

COVID-19 Fortnightly Insights Report

Research & Intelligence
16th April 2021



Executive Summary – social and economic

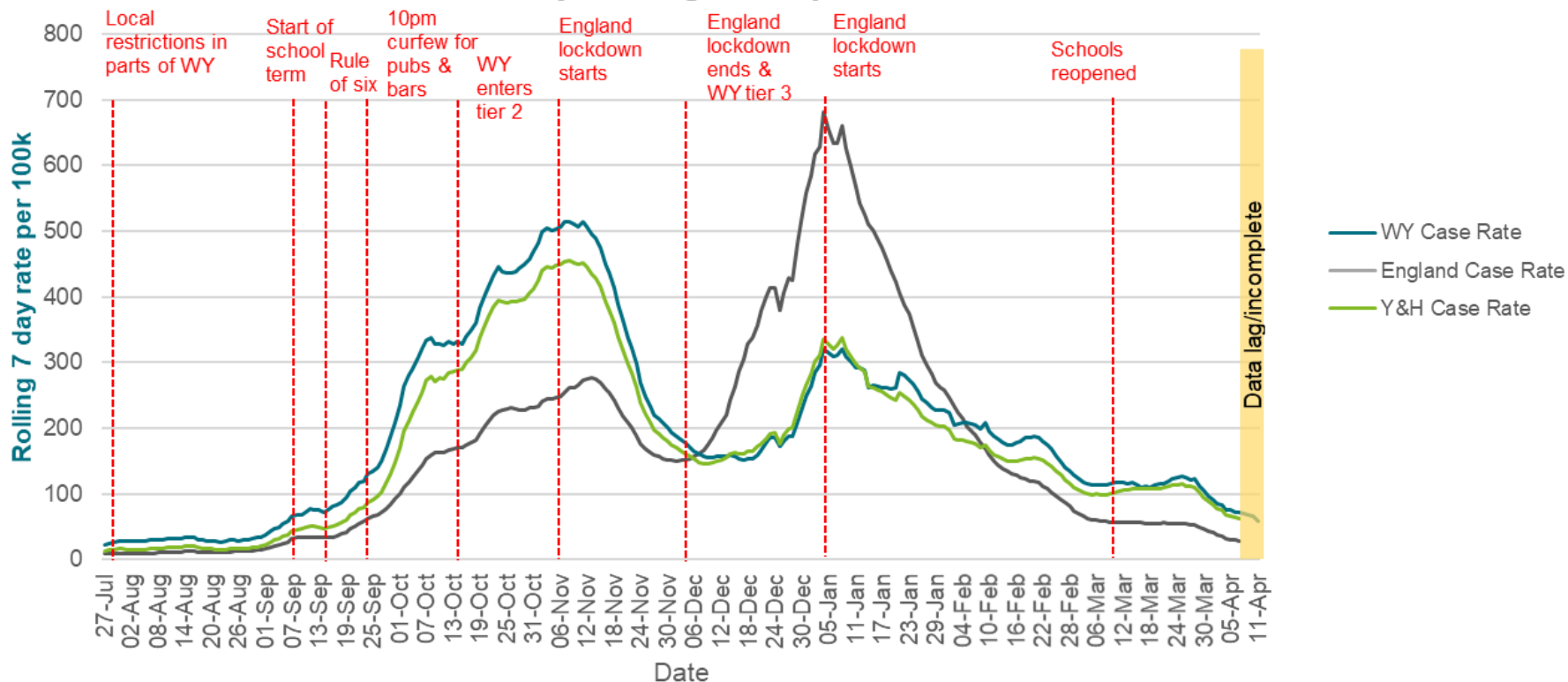
- **Activity appears to be increasing in many town and city centres** in West Yorkshire. Although the latest data available does not yet reliably capture the impact of the reopening of non-essential retail and outdoor hospitality on April 12th, it does suggest increased movement in some areas following the reintroduction of household mixing on March 29th, and also coincides with the school holidays in some parts of West Yorkshire.
- If the trend continues, it will be welcomed by consumer-facing businesses. The latest national GDP data shows **the economy grew by 0.4% in February**, avoiding contraction during a full month of lockdown, but **output in consumer-facing industries remains 19% lower than in February 2020**. Output is down 7.8% across the economy as a whole.
- Survey data from the Office for National Statistics suggests a largely static picture in the economy in late March, with **little change in businesses trading, furlough use or the return to usual work places** as businesses awaited the easing of restrictions. Businesses' cash position was apparently similarly stable.
- The number of **vacancies posted online fell in early April**, across West Yorkshire and in most industries except hospitality and tourism. Easter may have been a factor in subduing activity, whilst many businesses may have fulfilled their recruitment needs following recent increases in activity.
- Both anecdotal evidence and ONS survey data suggest **EU exit issues continue to pose challenges for many importers and exporters**, with little sign of easing in the past fortnight. Whilst some border disruptions may have lessened, paperwork and certification appear to be more stubborn issues.

Executive Summary – transport

- National travel trend data shows that **travel across all modes fell to some degree over the Easter break**. Excluding the impact of the Easter Holidays, levels of transport use have steadily been climbing since the start of lockdown in England, with use of motor vehicles increasing at a faster rate than public transport modes.
- **Local data on bus and rail use echoes the national trend**, with a decline in use over the Easter holidays following a period of increasing activity after schools reopened. In general bus use is recovering faster than rail.
- Before Easter, local bus use by all cohorts (under 19, under 26, adults, seniors, and disabled & companion) recorded a steady increase since lockdown started in early January.
- Levels of cycling and walking/running, based on data from the fitness app Strava, indicate that **considerably more trips and more people have been cycling, walking & running so far** in 2021 compared to the same periods in 2020 and 2019.
- In terms of footfall trends, for data up to the 11th April (before non-essential retail reopened), **some areas of Leeds City Centre, e.g. Dortmund Square, had already seen an increase in footfall**.

Virus prevalence – West Yorkshire trend

West Yorkshire COVID-19 daily cases and 7-day average rate per 100k



As of the 7th April 2021, the 7-day moving average **West Yorkshire COVID-19 rate was 71.8 cases per 100k, a 24.8% decrease compared to the previous week** (from 96.6 per 100k) and the lowest rates have been since 10th Sept 2020. In the same period, the rate in Yorkshire and the Humber fell by 36% to 62.4 per 100k, and rates overall in England fell by 36% to 28.1 per 100k.

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.

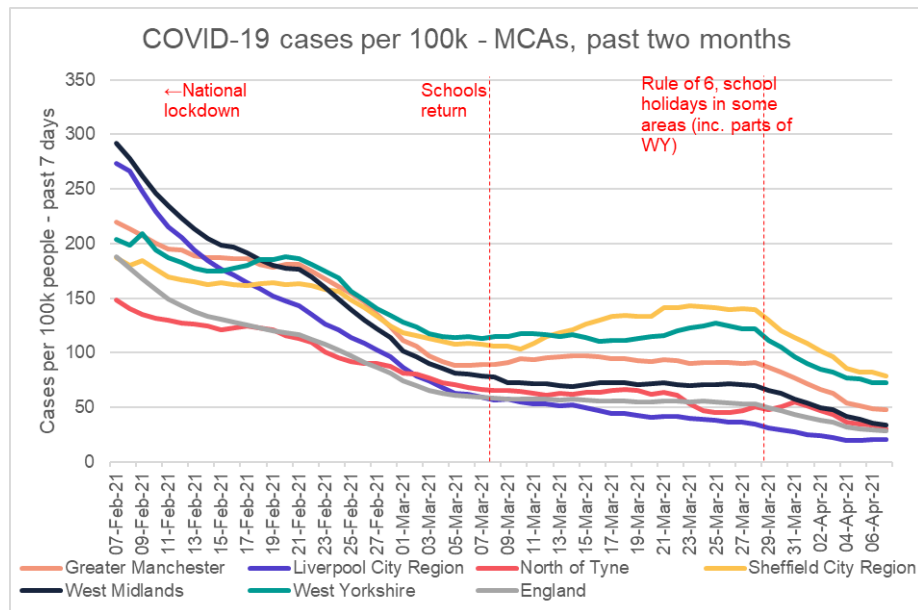
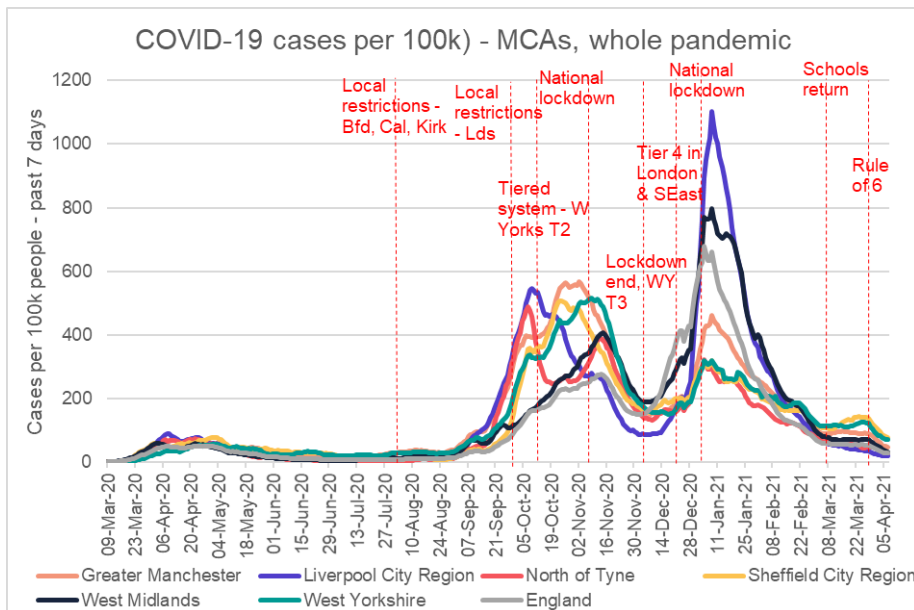
Virus prevalence – West Yorkshire

