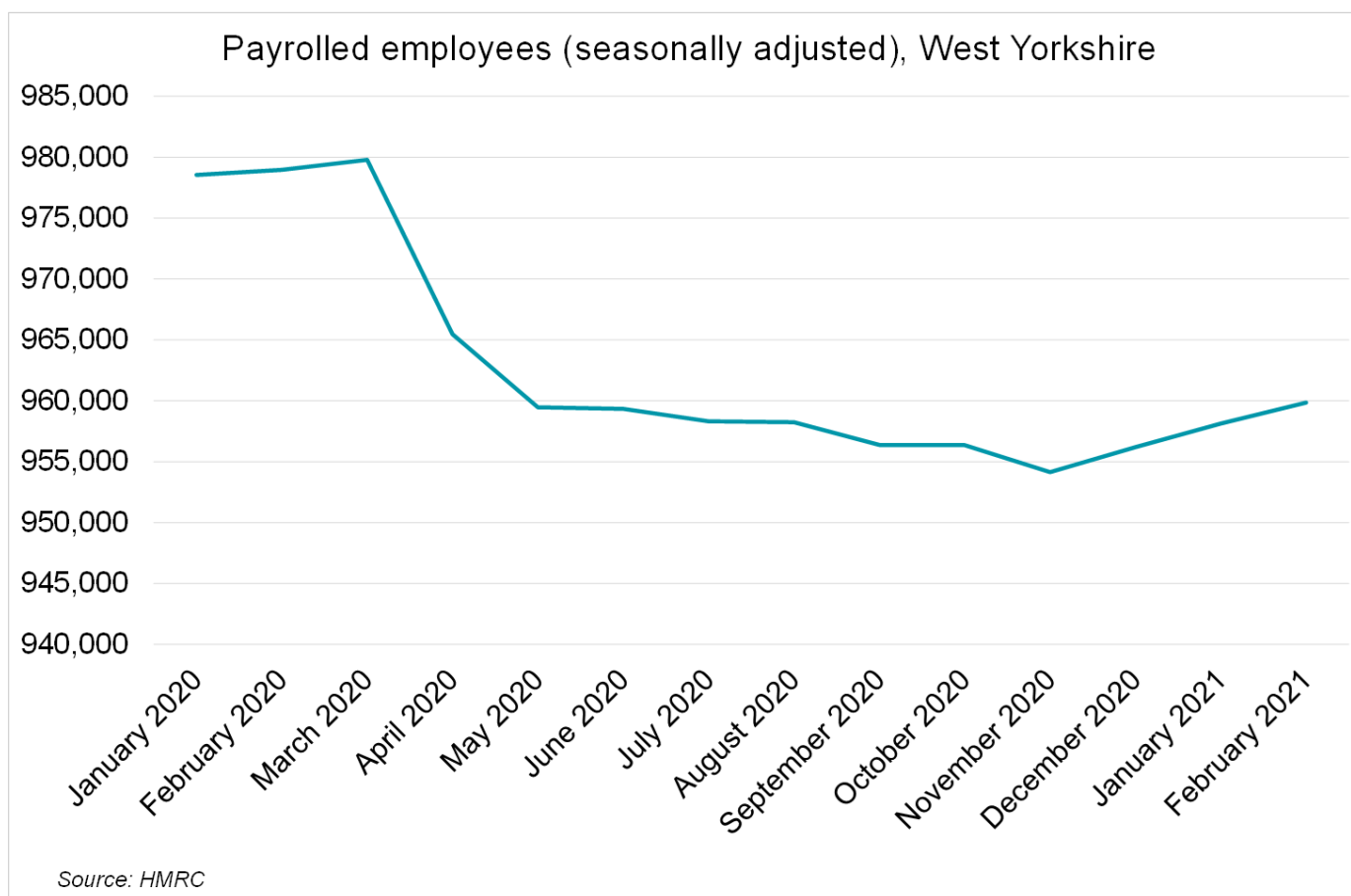
Between January and February 2021, the claimant count for West Yorkshire increased by 4,800 or 5%, in line with a national increase also of 5% (+120,000). The current West Yorkshire claimant count of 110,155 is 93% higher (+53,070) than in March 2020. Local authorities in West Yorkshire saw similar increases, ranging from 4% in Bradford, Calderdale and Kirklees, 5% in Leeds, to 7% in Wakefield. This follows eight months during which the count has remained largely flat following the big increases in April and May 2020.

West Yorkshire's claimant rate (claimants as % of working age population) is currently 7.5% compared with the national average of 6.6%. At local authority level rates range from 6.2% in Wakefield to 9.7% in Bradford.



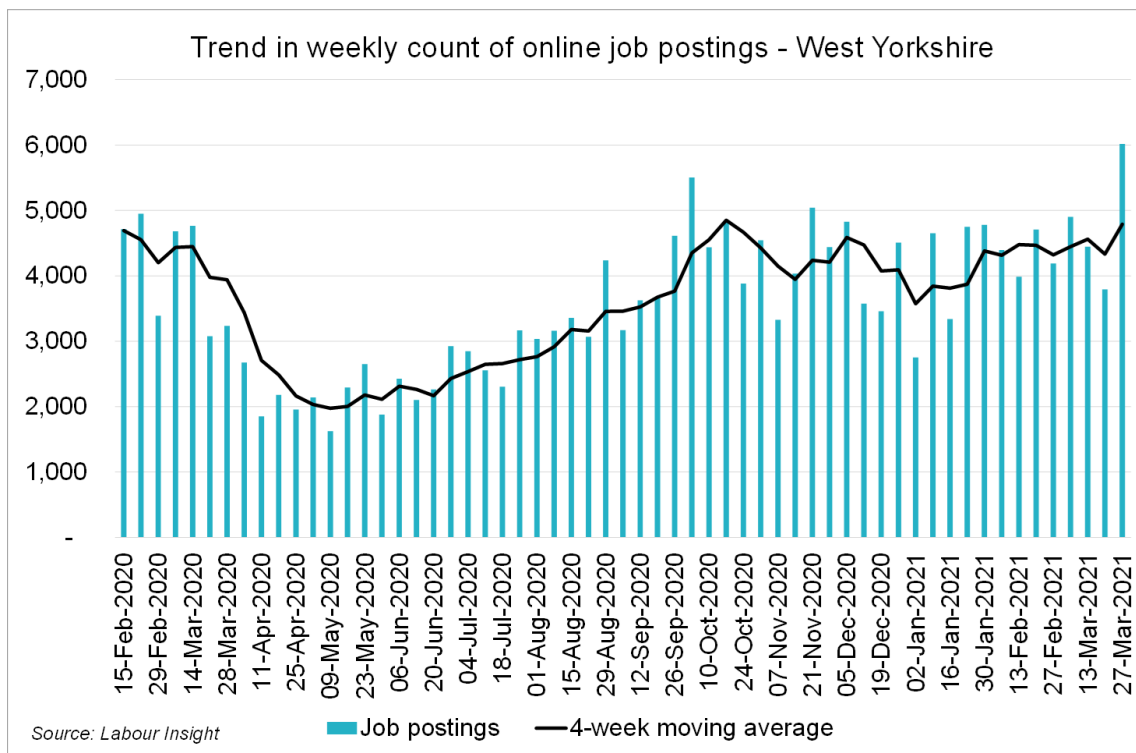
Third month of recovery in number of payrolled employees

