

Plumber

What does this career involve?

In this country we take running water, sanitation and heating for granted. It's the job of a qualified plumber to ensure that all these systems work so we can live in a comfortable, hygienic and safe environment.



Plumbing is just one of the careers within building services where you will be helping to save the planet by working on new environmental technologies.

Plumbers play a very important role in reducing our energy and water consumption by installing solar heating, rainwater harvesting or waste-water recycling systems into homes and other properties

Solar heating, for instance, uses the sun's power to produce hot water, rather than relying heavily on fossil fuels.

No two days are the same and there's a lot of variety and challenging tasks. You'll not only be installing and maintaining traditional central heating, hot and cold water and drainage systems, you'll also be working with technology such as solar heating.

Some plumbers also work on sheet lead systems that are used on the roofs of buildings.

In England, Northern Ireland and Wales, plumbing careers are roughly divided into three areas:

- As a *domestic plumber at NVQ Level 2* you'll install basic cold water, hot water, sanitation, rainwater harvesting, central heating systems and sheet lead systems.
- As a *domestic plumber at NVQ Level 3* you'll install more complex cold water, hot water, sanitation and heating systems and fuel burning appliances such as gas, oil or solid fuel boilers. You'll also design the systems, plan work activities for yourself and others, and will be responsible for improving the service you offer.
- In Scotland, the career route available is a *domestic plumber at SVQ Level 3*, which covers the same roles as the domestic plumber at NVQ Level 3, detailed above.
- As an *industrial and commercial plumber at NVQ Level 3* you'll install heating, fuel supplies, specialist appliances and fire protection systems in industrial and commercial buildings like factories, hospitals and shopping centres.

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What sort of person do I need to be?

You'll need to respond well to both emergency repairs and day-to-day maintenance work. In your role you'll be fitting pipework to bathrooms and sinks, central heating boilers, water pumps and hot and cold water systems.

Outside the building you'll have to fit rainwater, soil and drainage pipes, and maybe install solar panels on roofs.



Plumbers use a variety of hand and power tools to cut, bend, join and fix materials such as lead, copper, plastic, and iron or steel

You'll have to make sure your work is carried out safely and accurately, and that it complies with building regulations.

Whether you're male or female, the plumbing industry is keen to hear from people that:

- have good practical and hand skills
- can follow technical drawings, building plans and other instructions
- can work carefully, methodically and safely
- can measure accurately
- have a head for heights and be prepared to work in all sorts of weather
- are willing to work in confined spaces
- are presentable with a pleasant manner
- have good written and verbal communication skills
- are a good team player but also able to work on their own initiative
- can adapt to change
- have good problem-solving skills

If you work at Level 3 you'll also need to plan and organise the work for a team, be able to motivate others and have good analytical and evaluation skills to solve complex tasks and problems.

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What hours will I do and what's the working environment like?

You could be needed at any time to help fix a situation, so you might sometimes be asked to work outside of the usual working week of 37 to 40 hours, Monday to Friday.

You could be working in homes, offices and commercial premises like supermarkets or hospitals to install and maintain plumbing and pipework.

Depending on what type of work you specialise in, you might also work on construction sites, which can be noisy, dusty and cold

Sometimes it may mean working in cramped and uncomfortable conditions in order to access the plumbing equipment and you could sometimes work at heights using equipment such as scaffolding.

Working in this industry usually means you're based locally, travelling from one project to the next. But some companies work across the whole country for their customers, so if you work for one of these firms you might be asked to stay overnight for short or long periods if a project is far from home.

When you're on a construction site you'll have to wear hard hats, high-visibility jackets, safety shoes and other similar equipment to make sure you stay safe.

What salary and other benefits can I expect?

Your salary will vary depending on your employer and where you live in the UK, but as a guide you might expect:

- First-year apprentices may start on around £10,000 a year.
- Newly-qualified plumbers may earn over £17,000 a year.
- Experienced plumbers may earn over £30,000 a year.



Some employers pay more, and you might get bonuses and overtime pay.

There are national set rates to cover your travelling time, travel expenses and accommodation costs.

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What other interests would fit well with this career?

The work you'll do as a plumber is underpinned by maths, engineering and science. So if you're interested in these subjects, enjoy using your practical skills, and have an interest in environmental matters, this career could be a good fit for you.

What does the industry profile look like?

There are around 20,000 plumbing businesses in the UK, with about 80% of these being sole traders. The main employers are general building contractors with large contracts for housing estates, office buildings and public places, and smaller companies who work for building contractors and private clients.

How do I get into this industry?

In Scotland you'll need a Scottish Vocational Qualification (SVQ) Level 3. Elsewhere in the UK, depending on which level you'd like to work at, you'll need a National Vocational Qualification (NVQ) Level 2 or 3. There's also other training on top of the NVQ/SVQ that you'll have to complete in order to become fully qualified.

Most people start as an apprentice straight from school or college and train on the job. Apprenticeships give you the underpinning knowledge and skills you need to work effectively and professionally.

You'll do both off-the-job training, where you learn at a college or training centre, and on-the-job training, where you apply your skills and knowledge while working on-site for your employer.

Generally training will take between two and four years to complete, depending on the apprenticeship scheme.

For more information on the different types of apprenticeship, entry requirements and the specific training you'll do, use the links below to find out more based on where you live:

We have produced guidance booklets, based on where you live, that provide more information on the different types of apprenticeship, entry requirements and the specific training you'll do:

- [England](#)
- [Northern Ireland](#)
- [Scotland](#)
- [Wales](#)

If your company works on gas installations they must be registered with the Gas Safe Register and each employee must hold a gas ID card before they start work.

If you're not able to do an apprenticeship straight away, there are programmes around the UK that can help you to progress to an apprenticeship, further learning or a job.

Speak to your local careers adviser to find out more.

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What if I'm an adult that wants to join this industry?

Some apprenticeship schemes across the UK are open to people over 25, although the number of places might be limited. Local colleges may have their own training schemes aimed at adults.

If you're over 25 you can still undertake the NVQ/SVQ without doing an apprenticeship. To gain an NVQ/SVQ, you must be in employment or have the ability to be assessed on site, carrying out work on real installations. Similar to an apprenticeship scheme, you should be prepared to gain the qualification over a number of years, not weeks or months. There is no quick fix to gaining the right qualifications and it will take around four years to complete.

Vacancies for qualified workers are usually advertised in local newspapers, job centres, and on websites such as [Monster](#) or [Workthing](#).

Which training course is the right one to do?

A number of companies offer short intensive training courses, some with home-study options. However, practical in-college training as well as practical work experience on-site with a plumbing company is always required for all new entrants on the road to becoming fully qualified. Make sure that your training course will provide you with an NVQ/SVQ at the end of your programme.

How can I progress further in this career?

Most large employers have a formal progression structure. If you work for one of these companies you may have the chance to take on more important projects and managerial responsibilities as you progress and gain experience.



Once you're qualified to NVQ/SVQ Level 3, you could progress to higher qualifications like NVQ/SVQ Level 4 or even a degree, which will lead to job opportunities at [technician](#) or management level where you will design systems which will have an even greater environmental impact. If you want to do a degree course, many universities or similar institutions will accept a relevant qualification, or take your work experience into account instead of traditional academic qualifications.

You could also have to chance to move into design consultancy, teaching, or there's even the opportunity to run your own business if you become self-employed.