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 (1 – 7 April) Most recent data week	Total cases per 100k people (25 – 31 March) Previous week	Absolute Difference		% Weekly Change
Bradford	79.3	103.4	-24.1	↓	-23%
Calderdale	36.9	60.5	-23.6	↓	-39%
Kirklees	72.1	81.2	-9.1	↓	-11%
Leeds	70.4	99	-28.6	↓	-29%
Wakefield	84.1	121.7	-37.6	↓	-31%
West Yorkshire	71.8	96.6	-24.8	↓	-26%
Yorkshire & the Humber	62.4	88.9	-26.5	↓	-30%
England	28.1	43.7	-15.6	↓	-36%

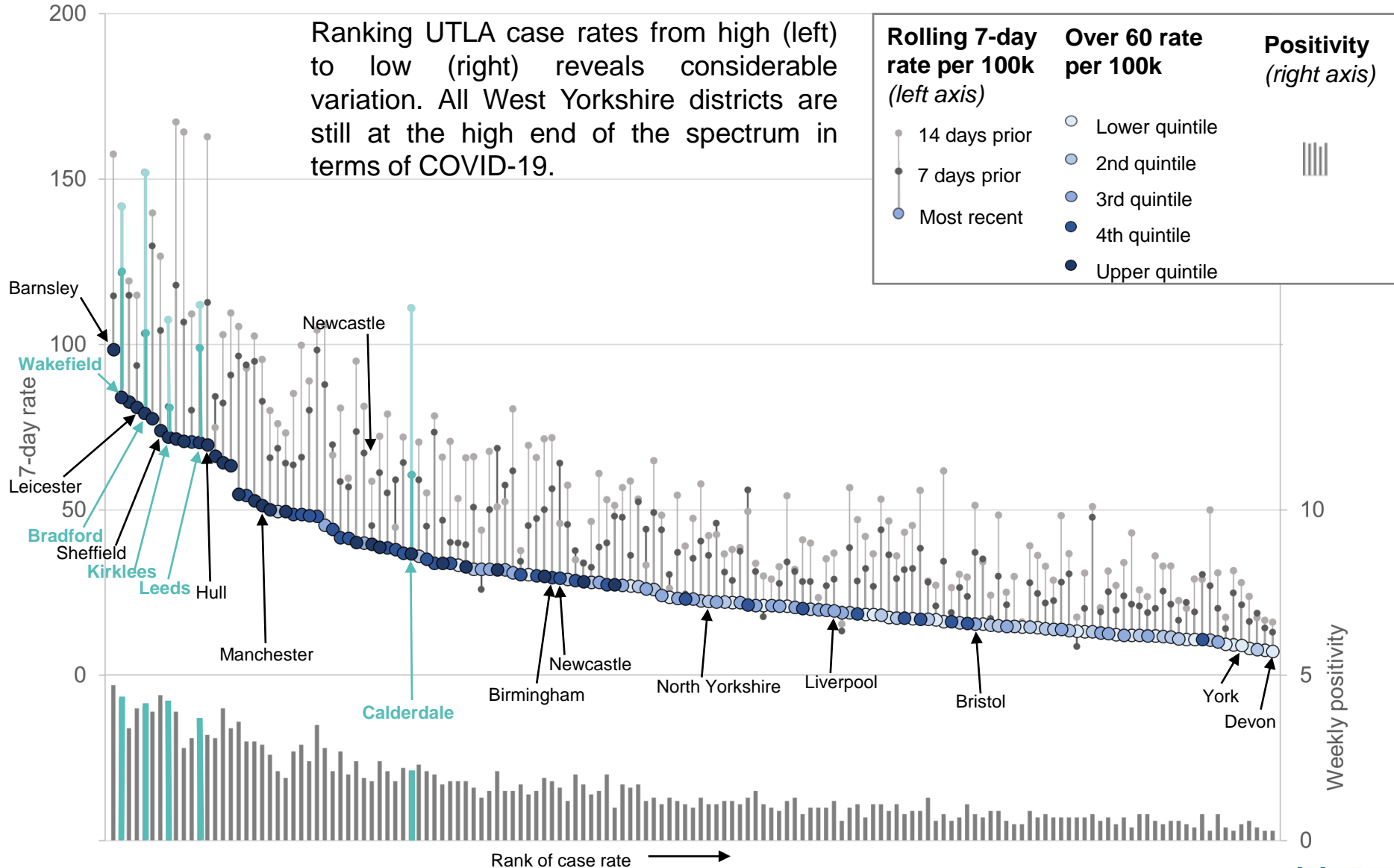
Rates falling across MCAs, but remain higher in Yorkshire

Rates have fallen in all MCAs since late March.. Whilst West Yorkshire saw a sharp (31.5%) drop in cases in the week to April 7th compared to the previous week, this was the second lowest fall among MCAs. Only Liverpool City Region (-29.5%) saw a lower fall, with the steepest declines in West Midlands (44%) and Greater Manchester (41.5%). The case rates in South Yorkshire (78 per 100k) and West Yorkshire (72 per 100k) are 50% higher than in the next highest MCA – Greater Manchester at 47 per 100k).



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



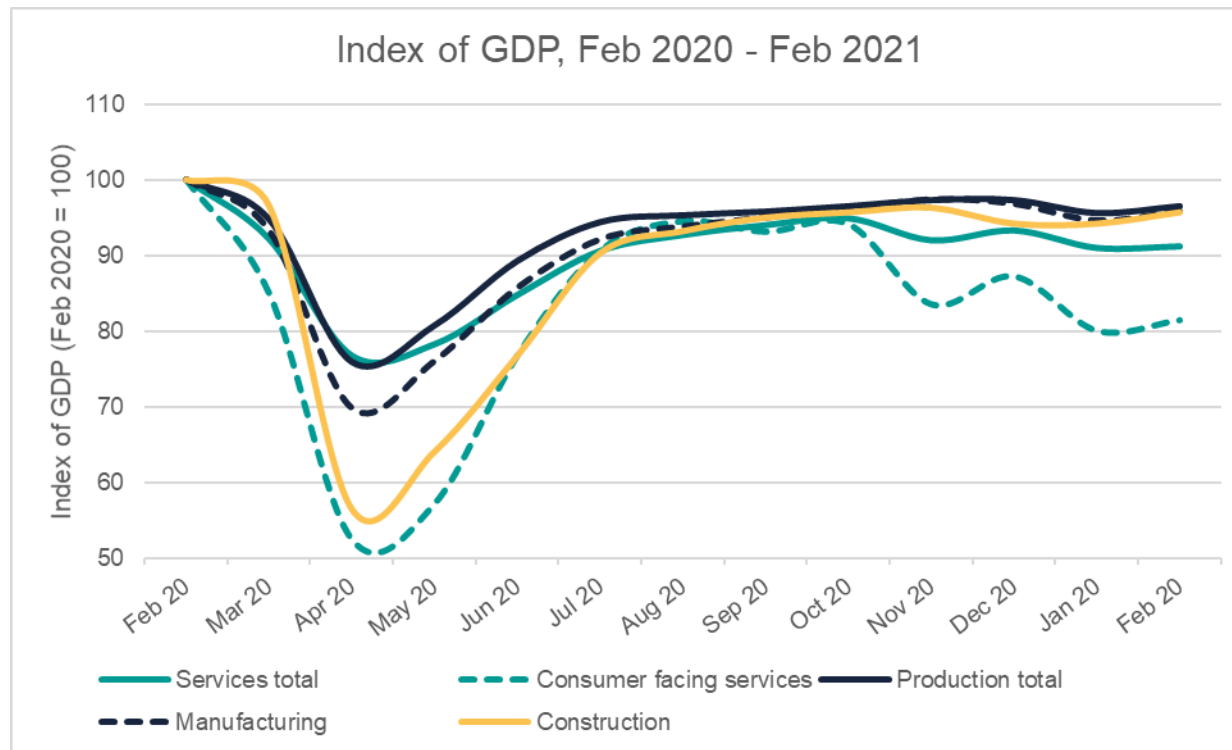
Blue points show latest COVID-19 case rate per 100k across UTLAs as of the 7th April (left Y-axis). Vertical bars connected to these points denote rate last week (dark grey) and the week before (light grey). Point colour denotes the COVID-19 rate per 100k in the over 60s. Grey bars at the bottom denote positivity (%) up to the 7th April (right Y-axis).

