

## Singer - Popular

Popular singers perform as soloists or as members of a band. They usually specialise in one style of music, such as jazz, rock and roll, pop, rap, rhythm and blues, folk, world or country.

### The Work

As well as solo and group singers, there are also those that sing backing vocals, work as session singers or perform in musical theatre. Some write their own songs, known as singer-songwriters. You could be:

- performing live in front of an audience, on your own or with a band
- accompanying yourself on an instrument such as guitar or piano, or singing a cappella (without backing music)
- preparing for and attending auditions
- writing the words and music for your own songs and performing them or singing cover versions of other writers' compositions
- recording music to be broadcast on TV or radio or to sell as a CD or digital download
- negotiating your own contracts (unless you have an agent)
- developing and performing dance routines to accompany songs you perform
- publicising your act by releasing recorded songs, making videos, doing interviews, performing live and using social media
- spending most of your time doing vocal exercises, practising songs and rehearsing for performances.

### Pay

A tiny minority of popular singers are seriously rich, but the vast majority must combine performing with another job to make ends meet.

Pay rates vary, depending on the venue (club, London theatre, regional theatre, pub, TV or recording studio, for example) and type of performance (live or recorded). Usually a singer is paid per gig although some might have a regular spot in a pub or club.

With any income you earn there may be expenses and fees to pay, such as manager's fee, publicity and transport costs. You may share the income with other members of the group.

It is common for back-up acts or warm-up acts to perform unpaid or in return for expenses in the hope of establishing themselves.

The Musicians' Union website shows recommended minimum pay rates (updated every year) for a range of musical performance types, including gigs and live engagements, recording and songwriting. For example, rates agreed with The British Recorded Music Industry (BPI) for session musicians currently range from £97.20 (2 hour session) up to £194.40 (4 hour session). Additional fees are paid for live recordings and commercial use of material. For casual gigs in pubs and clubs, the rate is £130.00 per musician for a three hour slot.

The Incorporated Society of Musicians (ISM) and Equity (the performers' union) carry out surveys of performers'

fees from time to time which appear on their websites.

## Conditions

- You work in recording studios, pubs or clubs and sometimes outdoors at festivals as well as performing in cabaret or musical theatre.
- You work long and unsocial hours, including evenings and weekends.
- You spend hours rehearsing and recording at home or in small studios.
- There is a risk of damage to your voice and your hearing long term.
- Singing and dancing routines can be physically exhausting.
- Theatres and concert halls can be large and intimidating, open air venues cold and wet and pubs or clubs crowded and hot.
- You may go on tour here or abroad, living for long periods in temporary accommodation. This could be hotels, hostels or even your transport — it depends on how established and successful you are.
- This is a highly competitive career, so expect job insecurity and the necessity of taking another job to make extra income.

## Getting In

- Talent, perseverance and skill in making contacts are more important than formal training.
- However, there are National Certificate (NC), Higher National Certificate and Diploma (HNC and HND) and degree courses in music, music performance and musical theatre. Entry qualifications vary depending on the level of the course. There is an interview and audition for most courses.
- There is a dedicated rock and pop exam board — Rockschool Ltd. They offer qualifications for vocal artists as well as instrumentalists. They have exam centres in Aberdeen, Edinburgh and Glasgow.
- The ability to sight read music is useful and often essential, particularly for session (casual, paid back-up) work.
- Send demo CDs or digital files of your work to session fixers, local venues and the organisers of festivals such as Celtic Connections and the Edinburgh Fringe.
- Check adverts in local recording studios and also in the music press. There are also websites where you can showcase your talents.
- Visit recording studios or send a demo CD or digital file showing the full range of your recent work to potential employers.
- Enter auditions for organised talent competitions locally or on radio or television.
- Join the Musicians' Union, to make useful contacts and to protect you against exploitation.

Most jobs are in cities, but there are opportunities in holiday resorts and in cruise ships. Even established singers often supplement their income with work as session singers or backup singers for film soundtracks, studio recordings or the advertising industry.

## What Does It Take

You need:

- excellent singing talent, with the ability to sing melody, harmony and backing vocals
- creativity

- self-discipline and determination
- a willingness to practise and work for long hours
- physical energy and stamina
- a sense of rhythm and, in some cases, the ability to dance
- networking skills
- business and negotiating skills.

You should be able to:

- portray the emotion appropriate to the song
- take criticism and rejection
- work with other people.

## Training

- Most training is on the job.
- Singers usually work with vocal coaches during their career. This helps to keep vocal cords in good condition and improves the voice, for example increasing the range of notes they can sing.

## Getting On

- You may be able to work as a singing teacher to earn extra income.
- You may be able to move into the business side of music — music promotion or music management, or work with a record or music publishing company.
- If you write your own songs and these become well known to other singers you can make money from performing rights (see More Information below).
- Many pop music careers are short lived, so plan an alternative career to take up later.

## More Information

Singer-songwriters who establish a reputation can make extra through performing rights and downloading rights — royalties paid to a songwriter whenever one of their songs is performed or downloaded from the internet.

