ECONOMY AND LABOUR MARKET

Public Sector Employment in Scotland Statistics for 4th Quarter 2024

The statistics in this release are based on administrative records and surveys of individual public sector bodies carried out by the Scottish Government and the Office for National Statistics (ONS). This is a snapshot of employment as at December 2024.

The public sector is defined based on UK National Accounts definitions. The statistics in this release were designated accredited official statistics in May 2010.

Scottish Government
Riaghaltas na h-Alba

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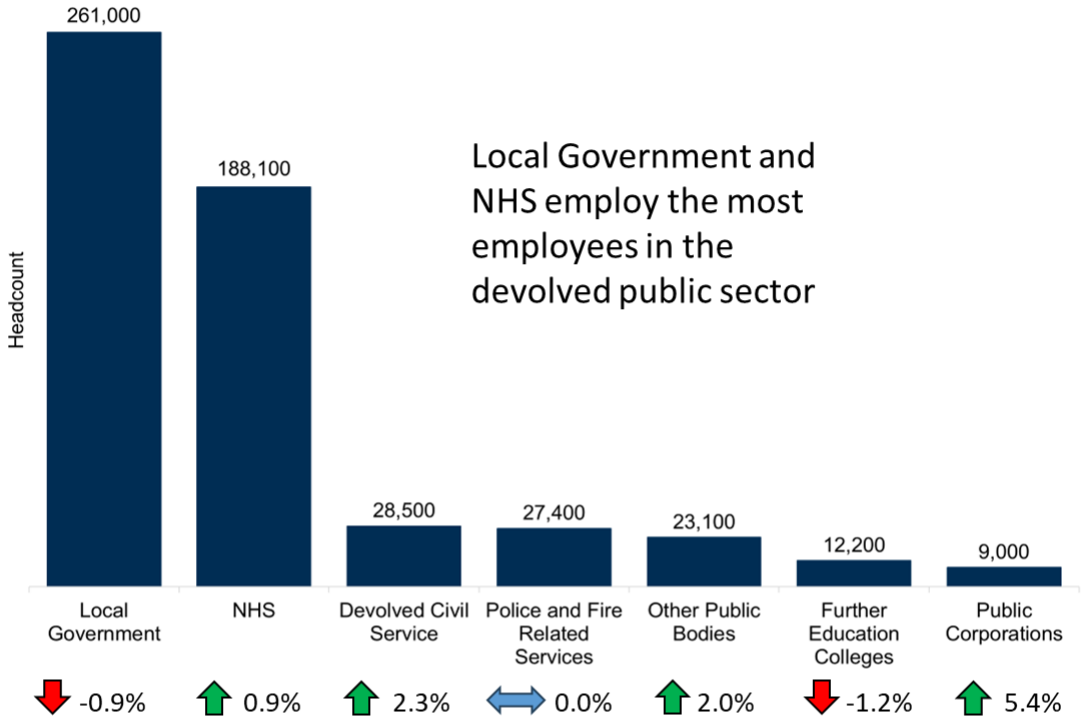
Quarterly Public Sector Employment in Scotland Q4 2024

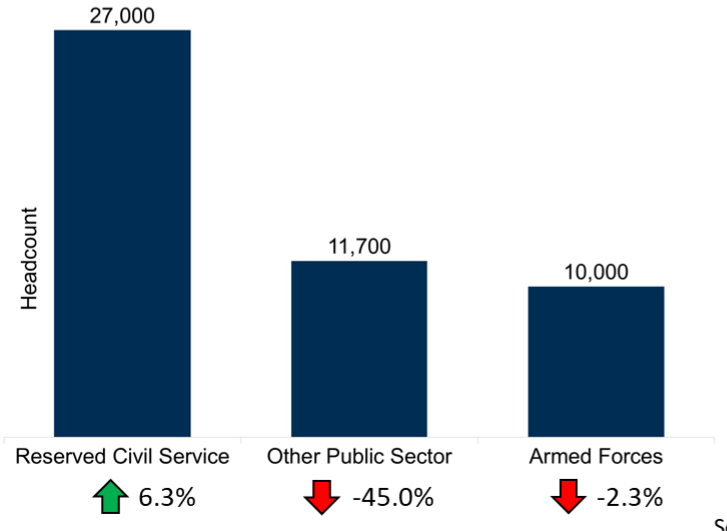
Public Sector Employment Headcount: 597,300 ↓ **1.2%**

Devolved Public Sector Headcount: 548,500 ↑ 0.1%



Change: December 2023 to December 2024

Reserved Public Sector Headcount: 48,800 ↓ 14.5%



Change: December 2023 to December 2024

Over the year, the devolved public sector headcount increased slightly.

The Devolved Public Corporations saw the largest percentage increase (5.4%), while Further Education Colleges saw the largest decrease (-1.2%).

