Picture Researcher

Picture researchers find suitable photographs or illustrations for use in a wide range of media such as books, magazines, websites and television. Their employers include media or advertising companies, picture agencies or libraries, and museums or art galleries.

The Work

You could be:

- meeting with clients to discuss their requirements and agree on a suitable fee
- reading briefs provided by clients on the subject they want illustrated
- considering the format, colour and dimensions for the image, as well as target audience and number of copies to be printed
- deciding where to look for images, including searching online image banks, picture library databases or gallery catalogues
- selecting pictures gathered from your research which are most suitable to your client's requirements and meet quality requirements
- negotiating with suppliers for the best prices on borrowing or buying images, including terms and conditions of use or return
- hiring a photographer to take any new pictures needed
- preparing captions (descriptions) or credits for images, and maybe editing images using computer software
- storing or filing pictures, and arranging the payment of invoices.

Pay

The figures below are only a guide. Salaries may vary, depending on:

- where you work
- the size of company or organisation you work for
- the demand for the job.

Starting salaries for picture researchers are between £20,000 and £28,000 per year.

With experience, this could rise to around £30,000 per year. Picture editors can earn around £35,000 a year.

Freelance rates are usually per day, and vary according to the area you are working in. For example, recommended rates for books can be £160 to £190; broadcasting £200 a day; glossy magazines £180 a day; and national newspapers £180 a day. (National Union of Journalists Freelance Guide website, September 2025).

Conditions

- You will work at a computer in an office, or from home if you work freelance.
- You work normal office hours, Monday to Friday, but may have to work evenings or weekends to meet

deadlines.
- You will spend a lot of time on the phone to suppliers or other agents.
- You might have to visit companies to search their picture collections.
- You may have regular deadlines to meet and work under pressure.

Getting In

- Entry is competitive.
- Employers usually ask for an HND (SCQF Level 8) or degree (SCQF Level 9 and 10). Relevant degree subjects include art history, history, science or photography.
- For entry to an HND course you normally require 1-2 Highers plus some subjects at National 5. For entry to a degree course you need 4-5 Highers.
- It is common for new entrants to undertake some unpaid work to strengthen their CV and improve their employment prospects.
- You will need knowledge of photo editing software, spreadsheets and online content management systems.

What Does It Take

You need to have:

- a good visual memory and imagination
- excellent research skills
- good IT skills and knowledge of imaging software
- excellent communication skills
- persistence and good negotiation skills
- knowledge of copyright law and licensing issues
- good admin and organisation skills
- knowledge of data storage and management.

You need to be:

- able to multitask
- accurate and methodical
- able to work within a budget
- interested in photography
- well organised and able to meet deadlines.

Training

- Training is through experience, on the job.
- The London School of Publishing (LSP) runs a 2-day course in Picture Research for new entrants. It is approved by the British Association of Picture Libraries and Agencies (BAPLA).

Getting On

- You can move between organisations to gain a wider range of experience.
- You could work on a freelance basis once you build up a network of contacts and clients.
- With enough experience, you could gain promotion to senior picture researcher or picture editor.

More Information

BAPLA lists job vacancies on their website as well as individual employers such as picture libraries or art galleries.

Contacts

Picture Research Association
Website: www.picture-research.org.uk
X: @PRA_Association

Publishing Training Centre
Tel: 020 8874 2718
Email: courses@publishingtrainingcentre.co.uk
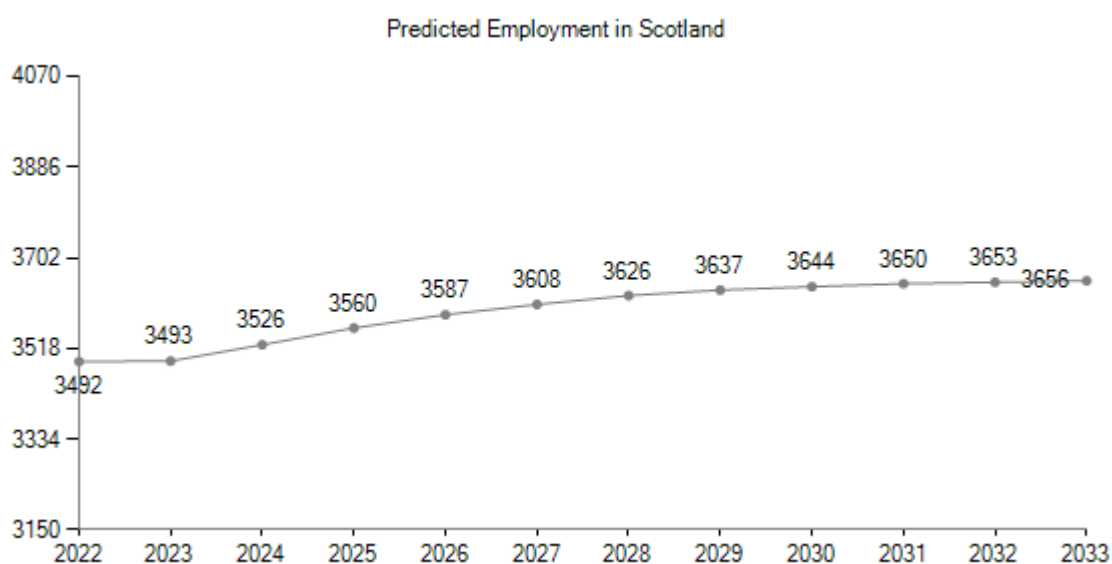Website: www.publishingtrainingcentre.co.uk
X: @PTCBookHouse

Statistics

Employment Status : Not available this career.

Past Unemployment - Scotland

No Claimant statistics available for Scotland.

Predicted Employment in Scotland

LMI data powered by Lightcast