

Manufacturing Industries

If you have good practical skills, an eye for detail, or enjoy working with tools or machinery, then you may well consider a career in manufacturing.

Scotland's manufacturing industry is diverse and specialises in the areas of food, computer, electronic and optical products, chemicals and chemical products.

There are approximately 2.68 million people employed in the manufacturing sector in the UK in 2025, compared with 4 million in 2020.¹ In December 2024 manufacturing accounted for around 8% of all employment, with a total UK economic output of 8.4%.⁴

What areas can I work in?

Manufacturing involves many products from chemicals to computers, with many jobs on production lines and packing work. Clothing and textile jobs range from machine operation to production management and includes design-related and technical posts. In food and drink, you could be working in confectionery and bakery, meat processing or food science technology.

There is also work within engineering, chemicals and furniture manufacture, not to mention the printing industry.

To see the routes to getting into each of these sectors, take a look at our [Career Pathway](#).

What kind of companies can I work for?

There are a wide variety of employers including:

- engineering tools and chemical manufacturers
- food processing and manufacturing
- breweries, distilleries and drink manufacturers
- clothing, knitwear and textiles companies
- computers and electronics manufacturers
- furniture manufacturers.

What's the job market like?

Manufacturing is vital to Scotland's economy, employing more than 202,000 people, accounting for around 8% of Scotland's total workforce.² Many Scottish firms produce some high quality products, particularly for export, like whisky, seafood, Scotch beef, cashmere and other luxury textiles, providing a significant number of jobs in Scotland.

According to a PwC report in 2023, Scottish manufacturing output per hour was 19% higher than the UK average, with a focus on the subsectors of food and drink (26%), chemicals (10.6%) and pharmaceuticals (8.4%), and highlighted Scotland's strong performance in the hydrocarbons and oil industry. However, this research showed also that there was room for more growth in manufacturing productivity, which had a modest growth rate of

5.2%.⁵

Scotland has a vibrant food and drink manufacturing industry and is the largest manufacturing sub sector, employing around 44,000 people across 1,295 businesses. It accounts for 26% of the Scottish manufacturing workforce, with a turnover of £10.7 billion - accounting for 29% of all Scottish manufacturing turnover. It is predicted that Scottish food and drink manufacturing will need 7,000 new recruits by 2033.³

In 2024 the Scotch whisky industry accounted for 74% of Scottish food and drink exports and 22% of all UK food and drink exports. More than 41,000 people are employed in this industry with 150 operating Scotch whisky distilleries. It supports a further 25,000 jobs across the UK.⁸

The Scottish space sector is a fast-growing industry, one of whose expertise areas is in manufacturing small satellites. In 2024 there were approximately 8,500 working in the space sector in Scotland and it is expected that the Scottish space sector will be worth £4 billion by 2030.⁷

Facts and figures

- Food and drink manufacturing has a lower proportion of the workforce education to SCQF Levels 7 and above, and a higher proportion educated to SCQF Levels 6 and below compared to Scotland as a whole.³
- In 2023 food and drink exports decreased by 6.8% to £7.6 billion.³
- In 2024 approximately 44,000 were employed in food and drink manufacturing in Scotland.⁶
- In 2024 the greatest number of people employed food and drink manufacturing were in the following areas: Lanarkshire (7,000); Highlands and Islands (6,300); Aberdeen City and Shire (6,200); and Glasgow College Region (5,800).⁶

Want to find out more?

[Tasty Careers](#), hosted by the National Skills Academy, is a great resource for careers in the food and drink manufacturing industry

Sources

¹ [Number of people employed in the manufacturing industry from 1st quarter 1997 to 1st quarter 2025](#), D Clark, Statista (22 May 2025)

² [Labour Market, 11 September 2024](#), Scotland's Census

³ [Scottish facts and stats](#), Food and Drink Federation (June 2025)

⁴ [A6: Manufacturing, 3 June 2025](#), The House of Commons Library

⁵ [UK's most productive manufacturing region' – but PwC study shows there is more room for growth](#) (Alistair Houghton, 27 September 2023), Insider

⁶ [Sectoral Skills Assessment Food and Drink Manufacturing](#), Skills Development Scotland (October 2024)

⁷ [Successful Scottish space industry could help Ireland's sector take off \(29 February 2024\)](#), Strathclyde University

⁸ [Facts and Figures](#), Scotch Whisky Association (June 2025)