

Airline Pilot

Airline pilots fly aircraft on long-haul and short-haul flights transporting passengers and/or cargo. They direct the crew and are responsible for the safety of everyone on board.

The Work

You could be:

- following a flight plan which takes into account weather, passenger numbers, cargo weight and aircraft type
- confirming planned flight altitude, path and speed with crew members and air traffic control
- checking the instruments
- supervising the refuelling and loading of the aircraft
- operating the controls, particularly during take-off and landing
- using computers to control and monitor the plane's performance
- keeping radio contact with air traffic controllers
- informing passengers over the tannoy about flight conditions
- writing a flight report after landing.

Pay

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

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

Starting salaries for Junior First Officers are around £24,000 to £28,000 a year, depending on the type of aircraft and the rating required. First Officers can earn up to £48,000, Senior First Officers up to £58,000 with some of the European airlines. Captains can earn £80,000 - £90,000, rising up to £200,000 flying for large international airlines.

Conditions

- As a short-haul pilot you would usually work the same shift pattern over long periods, spending nights at home, unless delayed for some reason.
- As a long-haul pilot you would work long, irregular and unpredictable hours, often spending nights in hotels abroad. You would have to constantly adjust to different time zones and perhaps suffer from jet lag.
- You regularly have to undergo tests, both medical and aptitude.
- You must live near an airport so that you can go to work at short notice.
- You would spend long periods sitting in a locked enclosed space.
- You work in a team of two.
- You usually wear a uniform.

Getting In

To become an airline pilot you need to obtain the full Air Transport Pilot Licence (ATPL).

There are 4 main routes to achieve this:

- integrated training for an Air Transport Pilot Licence (ATPL) with Instrument Rating (IR)
- training for a Private Pilot's Licence (PPL) followed by modular training for the ATPL and IR
- company training schemes for the Multi-crew Pilot Licence (MPL)
- training to become a pilot in the armed services followed by a civil aviation conversion course for the ATPL and IR.

You cannot achieve the full ATPL until you are at least 21 years old.

Integrated Training for the Air Transport Pilot Licence (ATPL) and Instrument Rating (IR)

- Entrants either have to finance themselves through training or obtain full or partial sponsorship from an airline. Training is expensive and students who finance themselves should expect to pay around £90,000 or more.
- There are also some bursaries and loans available – see the [Acron Aviation Academy](#) for more information. Training usually lasts around 18 months.
- Entry to a Civil Aviation Authority (CAA) approved training school or airline sponsored training programme normally requires a minimum of 5 subjects at National 5, including English, Maths and a science subject.
- Before being accepted onto the integrated programme, applicants have to pass a selection test to demonstrate aptitude and suitability.
- [Buckinghamshire New University](#) offers a number of aviation related degrees that include pilot training.
- The CAA publishes a list of approved pilot training courses on its website.

Training for the Private Pilot's Licence, followed by Modular Training for the ATPL and Instrument Rating (IR)

- You can begin private flying lessons from the age of 14, but can't fly solo until the age of 16. Once you are 17 or over and have completed the training, you can have your Private Pilot's Licence (PPL).
- The PPL does not allow you to fly commercially or become an airline pilot. However, you can go on to take separate training modules for the Commercial Pilot's Licence (CPL), the IR, followed by the ATPL.
- This modular route takes longer but is less expensive, costing around £45,000, although you still need to cover the costs of the private flying lessons.

Company training scheme for the Multi-crew Pilot Licence (MPL)

- Some airlines offer sponsored training through special schemes. For example British Airways' Speedbird Pilot Academy, Virgin Atlantic's Future Flyers Programme and Jet2 Flight Path.
- The training leads to a Multi-crew Pilot Licence, which means that you are qualified to fly a particular type of aircraft with a certain airline.
- Pilots with the MPL can only fly as first officers. In order to progress to captain they need to obtain the ATPL.
- Entry requirements and sponsorship arrangements vary. Airline and training provider websites specify

details.

Armed services training followed by a civil aviation conversion course

- You can enter the Army, Royal Navy, Royal Marines or Royal Air Force as a trainee pilot.
- There are a limited number of vacancies each year and competition is intense.
- On leaving the armed services, qualified pilots can take civil aviation conversion courses to allow them to gain their CPL, IR and ATPL.
- Further information on careers in the armed services can be found in the Uniformed and Security Services career area on this website and from Armed Forces Careers Offices throughout the country.

Whatever the training route you choose, you must:

- be physically fit and able to pass a CAA Class One Medical examination, which includes tests for, amongst other things, sight, hearing, heart and breathing
- be able to meet the strict security criteria of airlines and airports in order to obtain a pass enabling you to work 'airside'.

Most jobs require applicants to have a specific minimum of hours of commercial flying experience. There is no shortage of qualified pilots in the world, but there is a shortage of pilots who have managed to clock up the necessary hours of flying experience to allow them to apply for most jobs. Until you have achieved this experience, your ATPL is 'frozen'.