Data from Pay As You Earn Real Time Information shows a recovery in the number of employees in West Yorkshire during the three consecutive months between December 2020 and February 2021, reflecting the national picture. The employee count in February was almost 6,000 above its lowest point in November 2020. However, the number of employees in February 2021 is around 20,000 below its March 2020 level.



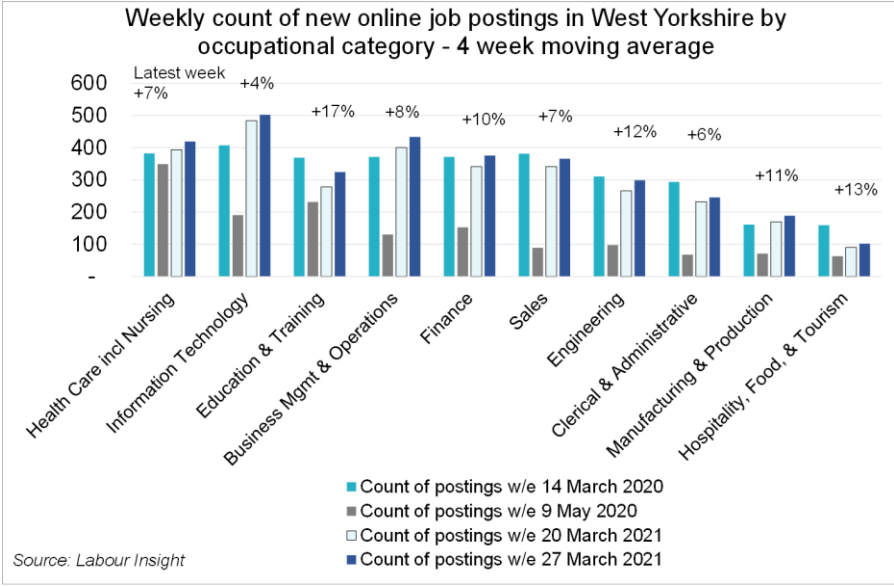
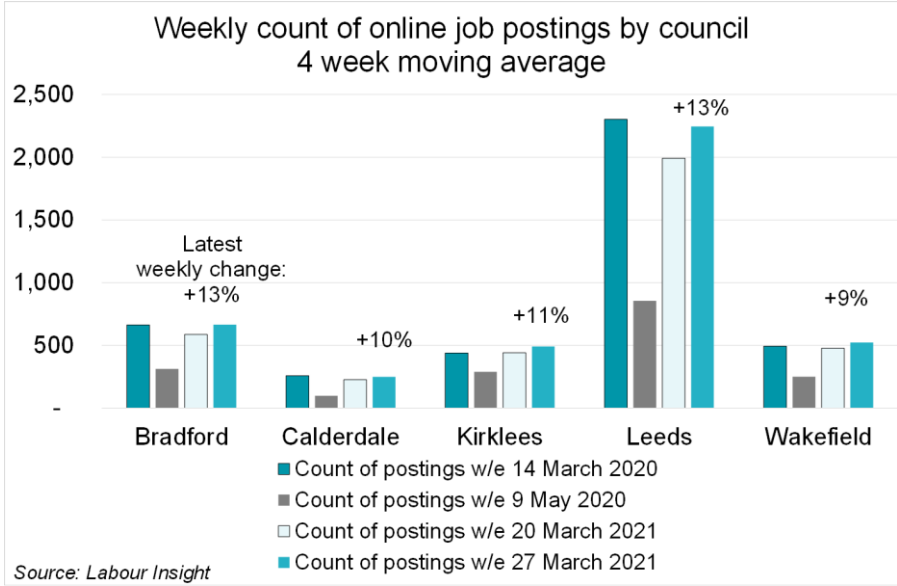
Strong increase in vacancy count in latest week

The number of vacancies for jobs in West Yorkshire posted online during week ending 27 March grew by 11% compared with the previous week, based on a 4-week moving average. Looking at the unadjusted raw data the weekly count is the highest since the crisis began and may reflect the lifting of Covid-19 restrictions. Nationally, the number of vacancies increased by 10% (based on the moving average). The weekly vacancy count for West Yorkshire is currently 8% above its pre-crisis level (i.e. compared with week ending March 14 2020).



Double-digit percentage increases in vacancies for most local authorities

All local authority areas saw double-digit percentage increases in postings in the latest week, except Wakefield (+9%). Leeds' and Calderdale's latest counts are still below their pre-crisis levels but the gap is narrowing.



All occupational categories also saw an increase in postings for the latest week, based on a 4-week moving average, with the largest percentage growth rates for Education and Training, Hospitality, Food and Tourism and Engineering. The occupational categories are now evenly split between those that have returned to pre-crisis levels and those that are still below those levels.

