

More job vacancies now than before pandemic, as unemployment rate falls slightly

There are more job vacancies now than there were before the pandemic, official figures show, as unemployment edges slowly down after a year of job losses.

The number of open jobs between April to June 2021 was 77,500 above its pre-pandemic level in January to March 2020, according to the Office for National Statistics (ONS).

There were 862,000 job vacancies between April and June, the ONS said. This is the first time it has been this high in 15 months.

“Vacancies exceeding pre-COVID levels is a further sign of demand returning and employers creating jobs,” said Matthew Percival, director for people and skills at CBI, the trade body that represents more than 190,000 British businesses.

“Yet businesses’ ability to meet this demand, and support the recovery, is being challenged by staff shortages,” he added. “As COVID cases rise, firms are facing the double difficulty of hiring workers and more employees self-isolating.”

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Meanwhile, unemployment fell slightly between March and May 2021, according to official figures, with an increase in both the employment and the number of hours worked.

The UK’s unemployment rate is currently 4.8%, nearly 1% higher than before the pandemic began, the ONS said, but slightly lower than the previous quarter.

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The jobs market has been showing signs of recovery since December 2020; currently, there are 32 million people employed in the UK, an increase of 25,000 on the quarter.

The estimated number of unemployed people aged 16 years and over was 1.6m, a decrease of 68,000 on the quarter.

Whilst the scale of unemployment throughout the pandemic was similar for both men and women, the employment rate for men has shown some initial recovery, while the employment rate for women remains subdued, according to the ONS.

“As we approach the final stages of reopening the economy, I look forward to seeing more people back at work and the economy continuing to rebound,” said Chancellor Rishi Sunak.