Economic Insights



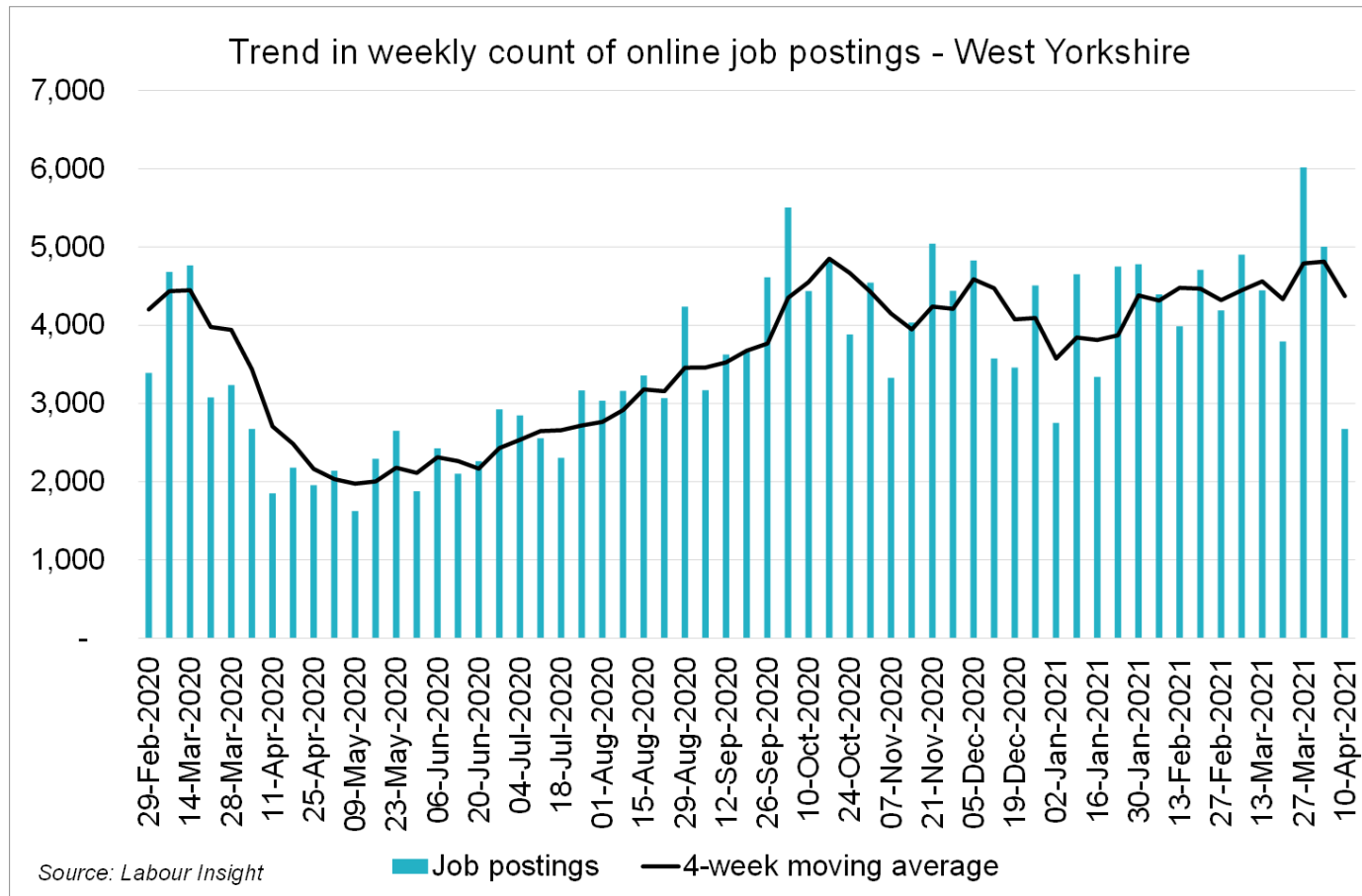
UK economy grows in February despite ongoing lockdown

UK GDP increased by 0.4% in February, returning to growth following a 2.2% fall in January despite the country being in lockdown throughout the month. Construction (+1.6%) and manufacturing (+1.3%) saw output increase at a faster pace. The picture was more static in the service sector (+0.2%), but still recorded slight growth thanks to a small increase in output in wholesale and retail activities. Despite this, output in consumer-facing industries remains almost 19% lower than in February 2020. Construction and production output has recovered more strongly and is now almost 5% below pre-pandemic levels. Across the economy as a whole, February's GDP is 7.8% below the levels seen in February 2020, and 3.1% below the recent recovery peak in October 2020.



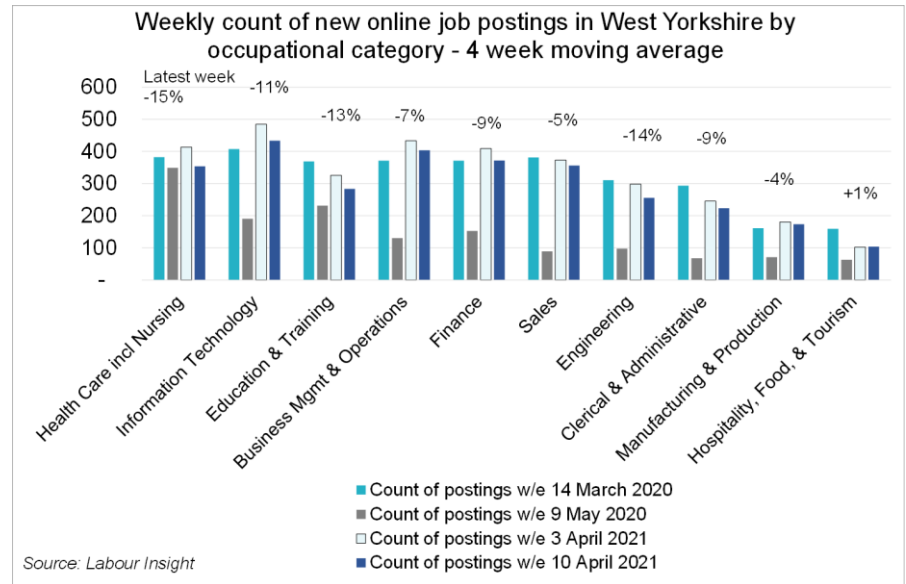
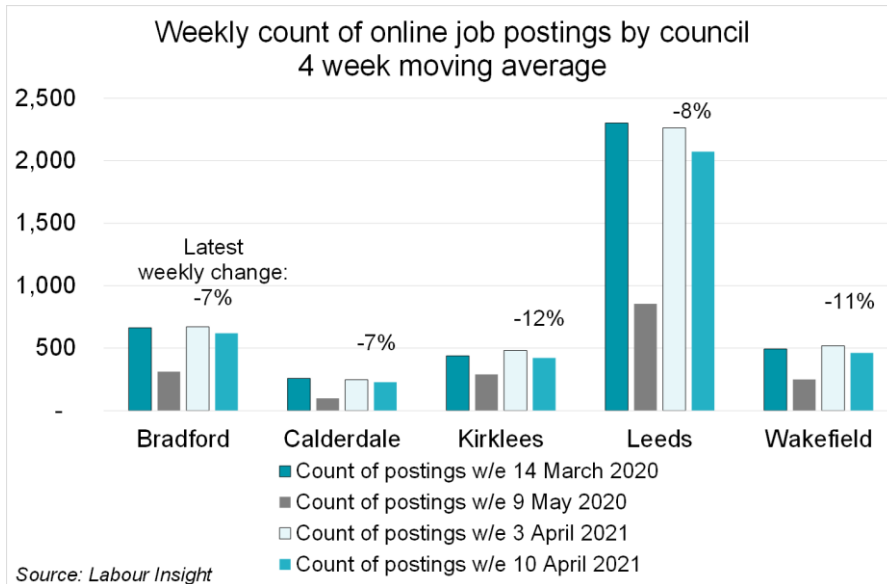
Sharp decline in vacancy count in latest week

The number of vacancies for jobs in West Yorkshire posted online during week ending 10 April fell by 9% compared with the previous week, based on a 4-week moving average. The Easter holidays are likely to have played a part and employers may have already fulfilled their current recruitment needs in recent weeks. Nationally, the number of vacancies fell by 8% (based on the moving average). The weekly vacancy count for West Yorkshire is currently 2% below its pre-crisis level (i.e. compared with week ending March 14 2020).



