

Animal Care Assistant

Animal care assistants look after the animals in their care by making sure they are kept clean, comfortable, exercised and fed. They look after animals such as cats, dogs, rabbits, hamsters, guinea pigs or birds.

They are also known as animal boarding assistants or kennel or cattery workers. They may also work in rescue centres helping rehome animals.

The Work

You could be:

- cleaning out and disinfecting the living and sleeping areas and changing the bedding
- preparing food, including any special diets needed, and feeding the animals
- taking dogs for walks outside or exercising them in a yard
- looking after sick animals and calling the vet if needed
- grooming animals and making sure they are clean
- giving animals medicine or tablets, or treating them for fleas or parasites
- advising owners or customers on animal care
- showing animals available for adoption to possible new owners
- maintaining and monitoring animal records, taking bookings, dealing with payments and handling enquiries.

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.

Pay rates for new entrants to the job of animal care assistant vary. 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.

Pay rises with experience, and some employers may pay higher rates.

Salaries for animal care assistants in the SSPCA are between £17,000 and £24,000 a year. A dog care and welfare assistant with Guide Dogs earns around £19,000 to £21,500.

Conditions

- You might work in a boarding premises where owners leave pets to go on holiday, a quarantine centre, a

breeding centre or where abandoned animals are kept. There are also charity kennels such as those run by Guide Dogs (working name for Guide Dogs for the Blind Association).

- The working conditions can be dirty, smelly and noisy.
- Animals can sometimes bite or scratch.
- The working hours can be long and unsocial, including weekends, evenings and sometimes shift work.
- In some cases you might have to live-in.
- Boarding centres are busier at holiday times.
- It can be upsetting when animals are ill or injured, have been badly treated or are unwanted.

Getting In

- A good general education is useful. Some employers may ask for a few subjects at National 4 or 5.
- Enthusiasm and a real interest in working with animals can be just as important as academic qualifications.
- You could take a college course such as an NC (SCQF Levels 4-6) or HNC (SCQF Level 7) in animal care before applying for your first job. Entry requirements for NC courses range from no formal requirements to 5 subjects at National 4 or 5 including English, while HNC courses require 1-2 Highers or an NC.
- Previous work experience caring for animals is useful and sometimes essential.
- You need to be fit enough to do physical work.
- You may possibly need a driving licence for some jobs.
- Some employers advise you to get the anti-tetanus vaccination.

What Does It Take

You need to be able to:

- handle small animals and enjoy working with them
- calm down anxious or uncontrolled animals
- follow instructions
- communicate well with people when finding new homes for unwanted animals
- notice changes in animals' behaviour or physical wellbeing
- work on your own
- cope with upsetting situations, such as injured or mistreated animals.

You should also be:

- reliable and responsible
- not squeamish
- fit enough to do active tasks
- committed to animal welfare.

Training

- You would train on the job with your employer.
- You may also be able to study part time at college for a relevant qualification, such as an NC or SVQ in Animal Care at SCQF Levels 5 and 6.

- You can also do an online learning course to gain a Level 2 Diploma in Animal Care with the College of Animal Welfare.

Getting On

- In larger organisations, and with sufficient experience, you may be able to become a supervisor or manager.
- You may be able to set up and run your own kennel or cattery, or work for a national organisation such as an animal charity.
- You may also be able to consider moving into related careers such as dog training, veterinary nursing or inspection work with the Scottish SPCA.

Contacts

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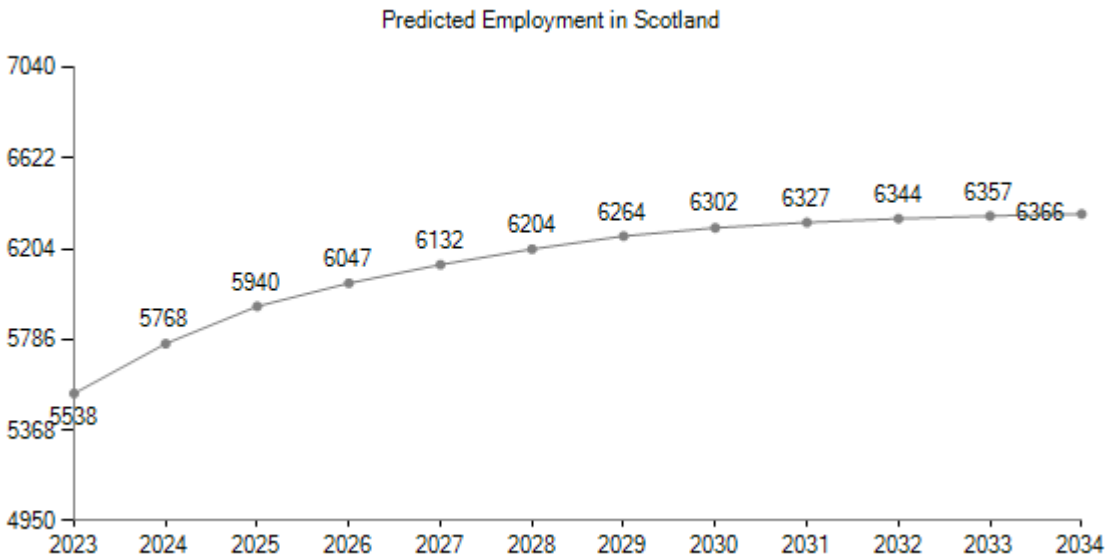
Facebook: www.facebook.com/scottishspca

Statistics

Employment Status : Not available this career.

Past Unemployment - Scotland

No Claimant statistics available for Scotland.



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