Source: Public Sector Employment, Joint Staffing Watch, Scottish Government, ONS
Changes between December 2023 and December 2024 are shown

Key points

Summary - based on headcount data:

- in December 2024, there were 597,300 people employed in the public sector in Scotland, accounting for 22.5% of total employment[1].
- in December 2024, employment in the public sector was 7,500 (-1.2%) less than in December 2023, mainly due to the reclassification of an organisation from the public to the private sector.
- when major reclassifications are excluded, the public sector increased by around 2,000 (0.3%) between December 2023 and December 2024[2].
- of the total 597,300 people employed in the public sector in Scotland, 548,500 (91.8%) were employed in the devolved public sector in December 2024. This was 760 (0.1%) more than in December 2023.
- between December 2023 and December 2024, employment in the devolved public sector increased by:
    - 1,730 (0.9%) in the NHS
    - 630 (2.3%) in the Devolved Civil Service
    - 460 (2.0%) in Other Public Bodies
    - 440 (5.4%) in Public Corporations
- while employment in the devolved public sector decreased by:
    - 2,350 (-0.9%) in Local Government
    - 150 (-1.2%) in Further Education Colleges
- and was unchanged for Police and Fire Services employment
- in December 2024, there were 48,800 people employed in the Reserved Public Sector in Scotland. This was 8,260 (-14.5%) less than in December 2023. The Reserved Public Sector accounts for 8.2% of total public sector employment in Scotland.
- between December 2023 and December 2024, employment within the Reserved Public Sector decreased in Other Public Sector[3] by 9,630 (-

[1] Estimates for **total employment and private sector employment** are based on the Labour Force Survey, ONS. ONS Labour Force Survey (LFS) estimates for January to March 2019 onwards were reweighted in December 2024, causing a step change discontinuity. Therefore, the LFS reweighting exercise creates a break in the series between December 2018 to February 2019 (Q4 2018) to January to March 2019 (Q1 2019) for regional total employment and regional private sector employment. LFS estimates are designated as official statistics in development.

[2] Further details on major reclassifications are provided on page 8 and on the About public sector employment statistics page of the Scottish Government website.

[3] Public corporations, public sector financial institutions and public bodies have been combined into ‘other public sector’ to ensure individual organisation employment figures are not disclosed.

45.0%)[4] and by 240 (-2.3%) in the Armed Forces. Employment increased in the Reserved Civil Service by 1,610 (6.3%).

[4] The NatWest Group plc (including Royal Bank of Scotland plc) was reclassified to the private sector with effect from 1 June 2024, contributing to the decrease in employment in Other Public Sector. The ONS published a media statement and a blog to accompany this re-classification.

Introduction

The statistics in this release are based on administrative records and surveys of individual public sector bodies carried out by the Scottish Government and the Office for National Statistics (ONS). This is a snapshot of employment as at December 2024.

The publication includes information on public sector employment in Scotland with distinctions made for employment in devolved bodies and reserved bodies (located in Scotland).

The public sector is defined based on UK National Accounts definitions. The statistics in this release were designated National Statistics in May 2010. National statistics are accredited official statistics.

An Accredited Official Statistics Publication for Scotland

These statistics are accredited official statistics. The Office for Statistics Regulation has independently reviewed and accredited these statistics as complying with the standards of trustworthiness, quality, and value in the Code of Practice for Statistics.

The Office of Statistical Regulation published a report accrediting Public Sector Employment in Scotland statistics as accredited official statistics from May 2010.

Accredited official statistics are called National Statistics in the Statistics and Registration Service Act 2007.

Scottish Government statistics are regulated by the Office for Statistics Regulation (OSR). OSR sets the standards of trustworthiness, quality and value in the Code of Practice for Statistics that all producers of official statistics should adhere to.

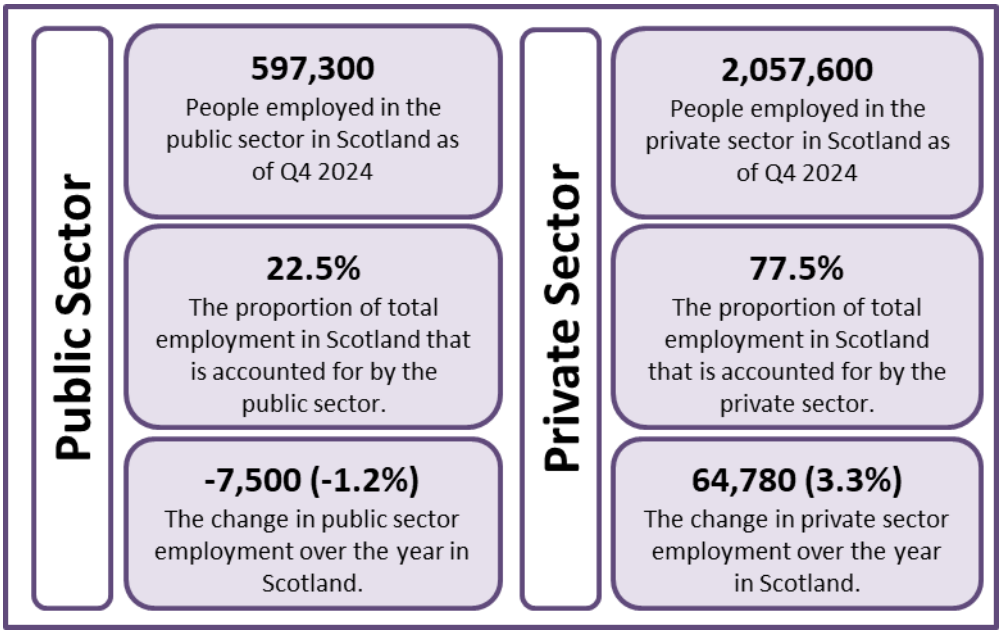
1. Public and Private Sector Employment in Scotland; Headcount

Public sector employment in Scotland decreased by 7,500 (-1.2%) between December 2023 and December 2024. This decrease in public sector employment is mainly due to a decrease in the reserved public sector following the reclassification of an organisation from the public to the private sector.

