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.

As of September 2025 there were approximately 2.6 million people employed in the manufacturing sector in the UK. [1] From January to March 2026 manufacturing accounted for 8.5% of all economic output in the UK. [4]

What areas can I work in?

Manufacturing involves many products from chemicals to computers, with many jobs on production lines and packing work. You could work in the following areas:

- clothing and textiles - this could range from machine operation to production management, and includes design-related and technical posts
- food and drink - you could be working in confectionery and bakery, meat processing or food science technology
- furniture - this could be working in wood machining, upholstery or making furniture items
- printing - you could be working in different stages of the printing process, using large industrial machines
- general - this could be anything from engineering tools to manufacturing chemicals.

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, 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.

Scotland has a vibrant food and drink manufacturing industry and is the largest manufacturing sub sector, employing around 45,200 people, accounting for 1.7% of all employment in Scotland. Food and drink

manufacturing is estimated to be worth £4.1 million, and is responsible for 2.4% of Scotland's economic output. [5]

In 2025 the Scotch whisky industry accounted for 72% of Scottish food and drink exports and 21% of all UK food and drink exports. More than 41,000 people are employed in this industry with 154 operating Scotch whisky distilleries. It supports a further 25,000 jobs across the UK. [6]

The Scottish space sector is a fast-growing industry, one of whose expertise areas is in manufacturing small satellites. There are 183 space organisations employing 8,568 workers in Scotland. It is expected that by 2030, the space sector workforce will increase fivefold. [7]

Facts and figures

- Food and drink manufacturing has a lower proportion of the workforce educated to SCQF Levels 7 and above, and a higher proportion educated to SCQF Levels 6 and below compared to Scotland as a whole. [5]
- Within the food and drink industry, the average pay increased by 3.1% in 2025. This is expected to further rise by 2.6% over the next year. [3]
- In 2025 the greatest number of people employed food and drink manufacturing were in the following areas: Lanarkshire (7,200); Highlands and Islands (6,500); Aberdeen City and Shire (6,200); and Glasgow College Region (5,900). [5]

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] UK Manufacturing Statistics, The Manufacturer (www.themanufacturer.com) (May 2026)

[2] Scotland's Census 2022 - Education, labour market and travel to work, (www.scotlandscensus.gov.uk) (11 September 2024)

[3] State of the Industry Report Q1 2026, Food and Drink Federation (May 2026)

[4] Manufacturing industries: Economic indicators, The House of Commons Library (12 June 2026)

[5] Sectoral Skills Assessment: Food and Drink Manufacturing, Skills Development Scotland (October 2025)

[6] Facts and Figures, Scotch Whisky Association (May 2026)

[7] Space Careers, Education Scotland (May 2026)