Vacancies decline across local authorities and industries, except hospitality and tourism

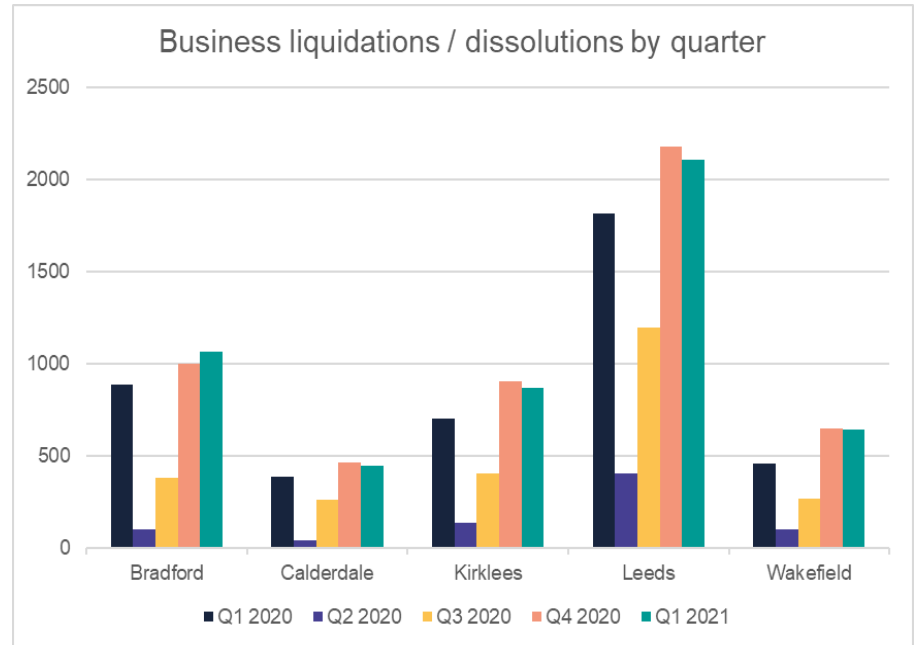
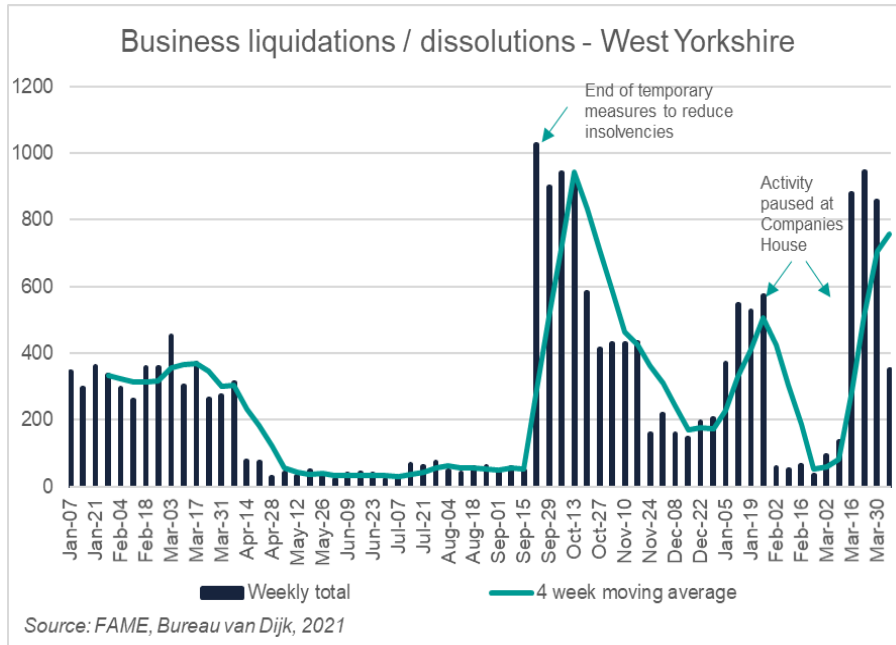
Reflecting the overall West Yorkshire picture, all local authority areas saw decreases in vacancy postings in the latest week. The biggest percentage declines were in Kirklees and Wakefield.



All occupational categories except Hospitality, food and tourism saw a reduction in postings for the latest week, based on a 4-week moving average, with the largest percentage decreases for Health, Engineering, Education and Training and Information Technology. But as noted above this is likely to reflect the impact of the Easter holiday on recruitment activity.

Business liquidations unchanged from Q4, but higher than pre-pandemic levels

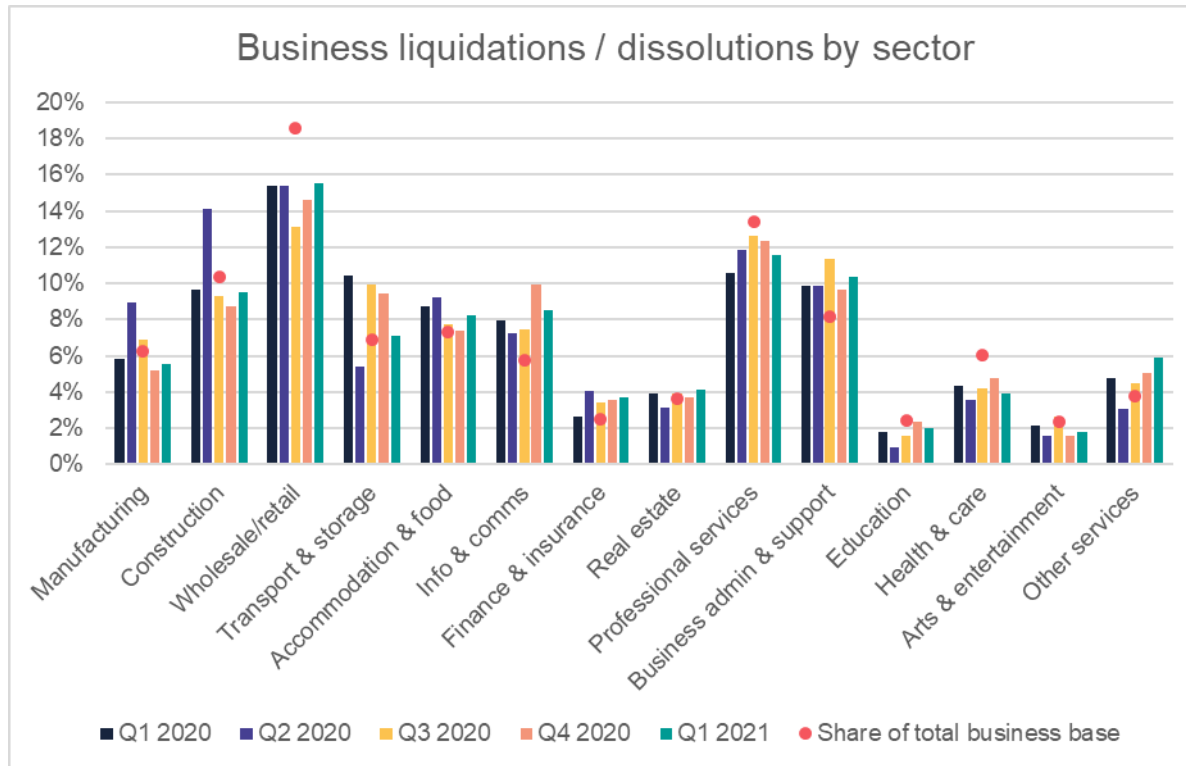
350 businesses were liquidated in West Yorkshire in the week to April 6th, down from 850 the previous week. This may reflect the clearing of a backlog of activity at Companies House, or may reflect lower activity around Easter. Both West Yorkshire and the UK as a whole saw a 59% fall in activity week on week. Whilst patterns of business liquidations over the past year are disrupted by intermittent cessations of activity at Companies House, the 5,140 businesses liquidated in West Yorkshire in Q1 2021 is similar to the 5,200 events in Q4 2020. It is however 20% higher than in Q1 2020.



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

Business administration and personal services show higher levels of liquidations

Analysis of business liquidations / dissolutions by sector in West Yorkshire shows the sectoral profile of business failures reflects the make up of the economy quite closely in Q1 2021. However, there has been an overrepresentation of business failures in business administration & support, information & communications, and other services (which includes hairdressers and other personal services). There have been comparatively few liquidations in wholesale & retail, professional services and health and care, relative to their overall share of business stock though wholesale and retail had the highest number in absolute terms.