The public sector is defined according to the UK National Accounts Classifications Guide

Figure 1: Public sector employment in Scotland accounts for over one fifth (22.5%) of total employment

Public and Private[5] Sector employment (Headcount) in Scotland as at December 2024

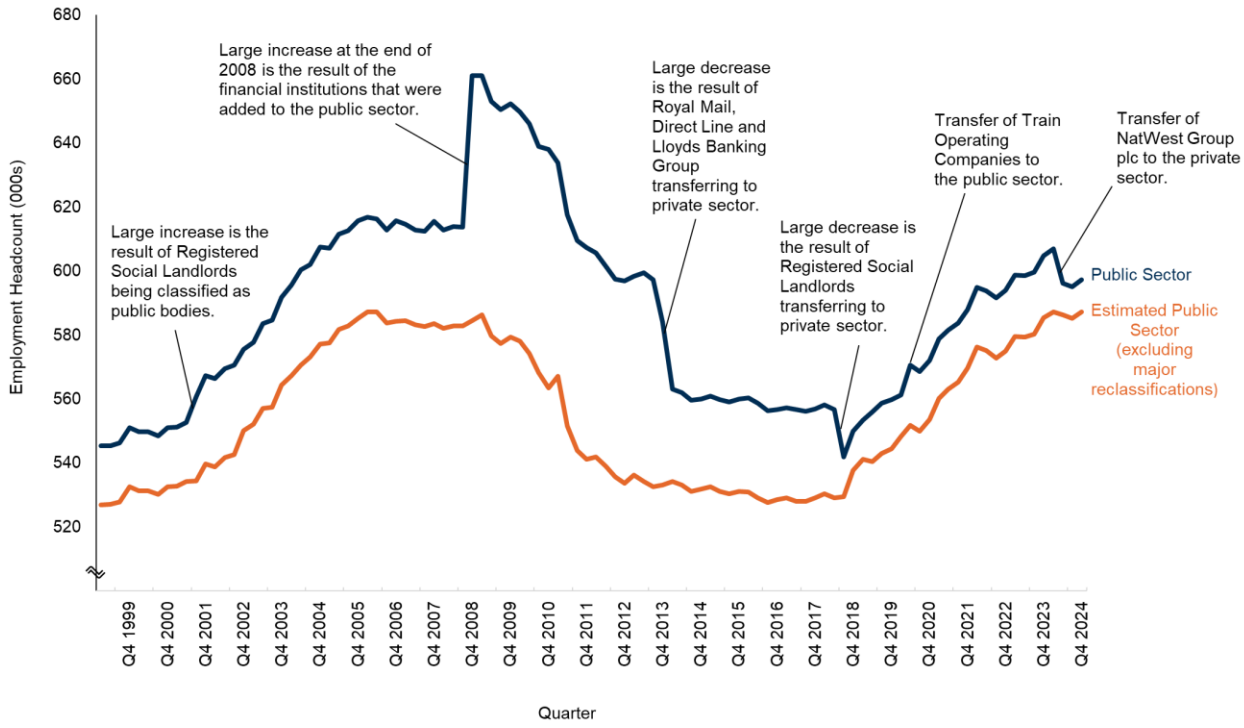


Source: Public Sector Employment in Scotland, Quarter 4 2024

[5] Private sector employment estimates are based on non-seasonally adjusted total employment estimates from the ONS Labour Force Survey and public sector employment figures.

Figure 2: Public Sector employment in Scotland has been gradually increasing since 2018

Public Sector employment and estimated public sector employment (excluding major reclassifications) in Scotland, March 1999 to December 2024, non-seasonally adjusted



Source: Public Sector Employment in Scotland, Quarter 4 2024

Figure 2 shows that the number of people employed in the public sector remained relatively constant between Q1 2014 and Q2 2018, before falling in Q3 2018 and rising again from Q4 2018 onwards. Excluding the effects of major reclassifications[6] (i.e. taking out the headcounts for all large organisations listed in footnote 6 from the overall numbers), the number of people employed in the public sector gradually reached a peak in Q2 2006, decreased until Q3 2013 and remained relatively constant until Q3 2018. The increase between Q3 2018 and Q4 2018 is mainly due to Cordia services moving back under Glasgow City Council services. Since Q4 2018, the series has typically been increasing over time. In Q3 2018, Social Security Scotland was added to the public sector series and has grown in size over time partly contributing to the increase.

[6] Major reserved reclassifications include NatWest Group plc (including Royal Bank of Scotland plc) (until Q2 2024), Lloyds Banking Group plc (until Q4 2013), Northern Rock plc (until Q4 2011), Lloyds TSB Commercial Finance (until Q4 2013), Lloyds Bank Asset Finance (until Q4 2013), Scottish Widows (until Q4 2013), Direct Line (until Q2 2013), Royal Mail Group plc (until Q3 2013), Post Office Ltd (until Q2 2006) and Network Rail. Devolved reclassifications include Registered Social Landlords (until Q2 2018), with Train Operating Companies split across Reserved and Devolved responsibility.

