

# Finding out about footwear and leather manufacturing

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The footwear and leather industry is part of the fashion and textiles sector, represented by Skillset Sector Skills Council, which also includes: apparel; textiles; and footwear and leather; advertising; animation; computer games; facilities; film; interactive media; photo imaging; publishing; radio; and television. The fashion and textiles sector as a whole employs an estimated 340,000 people across 79,000 enterprises, which are predominately small and medium sized employers. The sector contributes around £10 billion to the UK economy each year, but due to the current economic downturn, product exports have fallen. However, employment in the sector has remained relatively stable level.

The footwear and leather industry includes: leather production and tanning; the manufacture of leather goods and accessories, such as luggage; footwear; and shoe repair. Recent manufacturing output of the industry has declined, but productivity has risen where it has remained virtually static across the wider manufacturing sector. Clothing and footwear prices have fallen, but suppliers of niche and luxury leather goods are reportedly doing well.

## Key facts:

- The industry contributes around £700 million to the UK economy each year.
- There are around 4,600 businesses, of which almost 3,000 are sole traders.
- Almost 27,000 people work in the industry.
- There is a forecast decline in the industry of 57% between 2006 and 2014.
- The wholesale component of the footwear and leather industry is, however, expected to see modest growth in employment.

## Jobs in the industry range from:

Production staff – leather production operative; footwear manufacturing operative; production manager; technical manager

Design staff – footwear designer; footwear technologist; leather goods/accessories designer

Repair staff – shoe repairer; shop manager

Technology staff – leather technologist

## Entry and progression

There are not usually any formal entry requirements for lower-level jobs in the footwear and leather industry. Employers look for candidates who are good with their hands, reliable and willing to learn. Many jobs will provide training in the workplace, sometimes alongside formal vocational qualifications.

The fashion and textiles sector has a track record of recruiting adults who are looking for career change. Many skills needed in the industry are transferable. Those who have previously worked in a wholesale environment or management position may be able to transfer more easily. Those in professional and management positions can move into similar posts in other areas or sectors.

Progression is usually possible with the appropriate levels of experience or by obtaining relevant qualifications. A progression route in footwear and leather could be from:  
footwear manufacturing operative -> footwear technologist -> designer -> production manager

There are a range of industry endorsed courses (both at undergraduate and post-graduate) and foundation degrees, apprenticeships and training schemes.

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

### **Workforce statistics**

Number of UK employees: 27,000

Number of UK employers: 4,600

Gender: around six out of ten workers are male

The fashion and textile sector as a whole has an ageing workforce, with 32% of those employed aged 50 years or over, compared with 26% in the wider economy.

The fashion and textiles sector as a whole is a major source of employment for people from ethnic minority groups.

### **Employment trends and future prospects**

Recent forecasts indicate a decline in the UK footwear and leather industry of 57% to 2014. However, it is estimated that the industry will need to recruit 3,000 people over the same period to replace those leaving, mainly through retirements.

### **Skill requirements and shortages**

There is a shortage of workers with the technical skills needed for practical roles within the leather production industries. Designers with specialist knowledge of footwear and leather products are also in short supply. Subject-specific technical skills are the most sought after, which include:

- footwear technology
- leather technology
- footwear manufacturing operations
- leather manufacturing operations
- leather cutting and stitching (by hand)

- pattern cutting and matching
- design

The majority of UK companies report difficulties in finding applicants with the right skills for jobs in Leather Technology, Leather Tanning, Leather Manufacturing, Footwear Technology, Footwear Manufacturing and Shoe Repair roles.

## Occupational trends

The footwear and leather industry is anticipating a decline in the number of people employed in production activities, as more manufacturing moves overseas.

## National and regional data

The industry is widely distributed across England, but activity is heavily concentrated in Northamptonshire and Lancashire (both footwear areas), together with Walsall (leather goods including saddlery) and Somerset (production of leather and leather goods).

**East Midlands** – There are around 4,000 people employed within the footwear and leather industry in the East Midlands, which is more than any other region of England. The majority of the workforce is based in Northampton.

**East of England** – There are almost 2,000 people employed within the industry. South Cambridgeshire has the largest workforce. To 2017, it is estimated that the number in the leather manufacturing industry will need to remain the same, at around 1,000 people.

**London** – There are around 3,000 people employed within the industry in London, making it the third largest region for footwear and leather in the UK. Hackney has the largest workforce, followed by Westminster. Employment is fairly evenly distributed throughout the remaining districts in London. To 2017, it is estimated that the number of people required in leather manufacturing will increase from around 2,000 to 3,000.

**North East** – There are around 340 people employed within the industry, which represents a small proportion of the total UK employment in this industry. Redcar and Cleveland have the largest number of people employed in the footwear and leather industry. Employment is fairly evenly distributed throughout the remaining districts. To 2017, it is estimated that 1,000 additional people will be required in leather manufacturing positions.

**North West** – There are almost 2,000 people employed within the industry in the North West. Manchester has the largest workforce, followed by West Lancashire. It is estimated that there will be a decline in the total level of employment required in leather manufacturing between now and 2017.

**South East** – There are around 2,000 people employed within the industry, who are mainly located in mid-Sussex. It is estimated that 1,000 more people will be required in leather manufacturing positions between now and 2017.

**South West** – There are over 3,000 people employed within the industry. Within this region, Mendip and South Somerset have the largest number of people employed. It is estimated that there will be a small decline in the total level of employment required in leather manufacturing to 2017. An estimated 1,000 people will be needed during this time.

**West Midlands** – There are almost 2,000 people employed within the industry, who are mainly located in Walsall. It is estimated that there will be a slight increase in the total level of employment required in leather manufacturing between now and 2017 in the region and an estimated 4,000 recruits will be needed.

**Yorkshire and the Humber** – There are almost 2,000 people employed within the industry, who are predominately located in Leeds and Bradford. To 2017, it is estimated that there will be a decline in the total level of employment required in leather manufacturing.

[N.B. Data derived from Annual Business Inquiry, 2007.]

## Salary levels

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

- Entry Level worker, such as a Leather Production Operative - £10,000 to £13,000
- Multi-Skilled worker, such Skilled Shoemaker - £14,000
- Experienced/Management workers, such as a Production Manager - £20,000 to £60,000

More information on salary levels can be found on [Just the job](#) and [Canucutit](#).

## Career paths

Job profiles from [Advice Resources](#) and [Skillset Just the job](#)

## Further sources

Skillset [Canucutit](#) and [Just the Job](#)

[British Footwear Association](#) (BFA)

[British Leather Council](#)

[British School of Leather Technology](#)

[Saddlery Training Centre](#)

[Society of Dyers and Colourists](#)

[Society of Leather Technologists and Chemists](#)

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