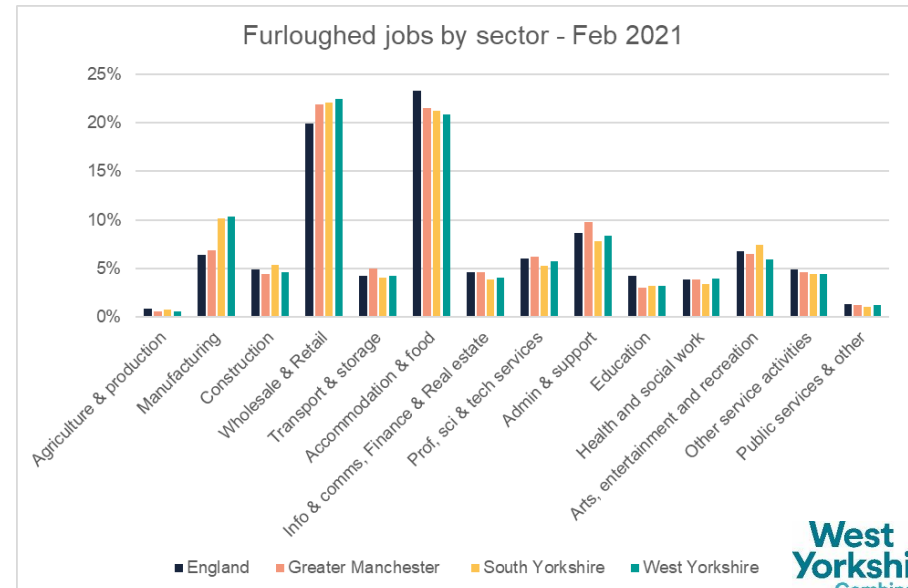
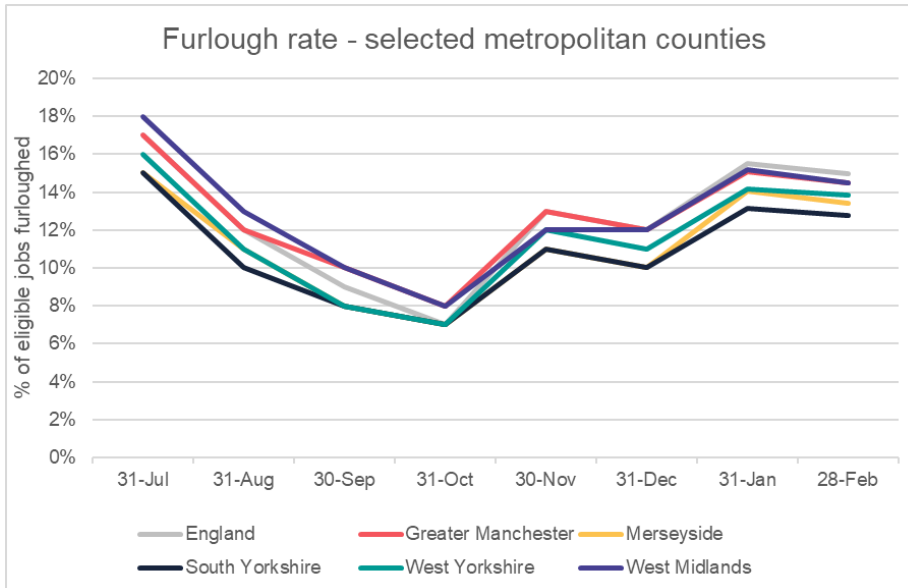
Source: Labour Insight



Small fall in furloughed jobs in February

139,700 jobs were furloughed in West Yorkshire in February 2021, down 2.2% on January, according to HMRC. This is smaller than the 3.4% fall seen nationally whilst comparators in the West Midlands and Greater Manchester saw falls in excess of 4%. 14% of eligible jobs were furloughed in West Yorkshire in February. Despite the slower fall, this remains lower than England (15%), West Midlands and Greater Manchester (both 14.5%).

A breakdown of jobs furloughed locally by sector is available for the first time, but shows relatively little variation across different comparator areas. Wholesale and retail accounted for 22% of jobs furloughed in West Yorkshire and 20% in England, more than the sector's share of the economy. This was followed by accommodation & food (21% in West Yorkshire, compared to 6% of total jobs). Both West Yorkshire and South Yorkshire had a higher than average share of furloughed jobs in manufacturing, but this largely reflects local economic structures.

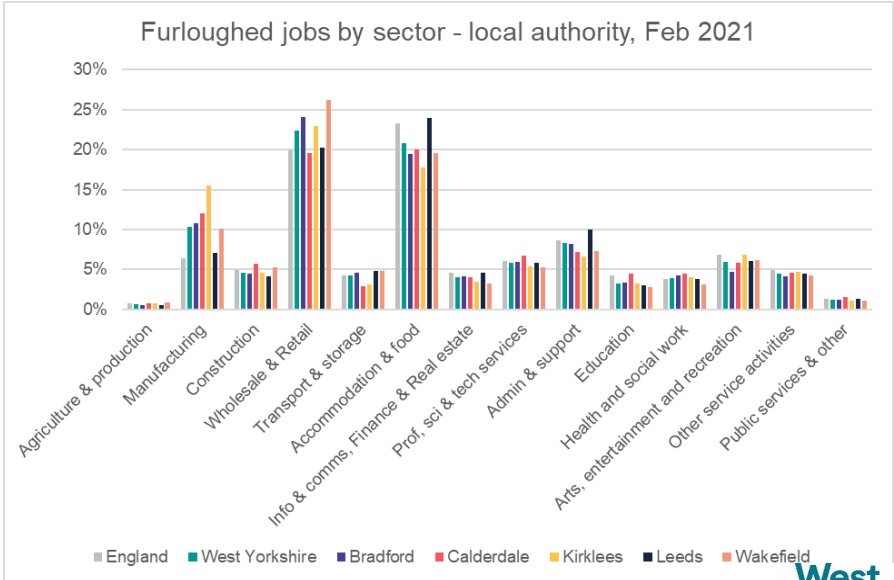
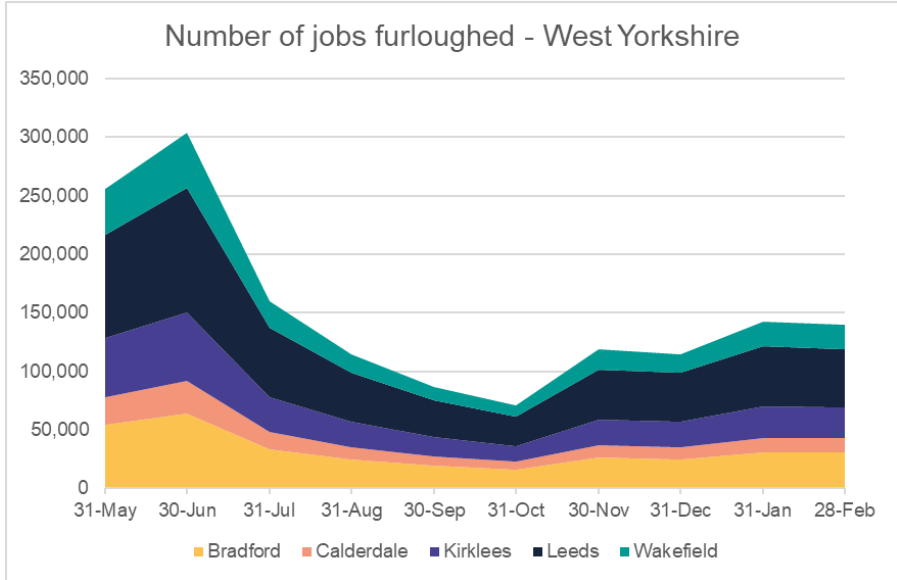