Impact of Excluding Major Reclassifications from Public Sector

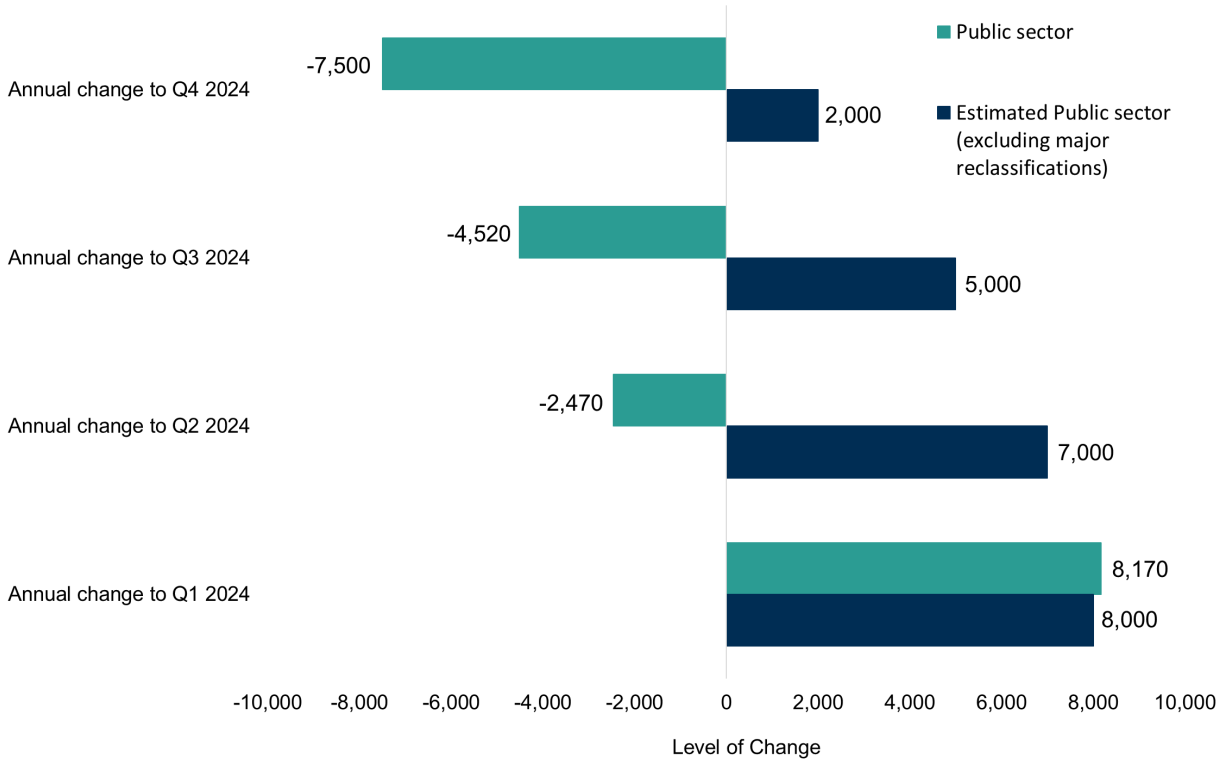
Figure 3 shows the annual change in employment for the public sector. Employment decreased by 7,500 (-1.2%) between December 2023 and December 2024. The decrease is mostly due to a reclassification in the Reserved Public Sector.

If the major reclassifications[6] were to be excluded from the public sector series (i.e. the headcounts for all large organisations listed in footnote 6 were taken out of the overall numbers), there would be around 587,000 people employed in the public sector as at December 2024.

Public sector employment, excluding the effects of the major reclassifications, would be around 2,000 (0.3%) higher in December 2024 compared with December 2023. This series provides a better picture of the annual change in the overall public sector in Scotland due to the change in the classification of an organisation deemed a major reclassification.

Figure 3: In the latest three quarters, employment in the Public Sector in Scotland has decreased over the year due to National Accounts classification changes. When major reclassifications are excluded from the series, employment has increased over the year in each quarter.

Annual change in Public Sector employment (Headcount) in Scotland



Source: Public Sector Employment in Scotland, Quarter 4 2024

Note: The annual change for the Public sector series is rounded to the nearest ten and the Estimated Public sector (excluding major reclassifications) series is round to the nearest thousand.

2. Public Sector Employment by Devolved and Reserved Responsibility; Headcount

The devolved public sector covers those bodies which are the responsibility of the Scottish Government or Scottish Parliament while the reserved public sector in Scotland covers those bodies for which the UK Government has ministerial responsibility.

The devolved public sector headcount was 760 (0.1%) higher in December 2024 compared with December 2023 and the reserved public sector was 8,260 (-14.5%) lower.

In the devolved public sector, Public Corporations saw the largest percentage increase (5.4%) over the year, while Further Education Colleges saw the largest percentage decrease (-1.2%).

The largest increase in headcount over the year was in the NHS (increasing by 1,730) and the largest decrease was in Local Government (decreasing by 2,350).

In the reserved public sector, both the Other Public Sector[7] and Armed Forces saw percentage decreases in headcount over the year, at -45.0%[8] and -2.3% respectively. Employment in the reserved Civil Service increased over the year by 6.3%.