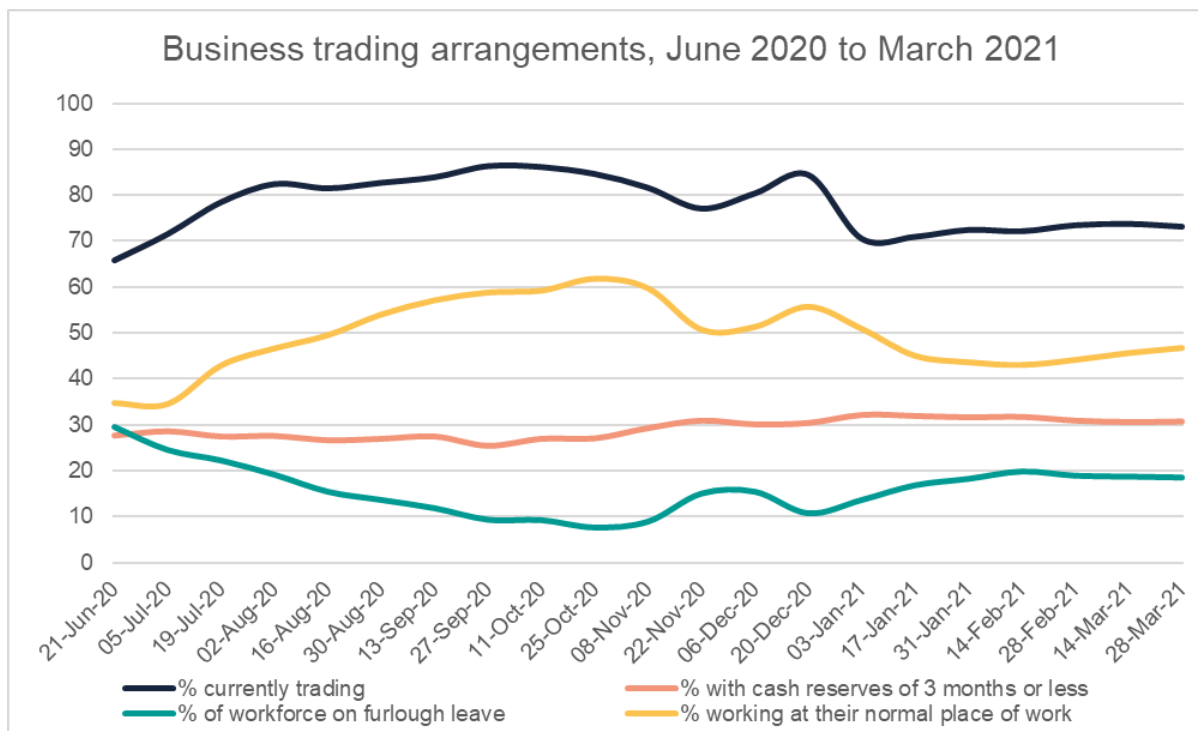


*Source: FAME 2021. Analysis based on company registration address, location of activity may differ in some cases

Little change in business conditions as easing of restrictions approached

There has been relatively little change in headline measures of business conditions in the latest ONS Business Insights and Conditions Survey (BICS) to March 28th. Compared to a fortnight earlier, there was very little change in the proportion of businesses currently trading (73%), or the proportion of businesses with less than three months cash in reserve (30.7%). The proportion of workers currently furloughed was also largely unchanged at 18.6%, though there was a slight increase in people in their usual work place. This was at 46.8% in the fortnight to 28th March, up from 45.7% a fortnight earlier and 43% in mid-February.

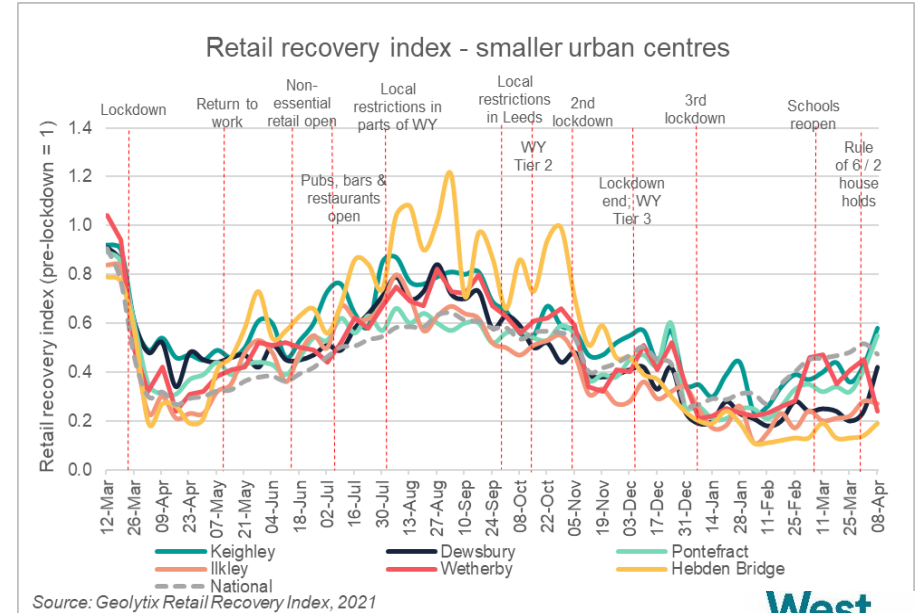
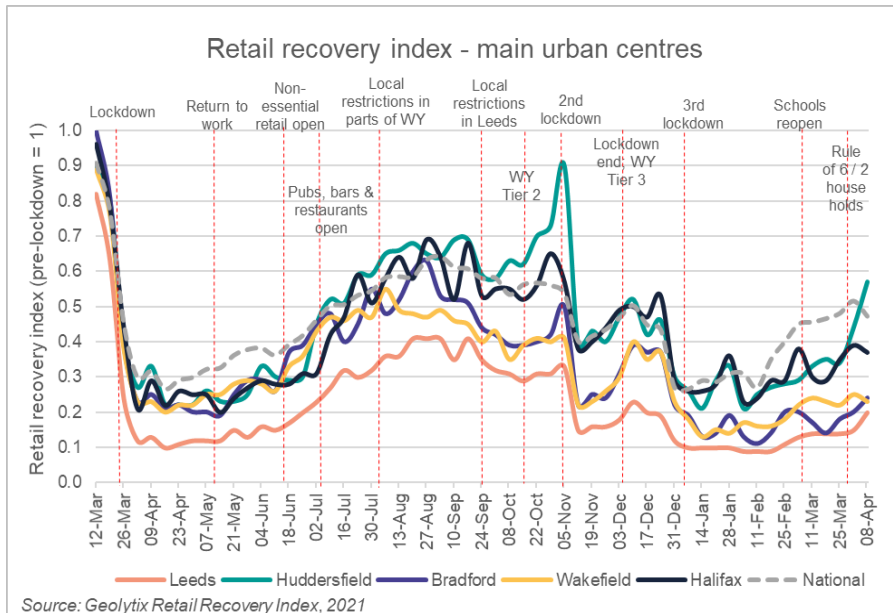
Taken together, this suggests the economy was largely static as many businesses awaited the further easing of restrictions in March and April.



Activity increasing in some urban centres as more social mixing returns

Some urban centres in West Yorkshire saw substantial increases in activity in the week to April 8th, according to Geolytix's Retail Recovery Index. However, some areas saw fewer movements, suggesting a mixed pattern after the rule of six returned but prior to outdoor hospitality and non-essential retail reopening. Leeds, Bradford and Huddersfield saw increases, with Huddersfield seeing the most substantial change, to 57% of its pre-pandemic baseline compared to 44% a week earlier. Despite these increases, activity remains between 35 and 50% lower than it was at the end of October, prior to the introduction of November's lockdown.

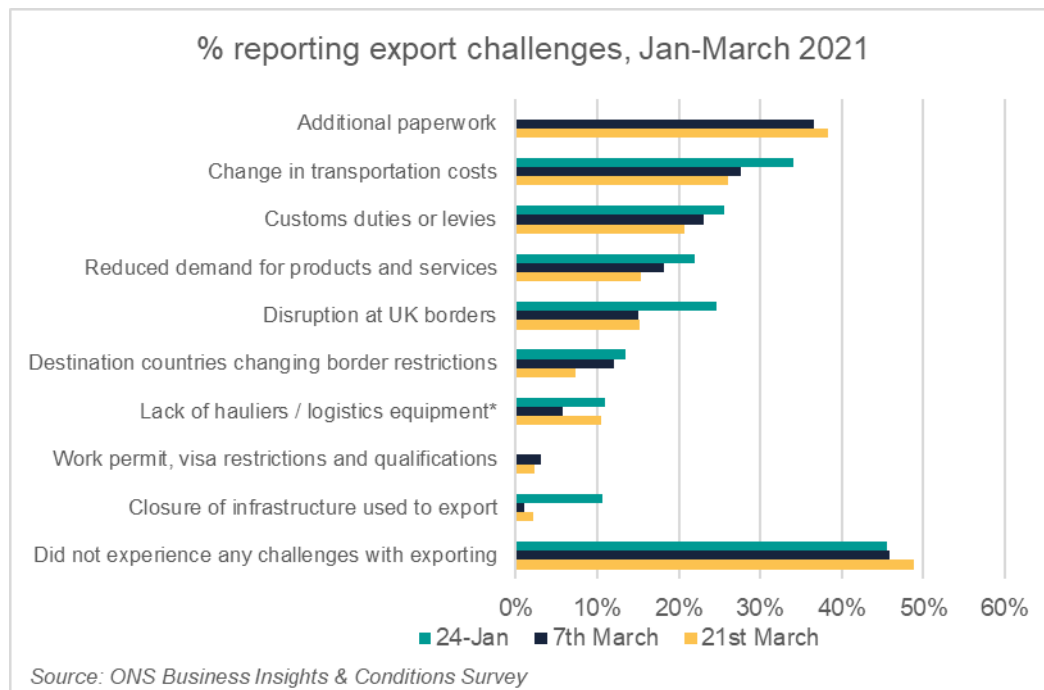
Smaller centres also show a mixed pattern, though Dewsbury, Keighley and Pontefract all saw sharp increases, with the former two seeing activity levels similar to late October.



