

Regional Skills Assessment Highlands and Islands

October 2024



Regional Skills Assessments

First launched in 2014, the Regional Skills Assessments (RSAs) provide a robust and consistent evidence base to support partners in strategic skills investment planning. Skills Development Scotland (SDS) has worked with key partners and stakeholders in the production of RSAs to ensure an inclusive approach to their development, dissemination and utilisation.

RSAs include forecast data that has been commissioned through Oxford Economics. The Technical Note¹ provides full detail on the caveats that must be applied when using forecast data, but broadly, it should be noted that:

- Forecasts are based on what we know now and include past and present trends projected into the future.
- The more disaggregated they become, especially at smaller geographical units, the less reliable they are likely to be.
- Their value is in identifying likely directions of travel rather than predicting exact figures.
- The forecasts do not account for national or regional activities, initiatives or investments that are planned.

Industries and occupations used in the RSAs are defined by standard industrial classifications (SIC)² and standard occupational classifications (SOC).3

This RSA report is for the Highlands and Islands, which covers the Argyll and Bute, Na h-Eileanan Siar, Highland, Moray, Orkney Islands and Shetland Islands local authorities.

The RSAs are part of a suite of Labour Market Insight publications by SDS. Other products in the suite include:



Economy, People and Skills report which provides succinct and up-to-date evidence on Scotland's economy, businesses and people. It is updated monthly.



Sectoral Skills Assessments provide Labour Market Insight for key sectors across Scotland. These are updated annually.



The **Data Matrix** is an interactive tool, offering more detailed data from a variety of sources in a visually engaging format. It is updated frequently.

Throughout the report, we indicate where local authority information is available through the Data Matrix. The Data Matrix also contains additional data for the region, including data on employment, unemployment, and economic inactivity from the Annual Population Survey. These are available under the theme Skills Supply.

RSA Summary Infographics are also available, which provide a summary of the forecast data down to local authority level.

Alongside the suite of Labour Market Insight publications, SDS also produces a wide range of reports such as statistics on Modern Apprenticeships and the Annual Participation measure for 16-19 year olds. This includes a wide range of data related to equalities. Further information can be found on the Publications and Statistics section of the SDS website.

We value user feedback on the Regional Skills Assessments. If you would like to provide feedback, please do so here. For any further information or queries on the RSAs or any of our other products, please contact: RSA@sds.co.uk

We held a series of webinars to complement the publication of the Regional Skills Assessments.



The recording of the Highlands and Islands webinar can be found on the SDS YouTube Channel here.

You can also watch the webinars for other regions and key sectors in Scotland here.

^{1.} RSA Technical Note (2024).

^{2.} Office for National Statistics UK Standard Industrial Classification (SIC) 2007.

^{3.} Office for National Statistics UK Standard Occupational Classification (SOC) 2010.

The Context for Scotland's Labour Market

Within the last 10 years, the economy has faced significant disruption due to events such as the pandemic, Brexit, the war in Ukraine, and the cost-of-living crisis. In addition, megatrends around demography, technology, and the environment have continued shaping Scotland's economy and labour market, many of which are interdependent. Below is an overview of the drivers expected to have the greatest influence on Scotland's labour market outlook in the near term, based on a comprehensive analysis of structural and cyclical factors.



The Economy

The economic outlook for Scotland has improved, but growth is still expected to be modest in 2024, after annual GDP figures estimated the Scottish economy (like that of the UK) remained broadly flat throughout 2023. While inflation rates have eased from their peak in October 2022, the effects of rising prices and high interest rates continue to impact Scottish households and businesses. Scotland has experienced a tight labour market in recent years, but there have been signs of this loosening in 2024.



Demographic Change

Scotland has an ageing population. In 2022, around 20 per cent of Scotland's population was aged 65 years or over, and around 15 per cent were aged under 15 years old. Population growth is also expected to slow in the next decade, and it is anticipated that the country is likely to rely on in-migration for population growth. These demographic changes in Scotland have important implications for the labour market and economy.



Inclusive Growth and Equality

Scotland continues to experience inequality, which can impact individuals' access to labour market opportunities. Cost-of-living pressures have affected different groups disproportionately, particularly in lower-income households. Geographical inequalities also exist across Scottish regions that can affect individuals' access to opportunities. There have been some advances in improving diversity within the workforce and reducing inequality, but challenges remain.



Technology and Automation

Scotland has a strong technology sector, with specific strengths in digital technology, life sciences and financial technology (fintech). The current makeup of the technology sector suggests Al will likely be the most important technological advance for the foreseeable future. It is estimated that 60 per cent of jobs in developed countries will be affected by AI. This could be disruptive within the labour market, creating challenges and opportunities for job roles and businesses.