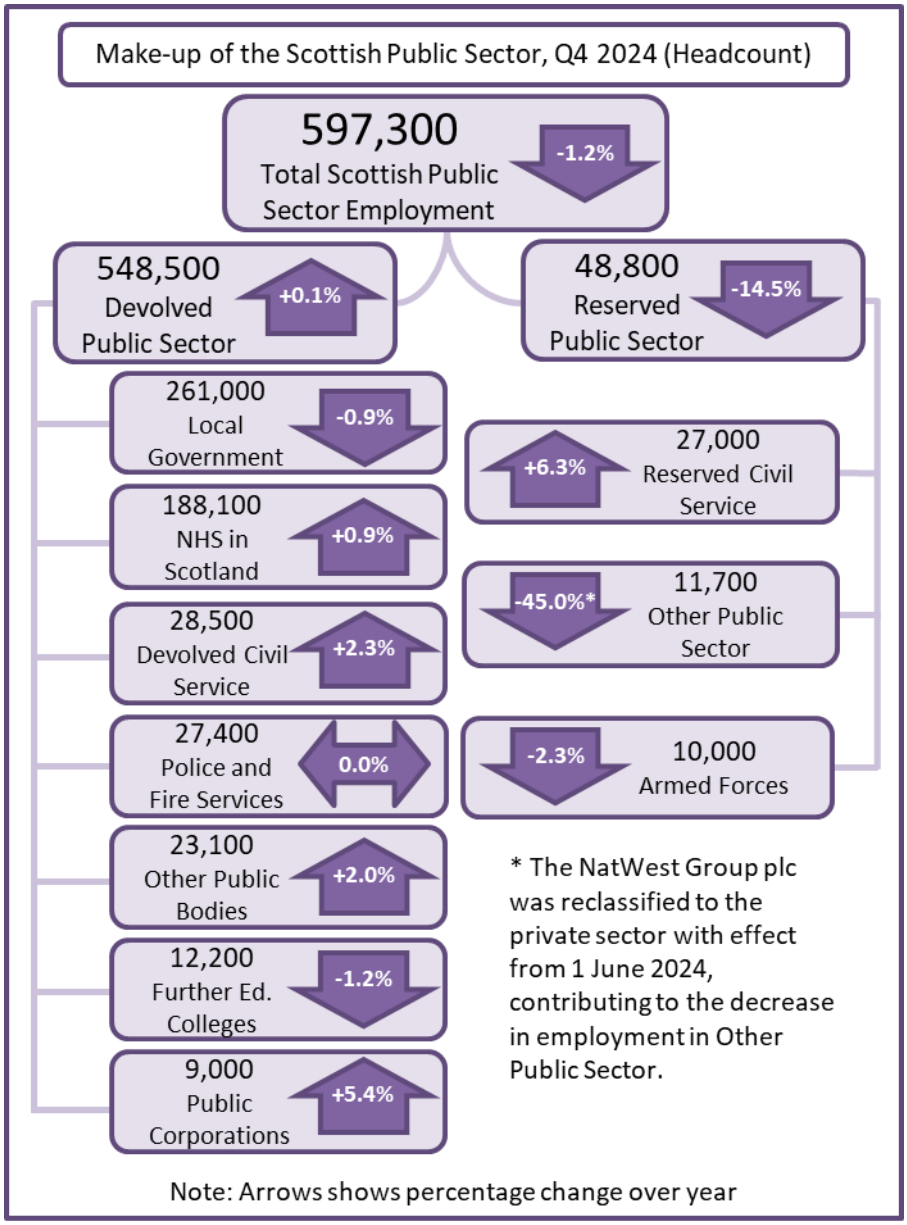
Changes in the devolved and reserved public sector are explored in more detail in sections 3 and 4 respectively.

[7] For the Reserved sector: Public corporations, public sector financial institutions and public bodies have been combined into 'other public sector' to ensure individual organisation employment figures are not disclosed.

[8] The NatWest Group plc (including Royal Bank of Scotland plc) was reclassified to the private sector with effect from 1 June 2024, contributing to the decrease in employment in Other Public Sector. The ONS published a media statement and a blog to accompany this re-classification.

Figure 4: The devolved public sector headcount increased slightly over the year

Breakdown of Public Sector[9] employment (Headcount) in Scotland and annual change from December 2023 to December 2024



Source: Public Sector Employment in Scotland, Quarter 4 2024

Note: Armed Forces data is updated once per year, in Quarter 2.