All local authorities see falls in furlough use

All West Yorkshire local authority areas saw a fall in the number of jobs furloughed to some degree in February. Leeds and Wakefield saw falls broadly in line with the England figure at 3.3%, though the decline was lower in Kirklees (-1.5%), Calderdale (-0.8%) and Bradford (-0.7%).

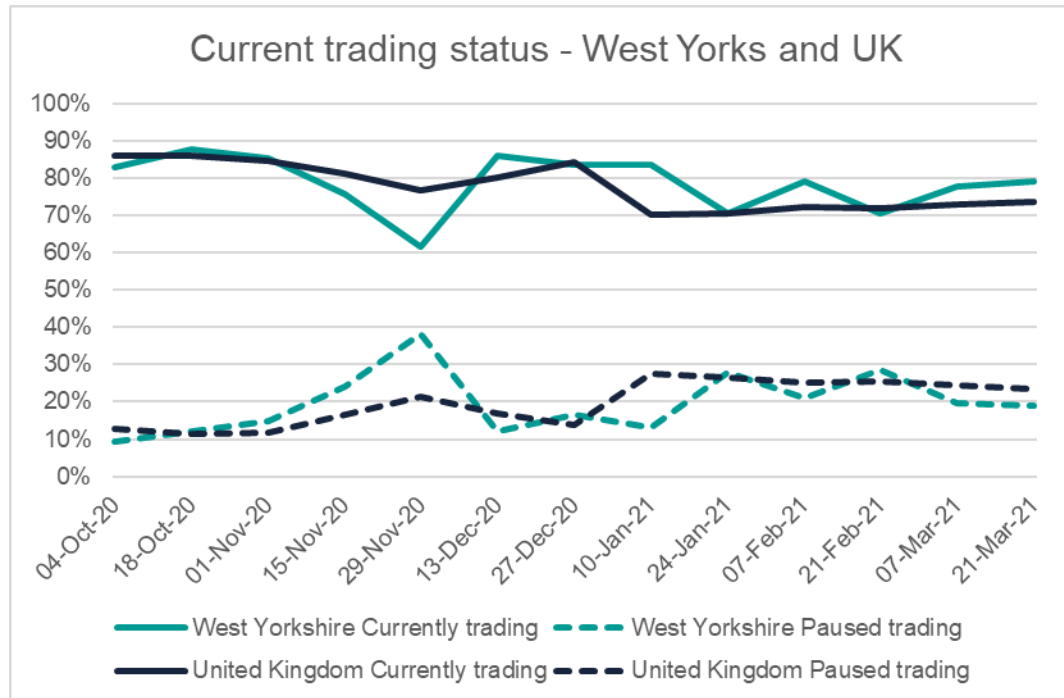
The furlough rate is lower than the national average of 15% in all West Yorkshire local authority areas, though it is highest in Bradford and Kirklees (14.4%) and lowest in Wakefield (12.6%).

Locally, patterns of furlough by sector show that manufacturing accounted for 15% of furloughed jobs in Kirklees, higher than elsewhere in West Yorkshire. As is the case nationally, wholesale & retail and accommodation & food are the most frequently furloughed sectors, with the former highest in Wakefield (26%) and the latter in Leeds (24%).



Survey suggests West Yorkshire businesses may be starting to reopen

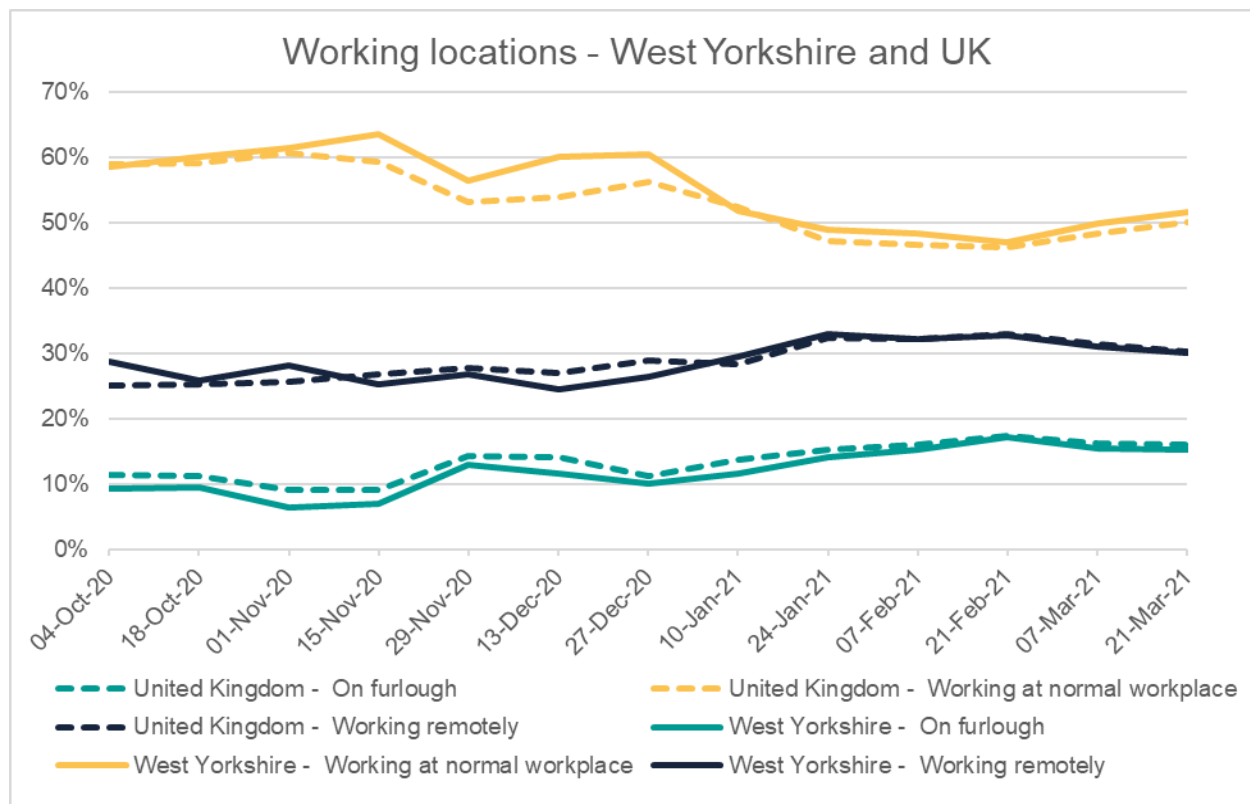
There has been a slight increase in West Yorkshire businesses saying they are currently trading according to local data from the ONS Business Insights and Conditions Survey (BICS). The proportion currently trading has increased from 70.6% in the fortnight to 21st February to 79.1% in the fortnight to 21st March. The increase in reopening appears more gradual nationally, where 73.5% of businesses currently say they are trading, though some of this may reflect variation in the sample.



