

Buying, Selling and Related Work

Do you think of yourself as a 'people person', someone who'd enjoy providing information and advice to people looking to buy a product or service? Or, maybe you'd prefer to negotiate with suppliers to get the best deal for your company or employer?

If either option applies, then this career area may be a good choice. Whether you are dealing with customers or suppliers you need to have good communication skills, a confident and positive outlook, and the ability to deal with complaints while you are busy.

The retail industry remains the UK's largest private sector employer, with just under 3 million jobs and a turnover of over £441 billion in sales in 2022.

What areas can I work in?

As buying and selling affects most types of business, a wide variety of careers are available. Jobs and courses are split into three sectors: buying; call centres; and retail and sales.

This doesn't include careers in warehousing – you'll find those in the ['Transport and Distribution'](#) career area.

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?

Of the huge range of companies to work for, possible employers include:

- retail stores and outlets
- local authority and public services, including the Civil Service and National Health Service
- call centres for businesses such as banks, insurance companies, utility firms and supermarkets
- construction and manufacturing
- medical sales companies and pharmaceuticals.

What's the job market like?

The buying, selling and related work industry is one of the biggest employers in Scotland, with the retail sector alone remaining Scotland's largest private sector employer. Around 261,000 people work in Scottish retail and remains one of the largest contributors to the Scottish economy.

Between 2015 and 2021, retail employment rose the most in Scotland, at 6.1%. However, due to the current cost of living crisis and the impact of the recent pandemic, it is predicted that retail will lose at least 131,000 jobs by the end of 2024 in the UK, the bulk being lost in 2023. The proportion of retail jobs out of all UK jobs has been steadily declining from 10% in 2008 to 8.5% in 2022, a contributor being the shift to online buying. As a result, the retail industry has adopted new technologies at a faster pace than other industries, meaning that the number of stores has been declining, while the number of retail online outlets has been rising.

According to Ibis World, in 2023 there were 42,352 call centre employees in the UK. Between 2018 and 2023 the

number of people employed in call centres declined by 3.5% on average over the past 5 years.

In Scotland, it is estimated that there are 51,700 people employed in customer service occupations (compared to 72,100 in 2021), with 12,500 of these working in call and contact centre operations.

There are lots of ways to get into these jobs. You can start straight from school with few or no qualifications, where you can work your way up to a senior position, such as retail manager. Many employers provide the opportunity to work towards vocational qualifications on the job to help with promotion. There are Modern Apprenticeship frameworks for both retail and procurement.

Facts and figures

- For 7 out of the last 8 years, pay growth in retail was above the UK average of 4.7%, at 5.6% (as of April 2022).
- In April 2022, the average worker in retail in the UK was paid £10.79 per hour, and in Scotland it was £10.45 per hour.
- Retail has a relatively young workforce, with 28% being aged 24 and under, compared to 11% of employees in the UK as a whole. 16% of employees in retail are over 55, as compared to 32% of all workers in the UK.
- In 2023 there were 150,800 people working in sales occupations in Scotland, with 75,300 of those working as sales and retail assistants, and 25,700 working as retail cashiers and check out operators.
- In 2023 there were 6,800 buyers and procurement officers in Scotland.

Want to find out more?

You can find out more about training and qualifications in Scotland on the [Scottish Retail Consortium](#) website.

Sources

- Annual Population Survey – Employment by occupation (SOC2020) [Nomis](#) (January 2022 - December 2022)
- Call Centres in the UK – Employment Statistics 2011 – 2029 (February 2023) [Ibis World](#)
- Retail Economics: Top 10 stats and facts about the UK retail sector [UK Retail Stats & Facts | Retail Economics](#) (May 2023)
- Retail Jobs Report, December 2022 – British Retail Consortium