

More people in work despite end of furlough, latest figures show

The number of UK workers on company payrolls surged by 160,000 last month and there was no sign of a jump in redundancies despite the furlough support scheme coming to an end, according to official figures.

The Office for National Statistics (ONS) said payrolled workers jumped by 0.6% between September and October to 29.3 million – “well above” levels seen before the pandemic struck.

The unemployment rate also fell once more to 4.3% between July to September, down from 4.5% between June and August, in spite of the furlough scheme coming to an end on September 30.

The ONS said survey responses so far suggest only a small number of redundancies have been made among the 1.1 million still on furlough when the scheme closed.

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But it cautioned the full effect of furlough closing may yet be felt, with some workers let go still potentially working out their notice and on redundancy pay.

The data also showed that job vacancies reached a new record high, up 222,000 quarter on quarter to 1.17 million in the three months to October and 388,000 higher than before the pandemic as firms battled to hire amid mounting labour shortages.

Sam Beckett, ONS head of economic statistics, said: “It might take a few months to see the full impact of furlough coming to

an end, as people who lost their jobs at the end of September could still be receiving redundancy pay.

“However, October’s early estimate shows the number of people on the payroll rose strongly on the month and stands well above its pre-pandemic level.”

She added: “There is also no sign of an upturn in redundancies and businesses tell us that only a very small proportion of their previously furloughed staff have been laid off.”

Britain’s jobs market has now recovered above levels before the Covid-19 crisis hit, with the furlough scheme cushioning the blow for workers.

Almost nine million British workers were on the support scheme at the peak.

But the ONS showed the increase in payrolled workers in September was not as big as first thought, with a downward revision to 171,000 added in the month, against the 207,000 initially estimated.

There were 1.4 million unemployed between July and September, down 152,000 on the previous quarter, while employment rose 247,000 to 32.5 million.

Wages growth eased back, with total average weekly earnings up 5.8% between July and September, down from a 7.2% hike previously.

Earnings figures continue to be skewed by certain factors, with lower paid jobs being hit hardest by the pandemic, but the growth is thought to be easing as fewer people came off furlough and saw their pay recover.

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