[9] For further details on the make-up of the Scottish Public Sector, please see the background notes for this publication on the About public sector employment statistics – background notes webpage

3. Devolved Public Sector Employment in Scotland; Headcount

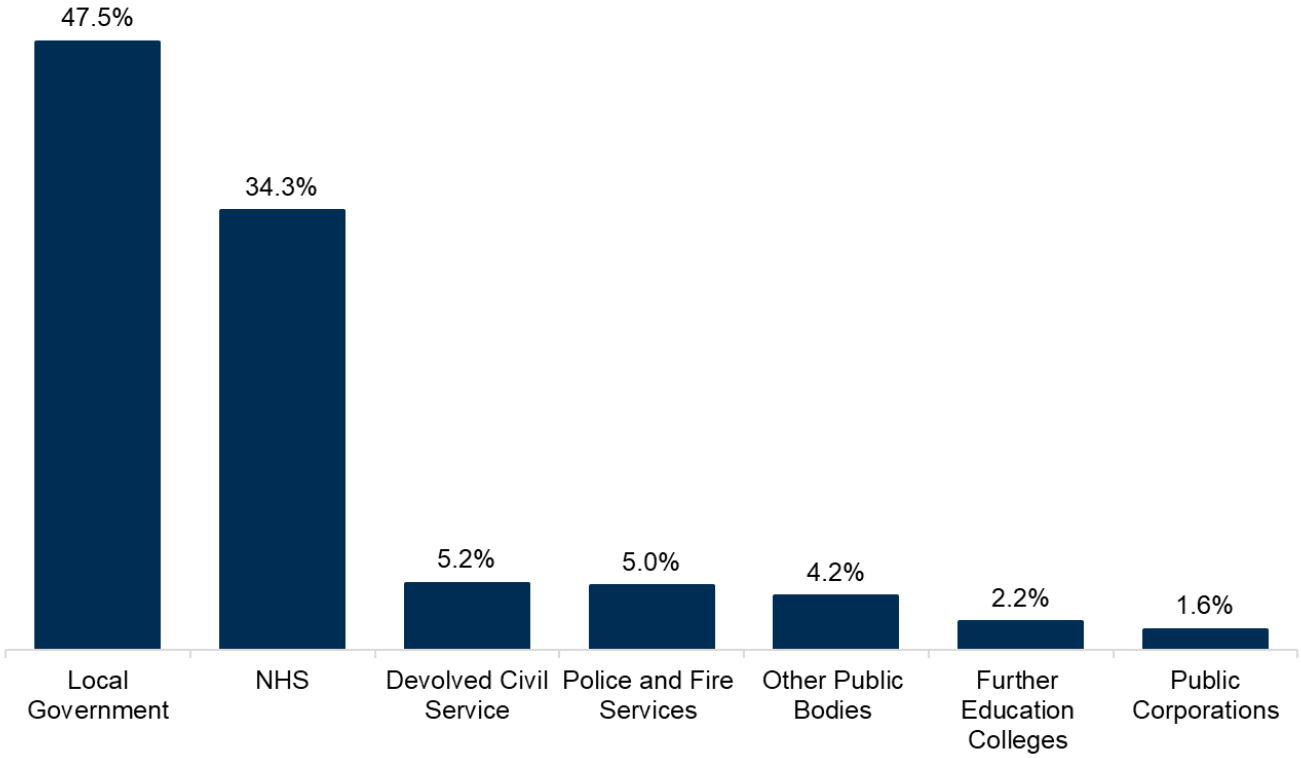
The devolved public sector includes:

- Devolved Civil Service
- Local Government, covering Scottish Local Authorities, Police and Fire Services (up to Q1 2013), Valuation Joint Boards and Regional Transport Partnerships
- Police and Fire Services (Q2 2013 onwards)
- NHS in Scotland
- Further Education Colleges
- Devolved Public Corporations
- Other Devolved Public Bodies (which covers Non-Departmental Bodies and other bodies).

Employment in the devolved public sector was 548,500 in December 2024. This is 760 (0.1%) higher than in December 2023. This increase is largely due to an increase in NHS employment of 1,730 (0.9%).

Figure 5: Local Government and NHS employ the largest number of people in the Devolved Public Sector

Breakdown of Devolved Public Sector employment (Headcount) in Scotland as at December 2024



Note: Totals may not equal the sum of the individual parts due to rounding

Source: Public Sector Employment in Scotland, Quarter 4 2024

The increase over the year in the devolved public sector headcount was due to the following changes (changes are given from December 2023 to December 2024):

- employment in NHS increased by 1,730 (0.9%) to 188,100[10]
- employment in Devolved Civil Service increased by 630 (2.3%) to 28,500
- employment in Other Public Bodies increased by 460 (2.0%) to 23,100
- employment in Public Corporations increased by 440 (5.4%) to 9,000

while:

- employment in Local Government decreased by 2,350 (-0.9%) to 261,000

[10] NHS employment statistics for the number of staff directly employed by NHS Scotland (headcount) were published by NHS Education for Scotland (NES) on 4 March 2025, with data relating to 31 December 2024 in their NHS Scotland official workforce statistics publication