What Does It Take

You need to have:

- discipline and commitment
- a responsible approach
- knowledge of safety issues
- confidence
- practical and analytical skills
- spatial awareness
- good co-ordination
- excellent communication skills.

You need to be able to:

- absorb, remember and apply a lot of technical information
- communicate clearly and give instructions
- concentrate on more than one thing at a time
- work with technical instruments
- react quickly
- take charge and make decisions
- stay calm in a crisis.

Training

- Pilots complete type-rating training for flying specific types of aircraft.
- Fitness continues to be vital throughout the career of a pilot. They must undergo medical and fitness tests for the whole of their career.
- At regular intervals pilots also need to undertake refresher training courses. They also receive extra training as new aircraft and instrumentation are introduced.

Getting On

- Airline pilots start as co-pilots or 'first officers' and eventually become fully qualified senior first officers.
- After about five years' experience, they can become the co-pilot on a long-haul flight.
- Promotion to captain can take between seven and ten years.
- There are opportunities for working abroad. Pilots can also transfer to other flying work, such as flying instruction, agricultural flying in remote areas or flight testing.
- There are also opportunities in management, leading to senior positions.

More Information

The [Honourable Company of Air Pilots](#) website has details of aptitude tests available for people with little or no flying experience. This could help you decide whether you are suited to this career, before you make a financial commitment to training.

The [British Women Pilots' Association \(BWPA\)](#) gives a small number of scholarships each year to new or inexperienced female pilots, providing funds towards training.

Airlines that offer sponsored or part-sponsored pilot training include British Airways and Virgin Atlantic. Relevant vacancies may be advertised on websites such as [Aviation Job Search](#).

Contacts

Acron Aviation Academy

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X: [@acron_academy](#)

British Airline Pilots Association (BALPA)

Tel: 020 8476 4000
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Website: [www.balpa.org](#)
X: [@BALPApilots](#)
Facebook: [www.facebook.com/BALPApilots](#)

Civil Aviation Authority

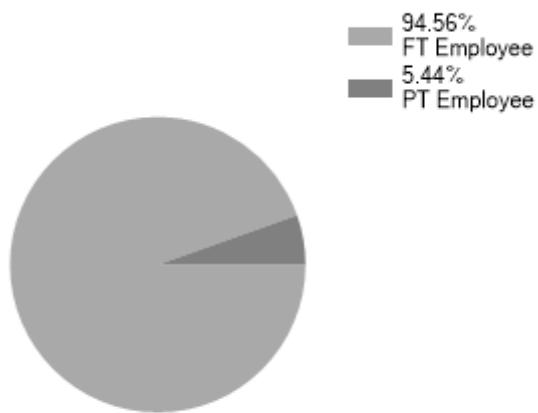
Website: [www.caa.co.uk](#)
X: [@UK_CAA](#)

Royal Aeronautical Society (RAeS)

Tel: 020 7670 4326
Email: careers@aerosociety.com
Website: [www.aerosociety.com](#)
Website (2): [www.careersinaerospace.com](#)

Statistics

Employment Status UK %

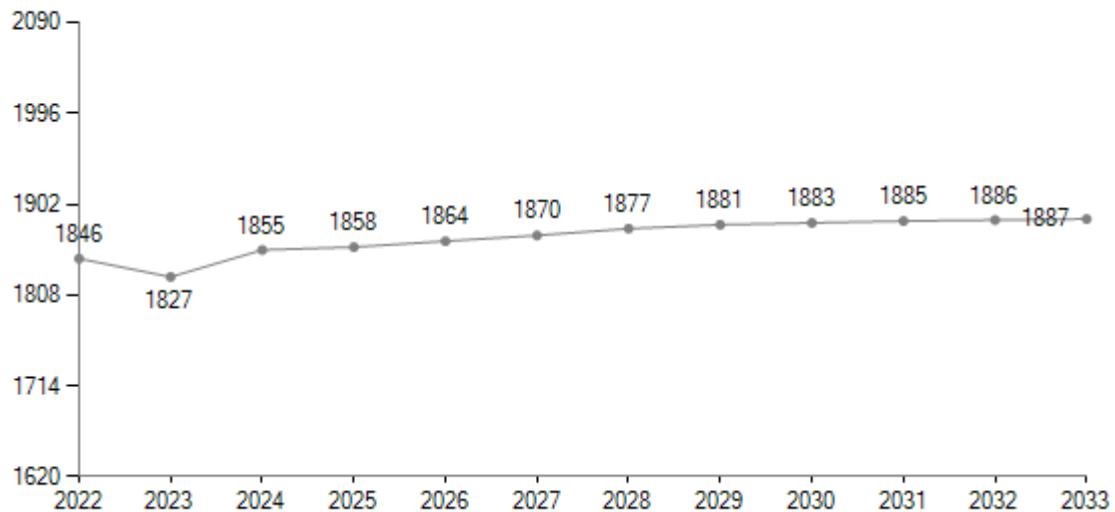


Past Unemployment - Scotland

No Claimant statistics available for Scotland.

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

Predicted Employment in Scotland



LMI data powered by [Lightcast](#)