

Arborist

Arborists plant and take care of trees and other woody plants. They make sure that trees are healthy, safe and protected from damage and disease. They are sometimes called tree surgeons.

The Work

You could be:

- carrying out surveys and assessing trees using specialist equipment
- taking a variety of measures to control or get rid of diseases
- growing seedlings or cuttings, planting young trees and shrubs and caring for them
- pruning and carrying out tree surgery, including climbing trees (with a rope and harness) and using a chainsaw to cut branches
- felling, reducing and thinning trees
- driving vehicles, including tractors with trailers, possibly with lifting equipment
- planning new areas of woodland or conserving existing ones
- recruiting and training staff
- giving advice to the public on how to look after trees and other tree specific issues.

You could also be:

- reviewing planning applications for new sites
- writing reports for solicitors, mortgage and insurance companies on whether a tree is likely to cause building damage or subsistence
- ensure tree growth does not affect public paths or electricity cables.

Pay

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

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

Apprentice arborists will be paid the minimum wage for apprentices in Scotland. The apprentice rate, for those aged under 19 or aged 19 or over and in the first year of their apprenticeship, is £8.00 an hour (1 April 2026).

Starting salaries for arborists at assistant or technician level range from £17,000 to £20,000 a year. Skilled arborists earn between £30,000 and £45,000 a year. The earnings of arborists who are self-employed will vary. They charge a fee which is based on the job to be done.

Conditions

- There are posts in both urban and rural areas.

- Most of your working time would be spent outdoors.
- Your working conditions could be wet, cold, windy, dusty and noisy.
- You have to climb and work high up in trees, sometimes carrying heavy equipment (using safety gear).
- You would wear protective clothing and footwear, including gloves and boots.
- Working hours are normally 35-40 a week, but vary at different times of year.

Getting In

There is no single entry route to this career, but a good general education is useful.

- You could start as an arboricultural worker and study part time for qualifications to allow you to move up to more senior positions.
- You may get in through a Modern Apprenticeship leading to an SVQ. There is a framework available in Trees and Timber at SCQF Level 5.
- Full time courses in arboriculture, amenity horticulture, forestry and related subjects are available at a variety of levels, from NC/NQ (SCQF Level 4-6) to HNC (SCQF Level 7) and HND (SCQF Level 8).
- The entry requirements for NC and NQ courses vary from no formal requirements to 4-5 subjects at National 4 or 5. For HNC and HND courses, the normal requirement is 1-2 Highers and subjects at National 5, or other relevant national qualifications.
- You could take a degree (SCQF Level 9/10) in forestry or a similar subject. Entry requirements are normally 4-5 Highers, sometimes including 2 from Maths and science or technological subjects.
- Previous work experience in a tree nursery, or in forestry or agriculture is helpful.
- You usually need a full, clean driving licence.
- You need to be fit as there is a lot of active work including climbing.

You could work for a local authority, national park, private estate, landscaping firm, garden centre or private contractor.

What Does It Take

You need to be:

- keen to work outdoors
- strong, fit, healthy and agile
- good with your hands
- able to read maps or plans
- able to work alone and as part of a team
- safety conscious, responsible and reliable.

You need to have:

- a head for heights
- an interest in trees, plants and the environment
- knowledge of trees and shrubs
- good communication skills.

Training

- You would train and gain experience on the job.
- You would also study part time for qualifications at a level appropriate to you. There are various relevant short courses at local colleges.
- You would work towards certificates of competency, such as using chainsaws with safety equipment and harness.
- The Modern Apprenticeship in Trees and Timber at SCQF Level 5 leads to an SVQ in Trees and Timber. At SCQF Level 6, there is a choice to specialise in either Arboriculture or General Woodland and Forestry Treework.
- You might be able to take a part time or distance learning course leading to an SVQ, a degree or a postgraduate qualification.
- You could study for one of the qualifications awarded by the [Arboricultural Association](#) or the [Royal Forestry Society \(RFS\)](#).

Getting On

- With experience, you may get a supervisory job, with responsibility for other staff.
- You might be able to set up your own business, but this can require quite a lot of money.
- There are good opportunities in parts of Europe, Australia, New Zealand, the USA and Canada for well qualified and experienced arborists.

Contacts

Arboricultural Association

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X: [@ArbAssociation](#)

Facebook: www.facebook.com/ArbAssociation/app/?sk=app_2309869772

Chartered Institute of Horticulture

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Institute of Chartered Foresters (ICF)

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Lantra Scotland

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Royal Forestry Society (RFS)

Tel: 01295 678588

Email: rfshq@rfs.org.uk

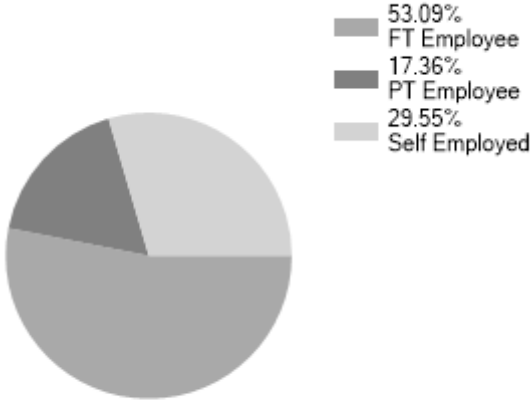
Website: www.rfs.org.uk

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

Facebook: www.facebook.com/RoyalForestrySociety

Statistics

Employment Status UK %

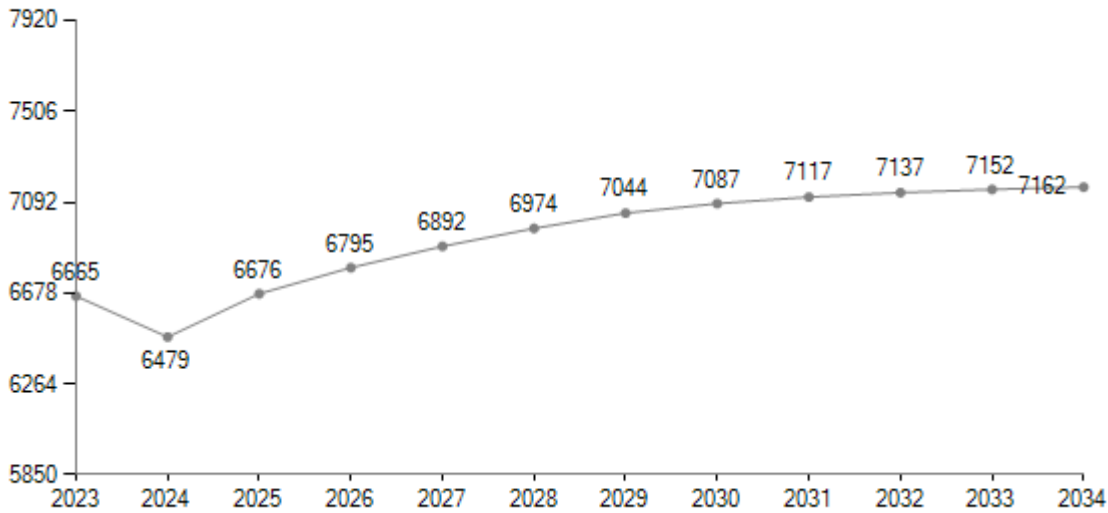


Past Unemployment - Scotland

No Claimant statistics available for Scotland.

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

Predicted Employment in Scotland



LMI data powered by [Lightcast](#)