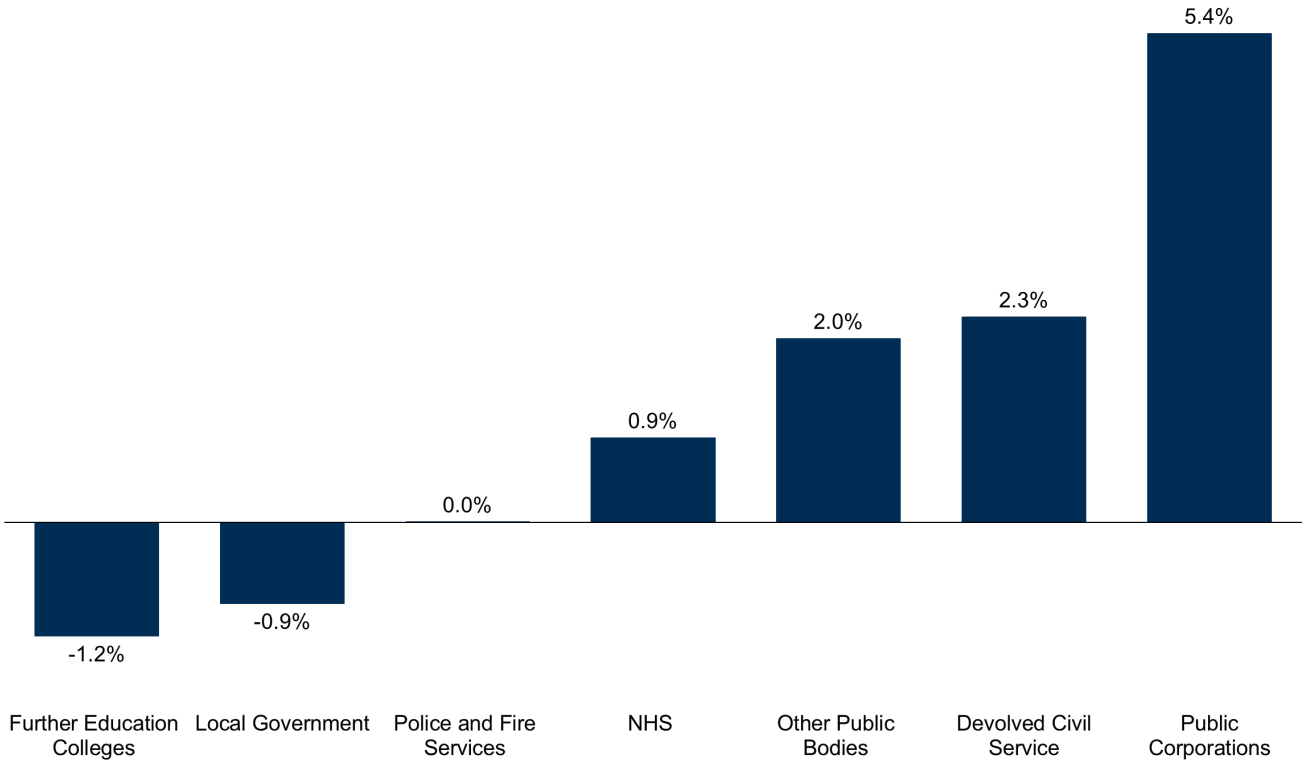
- employment in Further Education Colleges decreased by 150 (-1.2%) to 12,200

and

- employment in Police and Fire Related Services was unchanged at 27,400

Figure 6: Public Corporations had the largest percentage increase over the year across the Devolved Public Sector

Change in Devolved Public Sector employment (Headcount) in Scotland from December 2023 to December 2024



Source: Public Sector Employment in Scotland, Quarter 4 2024

4. Reserved Public Sector Employment in Scotland; Headcount

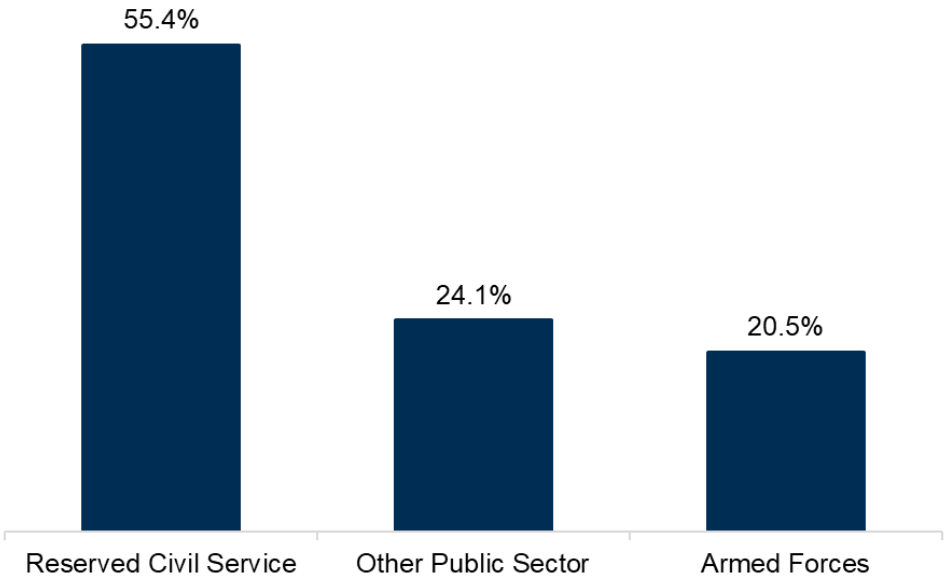
The reserved public sector employment includes:

- Reserved Civil Service
- Armed Forces
- Other Public Sector (which covers, Non-Departmental Bodies, Public Corporations and Other Bodies)

The number of people employed in the reserved public sector in December 2024 was 48,800. This was 8,260 (-14.5%) lower than in December 2023. This decrease is mainly due to an organisation being reclassified from the public to the private sector[11].

Figure 7: Reserved Civil Service employs the largest number of people in the Reserved Public Sector

Breakdown of Reserved Public Sector employment (Headcount) in Scotland as at December 2024



Source: Public Sector Employment in Scotland, Quarter 4 2024.