Climate Change

The Scottish and UK governments have committed to meeting targets for Net Zero carbon emissions. The transition to Net Zero will directly impact jobs, with potential for job growth in Scotland. Upskilling and reskilling will be vital to equip Scotland's workforce with the skills needed to meet the transition. Scotland is well placed to take a lead in the development of new green technologies building on its significant natural resources and strengths in key sectors.



A fuller report on Scotland's Labour Market Drivers can be found here.

Regional Insight¹

Economic Strategies and Skills

Regionally, the Highlands and Islands Regional Economic Partnership (HIREP) has been established to take forward and co-ordinate partners' actions to deliver inclusive and sustainable economic growth and build resilience throughout the region. The partnership has a key role in developing a regional vision for the delivery of the Scottish Government's National Strategy for Economic Transformation (NSET).

The HIREP brings together public, private, third sector and academic perspectives in a partnership committed to delivering prosperity and opportunity across the whole of the Highlands and Islands.

The partnership is active in taking forward the region's big economic opportunities and tackling challenges across the Highlands and Islands. The HIREP have developed the Highlands and Islands Regional Economic Strategy (HIRES) to drive the region's response, including a goal to "develop a coordinated response to skills and labour requirements across the region". This goal will be achieved through actions to:

- Develop a shared understanding of labour and skills needs:
- Protect and build on the best of provision;
- Talent Attraction and Retention.

A HIREP Skills and Labour Sub-Group will lead on

achieving agreed outcomes.

The HIREP also has links to the <u>Convention of the Highlands and Islands</u> (COHI), chaired by the Deputy First Minister, which brings together regional organisations and the Scottish Government.

City and Regional Growth Deals

The UK and Scottish Governments have committed funding for the Inverness and Highland City-Region Deal, Moray Growth Deal, the Argyll and Bute Growth Deal, as well as for the Islands Deal which includes Comhairle nan Eilean Siar, Orkney Islands and Shetland Islands Council regions.

Economic Opportunities

Highlands and Islands Enterprise (HIE) operating plan 2024/2025 contains a commitment to work with partners to capitalise on the unprecedented range of once-in-a-generation opportunities across the region, seeking to ensure that all parts of the region benefit from these prospects, many of which arise from its natural and built assets.

To support this ambition HIE will undertake research to identify and map key strategic projects / investments, quantify economic impact, and assess critical enablers such as labour, housing and transport infrastructure to help determine priority activities for the region and support investment planning and attraction.

There is already significant investment in the region in sectors such as offshore wind, green hydrogen and space which will drive demand for skills and labour. Equally important will be supporting the evolution and strengthening of the Food and Drink, Tourism and Creative Industries sectors that have underpinned the regional economy for decades.

The forecasts used in this Regional Skills
Assessment are policy and investment neutral.
This means the figures present a baseline outlook that takes into account historical trends and external economic conditions, but the figures do not reflect investment or policy that is unconfirmed or at planning/development stage.

For example, the figures presented in this report do not reflect significant levels of investment expected in the region such as:

- Inverness and Cromarty Firth Green Freeport;
- ScotWind related supply chain jobs. For example, Sumitomo Electric establishing a high voltage cable manufacturing facility in the Highlands;
- Recent commitments in the Oil & Gas sector, such as INTOG leasing and Rosebank Oil & Gas field.

The forecasts should be used in conjunction with other sources, and readers are encouraged to overlay these with their own local knowledge.

^{1.} Insight from the region gathered via Skills Development Scotland (2024).

Economic Performance¹



Highlands and Islands estimated GVA in 2024: £12,428m

The Highlands and Islands was estimated to generate 8.5% of Scotland's output in 2024. This share of GVA ranked the region in the second highest quartile of RSA regions for GVA contribution to the Scottish economy.

In 2024, the highest value industries in the Highlands and Islands were estimated to be:

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Real Estate Activities* £1,778m



Manufacturing £1,641m



Public Administration and Defence £1,463m



Human Health and Social Work Activities

£1,370m



GVA forecast average annual growth (2024-2027)

Highlands and Islands: 1.3%

Scotland: 1.4%

GVA forecast average annual growth (2027-2034)

Highlands and Islands: 1.0%

Scotland: 1.3%

Forecast Average Annual GVA Change by Industry (%), Highlands and Islands

Education

Mining and Quarrying

Electricity, Gas, Steam and Air Conditioning Information and Communication Construction Administrative and Support Service Activities Arts, Entertainment and Recreation Manufacturing Transportation and Storage Accommodation and Food Service Activities Agriculture, Forestry and Fishing Other Service Activities Professional, Scientific and Technical Activities Human Health and Social Work Activities Wholesale and Retail Trade Water Supply Real Estate Activities Financial and Insurance Activities Public Administration and Defence



Productivity¹

In this report, we have used Oxford Economics' measure of productivity, which is calculated by dividing total regional GVA by total regional employment (measured by jobs). Please note, there are different ways of calculating productivity, and caution is needed when interpreting productivity data presented in this report. It must be considered in the context of other data and insight.