*Source: ONS Business Insights and Conditions Survey

Signs of a gradual return to normal workplaces in March

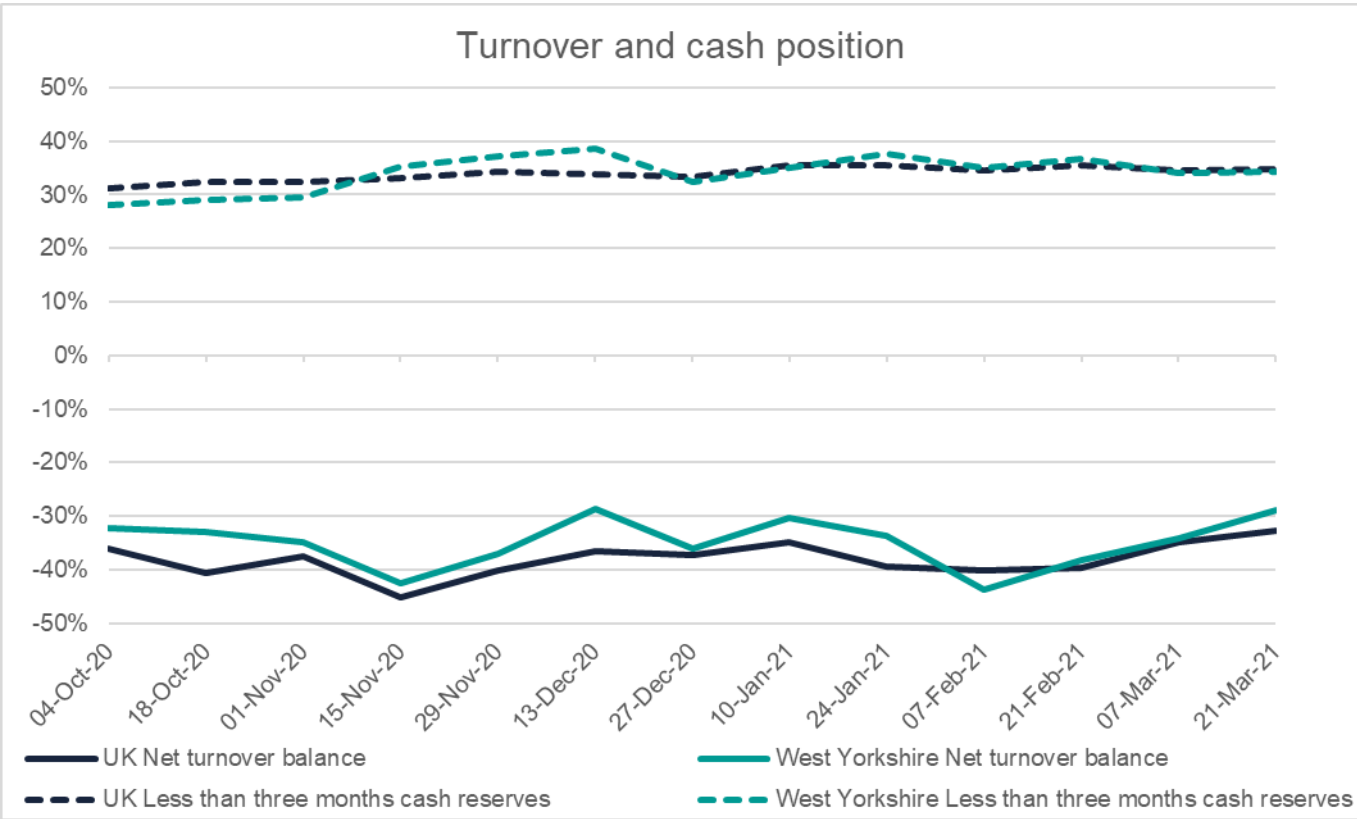
The proportion of people working in their usual place has risen back above 50% in the fortnight to March 21st, for the first time since January 10th. 51.6% were in their usual workplace in West Yorkshire in the fortnight to March 21st. As with previous waves of lockdown and easing, the return to normal workplaces has coincided with a slight fall in furlough use, and a slightly more pronounced fall in homeworking. Sectors including education, construction and manufacturing saw an increase in people in their usual workplace in recent weeks.