Source: Geolytix Retail Recovery Index

Growth Service business feedback – issues related to EU Exit persist

Feedback from businesses on EU Exit impacts was limited over Easter, but continues to highlight supply issues with companies facing challenges maintaining stock levels when sourcing from the EU. Combined with the ongoing importing & exporting issues some companies are seeing delays of up to 4 weeks for products to be delivered, either due to customs delays or being unhappy or unsure of the paperwork needed to export.



While other companies are currently reviewing internal practices or trying to invest in new machinery to help improve their business ahead of the planned reopening of the economy, at this stage in the pandemic many businesses have managed to mitigate the worst of the COVID-19 impacts, successfully applying safe working conditions. However, some of the restrictions are not so easily overcome for many businesses - in some context working from home has reduced the ability to train new staff and the limitation on overseas travel has impacted business that rely on overseas travel.

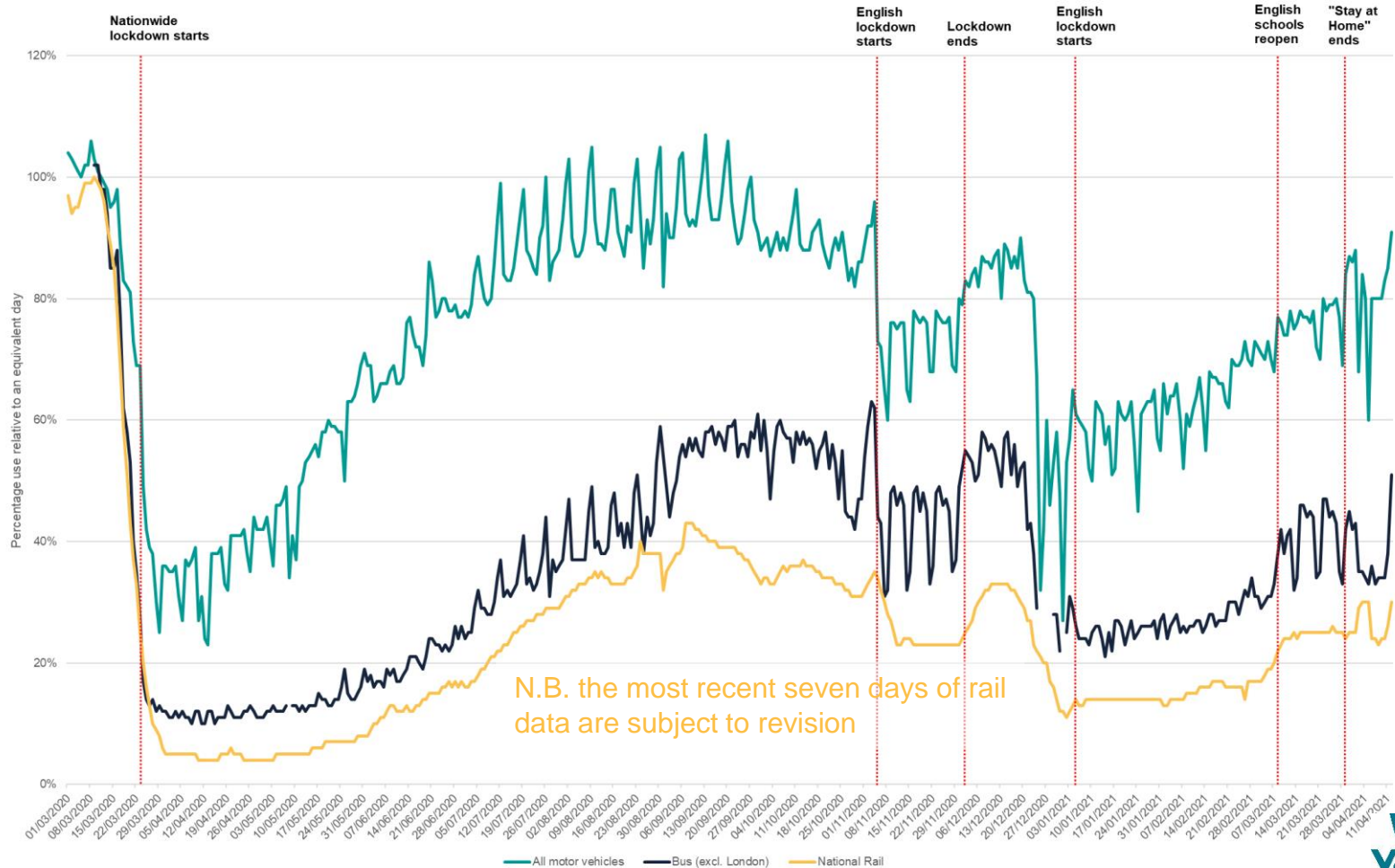
Transport Insights



National travel use shows a mixed picture over the Easter period

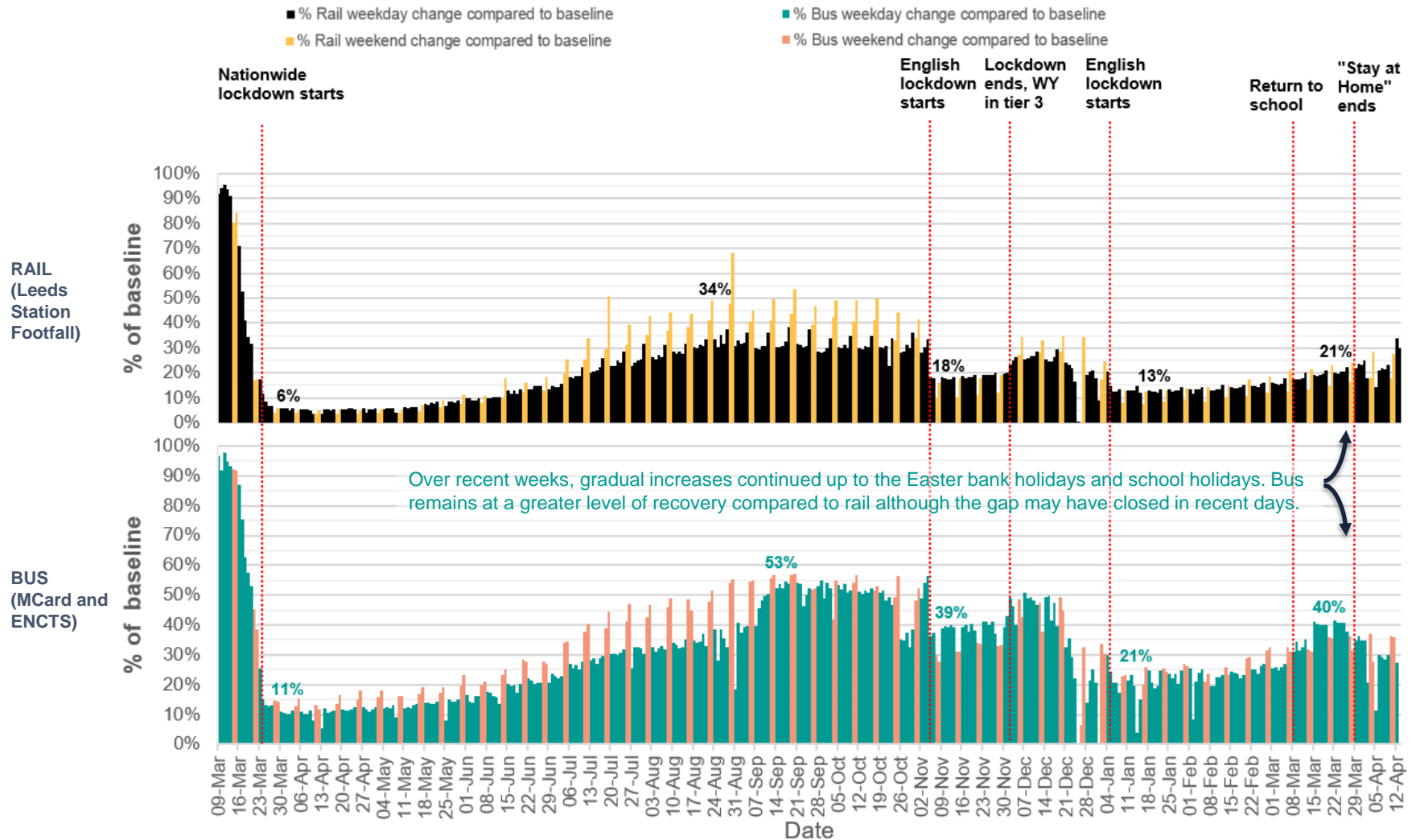
Data for Great Britain shows that travel usage fluctuated over the Easter period, with a decrease in public transport use. More data is needed to determine if the marked increase in the most recent days is a long term trend. Similar trends occur locally.

