

## Outdoor Activities Instructor or Leader

An outdoor activities instructor or leader teaches individuals and groups, of all ages and abilities, outdoor based activities and watersports such as hillwalking, abseiling, orienteering, canoeing, sailing, skiing and snowboarding.

### The Work

You could be:

- assessing the ability of a client group and developing a suitable programme of training or activities for them
- checking the weather forecast, deciding whether to go ahead with planned activities, and taking responsibility for the safety of participants regardless of age
- driving a minibus to take a group to the starting point either locally or abroad and arranging overnight accommodation, perhaps in youth hostels, campsites or marinas
- guiding a group across rough or mountainous terrain, using a hand-held satellite navigator, map or traditional compass to plot the route to take
- showing them new skills and helping them gain confidence
- contacting rescue services in emergencies
- maintaining equipment and checking that it is safe
- helping run an outdoor centre – keeping records of students and activities and writing reports
- giving talks to students on outdoor topics such as survival and organising evening social activities.

### Pay

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

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

Pay can vary depending on the employer and conditions. It could be based on the National Minimum Wage. 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).

Some jobs may include accommodation/food and a salary, which could be around £20,500. For a job with a standalone salary, this could be up to £30,000 a year.

If you work freelance, wages could be £100 to £180 a day or more plus expenses.

### Conditions

- You will work outdoors in all weather conditions.
- Your working hours will include evenings and weekends.
- Activities and trips may last from one day to several weeks.

- Part time and seasonal work is common.
- You might be away from home or from the centre, possibly living in a tent or on a boat, for several days at a time.
- You might have to carry a rucksack packed with heavy equipment about.

## Getting In

Outdoor education centres (except those where members of an organisation run courses for other members of the same organisation, or where parents accompany young people) must meet the regulations of the Adventure Activities Licensing Service run by the [Health and Safety Executive](#) (HSE) which arranges licences for staff. See the HSE website for more details. There are several ways into this career.

- An NQ or NC (SCQF Levels 4-6) in outdoor pursuits, sports coaching or sports studies – you do not normally need entry qualifications but for some courses you need 3 subjects at National 4 or 5. Extracurricular activities such as the Duke of Edinburgh Award scheme can also be useful.
- An HNC (SCQF Level 7) or HND (SCQF Level 8) or degree (SCQF Levels 9-10) qualification in an outdoor pursuits subject – for entry you usually need 1-2 Highers for HNC or HND, 4-5 Highers for a degree.
- Glasgow Kelvin College offers an HND in Coaching and Developing Sport: Adventure Sports.
- Several of University of the Highlands and Islands colleges offer the degree in Adventure Performance and Coaching, and Outdoor Education and Learning. See the UHI website for details.
- The University of Stirling offers a BSc Honours degree in Environmental Science and Outdoor Education and Environmental Geography and Outdoor Education.
- Alternatively, you could enter this profession through a Modern Apprenticeship in Active Leisure, Learning and Wellbeing at SCQF Level 6.
- Instructors' certificates or proficiency awards from the national governing bodies of each of the sports you wish to teach. Usually instructors will have proficiency awards or instructor qualifications in at least two relevant sporting activities.

You need:

- to be at least 18 years of age (21 if you will be driving a minibus)
- to be very fit and have a lot of practical experience in your chosen sport(s)
- a lifesaving qualification if doing water based activities
- a first aid qualification
- a driving licence, preferably including D1 Category (minibus)
- you will require a satisfactory criminal record check from [Disclosure Scotland](#) to show that you are suitable for this type of work. Contact Disclosure Scotland for details on the type you would need.

There are jobs in local authority outdoor centres, centres run by sports bodies and private activity holiday centres. Note that to work in a local authority centre, you may need a teaching qualification – check with the local authority.

## What Does It Take

You should be:

- energetic, with a lot of stamina
- physically fit
- good at explaining and demonstrating skills and equipment
- enthusiastic and willing to try new things
- able to get on with people from all backgrounds
- patient – to deal with people at all levels of ability
- a good leader and organiser.