*Source: ONS Business Insights and Conditions Survey

Businesses' cash position appears stable, some improvement in turnover

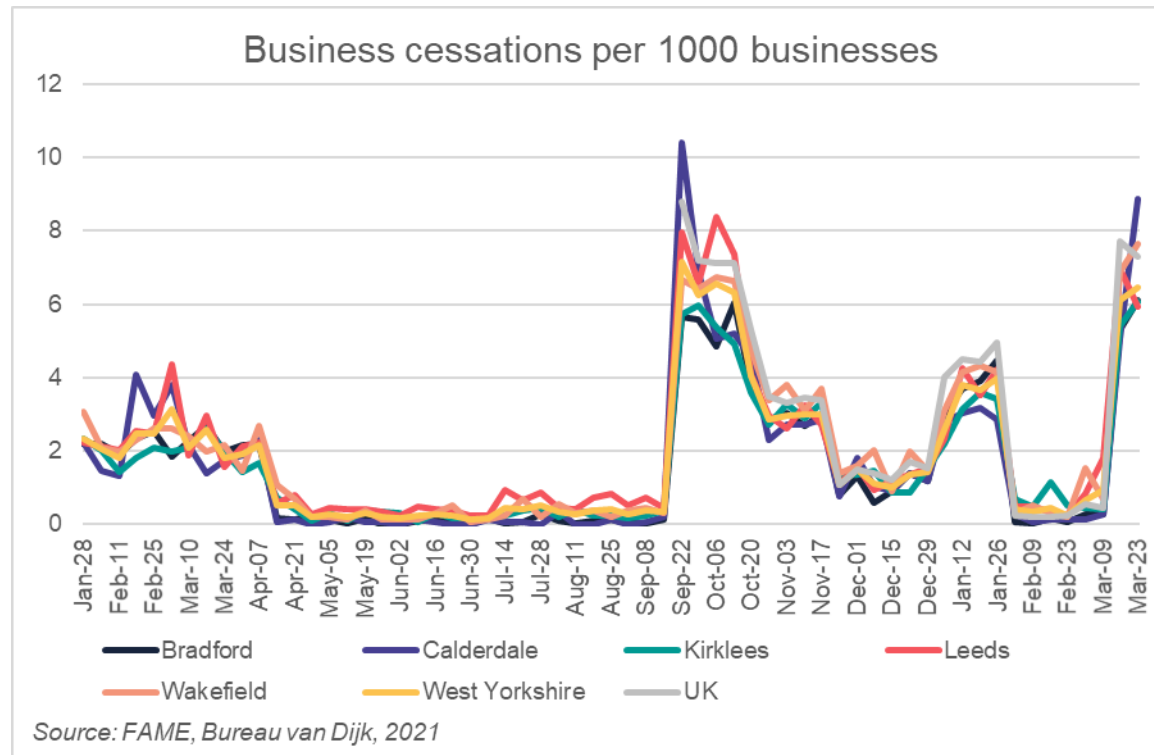
Businesses' cash position has remained relatively stable of late, both locally and nationally, with around 34% of businesses having less than three months cash in reserve. This appears unaffected by recent lockdowns. There has been some improvement in businesses reporting increasing turnover – particularly in West Yorkshire, where the net balance has increased from -40% on 7th February to -32.8% on March 21st. Net balances are calculated by subtracting those reporting decreases from those reporting increases, so clearly this indicates that many more businesses still report falling turnover than increases.



*Source: ONS Business Insights and Conditions Survey

Business liquidations increasing as backlog is cleared

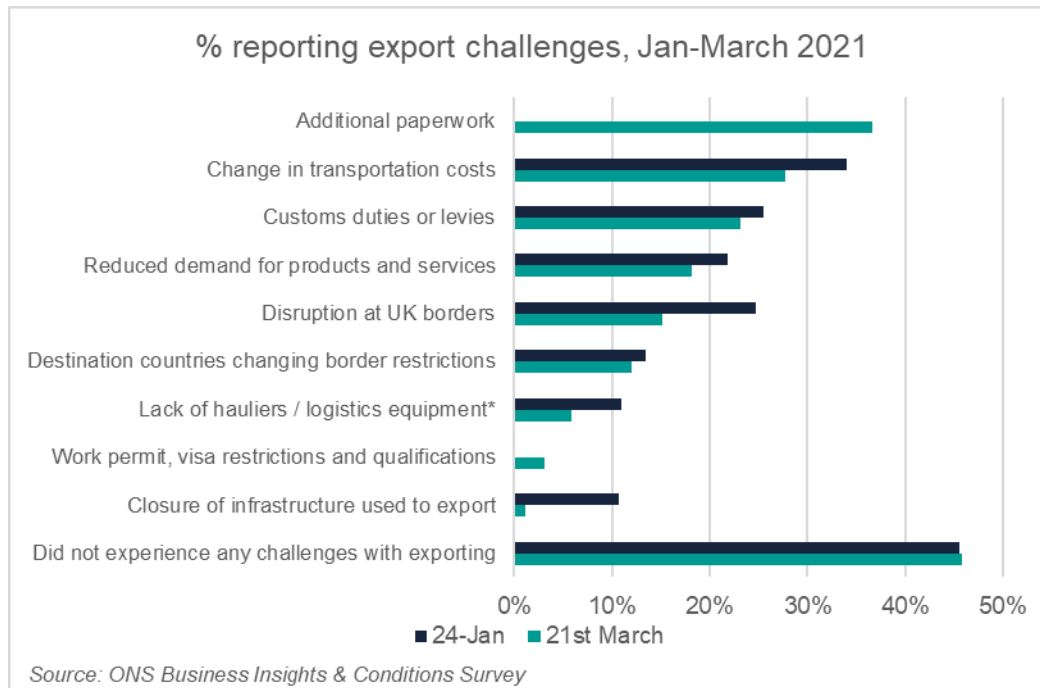
Following the resumption of company liquidations and cessations at Companies House, 2,000 businesses have been dissolved or liquidated in West Yorkshire so far in March, up to the 23rd. This is up from 200 in February. However this activity likely reflects the backlog of cases in the system so little insight can be drawn from it in terms of reflecting current business conditions. In the week to March 23rd, 6.5 business liquidations/cessations per 1,000 businesses were registered in West Yorkshire, lower than the 7.3 national figure. Locally it was highest in Calderdale (8.9) and lowest in Leeds (5.9).



*Source: FAME 2021. Analysis based on company registration address, location of activity may differ in some cases

EU trade issues persist and show financial impact. Business enacting a range of mitigations

EU exit issues remain the focus of much of the feedback from businesses' conversations with Growth Managers. This week has seen a continuation of issues that have been raised in previous weeks. Specifically, around paperwork changes, VAT returns and delays that these issues and others have caused to deliveries. Issues with CE certification also persist, with reports of the UK and EU authorities not recognising each other's certifications. These issues are having a financial impact on businesses affected, with some using reserves to mitigate this. Some businesses report seeking finance to manage through the challenges, though in some instances they have been unable to access this, or the process is taking longer than they need to make use of the funding. Others are seeking to enact other measures to mitigate the impacts, including investing in digitising services or expanding marketing presence to increase activity in overseas markets.