Note: Totals may not equal the sum of the individual parts due to rounding.

[11] The NatWest Group plc (including Royal Bank of Scotland plc) was reclassified to the private sector with effect from 1 June 2024, contributing to the decrease in employment in Other Public Sector. The ONS published a media statement and a blog to accompany this re-classification.

The decrease over the year in the overall reserved public sector headcount was due to the following changes (changes are given from December 2023 to December 2024):

- employment in Other Public Sector decreased by 9,630 (-45.0%) to 11,700
- employment in the Armed Forces decreased by 240 (-2.3%) to 10,000
- employment in the Reserved Civil Service increased by 1,610 (6.3%) to 27,000

The decrease in the Other Public Sector category is mostly due to the reclassification of an organisation from the public sector to the private sector.

Tables

Tables showing the Public Sector Employment time series are available as supporting documents. These tables include comparisons for 1999 and 2018 to 2024 for the current quarter only. They give further breakdowns of the Devolved and Reserved Public Sectors for both headcount and full-time equivalent employment.

A complete time series, including all quarters back to Q1 1999, is provided in the Public Sector Employment web tables.

About this publication

How to access background or source data

The data collected for this statistical publication are available via web-tables on the Public Sector Employment Statistics web tables.

Revisions and Amendments

As set out in our Quarterly public sector employment statistics in Scotland revisions policy, larger revisions and amendments are typically made alongside the 3rd quarter release published in December.

Revisions made since Q4 2023 publication

Organisations that have been classified as part of the public sector within the National Accounts classifications guide since Q4 2023 have been included within the Public Sector series.

ONS Labour Force Survey (LFS) estimates for January to March 2019 onwards were reweighted in December 2024, causing a step change discontinuity. Therefore, the LFS reweighting exercise creates a break in the series between December 2018 to February 2019 (Q4 2018) and January to March (Q1 2019) estimates for regional total employment and regional private sector employment.

Further details of the reweighting of the ONS Labour Force Survey estimates can be found in the ONS Impact of reweighting on Labour Force Survey key indicators article.

Major Reclassifications

An outline of major reclassifications which have taken place in the Scottish public sector since 2013 are summarised on the about Public Sector Employment statistics – classifications webpage

A separate public sector series excluding the effects of these major reclassifications has been included in this publication to show the impact of the reclassifications on the number of people employed in the public sector.

More information is available on the Public Sector Employment Web Section.

On 21 August 2024, ONS announced the reclassification of NatWest Group plc and its subsidiaries (including Royal Bank of Scotland plc) from the public sector to the private sector with effect from 1 June 2024. This ONS Economic statistics classifications and developments in public sector finances: July 2024 article has more information on this classification decision. The ONS also published a media statement and a blog to accompany this re-classification. We have implemented this reclassification in the current release.

National Accounts Classifications

An outline of National Accounts classifications which have taken place in the Scottish public sector since 2015 are summarised on the about Public Sector Employment statistics – classifications webpage

Public Sector Employment Web section

The Public Sector Employment Web section provides additional information to this National Statistics publication, including the Public Sector Employment data web tables

The web section includes detailed information on:

- local government employment by local authority for the current quarter. A time series of total local government employment from Q1 1999 and by gender from Q1 2011
- detailed tables showing a full time series of data for all quarters back to Q1 1999 are also available to download
- background notes outlining the methodology used to compile this series

UK Comparisons

Public Sector Employment for Government Office Regions and Nations of the UK can be found in the Office for National Statistics (ONS) Public Sector Employment publication tables.

Comparisons to UK data should be made using non-seasonally adjusted UK data.

Background Notes

Statistics prior to Q1 2008 are estimates. These have been calculated using the total UK reserved public sector employment figure and applying to Scotland on a pro-rata basis as regional level data has only been collected from Q1 2008 onwards.

Background notes about the information contained in our PSE series are available on the about Public Sector Employment statistics - background notes webpage

Devolved and Reserved Civil Service Tables

Tables and commentary on the devolved and reserved civil service are not included in this summary. However, the full time series of data for the devolved civil service including Scottish Government, Scottish Government Agencies, Crown Office and Procurator Fiscal and Non-Ministerial Departments and the reserved civil service are updated and published in our associated Public Sector Employment statistics web tables. Tables 5 and 6 provide the headcount figures for the devolved and reserved civil service and Tables 12 and 13 provide the full-time equivalent figures.

Related Publications

Cabinet Office publish annual Civil Service employment statistics. These statistics provide more detailed information by ethnicity, gender, disability, age and earnings for Q1 each year. It is recommended that the Quarterly Public Sector Employment statistics are used when seeking to measure the size of the civil service over time. The Civil Service employment statistics bulletin was published by the ONS prior to 2019.

Further information on employment in the NHS in Scotland is published quarterly in the NHSScotland Workforce report.

Further information on employment in Social Security Scotland is available, and updated quarterly.

Further information on employment in the Scottish Government is also published quarterly in the Scottish Government Workforce Information publication.

The National Public Bodies Directory provides a summary of key information on Scotland's national devolved public bodies, including staff numbers.

Next Publication: June 2025

Tell us what you think

We are always interested to hear from our users about how our statistics are used, and how they can be improved.

Enquiries

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