Productivity in **the Highlands and Islands** was estimated to be **£46,500** in 2024. In comparison, the Scottish average was estimated to be £52,000.



Mid-term Productivity

From 2024 to 2027, productivity in the Highlands and Islands is forecast to grow by 0.7% on average each year. Over the same period, the Scottish growth rate is forecast to be 0.6%.

Highlands and Islands forecast productivity in 2027: £47,400

Scotland forecast productivity in 2027: £53,000



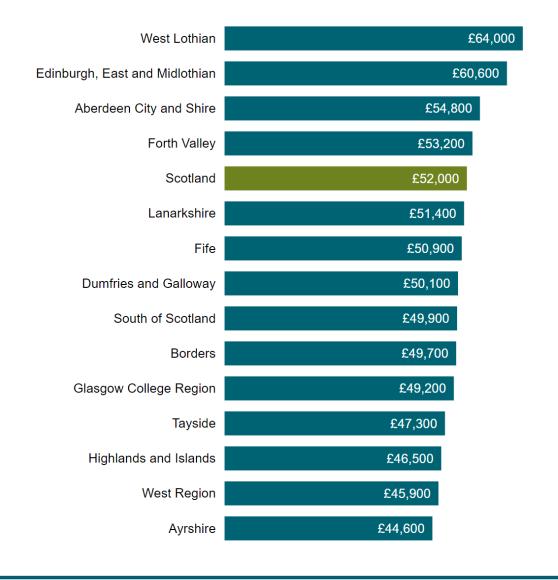
Long-term Productivity

From 2027 to 2034, productivity in the Highlands and Islands is forecast to grow by 1.1% on average each year. Over the same period, the Scottish growth rate is forecast to be 1.1%.

Highlands and Islands forecast productivity in 2034: £51,300

Scotland forecast productivity in 2034: £57,100

Productivity (2024)





Regional Employment¹



Workforce Size 2024: 221.200 people

The region's workforce was estimated to account for **8.4%** of Scottish employment.

Over the last 10 years (2014-2024), regional employment was estimated to have **declined** by **6.9%** (**-16,400** people). In comparison, employment in Scotland increased by 3.8%.



Workforce Size 2027: 224,900 people

The region's workforce is forecast to **grow** by **1.7%** or **3,700** people between 2024 and 2027.

Compared to a Scotland-wide increase of **1.9%** or **49,800** people.



Workforce Size 2034: 223,300 people

The region's workforce is forecast to **decline** by **0.7%** or **1,500** people between 2027 and 2034.

Compared to a Scotland-wide increase of 1.2% or 32,000 people.

Employment and forecast employment (2014-2034) (people), Highlands and Islands

237,600

228,600

226,800 230,400

217,800

221,200

224,900

225,400

224,300

223,300

 2014
 2017
 2021
 2024
 2025
 2027
 2030
 2034

Employment by Industry¹

The largest employing industries in the region in 2024 (based on people) were estimated to be:



Human Health and Social Work Activities 39,300



Public Administration and Defence 24.900



Wholesale and Retail Trade

21,900

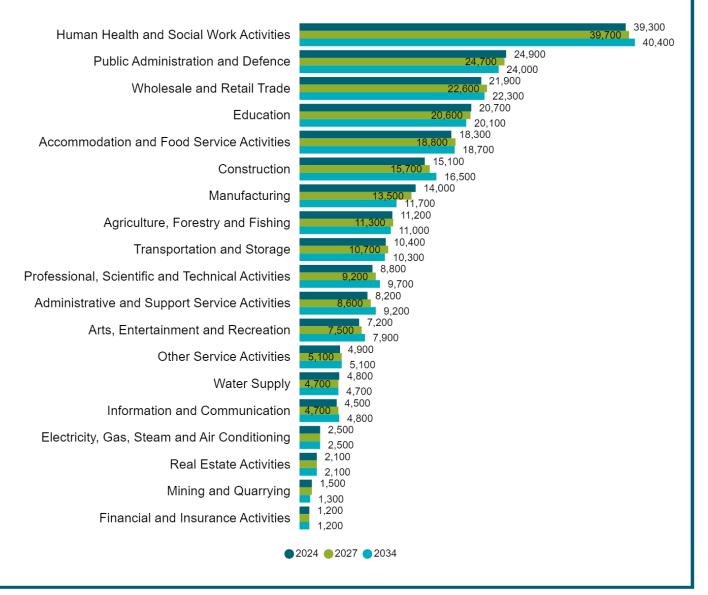
Between 2024 and 2027, employment in the region is forecast to grow, however industries will have varying performance. The greatest employment growth is forecast in Wholesale and Retail Trade, with 600 more people by 2027. While Manufacturing is forecast to have the greatest employment contraction (-400 people) in the mid-term.

