

Abattoir Operative

An abattoir or slaughterhouse operative, or meat process worker, kills animals humanely and prepares the carcasses for the meat market.

The Work

You could be:

- controlling large, live, possibly distressed animals such as cattle, sheep or pigs and herding them off lorries
- stunning the animal first with an electric current, so that it feels no pain and killing it immediately afterwards, using a bolt pistol, gas or an electric current
- removing the skin quickly without damaging it, removing the internal organs and separating the edible parts from the waste
- washing the carcass and examining it for signs of disease
- using an electric saw to split the carcass into sections and then removing bones
- using machinery to remove bristles from a pig's skin and processing the meat
- packing meat into separate containers or packaging
- cleaning the floor area, tools and equipment
- keeping up to date on rules of health, safety and hygiene.

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. This may rise to £10.50 an hour with experience.

There are sometimes additional shift bonuses, or bonuses for attendance and timekeeping.

Conditions

- You work 37-40 hours a week, Monday to Friday, but might have some Saturday shift work and overtime.
- Inside, the abattoir may be very cold, wet, messy and smelly.
- You wear protective (perhaps warm) clothing, hat, gloves and boots.
- You lift and carry heavy carcasses.
- You handle dangerous machinery, knives and saws.

Getting In

- You do not need formal qualifications to start training.
- You must be at least 18 years of age to slaughter animals or poultry.
- You might get in through a Modern Apprenticeship and work towards Scottish Vocational Qualifications (SVQs) at SCQF Levels 5 and 6/7.
- For certain abattoir or slaughterhouse work, you must apply for a Temporary Certificate of Competence, which is valid for 3 months. During this time you must pass the assessment for a Qualification Certificate. More details are on the [Food Standards Agency](#) website.
- Smaller abattoirs are often out in the country, so a driving licence can be useful.

Although there are fewer abattoirs than there used to be due to smaller ones closing, employment prospects are good. The centralised abattoirs are much larger. Each one usually specialises in a particular kind of animal.

What Does It Take

You should be able to:

- deal with the process of killing animals without becoming distressed
- cope with blood and excrement
- handle large animals with confidence
- deal humanely with the animals
- follow food safety and hygiene rules carefully and responsibly
- use blades and machinery carefully and responsibly
- work as part of a team.

Training

- Training is mostly practical and on the job. It covers use of tools and lifting and carrying techniques.
- You might study towards SVQ in Food and Drink Operations (Livestock Market Droving Skills) at SCQF Level 5, or SVQ in Food and Drink Operations (Meat and Poultry Skills) at SCQF Levels 5 and 6.
- You might do elementary and intermediate training in hygiene through Scottish Meat Training.
- The [Scottish Craft Butchers](#) website has details on courses in meat and poultry hygiene, processing and management, run by Scottish Meat Training.

Getting On

- With experience and qualifications you could go on to become a team leader or supervisor.
- You might become an abattoir manager.
- You could perhaps become a quality or standards inspector for the Food Standards Agency.

Contacts

Scottish Craft Butchers

Tel: 01738 637472

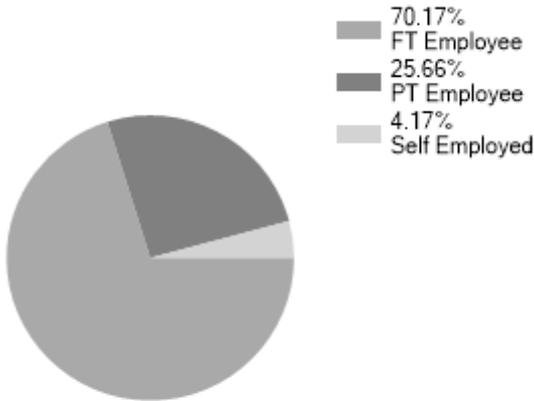
Email: craftbutchers@craftbutchers.co.uk

Website: www.craftbutchers.co.uk

X: @ScoCraftButcher

Statistics

Employment Status UK %

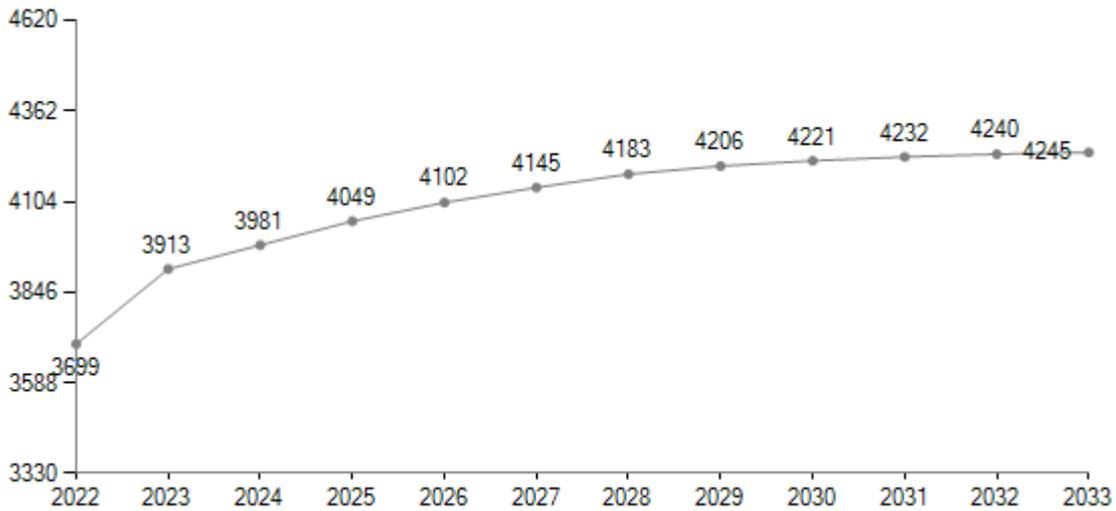


Past Unemployment - Scotland

No Claimant statistics available for Scotland.

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

Predicted Employment in Scotland



LMI data powered by [Lightcast](#)