

JSNA Health and Wellbeing Profile 2024/25

Employment

Summary points

- The employment rate for Bristol was 76.1% in the twelve months ending December 2023.
- The unemployment rate for Bristol was 3.6% in the twelve months ending December 2023, similar to the Great Britain average (3.7%).

Findings

In the 12 month period January to December 2023, the percentage of working age economically active people in Bristol was 79.2%, higher than the Great Britain average of 78.8%.

The unemployment rate¹ for Bristol has been rising incrementally since September 2018 when the rate was 3.4%², to 4.0% in the twelve months ending March 2020 (pre pandemic) continuing to rise until June 2021 when it appears to have peaked at 4.8%. Since then it has gradually decreased to 3.1% in March 2023 before starting to increase to its current rate of 3.6% (for the twelve month period ending December 2023). This is similar to the Great Britain rate of 3.7% and is the lowest rate of all UK core cities.

The employment rate in Bristol had been on an upward trend until its peak of 82.0% for the 12 months ending June 2022. Since then it has gradually been decreasing and as of the twelve months ending December 2023 the employment rate was 76.1%, lower than the same period the year before and lower than the regional rate for the South West (78.8%), but slightly higher than the national average of 75.8%. It is also the highest rate of the UK core cities - Leeds has the second highest employment rate of 74.7% and Birmingham the lowest (65.9%).

This is due in part to ongoing economic recovery nationally and productivity for all sectors returning to above or at least pre-pandemic levels, as well as high inflation, the rising cost of living and the impact of Brexit now being felt by businesses over the past few years.

Over the past five years preceding the impact of the pandemic the rate (and numbers) of working age people claiming out of work benefits (the claimant count rate) has been very low in Bristol, up to January 2019 the rate remained below 2%.

More recently the count and rate have increased month on month, largely due to changes in the benefits system where more benefits are classed in the same way as unemployment benefit because of the condition to seek work in order to be eligible.

At March 2020 (pre pandemic impact) the claimant rate was at 2.6%. There was a sharp increase to 4.7% in April 2020 as lockdown measures started to have an impact, with the rate increasing further to above 6% for most of 2020 and the first few months of 2021. Since April 2021 claimant rates have gradually decreased and reached as low as 3.2% in August 2022 and October 2022. Rates have shown a slight increase over the past five months and as at March 2024 the claimant rate is currently 3.6% (11,725 working age residents), just below the rate for Great Britain (3.9%).

¹ NB the % of economically active working age people who were out of work and looking for work

² Source: ONS Annual Population Survey via NOMIS: [Model-based unemployment data](#)

In the twelve months ending December 2023, there were 14,700 economically inactive people who wanted a job, while 9,500 people were estimated to be unemployed. This meant that a total of 24,200 people were involuntarily workless. This is 9.2% of the economically active population.

Economic participation and unemployment: key facts

- Economic activity rate December 2023: 79.2% (Great Britain 78.8%)
- Employment rate December 2023: 76.1% (Great Britain 75.8%)
- Unemployment rate December 2023: 3.6% (Great Britain 3.7%)

Claimant Count³ and employment rate by gender

As of March 2024 there were 6,875 male and 4,850 female out of work benefit claimants resident in Bristol (4.2% and 3.0% of the working age population respectively). This is the highest percentage for males since June 2022 but significantly lower than the pandemic peak rate of 7.8% experienced in May 2020 and August 2020. The rate for females was lowest between August and October 2022 at 2.5% and has been as high as 5% during August and September 2020.

In December 2016 the employment rate for working age (16 to 64) men was 77.1% compared to 74.0% for working age women, a gender gap of 3.1 percentage points. With male and female employment rates of 80.5% and 71.4%, respectively, in December 2023 the gap has increased to 9.1 percentage points,

Youth Unemployment

In March 2024 the number of young out of work benefit claimants, aged 18 to 24 years, resident in Bristol was 1,930. This is a rate of 3.1% of 18-24 year olds and is significantly lower than the national claimant rate for this age group (5.2%).

Unemployment amongst 50 to 64 Year Olds

In March 2024 the number of out of work benefit claimants aged 50+ years was 2,355 a rate of 3.3% which is slightly higher than the national rate for this age group at 2.8%.

UK economic trends and cost of living impact:

The cost of living remains an issue in the UK. Inflation in the UK peaked at 11.1% in October 2022 but has since fallen to 2.3% (April 24), which is just above the Bank of England's target of 2%. This is primarily as a result of falling energy prices.

However the impact of the cost of living crisis in the UK is not over, the sustained period of high inflation means that food and energy prices are still 20% higher than they were in 2021⁴. Nationally the UK continues to experience labour market and supply chain challenges with global issues contributing to economic instability.

³ This is measured by combining the number of people claiming Jobseeker's Allowance (JSA) and National Insurance credits with the number of people receiving Universal Credit principally for the reason of being unemployed.

⁴ [Best for Britain on X: What that 2.3% inflation figure really means for your pocket. and impact of prices rising 20% since 2021](#)

- The Consumer Prices Index (CPI) rose by 2.3% in the 12 months to April 2024,
- GDP is estimated to have grown by 0.6% in the three months to March 2024
- Services output grew by 0.7% in the three months to March 2024; the largest contributor to the overall growth in GDP.
- Production output grew by 0.8% in the three months to March 2024.
- Construction output fell by 0.9% in the three months to March 2024.⁵

Business conditions remain challenging, to give a regional perspective from the quarterly business survey conducted by Business West - Businesses continue to demonstrate resilience and adaptability, with 62% of respondents expressing confidence in their prospects for the next 12 months. However, concerns about the national economy persist, with only 19% of businesses expressing confidence in the UK's economic outlook⁶.

Further data / links / consultations:

- <https://www.bristolonecity.com/economic-recovery-and-renewal/>
One City Economic Recovery and Renewal Strategy
- [Nomis](#): Official labour market statistics

Date updated: May 2024**Date of next update:** May 2025

⁵ GDP first quarterly estimate, UK - Office for National Statistics (ons.gov.uk)

⁶ [business west qes report q4 2023.pdf](#) (businesswest.co.uk)