Over the long-term, between 2027 and 2034, the greatest employment growth is forecast in Construction, with 800 more people by 2034. While Manufacturing is forecast to have the greatest employment contraction (-1,900 people) in the long-term.

In 2024, Fishing and Aquaculture was estimated to be the region's greatest specialism, with the percentage of employment in this industry 6.6 times greater than the Scottish average. The second largest specialism was estimated to be Water Transport (4.0 times greater in the region than the Scottish average).

Figures may not sum due to rounding.

Employment by Industry, Highlands and Islands



Employment by Occupation¹

The largest employing occupation groups in the region in 2024 (based on people) were estimated to be:



Caring Personal Service Occupations 20,500



Elementary Occupations: Clerical and Services 20,400



Sales Occupations

15,700

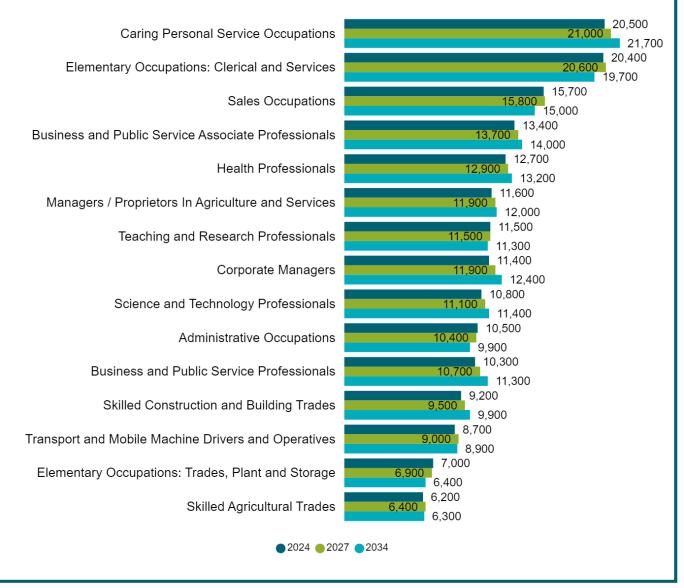
In 2024, 43.3% of employed people in the region were in 'higher-level' occupations*, which was a lower percentage of the workforce than Scotland (49.2%). 'Mid-level' occupations accounted for 29.6% of the workforce, which was a higher percentage of the workforce than Scotland (27.0%). Around 27.1% of people were employed in 'lower-level' occupations, which was a higher percentage of the workforce than Scotland (23.8%).

Between 2024 and 2027, the greatest growth is forecast to be in Corporate Managers (500 people). While Process, Plant and Machine Operatives is likely to experience the greatest contraction (-100 people).

Over the long-term between 2027 and 2034, the greatest growth is forecast to be in Caring Personal Service Occupations (700 people). While Elementary Occupations: Clerical and Services is likely to experience the greatest contraction (-900 people).

Figures may not sum due to rounding.

