

# JSNA Health and Wellbeing Profile 2026/27

## Employment

### Summary points

- The employment rate for Bristol was 79.6% in the twelve months ending December 2025, higher than the Great Britain average (75.5%).
- The unemployment rate for Bristol was 4.2% in the twelve months ending December 2025, lower than the Great Britain average (4.5%).

### Findings

In the 12 month period January to December 2025, the percentage of working age economically active people in Bristol was 83.1%, higher than the Great Britain average of 79.2%.

The unemployment rate<sup>1</sup> for Bristol has been rising incrementally since September 2018 when the rate was 3.4%<sup>2</sup>, 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 4.2% (for the twelve month period ending December 2025). This is lower than the Great Britain rate of 4.5% and is the third 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 reaching 76.1% for the twelve months ending December 2023 before starting to rise again and hitting 79.6% for the latest reported period (twelve months ending December 2025), higher than both the Great Britain average (75.5%) and the South West average (79.5%). It is the highest rate of all the UK core cities with Manchester having the second highest employment rate (75.0%) and Nottingham and Birmingham the joint lowest (67.0%).

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 4.6% 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 3.1% in January 2023. Rates have shown a gradual increase over the past two years and as at March 2026 the claimant rate is currently 3.7% (12,890 working age residents), lower than the rate for Great Britain (4.0%).

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

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

In the twelve months ending December 2025, there were 14,900 economically inactive people who wanted a job, while 11,600 people were estimated to be unemployed. This meant that a total of 26,500 people were involuntarily workless. This is 9.7% of the economically active population.

### **Economic participation and unemployment: key facts**

- Economic activity rate December 2025: 83.1% (Great Britain 79.2%)
- Employment rate December 2025: 79.6% (Great Britain 75.5%)
- Unemployment rate December 2025: 4.2% (Great Britain 4.5%)

### **Claimant Count<sup>3</sup> and employment rate by gender**

As of March 2026 there were 7,410 male and 5,480 female out of work benefit claimants resident in Bristol (4.2% and 3.1% of the working age population respectively). This is the highest percentage for males since June 2022 but has been operating between 4.0% and 4.2% since January 2025 and is significantly lower than the pandemic peak rate of 7.8% experienced in August 2020. The rate for females was lowest between May and October 2022 at 2.5% and has been as high as 4.8% 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. This gap widened in December 2023 to 9.1 percentage points but with male and female employment rates of 81.1% and 78.0%, respectively, the gap has reduced back down to 3.1 percentage points in December 2025.

### **Youth Unemployment**

In March 2026, the number of young out of work benefit claimants, aged 18 to 24 years, resident in Bristol was 2,530. This is a rate of 3.4% of 18-24 year olds and is significantly lower than the national claimant rate for this age group (5.8%).

### **Unemployment amongst 50 to 64 Year Olds**

In March 2025, the number of out of work benefit claimants aged 50+ years was 2,410 a rate of 3.4% which is higher than the national rate for this age group at 2.9%.

### **UK economic trends:**

- Inflation in the UK peaked at 11.1% in October 2022 but has since fallen to 3.3% (March 2026), which is above the Bank of England's target of 2%.
- The Consumer Prices Index including owner occupiers housing costs (CPIH) rose by 3.4% in the 12 months to March 2026, up from 3.2% in the 12 months to February.
- Monthly real gross domestic product (GDP) is estimated to have grown by 0.5% in February 2026. Services and production grew by 0.5% and construction grew by 1.0%.

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<sup>3</sup> 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.

- Real GDP is estimated to have grown by 0.5% in the three months to February 2026, compared with the three months to November 2025, this is mainly due to growth in the service sector.

Business conditions remain challenging, with business confidence remaining low. The impact of the sustained period of high inflation, food and energy costs, increased national insurance rates continue to impact on businesses and supply chains. Tax burdens on SMEs cited as one of the biggest barriers to growth, with the US trade tariffs having a major impact on small businesses who export to the US market.

**Further data / links / consultations:**

- [One City Economic Recovery and Renewal Strategy](#)
- [Fair, Green and Thriving: Bristol's Economic Strategy 2025 - 2035](#)
- [Nomis](#): Official labour market statistics
- Consumer price inflation, UK - Office for National Statistics
- GDP first quarterly estimate, UK - Office for National Statistics (ons.gov.uk)
- GDP monthly estimate, UK - Office for National Statistics (ons.gov.uk)
- Quarterly Economic Survey - British Chambers of Commerce
- Quarterly Economic Survey Q3 2023 | Business West
- South West small business confidence falls again | FSB, The Federation of Small Businesses

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