Prop Maker

Prop makers create a wide range of objects, such as furniture, replica weapons and moving models, for use in theatre, television and film. They follow the brief from a production or set designer and use a variety of practical skills to make realistic-looking items.

The Work

You could be:

- using a wide range of skills, such as carpentry, sculpting, sewing, computer-aided design (CAD), painting and modelling, to create objects
- discussing requirements with a set or production designer and drawing up designs
- carrying out research to make sure that objects look authentic
- making objects according to how they will be used, for example making what would normally be a heavy object light enough for an actor to lift
- experimenting with different materials, such as latex, leather, wood, metal or fabric, to see what works best
- using a variety of tools, from paint brushes and hammers, to power saws and welding equipment
- altering existing objects, using techniques such as distressing (making something look old or worn)
- repairing props that are damaged during use.

Pay

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

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

Many prop makers work freelance. They charge a fee, which can vary depending on the work and their reputation.

The rates recommended by the [Broadcasting Entertainment Cinematograph and Theatre Union (BECTU)](https://www.planitplus.net) range from:

- Trainee - £700 a week (TV) or £750 a week (Film)
- Junior prop hand - £1,050 a week (TV) or £1,050 to £1,155 a week (Film)
- Props department co-ordinator - £1,400 to £1,575 a week (TV) or £1,500 to £1,600 a week (Film).

Conditions

- If working on a large production (most likely in film or TV) you usually work with a team of people.
- If working on a small production (often in theatre) you may work on your own and carry out costume making and set building as well as prop making.
- Working hours vary and weekend and evening work may be necessary when meeting a deadline.

- You could work in a studio, workshop or prop room, in a theatre or on a TV or film set.
- The conditions might be noisy, dusty and cramped.
- Some of the materials you would use may give off unpleasant and dangerous fumes.
- You might have to wear protective clothing, gloves and a mask.
- Sometimes you may have to travel to suppliers or to carry out research.

Getting In

- Skills and talent are more important than formal qualifications, but many prop makers do take an art-based or technical theatre course.
- Relevant subjects include production arts, technical theatre, art and design, 3D design and model making.
- A number of Scottish colleges offer HNC (SCQF Level 7) and HND (SCQF Level 8) in these areas.
- Entry to HNC usually requires 1 or 2 Highers and for HND, 2 Highers.
- The Royal Conservatoire of Scotland offers a degree in Production Arts and Design which has a pathway for prop making. Entry is with 3 Highers.
- Computer-aided design (CAD) skills are useful.
- Competition for jobs is high so it can be useful to have some experience, for example through an amateur theatre group.

You can look for work with theatres, film and TV production companies, community arts groups and companies that specialise in supplying props. Most film studios are based in London and south-east England, but there are theatres and TV companies based around the UK.

What Does It Take

You need to be:

- practical and have good craft skills
- imaginative and creative
- patient and accurate, with an eye for detail
- good at problem solving
- able to understand plans and drawings
- able to interpret and visualise ideas
- able to work to deadlines and within budgets.

You need to have:

- an interest in design and technology
- drawing and IT skills
- good communication skills
- the ability to work on your own as well as in a team
- awareness of health and safety procedures.

Training

- You would train and gain experience on the job with your employer.

- You would continue to develop your skills by attending relevant part time courses and training opportunities.

Getting On

- You could work your way up to prop master.
- You may move into set design, production design or stage management.
- You may become self-employed, working on a freelance basis.
- There are some job opportunities overseas for prop makers, especially if you are working for a firm that operates internationally.
- You may need to move around to find new opportunities.

More Information

There are a number of websites advertising jobs in the theatre, film and TV industries, such as The Stage and Mandy.

Trainee Finder is ScreenSkills flagship new entrant programme which offers paid work placements across a range of roles in film and TV. Recruitment will usually begin around September of the year before placement. Find out more and apply online by visiting the Film Trainee Finder website.

Contacts

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Stage Management Association (SMA)
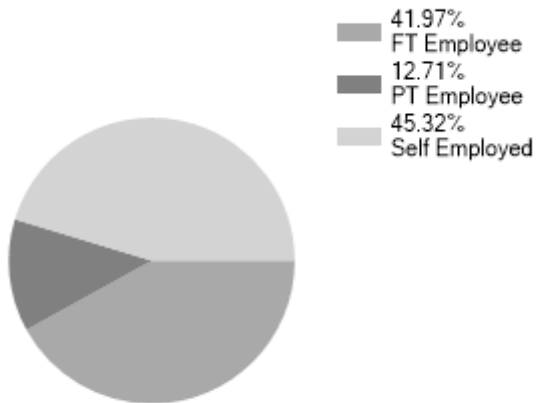Email: admin@stagemanagementassociation.co.uk
Website: www.stagemanagementassociation.co.uk
X: @SMAssoc
Facebook: www.facebook.com/smassoc#
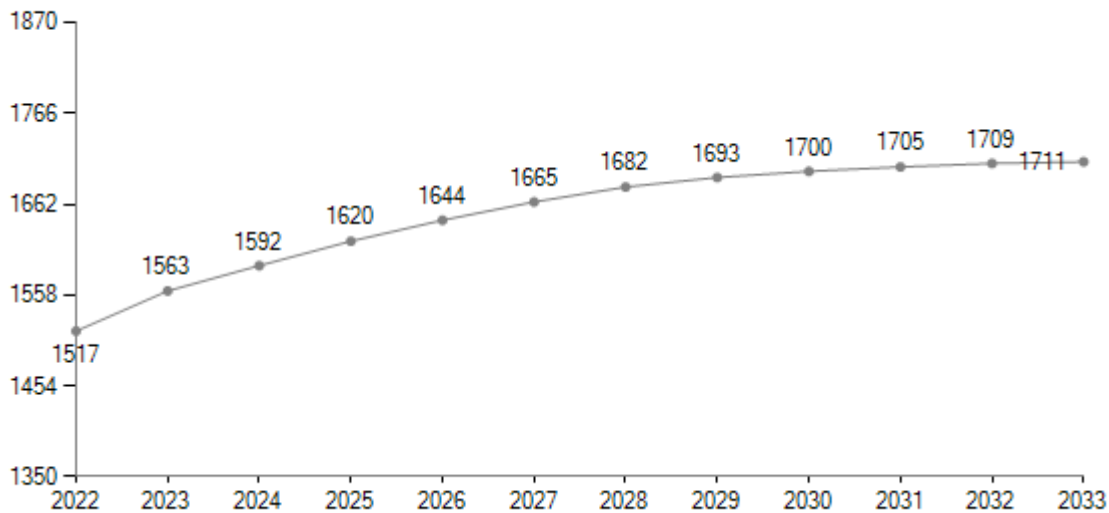
Statistics

Employment Status UK %

41.97% FT Employee
12.71% PT Employee
45.32% Self Employed

Past Unemployment - Scotland

No Claimant statistics available for Scotland.

LMI data powered by LMI for All

Predicted Employment in Scotland

1517 1563 1592 1620 1644 1665 1682 1693 1700 1705 1709 1711
2022 2023 2024 2025 2026 2027 2028 2029 2030 2031 2032 2033

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