

Camera Operator

Camera operators capture the action on location or in a studio for live broadcasts, film, TV and documentaries. You would usually work under the instructions of the director, and the director of photography. They decide which camera is best to use to suit the conditions.

The Work

You could be:

- setting up the camera equipment in a studio or outdoors on location
- choosing the most suitable type of film and lens
- reading and following the camera script
- discussing with the director the effects required, giving advice about how to achieve this and fixing camera angles, lighting, colour, lens focus and settings
- in outdoor shots taking account of natural light: the time of day and the weather conditions
- moving the equipment around and practising pre-arranged shots beforehand using one or more cameras
- solving practical or technical problems
- repairing and maintaining equipment
- keeping up to date with new technology, like 3D, High Definition (HD) and 4K (Ultra HD).

Pay

The figures below are only a guide. Actual salaries may vary, depending on:

- where you work
- the size of company or organisation you work for and whether or not you work freelance
- the demand for the job.

If you are employed, the starting salary for a trainee camera operator will be around £22,000 rising with experience to around £36,000 a year. Senior camera operators can earn £40,000 a year or more.

Freelance rates are listed on the Broadcasting, Entertainment, Cinematograph and Theatre Union (BECTU) website. The rate for camera operators in TV and film is between £504 and £723 for a 10-hour day, depending on the production budget (October 2022 rates).

There are few salaried camera jobs in TV. As a freelancer you will earn more but pay will be less regular.

Conditions

- You might be working indoors or out in any kind of weather or environment, including conflict or disaster zones.
- You may be the only camera operator and use a single camera, or you could be part of a camera team with a specific role.
- You will have to lift heavy equipment.

- You will work long and irregular hours, including shift work and weekends.
- You will probably be employed on short freelance contracts.
- You may have to spend periods away from home, possibly abroad.
- You might wear a headset to follow instructions from the director.
- Some camera operators, especially if working in video, provide and maintain their own equipment.
- You may have to work at heights or on a crane or scaffolding.

Getting In

- You need a good portfolio of work.
- Practical experience in a relevant area such as professional photography or lighting are more important than educational qualifications. However, an HND (SCQF Level 8) or degree (SCQF Level 9-10) in media production, media technology or photography may be an advantage.
- Employers rarely advertise posts. The best way in is to make contacts in the field and send in your portfolio. Make a show reel with impact – keep it short, use clips and include as much information as you can in 5 minutes.
- If you get a job as a [runner](#) in a broadcasting studio, or a big camera facilities house, you will be in the right place to try for any camera jobs. You may have to do several work experience placements without pay before getting your first job.
- You will normally start as a camera trainee or assistant, moving on to become a 2nd assistant camera (clapper loader), then a 1st assistant camera (focus puller) before becoming a camera operator.
- You must be able to show an interest in electronics and lighting as well as in current affairs, film, television and drama. Analyse TV and films – what works and what doesn't work? What is the lighting and the pace of the film?

What Does It Take

You would need:

- creativity
- a good eye for visual effect, composition and colour
- good hand-to-eye co-ordination
- flexibility and team work skills
- attention to detail
- practical skills and technical knowledge.

You should also have:

- good communication skills
- patience
- physical strength and stamina for carrying equipment about
- diplomacy and tact when working with artists
- a good knowledge of health and safety procedures
- a willingness to work long hours.

Training

- Training is mostly on the job.
- [ScreenSkills](#) provides a list of relevant courses on their website.
- [The National Film and Television School](#) offers relevant courses which includes camera operator techniques.
- The Guild of British Camera Technicians (GBCT) takes on a small number of trainees each year and runs a number of training courses. Their [website](#) has more information.
- There are some training schemes with television companies but entry is highly competitive, with a range of qualifications acceptable.

Getting On

- Although digital technology is always developing, film and television use different skills. It is still rare to cross over from one to the other.
- Increasingly work is short term and offered on a freelance basis. There are a few permanent jobs in broadcasting companies, but these are very much in demand. Hiring an agent will help you find short term contracts.
- When you do get a camera job, expect to do a long 'apprenticeship' before moving on.
- When you have a track record of success you can perhaps move on to be a senior camera operator and then a director of photography, with responsibility for managing the team. You must be prepared to move about the country to find work.

More Information

If you are aged 18 or over you may be interested in [The Network](#). The Network is held each year alongside the TV Festival in Edinburgh. If selected you would attend for four free days of masterclasses and workshops which will provide you with the skills, knowledge and contacts to start a career in TV. You can usually apply from February to April.