If the songwriter is a member of a performing rights collection agency, such as Broadcast Music Inc. (BMI), or Performing Rights Society (PRS), the collection group will keep track of public performances of the songwriter's material, collect payment, and pass the royalties on to the songwriter.

Performing rights royalties are paid whenever you or someone else performs your song live, when someone else records a cover version of your song and when your song is played on:

- television and radio stations and networks
- new media, including digital jukeboxes, the internet and mobile technologies such as ringtones.

The Creative and Cultural Skills website has a section called [Creative Choices](#) which has information on working in the music industry.

## Contacts

### Equity

Tel: 020 7379 6000

Email: [info@equity.org.uk](mailto:info@equity.org.uk)

Website: [www.equity.org.uk](http://www.equity.org.uk)

X: @EquityUK

Facebook: [www.facebook.com/EquityUK](http://www.facebook.com/EquityUK)

### Independent Society of Musicians (ISM)

Tel: 020 7221 3499

Email: [membership@ism.org](mailto:membership@ism.org)

Website: [www.ism.org](http://www.ism.org)

X: @ISM\_music

Facebook: [www.facebook.com/ISMusicians](http://www.facebook.com/ISMusicians)

### Musicians' Union (MU)

Tel: 0141 341 2960

Website: [www.musiciansunion.org.uk](http://www.musiciansunion.org.uk)

Facebook: [www.facebook.com/Musicians.Union](http://www.facebook.com/Musicians.Union)

### Rockschool Ltd

Tel: 0345 460 4747

Email: [info@rslawards.com](mailto:info@rslawards.com)

Website: [www.rslawards.com](http://www.rslawards.com)

X: @RSLAwards

Facebook: [www.facebook.com/rslawards](http://www.facebook.com/rslawards)

### StarNow

Website: [www.starnow.co.uk](http://www.starnow.co.uk)

X: @StarNow

Facebook: [www.facebook.com/starnow](http://www.facebook.com/starnow)

### Traditional Music and Song Association of Scotland (TMSA)

Tel: 07922 533915

Email: [office@tmsa.org.uk](mailto:office@tmsa.org.uk)

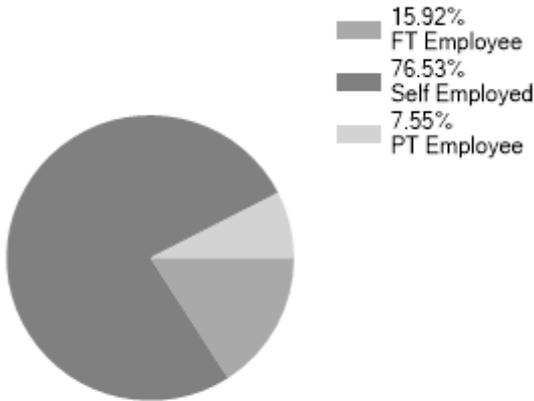
Website: [www.tmsa.org.uk](http://www.tmsa.org.uk)

X: @TMSAScotland

Facebook: [www.facebook.com/TmsaScotland](http://www.facebook.com/TmsaScotland)

Statistics

Employment Status UK %

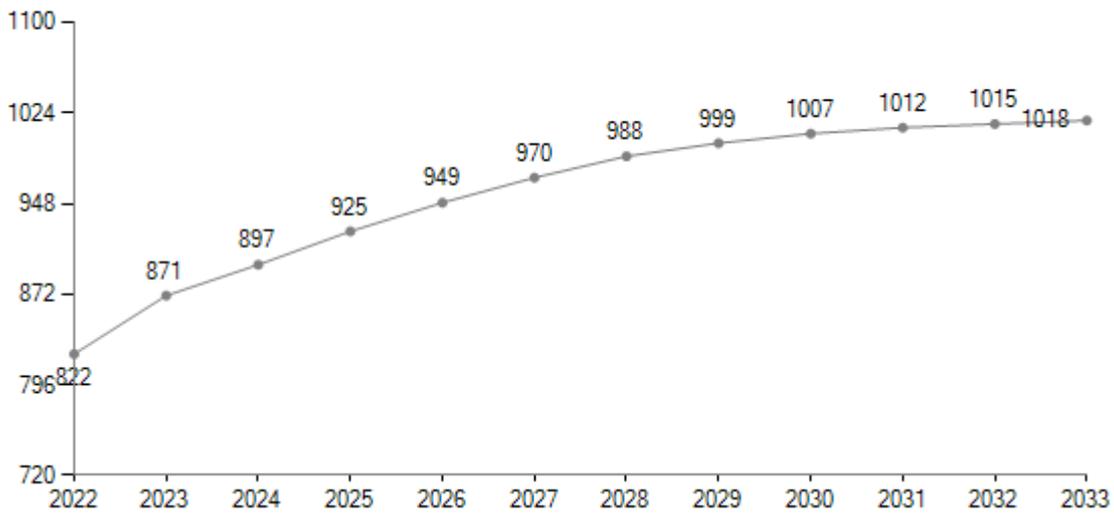


Past Unemployment - Scotland

No Claimant statistics available for Scotland.

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

Predicted Employment in Scotland



LMI data powered by [Lightcast](#)