Toolmaker

Toolmakers work with different metals, alloys and other materials known as castings to make precision tools and components such as jigs, fixtures, dies, gauges and moulds.

The Work

You could be:

- studying engineering drawings and using them to mark out the workpieces
- working with metals, alloys and castings
- making the tools using precision machines and equipment, most of which are now computer numerically controlled (CNC)
- working with a variety of equipment including lathes and machines for milling, grinding, cutting and boring
- using a polishing machine to smooth and finish the tool
- specialising in a particular type of machine, depending on the type of toolroom
- checking the accuracy and quality of the finished tool by setting up a test run
- adjusting and repairing tools which may have been damaged during use
- carrying out maintenance and repair of machines.

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.

A Modern Apprentice may start on the National Minimum Wage (NMW). 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 employers may pay their apprentices more.

The salary for qualified toolmakers is normally around £30,000 to £35,000 a year. Bonuses and extra pay for shift work are common.

Conditions

- You would work in a toolroom in a factory or workshop. In some cases, conditions might be noisy and dusty or dirty.
- You would probably have to stand for long periods of time and you have to take care to avoid accidents with machines.
- You would have to wear overalls as well as protective gear such as gloves, safety shoes, ear protectors and safety glasses.
- You would have to work around 40 hours a week and there may be shift work involved. There may be

opportunities for overtime.

Getting In

- You could complete the Engineering Foundation Apprenticeship (FA) (SCQF Level 6), while in S5 or S6 at school. Entry requirements vary between colleges, but you usually need 3 subjects at National 5 including English, Maths and Physics or a science subject. Some colleges may ask that you are studying for Higher Maths in S5.
- You could enter through a Modern Apprenticeship in engineering.
- You normally need 3-4 subjects at National 4 or 5, preferably including English, Maths and science or technological subjects.
- You may have to sit an aptitude test as part of the recruitment process.

There are opportunities for toolmakers in a wide range of both heavy and light engineering industries. These include general manufacturing, aerospace, shipbuilding and the defence industries.

What Does It Take

You need to have:

- an accurate and methodical approach
- practical and technical ability
- an eye for detail
- good computer skills if working with CNC machines
- good maths skills for taking measurements
- a good understanding of health and safety.

You need to be able to:

- understand engineering drawings
- concentrate well
- visualise the finished item
- make exact measurements and calculations
- work on your own as well as part of a team.

Training

- Training is through a Modern Apprenticeship with on the job training as well as time spent at college.
- You would work towards SVQ Mechanical Manufacturing Engineering at SCQF Level 6.
- You would do short courses to keep up to date with new technology.

Getting On

- After gaining experience, you may be able to get promoted to be a supervisor or inspector.
- Having good CNC machine skills should improve your job options.
- By taking further advanced training, you might be able to go on to a higher level of engineering such as

technician.

More Information

The Science, Engineering and Manufacturing Technologies Alliance (SEMTA) is the Sector Skills Council for science, engineering and manufacturing technologies.

The Tomorrow's Engineers website has more information on careers in engineering.

Contacts

Statistics

Past Unemployment - Scotland

No Claimant statistics available for Scotland.

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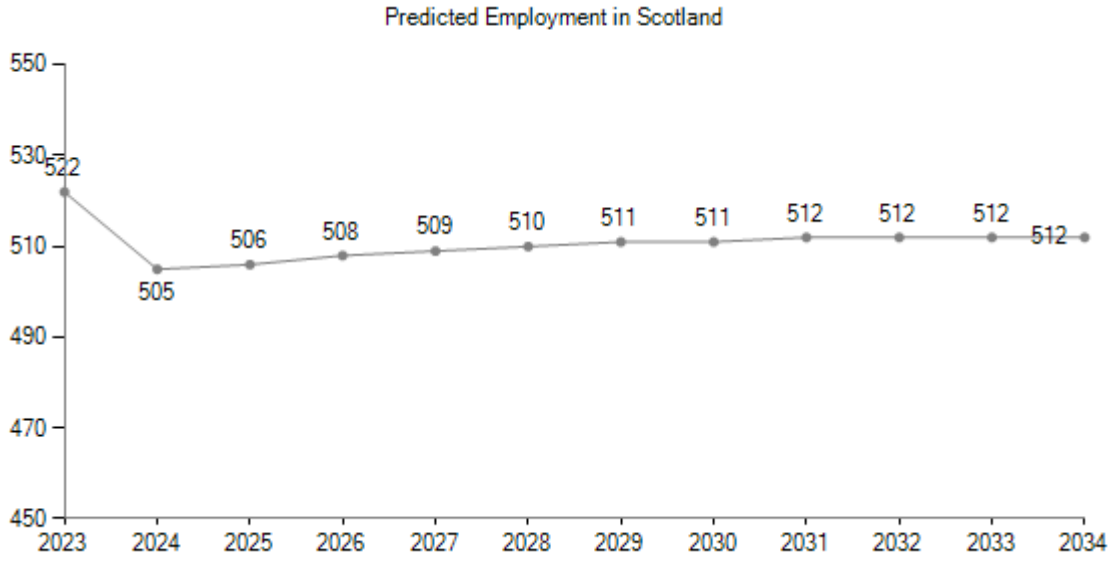

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