You need to be:

- knowledgeable about team building
- able to judge situations outdoors – to make sure conditions are safe
- able to remain calm, and use your initiative, in an emergency
- careful and willing to pay attention to detail – when setting and reading a digital navigator, a compass or map, gauging distance and direction, or repairing equipment.

You must have a responsible attitude to health and safety. The ability to swim is normally required.

## Training

- If you are a Modern Apprentice, you would train on the job and study part time for SVQ Outdoor Programmes at SCQF Level 6.
- You could take coaching and instructing certificates in other outdoor sports to increase your range of expertise. Specialist courses are available for mountain leader, kayak and canoe instructor and ski and snowboard instructor.
- You could develop your skills to become an Accredited Practitioner of the Institute of Outdoor Learning (APIOL).
- You could take professional courses and qualifications through the Chartered Institute for the Management of Sport and Physical Activity (CIMSPA).
- You could take a first aid course such as the ITC Certificate in Outdoor First Aid.
- You need to keep your skills up to date including your first aid certificate.
- You must be willing to learn new skills.

## Getting On

- After gaining experience, and particularly if you have the APIOL or qualifications in leisure and recreation management, you might become manager of an activity centre.
- You could become self-employed, leading groups on your own expeditions and activity holidays in the UK or abroad.

## More Information

Interest in outdoor sports and activity holidays is increasing and VisitScotland is encouraging active tourism throughout Scotland. So there are more jobs for outdoor experts who are able to teach others. Your prospects are better if you have qualifications in at least two activities. Some centres specialise in outdoor activities for people

with disabilities.

For more information please see organisations listed below:

- [British Mountaineering Council](#) (BMC)
- [Chartered Institute for the Management of Sport and Physical Activity](#) (CIMSPA)
- [Institute for Outdoor Learning](#) (IOL)

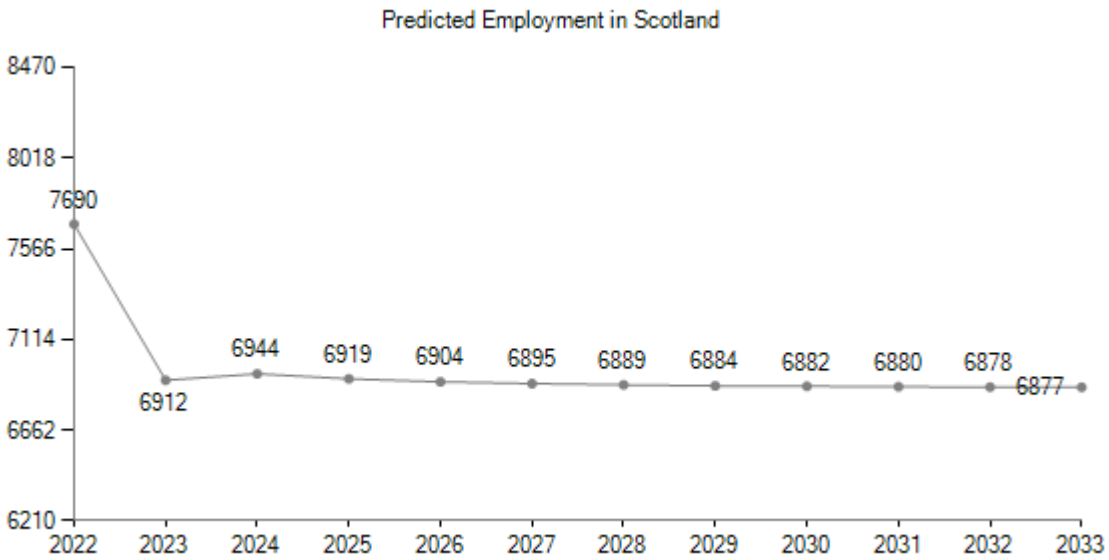
## Contacts

**Statistics**

Employment Status : Not available this career.

**Past Unemployment - Scotland**

No Claimant statistics available for Scotland.



LMI data powered by [Lightcast](#)