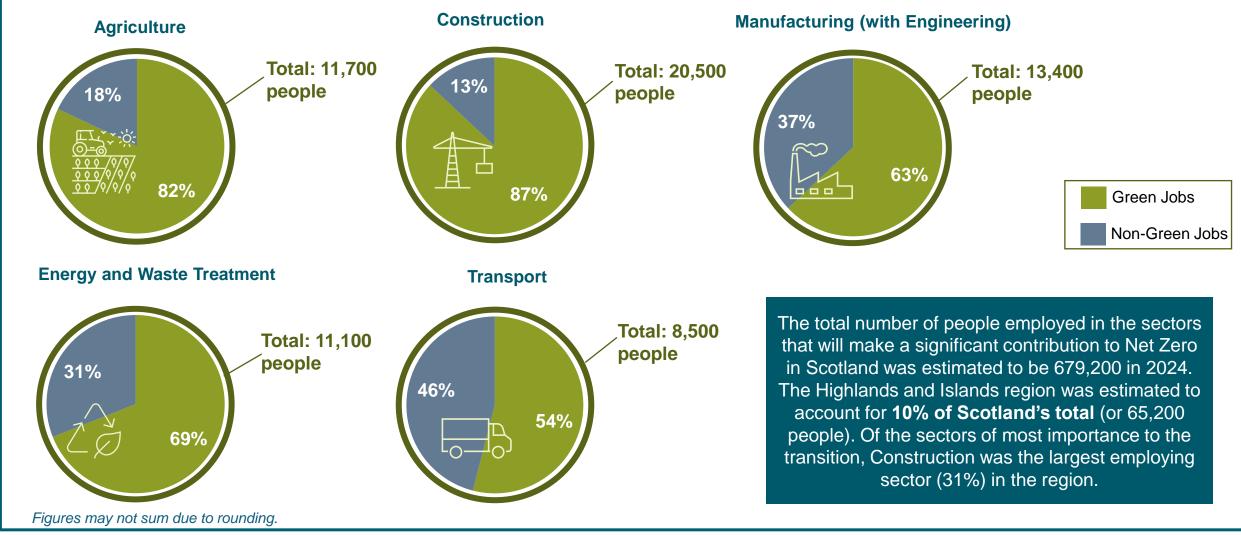
Employment by Top 15 Occupations, Highlands and Islands





Transition to Net Zero¹

Identified as part of the Climate Emergency Skills Action Plan (CESAP), the sectors² listed below **make a significant contribution to the Transition to Net Zero** and have the greatest potential for skills implications and jobs growth arising from it. We have been able to establish the split between green jobs and non-green jobs for the Regional Outcome Agreement (ROA) areas. Green jobs in Scotland are defined by three different categories: enhanced skills and knowledge, increased demand and new and emerging.³ Presented below are the **number of people estimated to be employed in these sectors within the Highlands and Islands in 2024.**



^{1.} SDS (2024). Oxford Economics Forecasts.

2. The sectors that make a significant contribution to the Net Zero transition were identified in **the Green Jobs in Scotland report**.

Due to the methodology adopted, the footprint of sectors presented on this page differs from the industry footprint presented elsewhere in this report, and in our Sectoral Skills Assessments (SSAs). Please find a full list of the

Standard Industrial Classification (SIC) codes used to define these sectors in the Green Jobs in Scotland report (and on this page) <u>here</u>.

3. Please see slide 12 for more information.

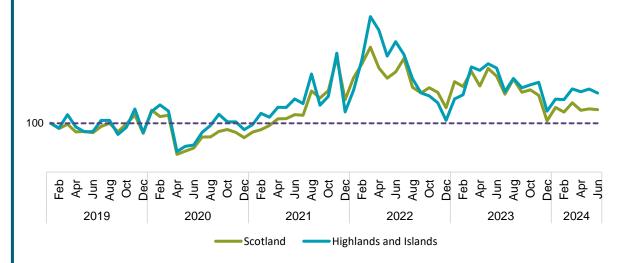
Job Postings in the Highlands and Islands¹

Online job postings data provides a useful barometer for the health of the jobs market, real-time employer demand and can indicate changing skills demands. It is important to note that the data does not capture all activity, so it should be considered as an estimate only.

The labour market has been cooling across Scotland, and job postings have declined from a peak in 2022. In the Highlands and Islands, the peak in job postings coincided with Scotland's peak in March 2022. Whilst it has cooled, the heat of the labour market in 2021 and 2022 was exceptional, and the levels of job postings across Scotland and the Highlands and Islands remain above prepandemic levels (January 2019).

In the first six months of 2024, there has been sustained demand for workers in the region. Job postings in the Highlands and Islands accounted for 8.3% of Scotland's total job postings between January and June 2024.

Index* of Job Postings, (January 2019 = 100)



Between January and June 2024, there were **20,700 job postings** in the **Highlands and Islands**, of which:

The locations with the most jobs advertised were:



Inverness 7,300 postings



Elgin 1,200 postings



Helensburgh 900 postings

The most requested skills and knowledge were:



Communications



Management



Customer Service



Planning

The top job postings were:



^{*}An Index shows the change over time. This graph displays the data for job postings converted to a reference value. This shows the relative change for Scotland and the region over time. Over 100 indicates where there has been an increase compared to the base or reference year (in this case January 2019), whereas below 100 shows a decrease.

Green Job Postings in the Highlands and Islands¹

The <u>Green Jobs in Scotland</u> research uses an **inclusive definition** to define green jobs.

