

Waiter or Waitress

A waiter or waitress works in a bar, restaurant, hotel or for a catering company taking customers' orders, carrying the meal from the kitchen to the table. They may work in a specialised area such as silver service or wine service.

The Work

You could be:

- setting the tables with cloths, napkins, cutlery and decorations such as flowers
- welcoming the diners and showing them to a table, answering questions about the menu and recommending wine
- writing down or remembering orders for food and drink and taking the order into the kitchen
- carrying each course of the meal from the kitchen to the table
- in silver service, serving food onto diners' plates from a platter balanced on your arm
- watching the diners to see when they are ready for the next course and collecting dirty plates
- printing off the bill, taking payment by cash, debit or credit card and giving change and the receipt
- cleaning and setting the tables for the next diners
- dealing with several tables at once, each at a different stage of the meal.

Pay

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

- where you work
- the size of the organisation you work for
- the demand for the job.

Starting pay is often based on the National Minimum Wage (NMW) or the National Living Wage (NLW).

As of 1 April 2026 the National Minimum Wage is £8.00 an hour for workers under 18, £10.85 an hour for workers aged 18 to 20. The National Living Wage for those aged 21 and over is £12.71 an hour.

With experience and depending on the type of establishment, you could earn up to £15.00 an hour or more. Tips can boost your earnings.

Conditions

- You work shifts, including early mornings, evenings and weekends.
- Part time work is common.
- Kitchens are often hot, crowded and noisy.
- You are on your feet the whole time.
- You have to carry several heavily laden plates at once, balancing them on your arms or on a tray.
- You may have to wear a uniform.

Getting In

- You do not need formal qualifications but a good general education is useful.
- You might get in through a Modern Apprenticeship in Hospitality (Food and Beverage Service pathway) at SCQF Level 5.
- You could study the Foundation Apprenticeship in Hospitality (SCQF Level 4 or 5) in S3-S6, which can help to get into a relevant Modern Apprenticeship.
- Excellent customer service skills are more important than formal qualifications.
- Licensed restaurants want you to be over 18 as you may be serving alcohol.

Jobs are in restaurants, hotels, works canteens, hospitals, nursing homes and catering companies. Because turnover is high there are usually a lot of vacancies in job centres both for experienced and inexperienced servers.

What Does It Take

You should have:

- a smart appearance
- a good understanding of hygiene
- a friendly, helpful, polite manner
- good communication skills
- a good memory to remember orders for different tables
- a steady hand - for carrying piles of hot and cold dishes
- energy and stamina.

You need to be:

- patient and tolerant
- alert - to react to customers' needs
- aware of health and safety
- able to multitask
- calm when things get busy.

Training

- Once you have had some basic experience you can go on to train in specialist skills, such as silver service, hygiene, health and safety or knowledge of wines and spirits.
- If doing the Modern Apprenticeship, you would work towards the SVQ in Hospitality Services (Food and Beverage pathway) at SCQF Level 5.
- There are SVQs in Food and Beverage Service at SCQF Level 5.

Getting On

- Promotion prospects are better in larger restaurants or hotels. You can move into specialist posts, such as wine server.
- After experience and some training you can move on to head server, assistant restaurant manager,

restaurant manager.

- You might move into another area of restaurant work such as purchasing, stock control, or accounts.

Contacts

Springboard

Email: info@springboarduk.org.uk

Website: careerscope.uk.net

Website (2): springboard.uk.net

X: [@CareerScope_](https://twitter.com/CareerScope)

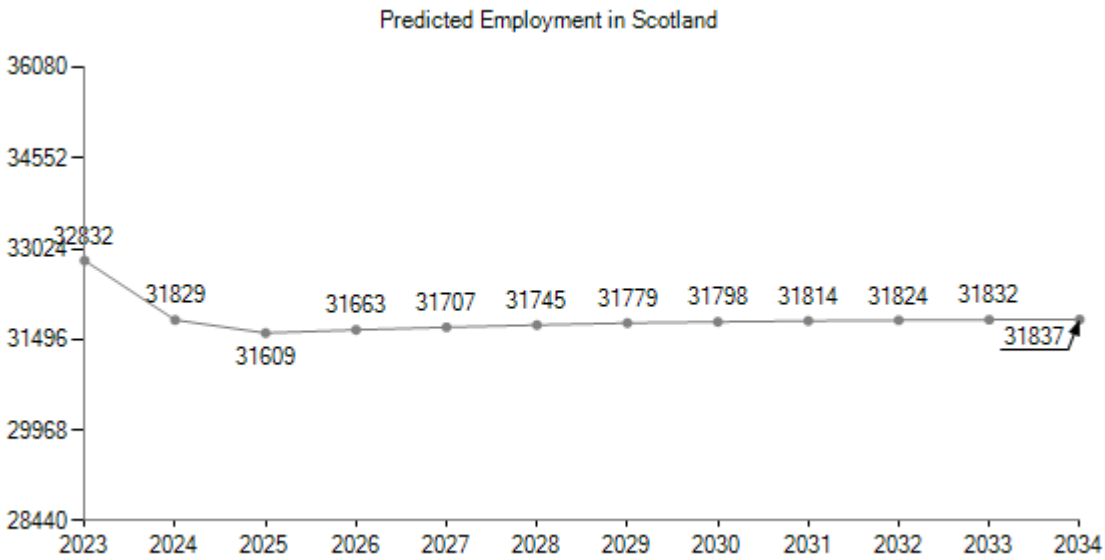
Facebook: www.facebook.com/SpringboardUKCharity

Statistics

Employment Status : Not available this career.

Past Unemployment - Scotland

No Claimant statistics available for Scotland.



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