

Plant Operator

Plant operators drive and control machines and equipment on building sites and road works. They are known as construction plant operatives.

The Work

You could be:

- driving and operating machines such as mobile and static cranes, excavators, diggers, bulldozers, telescopic handlers, rough terrain forklifts, crushers, grinders and dump trucks
- moving earth by using levers to put lifting gear or other tools in the right place, pushing earth to one side, taking it away and flattening the ground
- looking after equipment, changing large metal buckets and other parts and doing regular safety checks
- reporting any faults to plant mechanics
- laying road surfaces
- lifting tools and heavy loads
- working with an assistant (banksman or woman) who is at ground level and directs you by hand signals or radio
- specialising in one type of equipment such as mechanical diggers or cranes.

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 may be based 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).

Qualified operators earn around £12.00 to around £15.00 an hour. With experience this can rise to around £30.00 an hour. You may often get extra pay through working overtime. You may also get a lodging allowance if you have to work away from home.

Conditions

- You work outdoors on rough muddy ground in all kinds of weather.
- You may have to do a lot of climbing about and heavy lifting.
- You have to travel to different sites and sometimes live away from home.
- You may have to work overtime, including evenings and weekends, to get the work done on time.
- Work may be seasonal, with shorter hours and layoffs in the winter.
- Sites can be dusty, dirty and noisy.
- You wear protective clothing: a hard hat, goggles, gloves and ear protectors.

Getting In

- You do not need formal qualifications but some employers ask for subjects at National 4 or 5 including English, Maths and a science or technological subject.
- You can start to train at 16, but to drive the machines you must be 18 and have a full driving licence.
- You must hold a Construction Skills Certification Scheme (CSCS) card or equivalent to work on a site. You must pass a health and safety test to qualify for this scheme.
- Plant operators who work in the construction industry must hold a Construction Plant Competence Scheme (CPCS) card. Contact [NOCN Job Cards](#) for more details.

What Does It Take

You need to be:

- careful and practical with good mechanical skills and a steady hand
- able to follow detailed spoken and written instructions
- responsible about health and safety
- able to concentrate for long periods
- good at working in a team
- physically fit to move heavy equipment
- able to work at heights.

Training

- Training on the different machines is mainly on the job through the CITB. This leads to SVQ Plant Operations (Construction) at SCQF Level 5.
- The Construction Plant Competence Scheme (CPCS) is now the main standard for the industry.
- Trainees start with a red CPCS card to get on site to gather the required work experience. Trainees must pass the relevant NOCN Job Card health, safety and environment test and complete the SVQ to qualify for the blue CPCS Competent Operator Card.

Getting On

- You may be able to move on to more specialist jobs. These include estimating, plant sales or plant co-ordination where you choose the machines for each new project and evaluate new machines.
- Many plant operators are self-employed as owner-operators or working for contractors.

Contacts

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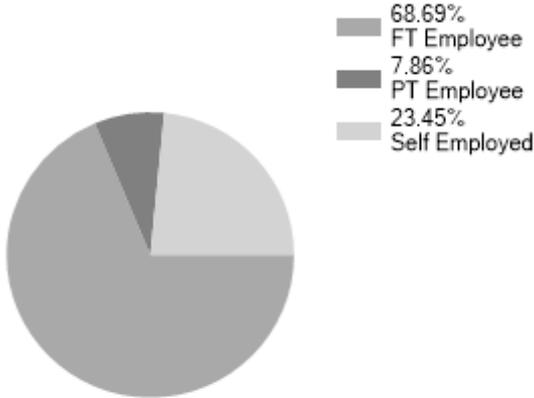
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Statistics

Employment Status UK %

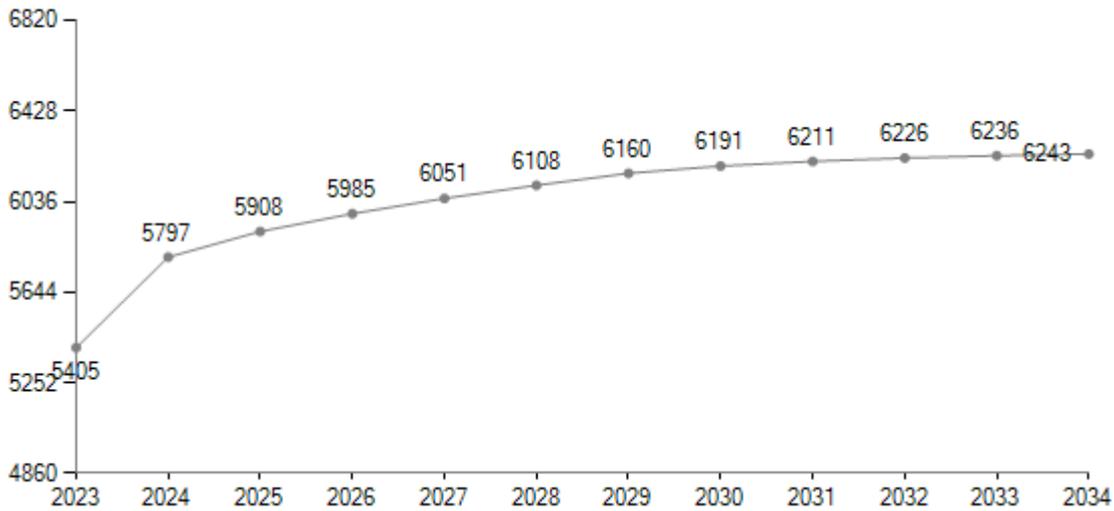


Past Unemployment - Scotland

No Claimant statistics available for Scotland.

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

Predicted Employment in Scotland



LMI data powered by [Lightcast](#)