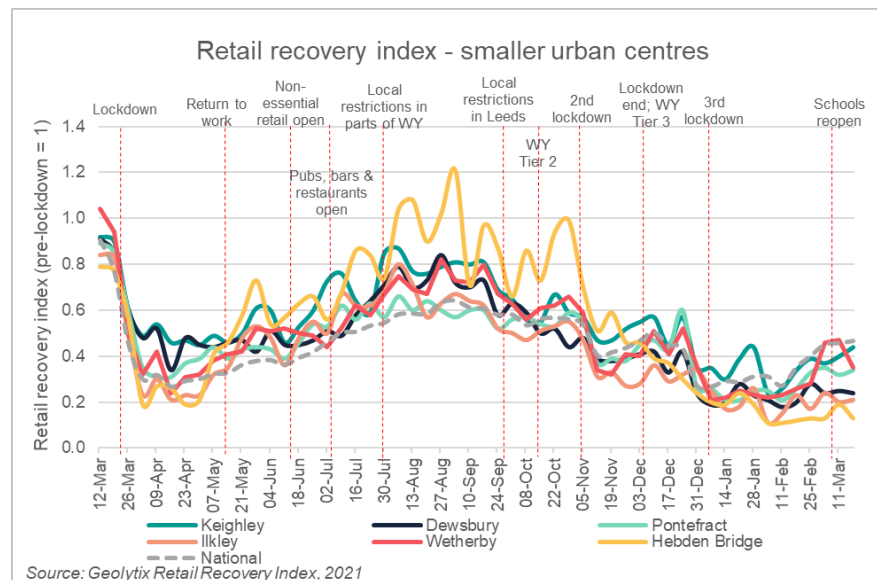
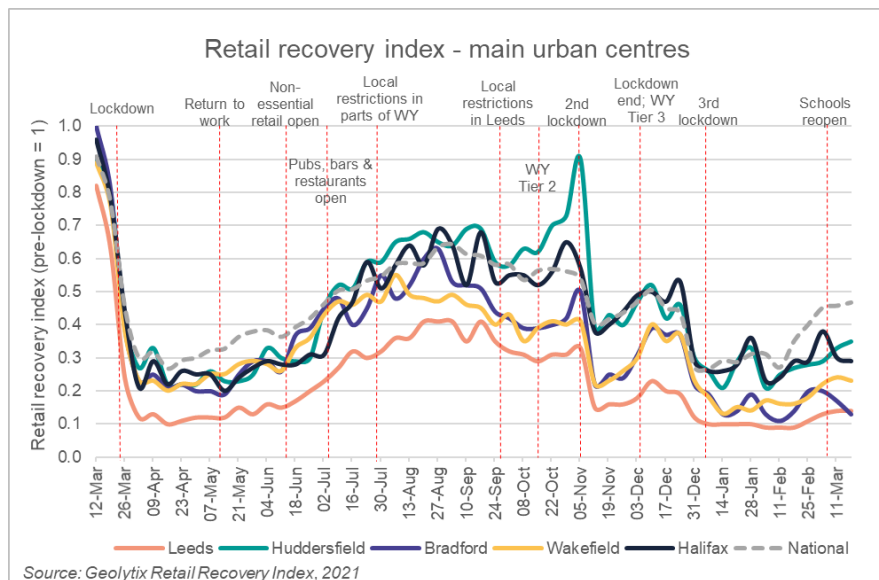


The ONS BICS survey continues to show around 55% of exporters reporting challenges in mid-March. This is similar to mid-January. Some issues have eased slightly in this time, such as disruption at borders and the availability and cost of transport & logistics. However, the demands of increased paperwork are the most frequently mentioned issue and this was not covered specifically in the January surveys.

No significant increase in town centre activity as schools reopen

There is no clear sign of activity in town and city centres increasing as schools reopened. Among the main urban centres, Huddersfield saw an increase in the week to March 18th, with a small increase in Leeds. Other areas saw small declines, and all remain between 13% (Bradford) and 35% (Huddersfield) of the respective pre-pandemic baselines. Nationally, activity is currently 47% of baseline.

Among smaller centres, all currently remain below the national baseline, indicating lower levels of activity relative to each place's pre-pandemic baseline. Keighley and Pontefract have seen increases recently, and the former is closest to its baseline at 44%. Wetherby and Hebden Bridge have seen falls in activity in recent weeks.