This definition recognises that there will be an ongoing process of 'greening' across the economy due to the transition to Net Zero, and a broad range of jobs will be impacted in different ways as a result.

Green jobs can be classified into one of the following three categories:

- 1. Enhanced Skills and Knowledge:
 Existing occupations which will require
 significant change to the work and worker
 requirements due to green economy
 activities.
- 2. Increased Demand: Existing occupations which will be needed in higher numbers due to green economy activities.
- **3. New and Emerging**: New occupations which are created because of the need for unique work and worker requirements due to green economy activities.

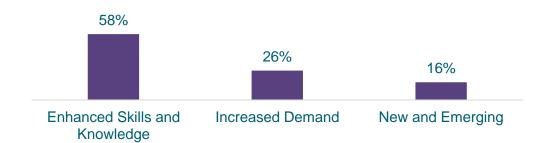
The full list of occupations (defined using Standard Occupation Classification (SOC) 2020) can be found here.



Out of the 20,700 job postings in the Highlands and Islands between January and June 2024, **just over a third of them, 7,300**, **were for green jobs (35.4%)**. This was a lower proportion of green job postings than the Scottish average (42.3%). The number of green job postings in the region accounted for 7.0% of all green job postings in Scotland. The demand for green jobs in the region and Scotland peaked in 2022 before cooling. However, demand for green jobs in the region remains above the pre-pandemic level.



Between January and June 2024, over half of green job postings in the Highlands and Islands were for Enhanced Skills and Knowledge roles.



The green jobs in demand in each category between January and June 2024 included:

Enhanced Skills and Knowledge:



Vehicle Technicians, Mechanics and Electricians

Increased Demand:



Warehouse Operatives

New and Emerging:



Engineering Technicians



The median advertised salary for **green jobs** in the Highlands and Islands was £36,000* in the first six months of 2024.

This was higher than the median advertised salary for all jobs in the region which was £29,100**.



Future Demand in the Mid-Term (2024-2027)¹

Oxford Economics' forecasts should be used as guidance only on the overall trends based on current evidence - rather than definitive numbers. There are still a wide range of factors which may impact on the labour market. It is important to note that the forecasts do not account for national or regional activities, initiatives or investments such as those mentioned in our section on Regional Insight, which are likely to influence the outlook presented. Users of the RSAs are encouraged to overlay the forecasts with their local knowledge.

Earlier in the report, we examined the future total employment in the Highlands and Islands. This part of the report focuses on the total requirement, which introduces not only employment growth or contraction but also the need to replace workers leaving the labour market due to retirement and other reasons.

The mid-term forecast suggests there could be a total requirement for **31,700** people in **the Highlands and Islands**. Between 2024 and 2027, replacement demand could create the need for **28,000** people, while **positive** expansion demand is forecast to result in **3,700 additional** workers.

In **Scotland**, there could be a total requirement for **370,800** people in the mid-term. Between 2024 and 2027, replacement demand could create the need for **321,000** people, while **positive** expansion demand is forecast to result in **49,800 additional** workers.

Figures may not sum due to rounding.











Total Requirement

made up of expansion demand and replacement demand to show the total number of people required.

Replacement Demand

the number of people required to replace workers leaving the labour market (i.e. retirement, move away, or change jobs). **Expansion Demand**

the number of people required as a result of economic growth or contraction.

Highlands and Islands: 31,700 people

Highlands and Islands: 28,000 people

Highlands and Islands: 3,700 people

Scotland: 370,800 people

Scotland: 321,000 people

Scotland: 49,800 people

The total requirement by qualification for **Highlands and Islands**:

SCQF 11-12	SCQF 7-10	SCQF 6	SCQF 5	SCQF 1-4	No qualifications
2,300	14,100	4,800	6,900	1,100	2,500
7%	44%	15%	22%	3%	8%

The total requirement by qualification for **Scotland**:

SCQF 11-12	SCQF 7-10	SCQF 6	SCQF 5	SCQF 1-4	No qualifications
34,000	175,600	46,600	76,800	10,300	27,400
9%	47%	13%	21%	3%	7%



Future Demand in the Mid-Term (2024-2027) by Industry¹

By industry, the greatest number of people are forecast to be required in:



