

Derrickhand

Derrickhands are crew members on offshore oil or gas rigs. They work on a platform attached to the derrick (mast), usually about 20-25 metres above the rig floor. The derrick supports the rig's drilling assembly. Derrickhands work under the supervision of the driller.

They are also known as Drilling Fluid Operators (DFO).

The Work

You could be:

- looking after the pipe to which the oil drill is attached
- handling and stacking sections of the drill pipe
- ensuring that all valves and equipment are correctly lined up
- operating the lifting equipment when the pipe is being run in or out of the drilling hole
- mixing mud, fluids and chemicals and keeping records of usage
- controlling the mud (the lubricant used for the drill bit) that is circulated down the drill pipe when drilling
- supervising the working of the mud pumps and mixing other necessary substances into the mud
- using gauges to measure mud density and carrying out regular viscosity tests
- maintaining the condition of the system that circulates the mud, including motors, transmissions and pumps.

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.

The salary for derrickhands is normally in the range of £35,000 to £40,000 per year. (In addition, employers provide accommodation and food, as well as work clothing.) With experience, this can rise up to £45,000 or more.

Conditions

- You would work on a rig or platform outdoors. Conditions can be very cold, wet, windy, noisy and dangerous.
- There are risks of injury from accidents, especially when working at heights, as you would be much of the time.
- You would normally work offshore for 2 or 3 weeks, followed by a 2 or 3 weeks' rest period ashore. This will mean spending long periods away from your home and family.
- There is often no mobile phone signal, but there are pay phones and usually internet access.
- Alcohol is banned on rigs, and there is random alcohol and drug testing.
- When offshore, you would normally work a 12-hour shift, including rest and meal breaks, with 12 hours

off duty.

- Employers provide free accommodation (usually shared cabins) and meals. There are usually good recreational facilities.
- You would wear protective and waterproof clothing. Employers provide all necessary safety equipment such as thermal suits, gloves, boots and a hard hat.
- You have to fly by helicopter between the rig or platform and onshore.

Getting In

- You do not normally need formal qualifications for entry, but it can be useful to have some subjects at National 4 or 5.
- You must be at least 18 years of age to work offshore and have at least one year's experience working offshore to be a Derrickhand.
- You would usually start working as a roughneck (floorhand) or roustabout.
- To work offshore, you must pass an offshore survival course such as the Basic Offshore Safety Induction and Emergency Training Certificate (BOSIET). Contact OPITO for details. Some people complete the course at their own expense before looking for work. In other cases, some companies sponsor new employees through the course.
- You might also have to take the Minimum Industry Safety Training (MIST) course.
- You will need to be fit, as this job involves climbing, lifting and using heavy equipment.
- You have to pass a medical examination every 2 years.
- Regulations for working abroad, outwith UK waters, may vary.

The UK oil and gas industry is located mainly off the east coast of Scotland and England. But there are also fields west of Shetland and in the Irish Sea. Employers include operating companies (usually oil companies) that hold exploration and production licences, drilling companies with contracts to do drilling work and a wide range of other major contractors and companies offering specialist technical services. The main recruitment contacts in Scotland are in the Aberdeen area.

What Does It Take

You need to have:

- good practical hand skills
- stamina and good physical fitness
- agility and a good head for heights
- a strong sense of responsibility
- an awareness of health and safety issues at all times
- a resilient nature.

You need to be able to:

- work outdoors in all weathers
- live on a rig or platform for long periods of time
- travel by helicopter to and from the rig or platform
- live and work as a member of a team

- observe regulations and follow instructions very carefully.

Training

- Your training may start with courses leading to the MIST and BOSIET certificates, if you do not already hold these.
- Otherwise, you may begin with a five-day induction training course onshore (known as 'greenhand' training), covering information on the industry and the company, health and safety and skills training.
- You then do further on the job training offshore on the oil rig or platform.
- You may attend further short courses from time to time.
- You may be able to gain SVQ in Offshore Deck Operations at SCQF Level 5.
- You may do some driller qualification courses through the company you work for.

Getting On

- After sufficient experience, you could gain promotion to assistant driller then driller. This normally takes about 3-4 years.
- You may perhaps eventually be promoted to toolpusher or oil rig manager.
- Many of the large companies in the oil and gas industry operate throughout the world, so you may be able to work overseas.
- Depending on the job market in the sector, you might need to move around, possibly abroad, for work and to advance your career.

More Information

Although some workers spend only a short time on the rigs, many others spend most of their careers – often more than 20 years – offshore.

Most of the major oil and gas reserves in the North Sea have been worked, but new technology is allowing the exploitation of smaller and more marginal fields.

There are also good opportunities for skilled and experienced workers in other parts of the world.

Contacts

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Statistics

Employment Status : Not available this career.

Past Unemployment - Scotland

No Claimant statistics available for Scotland.

Predicted Employment Statistics : Not available this career.