Forklift Truck Operator

A forklift truck operator uses a forklift truck to load, unload, move and stack heavy goods which are stored on wooden trays or pallets or in wire cages, or to move materials around construction sites.

The Work

You could be:

- picking up the load, usually on pallets or crates, using the truck's lifting equipment
- checking that the load on the forklift truck is secure
- making sure there are no obstacles on your route, or any other safety risks
- using the controls to drive the truck forwards and backwards
- sometimes driving in tight spaces and on slopes
- unloading the goods and stacking them, ensuring any fragile items are handled correctly
- inspecting the truck and equipment for faults and doing minor repairs
- stacking empty pallets and crates
- sometimes helping with other tasks, such as loading or unloading lorries.

Pay

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

- where you work
- the size of the company or 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 £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.

Newly trained forklift drivers can earn around £22,000 a year. With experience this can rise to £28,000 a year. In some cases senior forklift drivers can earn over £30,000 a year if operating certain types of forklift.

Conditions

- You might work in a factory, goods yard, haulage depot, store, warehouse or on a construction site.
- You may have to work in cold and draughty, noisy or dusty conditions.
- In some cases, you would have to work outside in all weathers.
- Your hours of work would vary depending on the company, but might include shift work, evenings and weekends.

Getting In

- No formal qualifications are required but you may have to pass an aptitude test.
- You must have completed approved training before using the forklift. This may be provided by your employer.
- You must be over 18 to drive a forklift truck unsupervised, however training can be started earlier.
- You need to be fit.
- You may need to pass a medical examination.
- If working on a construction site, you would need the relevant CSCS (Construction Skills Certification Scheme) card.
- You may get into this type of work through a Modern Apprenticeship in Freight Logistics: Warehousing and Storage at SCQF Level 5.

What Does It Take

You need to be:

- responsible
- accurate in your work
- good at judging weights and distances
- aware of safety matters
- able to follow written instructions and keep records.

You should have:

- patience and good concentration
- the ability to work both quickly and efficiently
- good co-ordination.

Training

- Initial training is usually provided by your employer either through an internal or external training organisation or a forklift truck manufacturer.
- The course would normally take between 1 and 5 days and include practical instruction, health and safety issues and basic truck maintenance.
- The initial training would be followed by on the job training supervised by an experienced operator.
- You may work towards a Scottish Vocational Qualification (SVQ) in Warehousing, Storage and Distribution (SCQF Levels 5 and 6).

Getting On

- You might train for the different types of forklift licences including Counterbalance, Reach Truck and Telescopic.
- After experience, you may be able to gain promotion to a supervisory position.
- You could train to be an instructor of other forklift truck drivers.
- There can be opportunities to move on to other work within the storage and warehouse sector such as a plant or crane operator, or a plant mechanic.

Contacts

Statistics

Past Unemployment - Scotland

No Claimant statistics available for Scotland.

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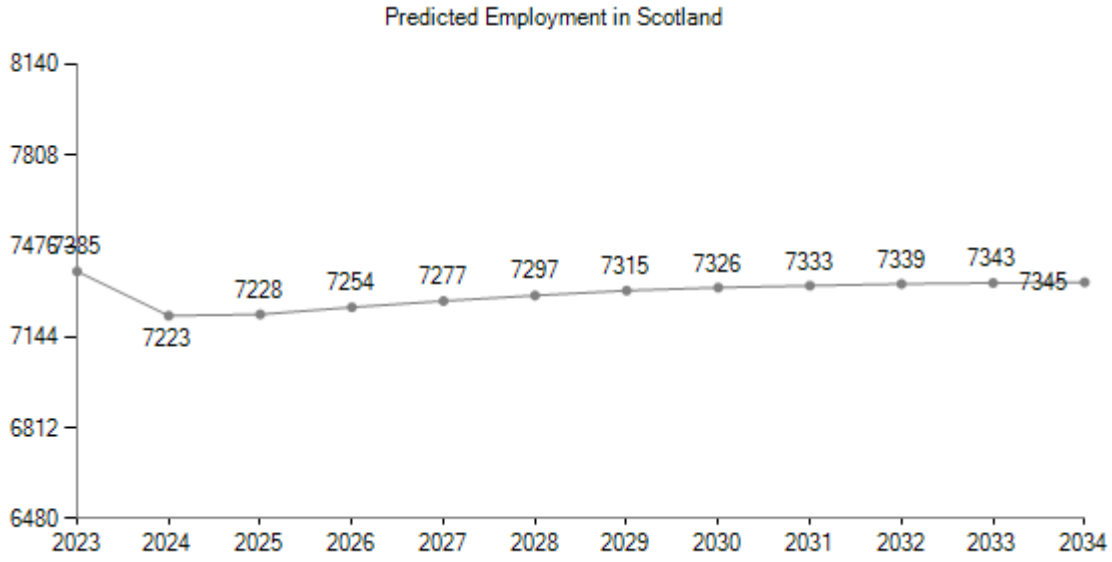

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