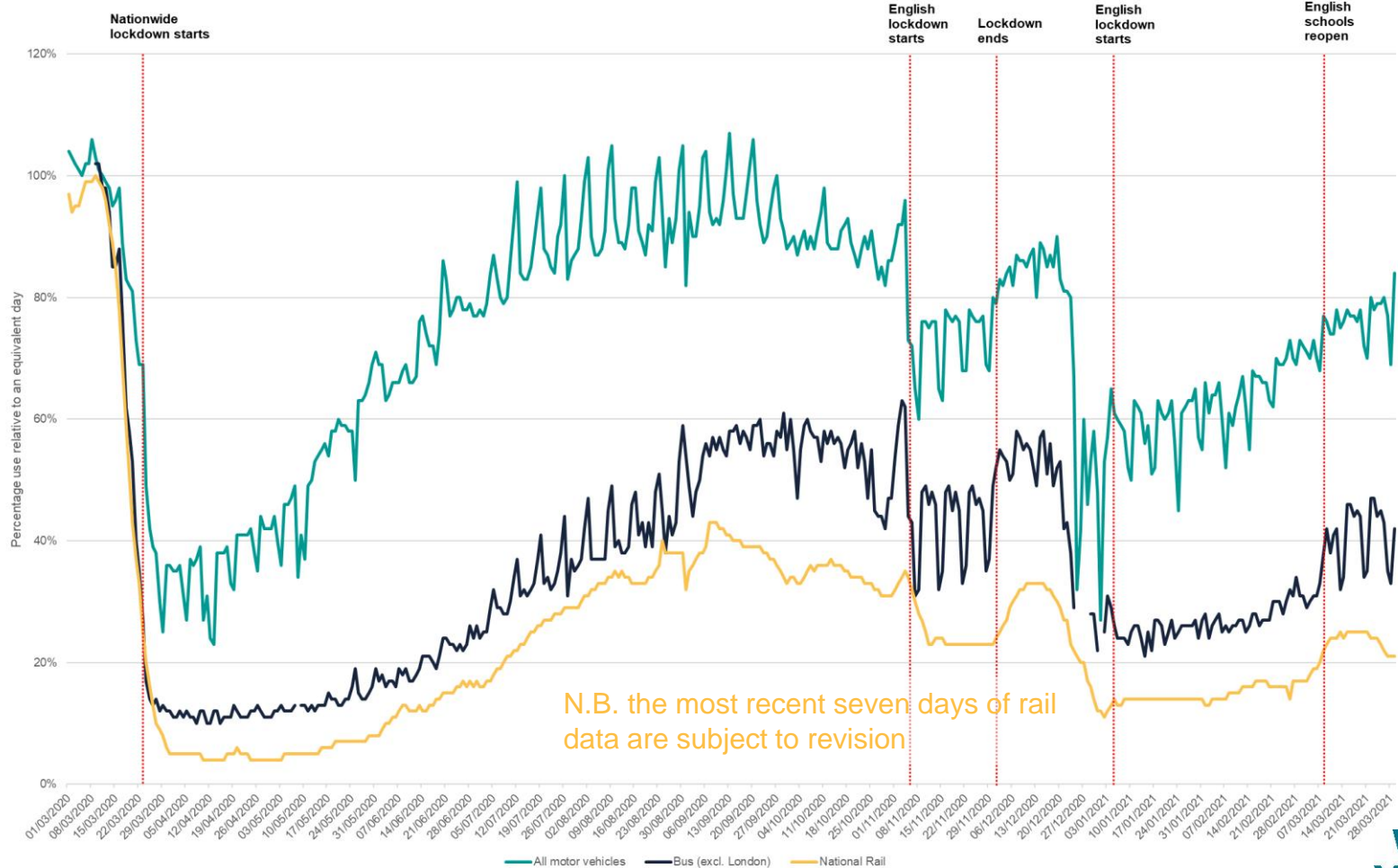
Transport Insights



National travel use shows a mixed picture between modes over recent weeks

Data for Great Britain shows that over the week commencing 22nd March 2021, travel by motor vehicle increased moderately. Bus use was fairly stable while rail appeared more variable. Similar trends occur locally on bus and road.

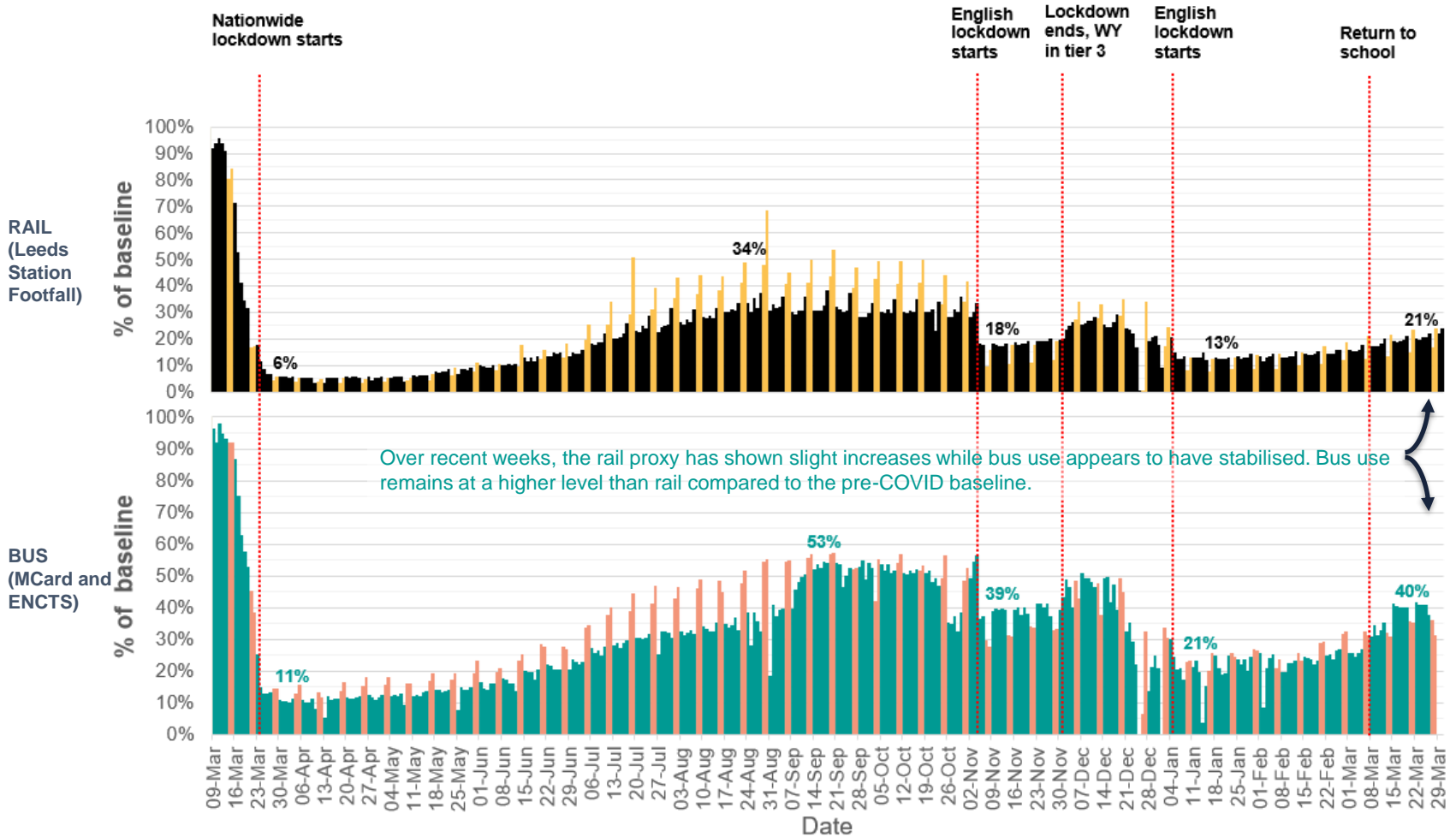
DfT transport use during the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic



Source: <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/transport-use-during-the-coronavirus-covid-19-pandemic>

Local rail shows moderate increase while bus use stabilises

■ % Rail weekday change compared to baseline
■ % Rail weekend change compared to baseline
■ % Bus weekday change compared to baseline
■ % Bus weekend change compared to baseline



Baseline period is Monday 2nd - Friday 6th March 2020 (weekdays) and 29th Feb -1st March and 6th-7th March (weekends)

Source: Leeds Rail Station Footfall - Network Rail (top) and MCard and English National Concessionary Travel Scheme (ENCTS)