Wholesale and Retail Trade

4,600



Accommodation and Food Service Activities

3,600

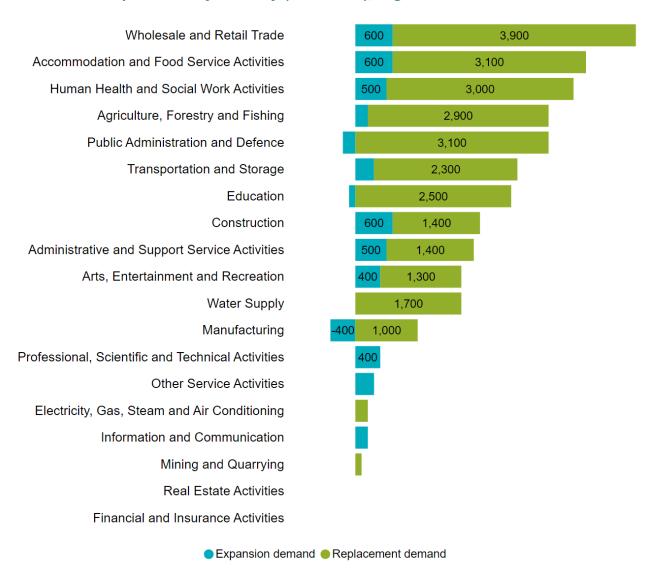


Human Health and Social Work Activities

3,500

Headline figures for each industry do not show how the composition of the industry is changing. Within industries there are changes to operating practices and consumer behaviours driven by automation, digitalisation and the transition to Net Zero. These shifts are not captured in the aggregated groups. We would encourage readers to bear this in mind when interpreting the data. For further sectoral evidence, please see our Sectoral Skills Assessments.

Forecast Total Requirement by Industry (2024-2027), Highlands and Islands





Future Demand in the Mid-Term (2024-2027) by Occupation¹

By occupation, the greatest number of people are forecast to be required in:



Elementary Occupations: Clerical and Services 4.100



Teaching and Research Professionals

3,400



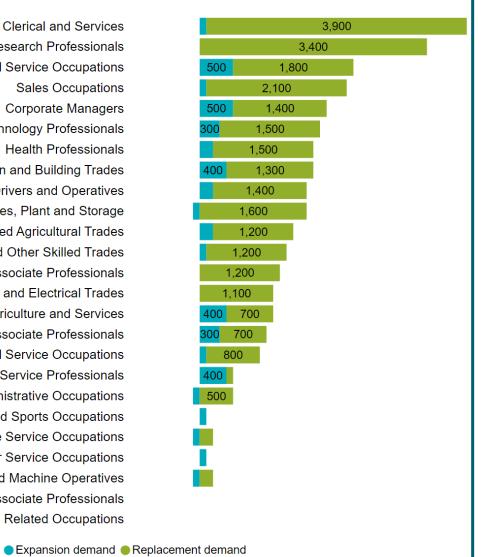
Caring Personal Service Occupations

2,300

As mentioned, there is forecast to be a total requirement for 31,700 people in the region over the mid-term. 'Higher-level' occupations* are forecast to account for 41.0% of this total requirement, followed by 28.9% in 'mid-level' occupations and 30.1% in 'lower-level' occupations. Across Scotland, 50.4% of total requirement will be in 'higher-level' occupations, 25.0% in 'mid-level' occupations and 24.6% in 'lower-level' occupations.

Forecast Total Requirement by Occupation (2024-2027), Highlands and Islands







Future Demand in the Long-Term (2027-2034)¹

The long-term forecast is more changeable than the mid-term forecasts and could be influenced by a range of factors that are less known. It is important to note that the forecasts do not account for national or regional activities, initiatives or investments like those mentioned in our section on Regional Insight, which are likely to influence the long-term outlook presented. Oxford Economics' forecasts should be used as guidance on overall trends based on current evidence - rather than definitive numbers.

In the Highlands and Islands, the labour market forecast for the long-term (2027-2034) suggests employment is expected to decline, but there could be opportunities created as a result of the need to replace workers leaving the labour market due to retirement and other reasons.

Forecasts for the long-term suggest there could be a total requirement for **61,900** people in **the Highlands** and **Islands**. Between 2027 and 2034, replacement demand could create the need for **63,400** people, while expansion demand is forecast to result in **-1,500** workers.

In **Scotland**, there could be a total requirement for **788,900** people in the long-term. Between 2027 and 2034, replacement demand could create the need for **756,900** people, while **positive** expansion demand is forecast to result in **32,000 additional** workers.

Figures may not sum due to rounding.











Total Requirement

made up of expansion demand and replacement demand to show the total number of people required.

Replacement Demand

the number of people required to replace workers leaving the labour market (i.e. retirement, move away, or change jobs). **Expansion Demand**

the number of people required as a result of economic growth or contraction.