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 bus and rail show variations over the Easter period



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

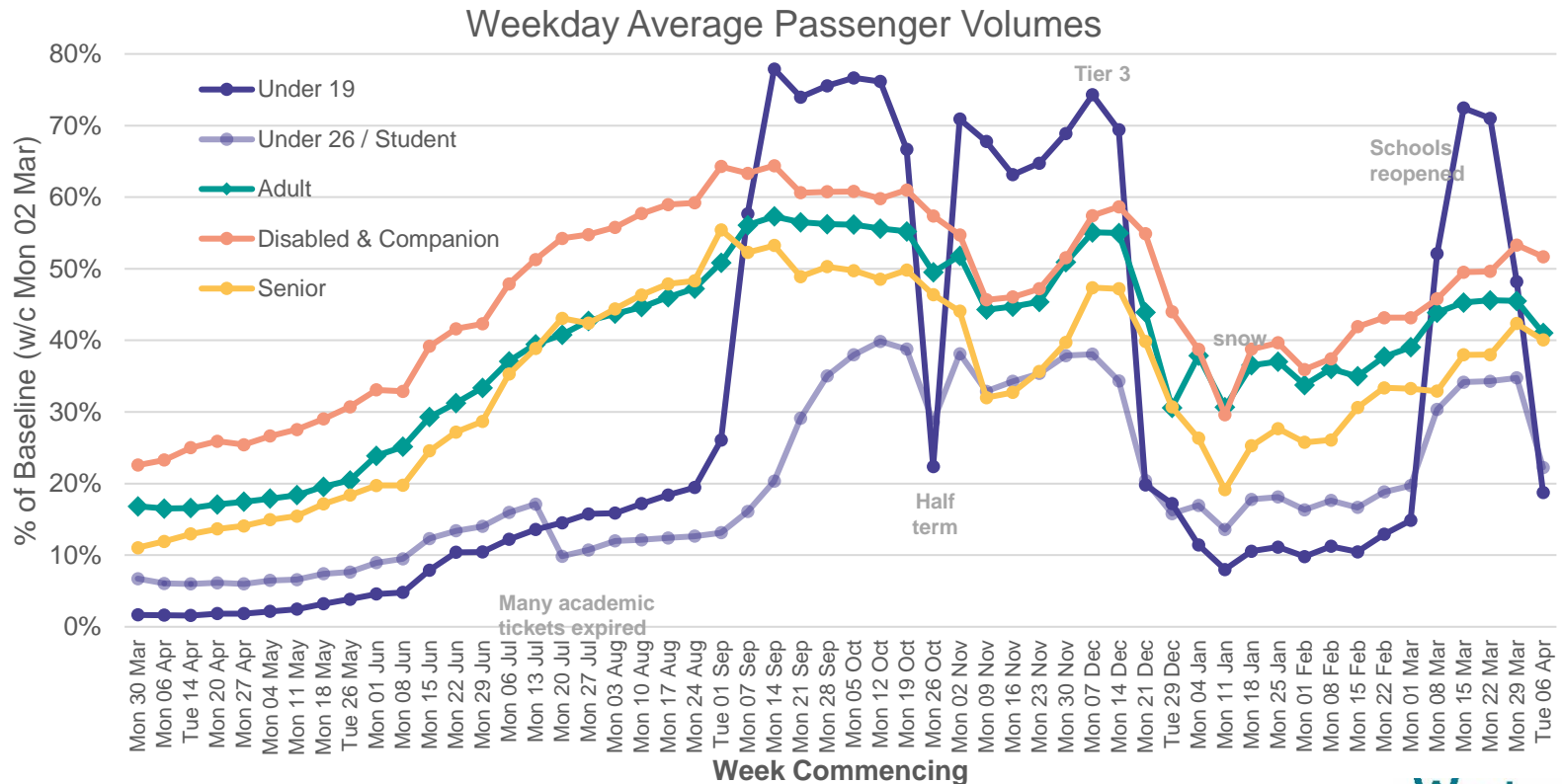
Source: Leeds Rail Station Footfall - Network Rail (top) and MCard and English National Concessionary Travel Scheme (ENCTS)

Bus use for all cohorts has been steadily increasing since lockdown

Bus use by all cohorts has steadily been increasing. In the week commencing 29th March some schools were closed for Easter and some remained open while outdoor social restrictions were relaxed and use by senior and disabled cohorts continued to grow. Provisional data for Easter week shows a reduction across all cohorts as expected. This is similar to October half-term but with lower totals, perhaps as non-essential retail and hospitality was open during October half term.

Thousand passengers per weekday before COVID	
Adult	221,000
Under 19	101,000
Senior	74,000
Under 26 / Student	34,000
Disabled & Companion	29,000
Miscellaneous	9,000

Data from First, Arriva, Yorkshire Tiger and Transdev

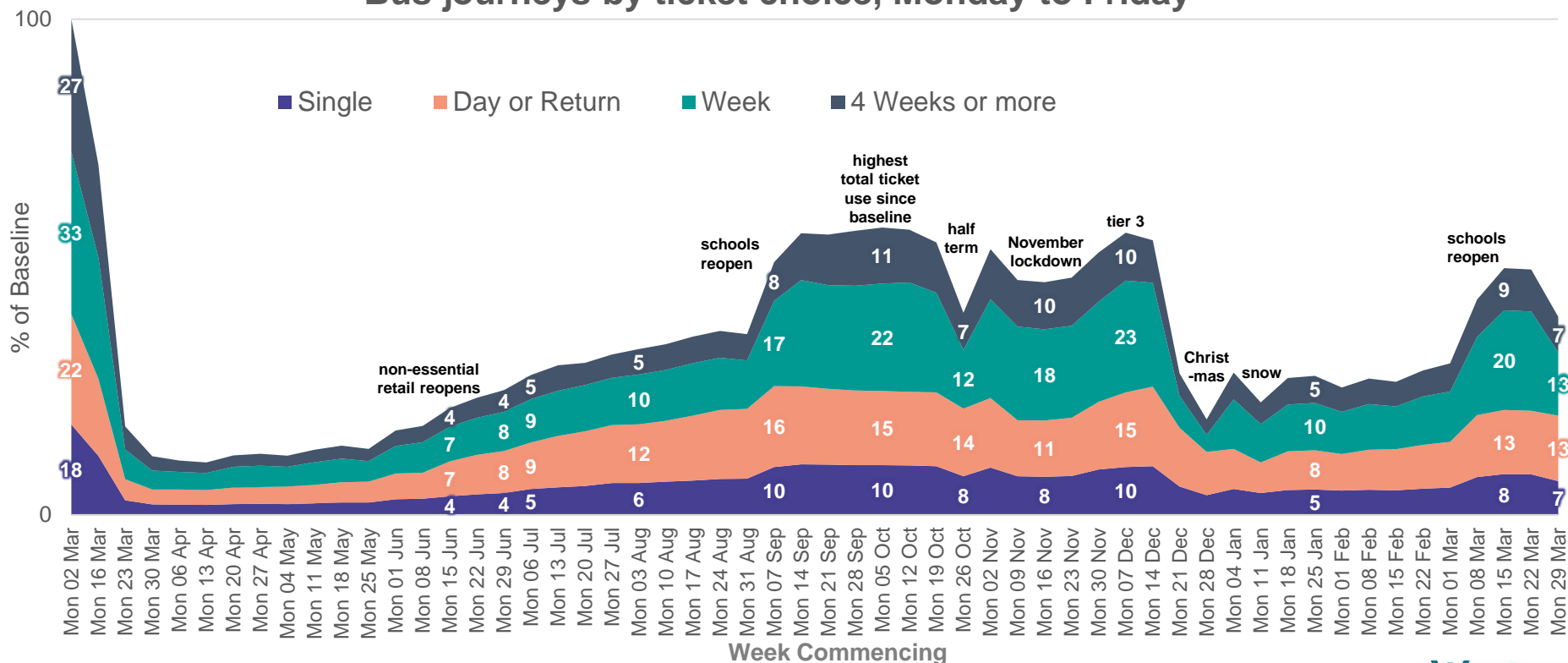


Baseline period is w/c Mon 02 Mar. Source: Bus operators electronic ticket machine data, passenger boarding locations in West Yorkshire. First, Arriva, Yorkshire Tiger and Transdev account for over 90% of bus services in West Yorkshire. Graph shows First and Transdev data. Data is for weekdays excluding bank holidays, with ticket types assigned to broad cohorts.

