

Finding out about plumbing

The plumbing industry is part of the building services engineering sector, represented by SummitSkills Sector Skills Council, which also includes: electrotechnical; heating and ventilating; air conditioning and refrigeration; and electrical and electronic servicing. The building services engineering sector as a whole employs over 600,000 people in over 60,000 businesses. Of these, 85% have between 1 and 5 employees, with most of the remainder employing between 6 and 250 workers. Very few have more than 250 employees. The sector has an annual turnover of around £17 billion in the UK. Building services engineering is continually adapting to meet technological challenges and plays a central role in environmental technology developments, particularly around renewable energy and micro-generation.

This industry works on domestic, commercial and industrial projects. A plumber undertakes a wide variety of jobs, including:

- installing and maintaining central heating systems, hot and cold water systems and drainage systems
- installing, commissioning and maintaining solar water heating, rainwater harvesters or grey water re-cycling systems
- installing and maintaining gas, oil and solid fuel appliances
- installing and maintaining industrial and commercial heating, specialist appliances and fire protection systems.

The plumbing industry is at the forefront of environmentally-friendly technologies, designing and installing low carbon systems involving solar water and rainwater harvesting.

Key facts:

- There are around 22,000 businesses in the industry employing 62,000 people, mostly white male.
- 90% of businesses employ fewer than 10 people.
- The number of people employed in the industry is forecast to fall due to the economic climate.

Jobs in the industry include domestic, industrial and commercial plumbers

Entry and progression

This is a common choice of career by those who are made redundant from engineering roles, by those changing career and by those returning to work after a break. Entrants are required to have a good level of education and will need to achieve the relevant NVQ Level 2 or Level 3 to be recognised as qualified within the industry. This will take between 2 and 4 years to complete whilst working in the industry.

There are a range of industry endorsed courses, apprenticeships (such as the Plumbing Apprenticeship and Plumbing Advanced Apprenticeship), vocational qualifications and training schemes.

For job specific entry requirements, job profiles should be consulted.

Workforce statistics

Number of UK employees: 62,000

Number of UK employers: 22,000

Gender: less than 1% of the skilled workforce is female

Ethnicity: 3% of the workforce is from an ethnic minority, with 1.4% of the workforce from Indian, Pakistani or Bangladeshi backgrounds.

Age: 63% of the workforce is aged 35-54 years

45% of people in training are aged 16-24 years

Employment trends and future prospects

Due to the current economic climate, the number of people employed in the industry is forecast to fall by between 18% and 42%, depending upon the depth of the recession and the speed of recovery. A proportion of these losses will be apprentices.

Currently, there are insufficient job opportunities available to satisfy demand.

Technician and professional roles typically sought after by experienced people who have worked in the industry for 10-15 years are: site supervisor; educator or trainer; and business manager or proprietor.

Skill requirements and shortages

Key common activities involve: working safely; working in an environmentally friendly manner; undertaking preparatory work; identifying and rectifying faults; providing functional and technical information; maintaining working relationships; and overseeing work activities.

The skill needs of the industry are expected to be met by the redeployment of displaced workers. Therefore, recruitment to replace those retiring or leaving the industry is likely to be minimal in the short-term.

Occupational trends

About 80% of people employed in the industry work as Domestic Plumbers, half of whom are in Domestic Heating, whilst 20% work as Commercial Plumbers.

At technician and professional levels, the workforce is likely to remain relatively stable. From 2010 onwards, there is likely to be an increase in the number of people required, thereby improving prospects for new entrants to the sector. This will particularly benefit graduates seeking to enter the industry and gain employment within consultancies.

National and regional data

East Midlands – There are 4,914 people employed in the industry. The number of new people required each year to replace those who retire or leave the industry is around 240.

East of England – There are 7,073 people employed in the industry. The number of new people required each year to replace those who retire or leave the industry is around 350.

London – There are 7,187 people employed in the industry. The number of new people required each year to replace those who retire or leave the industry is around 360.

North East – There are 3,800 people employed in the industry. The number of new people required each year to replace those who retire or leave the industry is around 190.

North West – There are 8,363 people employed in the industry. The number of new people required each year to replace those who retire or leave the industry is around 410.

South East – There are 10,195 people employed in the industry. The number of new people required each year to replace those who retire or leave the industry is around 510.

South West – There are 6,374 people employed in the industry. The number of new people required each year to replace those who retire or leave the industry is around 320.

West Midlands – There are 6,719 people employed in the industry. The number of new people required each year to replace those who retire or leave the industry is around 330.

Yorkshire and the Humber – There are 7,036 people employed in the industry. The number of new people required each year to replace those who retire or leave the industry is around 350.

Salary levels

Some suggested annual salary ranges for those working in the industry include:

- First-year apprentices start on around £10,000
- Newly-qualified plumbers earn around £17,000
- Experienced workers earn around £30,000

More information on salary levels can be found on the [Unite the Union website](#)

Career paths

Job profiles from [Next Step](#) and the [SummitSkills' careers website 'Good day'](#)

Further sources

[SummitSkills](#)

[Association of Plumbing and Heating Contractors](#) (APHC)

[Chartered Institute of Plumbing and Heating Engineering](#) (CIPHE)

[Joint Industry Board for Plumbing Mechanical Engineering Services](#)

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