Highlands and Islands: 61,900 people

Highlands and Islands: 63,400 people

Highlands and Islands:

-1,500 people

Scotland: 32,000 people

Scotland: 788,900 people Scotland: 756,900 people

The total requirement by qualification for **Highlands and Islands**:

SCQF 11-12	SCQF 7-10	SCQF 6	SCQF 5	SCQF 1-4	No qualifications
4,200	28,400	8,900	14,500	1,100	4,900
7%	46%	14%	23%	2%	8%

The total requirement by qualification for **Scotland**:

SCQF 11-12	SCQF 7-10	SCQF 6	SCQF 5	SCQF 1-4	No qualifications
67,300	378,500	93,400	180,300	12,100	57,200
9%	48%	12%	23%	2%	7%



Future Demand in the Long-Term (2027-2034) by Industry¹

By industry, the greatest number of people are forecast to be required in:



Wholesale and Retail Trade

8,600



Human Health and Social Work Activities

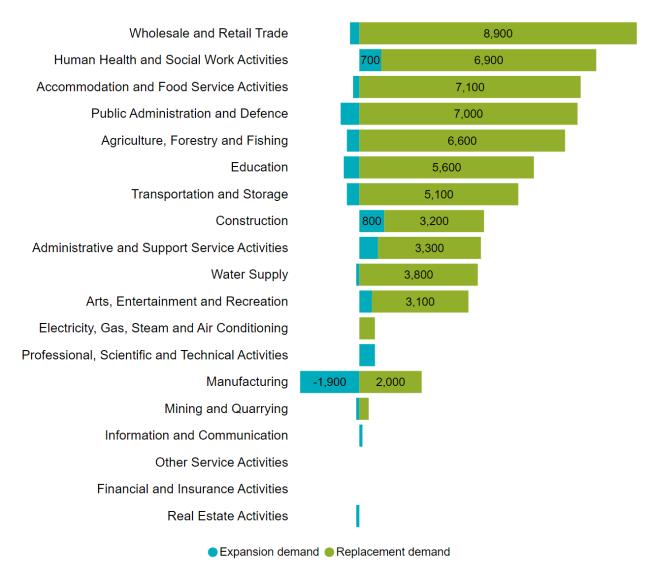
7,600

Accommodation and Food Service Activities

6,900

The mid-term forecast analysis indicated that some industries are experiencing a shift in their operational practices, and this trend is expected to continue in the long term.

Forecast Total Requirement by Industry (2027-2034), Highlands and Islands





Future Demand in the Long-Term (2027-2034) by Occupation¹

By occupation, the greatest number of people are forecast to be required in:



Elementary Occupations: Clerical and Services 7.900



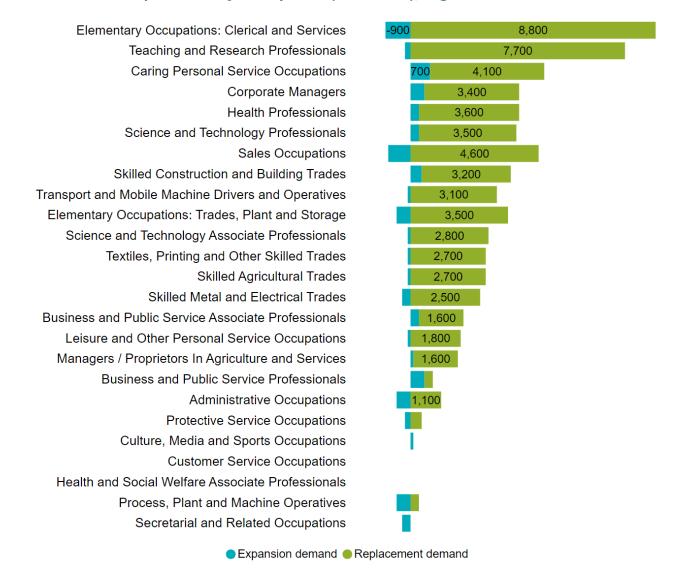
Teaching and Research Professionals 7.400



Caring Personal Service Occupations 4.800

There is forecast to be a total requirement for 61,900 people in the region over the long-term. 'Higher-level' occupations* are forecast to account for 42.8% of this total requirement, followed by 28.8% in 'mid-level' occupations and 28.5% in 'lower-level' occupations. Across Scotland, 52.4% of total requirement will be in 'higher-level' occupations, 24.7% in 'mid-level' occupations and 22.9% in 'lower-level' occupations.

Forecast Total Requirement by Occupation (2027-2034), Highlands and Islands







For further information or queries on the RSAs or any of our other products, please contact: RSA@sds.co.uk