

Quarter of adults out of work, official figures show

More than one in four adults in Britain are not working, after a record number left the workforce in recent months, official figures indicated.

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A total of 10.6 million people either did not have a job, or have stopped looking for one, according to **figures from the Office for National Statistics**

(<http://www.statistics.gov.uk/pdfdir/lmsuk0310.pdf>), which indicated that more people than ever before had abandoned the workplace – choosing instead to study, go on sick leave or just give up searching for a job.

A record 149,000 left the workforce and became "economically inactive", between November last year and January, the ONS said. These people more than offset the fall in the headline unemployment.



A quarter of adults are out of work, official figures show.

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Unemployment fell for the third month in a row, dropping by 33,000 to hit 2.45 million. It has yet to breach the symbolic 2.5 million mark, let alone the 3 million barrier that haunted the recessions of the early 1990s and 1980s.

However, economists immediately expressed caution about the monthly figures from the Office for National Statistics.

The total number of economically inactive hit 8.16 million, the highest since the ONS started recording this measure in 1971.

The number out of a job, or economically inactive totals 10.6 million, or 28 per cent of adults of working age.

The biggest rise in economic inactivity was down to the increase in students, with nearly 100,000 deciding to study in the last three months.

John Philpott, the leading employment economist, at the Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development said: "Unemployment is sharply down, however you measure it. Yet there are also 54,000 fewer people in work, with full-time jobs particularly hard hit. The apparent paradox is explained by a very sharp rise of 149,000 in the number of economically inactive people, with the number of students surging by 98,000. Jobless young people are thus turning to study in their thousands to avoid the dole."

There were also a 18,000 increase in the number of people staying at home to care for children or parents to hit 2.3 million, while the long-term sick failed to fall and stayed at 2 million. The ONS said that of the 8.16 million economically inactive people, 2.3 million have said they would like a job.

Theresa May, the Shadow Work and Pensions Secretary said: "What the headline figures don't show is that many people have simply given up looking for work. One in five people of working age you meet won't have a job.

"Britain needs a credible plan on jobs and growth so that the 2.3 million people looking for jobs who don't appear in the official

unemployment figures can get back into the workplace."

Added to the economically inactive, were a further 1.04 million part-time workers that were on reduced hours because they could not find a full-time job.

Experts also pointed out that the only jobs being created were in the public sector, with 22,000 created by central government, mostly in the NHS. Ironically, one of the biggest institutions hiring new workers are Jobcentres, which took on 2,250 new workers in the last three months.

In contrast, employment in the public sector fell by 61,000. Mr Philpott added: "Whether or not benign headline jobless figures limit the potency of unemployment as a vote clinching issue in the forthcoming General Election campaign, whoever forms the next Government will face a Herculean task in its efforts to return the UK economy to full employment within this decade."

Yvette Cooper, the Work and Pensions Secretary, said: "The fall in unemployment for the third month in a row is very welcome, but we should remain cautious.

"We're not out of the woods yet and we are still determined to do more to support jobs and help the unemployed this year."

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