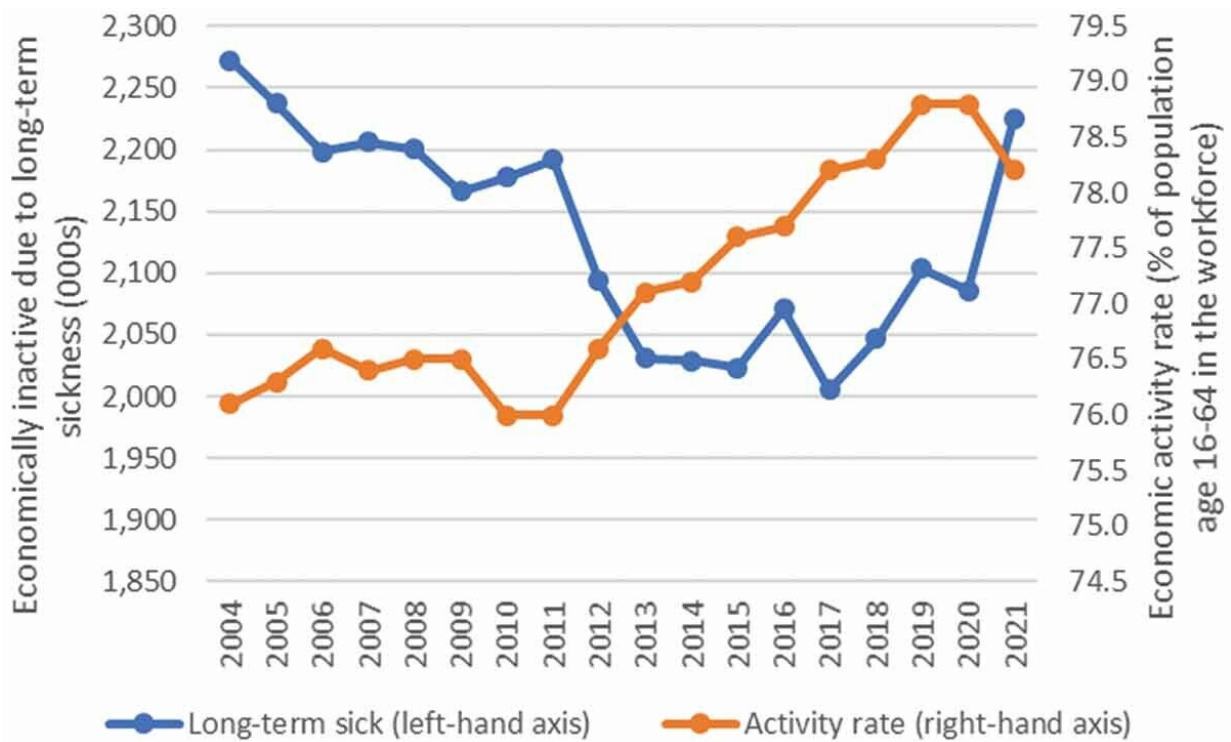


Study finds long COVID has significant impact on UK workforce

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Long-term sickness and economic activity, 2004–21. Source: Authors’ compilation using the Office for National Statistics’s Annual Population Survey. Credit: *Applied Economics Letters* (2022). DOI: 10.1080/13504851.2022.2098239

Researchers have warned the long-term effects of coronavirus will have a significant impact on the U.K. workforce for some time.

Of those who have been infected with COVID-19, 5.5% of people will develop life-changing chronic illness, in particular heart and lung conditions. Others have also experienced long lasting symptoms, including shortness of breath, fatigue, fever, headaches, brain fog and other neurological problems.

A new collaborative study by the universities of Southampton and Portsmouth, published in *Applied Economics Letters*, estimates that 80,000 people had left employment due to long COVID by early March this year.

Donald Houston, Professor of Economic Geography at the University of Portsmouth and co-author of the paper, said: "Continued waves of coronavirus infections, which may go on for a number of years, will keep people off work while sick with long COVID. Many will lose their jobs and some will remain out of the workforce for a long time or permanently."

At the peak of the omicron wave in February, 2.9 million people of working-age (7% of the total) had experienced persistent COVID-19 symptoms for more than 12 weeks. This figure is expected to rise following the current wave of infections, given that vaccination only gives modest protection against long COVID.

"The effects of this is what we can feel now in the economy", said Dr. Darja Reuschke, Associate Professor of Economic Geography at the University of Southampton and co-author of the paper.

"Workers are missing particularly in lower-paid jobs and these are the jobs that also put people at the greatest risk of getting infected with coronavirus.

"We have been told that hospitalization from COVID-19 are further

going down, so not to worry about infections much if you don't have an underlying health condition. At the same time, everyone witnesses that some sectors such as [health services](#), airports and hospitality are short-staffed. It is important to connect health and economic issues."

For the first time since records began, there are more job opportunities in the U.K. than [unemployed people](#), according to the latest monthly labor market figures. This has been driven mainly by a near-fourfold surge in vacancies to around 1.3 million since the summer of 2020, when [economic activity](#) was allowed to resume at the end of the first lockdown.

Professor Houston and Dr. Reuschke argue governments need to tackle the twin challenges to [public health](#) and labor supply and provide employment protection and [financial support](#) for individuals and firms affected by long COVID.

In the U.K., Statutory Sick Pay is currently £99.35 per week for up to 28 weeks paid by the employer, in comparison to insurance-based schemes in some other European countries paying up to 70% of wages for up to three years.

Professor Houston added: "Policy solutions include flexible working arrangements to accommodate ill-health and extensions to Statutory Sick Pay in order to maintain employment until recovery from long COVID."

More information: Darja Reuschke et al, The impact of Long COVID on the UK workforce, *Applied Economics Letters* (2022). [DOI: 10.1080/13504851.2022.2098239](https://doi.org/10.1080/13504851.2022.2098239)

Provided by University of Southampton

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