The BBC runs a number of early careers apprenticeships in different areas of media and broadcasting. Follow [@BBCGETIN](#) Instagram to stay up to date. See the [BBC Trainee Schemes website](#) for more details.

Trainee Finder is ScreenSkills flagship new entrant programme which offers paid work placements across a range of roles in film and TV. Recruitment will usually begin around September of the year before placement. Find out more and apply online by visiting the [Film Trainee Finder website](#).

Contacts

4 Careers

Website: careers.channel4.com/4skills

X: [@Channel4Skills](#)

Facebook: www.facebook.com/Channel4Skills

BBC Academy

Website: www.bbc.co.uk/academy

BECTU Scotland (Broadcasting Entertainment Cinematograph and Theatre Union)

Tel: 0141 370 1590
Email: info@bectu.org.uk
Website: www.bectu.org.uk
Website (2): careersmart.org.uk
X: @bectu
Facebook: www.facebook.com/BECTUOfficial

British Film Institute

Website: www.bfi.org.uk
X: @BFI
Facebook: www.facebook.com/BritishFilmInstitute

Edinburgh TV Festival

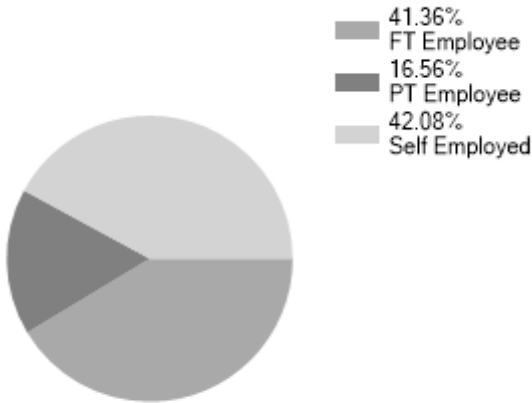
Website: www.thetvfestival.com
Facebook: www.facebook.com/edinburghtvfest

ScreenSkills

Tel: 020 7713 9800
Email: info@screenskills.com
Website: www.screenskills.com
X: @UKScreenSkills
Facebook: www.facebook.com/UKScreenSkills

Statistics

Employment Status UK %

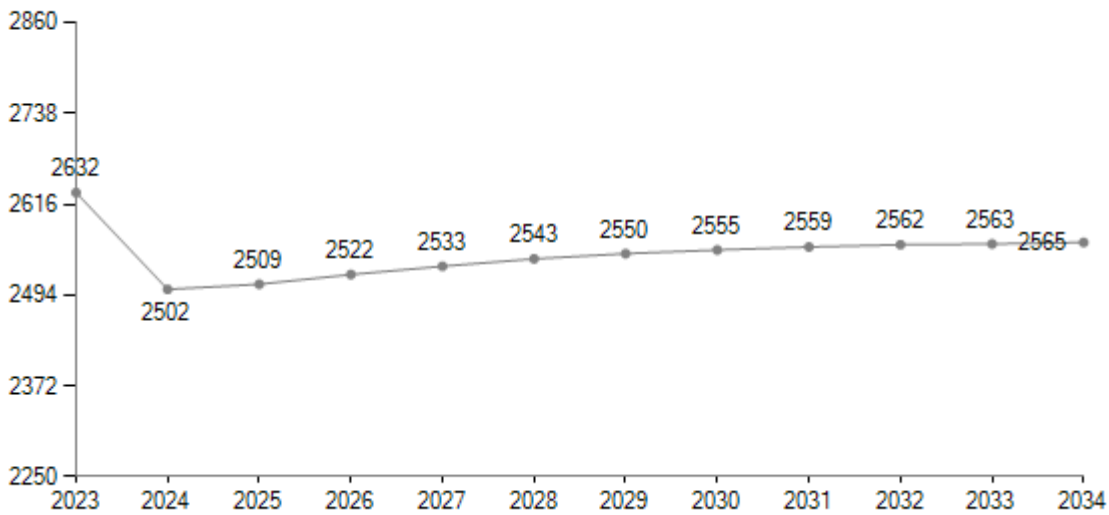


Past Unemployment - Scotland

No Claimant statistics available for Scotland.

LMI data powered by [LMI for All](#)

Predicted Employment in Scotland



LMI data powered by [Lightcast](#)