Weekly tickets have seen the largest increase in use which mirrors September

The total level of fare paying passengers has increased across all levels of ticket commitment as was expected with the return to school in the latest week's data. Schools re-opened with less than a month of term left which might explain why shorter ticket commitments were favoured compared with November. Some schools were closed for Easter holidays and some remained open in the week commencing 29th March.

Bus journeys by ticket choice, Monday to Friday

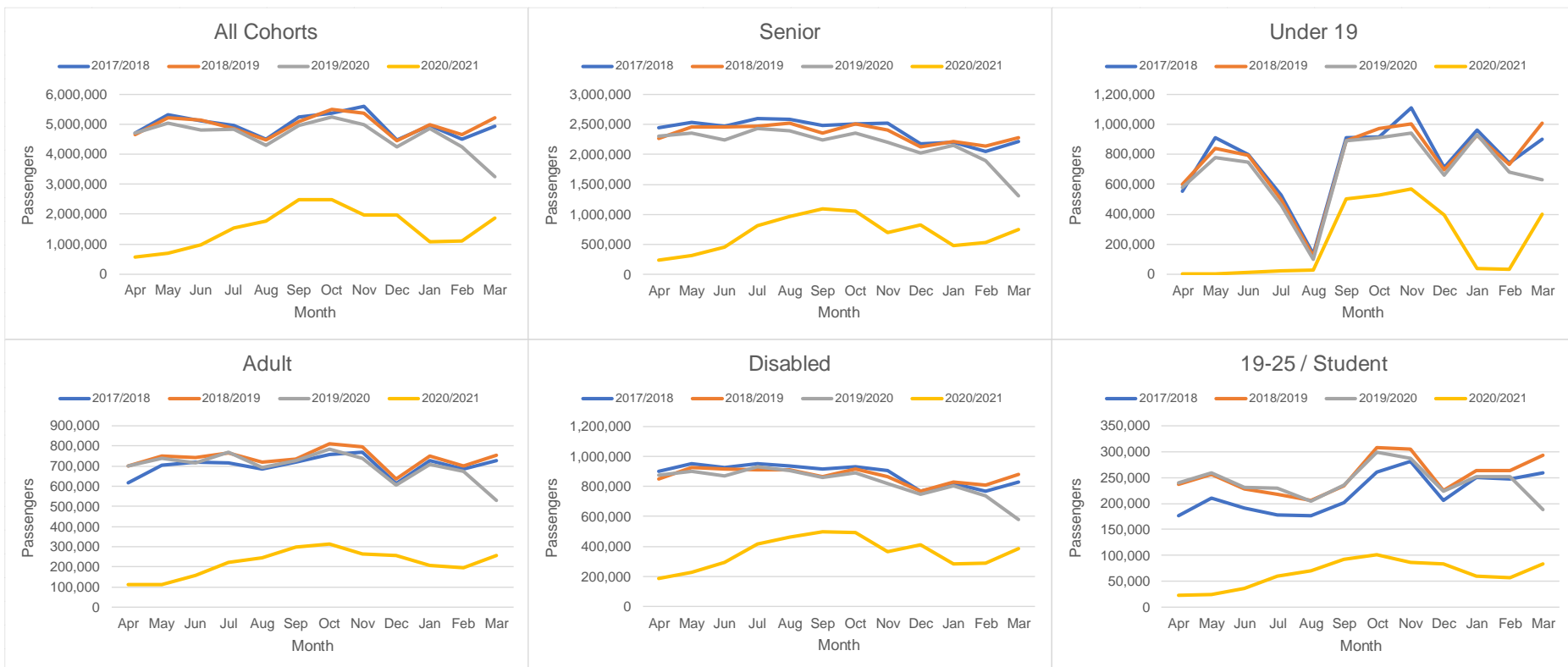


(Data from First, Arriva, Yorkshire Tiger and Transdev. Baseline period is w/c Mon 02 Mar)

Baseline period is w/c Mon 02 Mar. Source: Bus operators electronic ticket machine data, passenger boarding locations in West Yorkshire. Graph shows First and Transdev.

COVID restrictions have had more impact on bus patronage than seasonal variation

These charts reveal seasonal variation in bus patronage recorded from smartcard use in Nero. Use by seniors increased in February 2021 whereas it decreased in previous years, and in March it increased by over 65% whereas in the previous two normal years it increased by around 10%. Under 19s has a clear seasonal pattern, with reduced use in school holidays. The effect of combined school closures and other COVID restrictions was greater than the effect of school holidays.



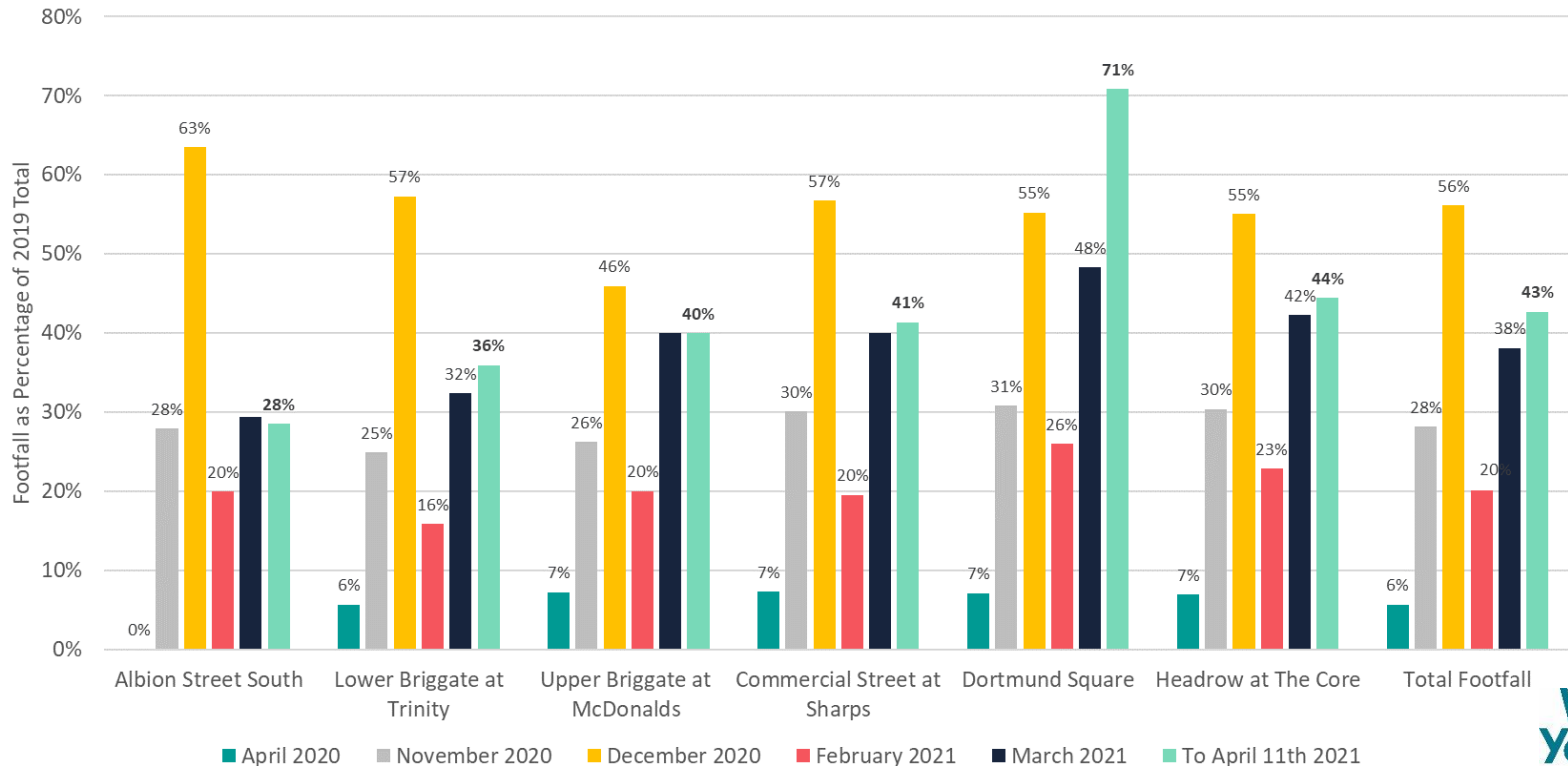
Source: WYCA Nero reports. Some variation between years occurs as months do not have an equal balance of weekdays, Saturdays and Sundays each year, and because school and statutory holiday dates can vary.

Leeds City Footfall increases as travel restrictions ease

There has been a slight increase in Leeds City Centre footfall, with total footfall in the first two weeks of April rising to 43% of the total recorded on the equivalent dates in 2019, up from 38% of the 2019 total in March. This is in response to the stay at home rule lifting on 29th March and social contact limits rising to allow meeting five other people.

The largest increase in footfall is seen at Dortmund Square, an area with outdoor seating, suggesting that it has been used as a congregating area as people begin to mix more.

Change in Leeds City Centre Total Footfall 2019 to 2020 / 2021



Source: Leeds City Council