



The Chartered Institute of Plumbing and Heating Engineering

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Training Guidelines

The most frequently asked questions

Although the Chartered Institute isn't a training organisation, we do get enquiries from people wanting advice on which courses they should take and the qualifications they should aim for. Here are a sample of those questions and answers.

Q – What qualities do you need to be a good plumber?

A – You need to be a practical sort of person that gets satisfaction from doing a job to the best of your ability. Math's, engineering and science are important factors in plumbing work, so it would be beneficial to have an A-C GCSE pass in these subjects. You will also need to be trustworthy with good communication skills to deal with customers.

Q – How do I become a plumber?

A – You will need to complete a plumbing course aimed at S/NVQ Level 2/3 qualification, or similar. These courses are usually run by training providers usually called Technical Colleges.

Q – Do you recommend trainee plumbers to aim for a particular NVQ level?

A – Yes. The Chartered Institute recommends S/NVQ Level 3, to be fully competent.

Q – How long will it take to qualify?

A – It can take around three years to reach S/NVQ Level 3, but it can be achieved quicker than this, or it can take longer, it depends on the individual.

Q - The plumbing courses at my local Technical College are full, what do you suggest?

A - It is a big advantage to be multi-skilled in the job market. Why not consider doing a course in plastering or decorating, which will enhance your skills? In the meantime you can put your name down on the waiting list for the next plumbing course.

Q – Can you recommend an intensive plumbing course that I can do within a couple of months?

A - We don't recommend this type of course as we believe learning has to be re-enforced over a period of time, especially the practical side of things. Some intensive plumbing courses claim to train plumbers in a matter of weeks or months when it takes years of learning to be a plumber, while some offer 'certificates' that are not recognized by the industry. A couple of days in a workshop does not give the experience necessary to work on people's plumbing systems. The Chartered Institute advises that the best way to train is through a recognized training provider (e.g. a college) on an accredited course (e.g. NVQ Level 2).

Q – I've seen an advert which offers distance learning courses in plumbing. Will I be able to qualify as a plumber if I do this?

A – To be a fully qualified plumber you need an adequate amount of practical study to accompany the theoretical side. Part of the S/NVQ Level 2 plumbing courses taught at Technical Colleges includes mandatory work experience. You cannot be adequately trained on a theory only course.

Q – Is it difficult to get work experience?

A- Yes. The majority of one-man bands cannot afford to take on a trainee. A few Technical Colleges will try to arrange this with local plumbing employers, but it would be helpful if you arrange your own work placement. It is vital to have a comprehensive understanding of the Regulations, such as Water Regulations and Building Regulations etc, before carrying out practical plumbing work.

Q – How can I arrange my own work placement?

A – You will need to create a CV detailing your educational background and qualifications gained, along with any work experience. Books are available at your local library to show you how to give your CV a professional look. Send your CV with a short covering letter to the local plumbing businesses in your area along with a stamped addressed envelope.

Q – I've been told that I have to pass a test to get onto a plumbing course, will this be difficult?

A – This is usually a general test to gauge your ability in math's and problem solving. The reason this is set is because some people enrolled on plumbing courses find it difficult to get to grips with the calculations that arise in the

course work. Plumbing courses have a high drop out rate because people underestimate how difficult the course is, colleges want to ensure potential students have the ability to succeed.

Q – I'm 35 and have decided to change my career and become a plumber. Will my age go against me?

A – Unfortunately, there are problems that face a mature plumbing student. It is extremely difficult to get funding for people over the age of 24 and as a lot of people in their thirties already have financial commitments, such as mortgages, it can make it impossible to do a full time course without the help of an employer. Employers may be reluctant to take on someone in their thirties, or older, because they may feel they have to pay them more. Also those in their 30's may be wishing to set up in business for themselves, an employer will be reluctant to train someone who will take the training then immediately set up in opposition.

Q – Where can I get information on Modern Apprenticeships?

A – Contact SummitSkills, JTL or BEST (contact details below) for more information.

Q – What are the job prospects for qualified plumbers?

A – Good, especially if you get the right training to begin with. There is always a skills shortage of well-qualified and experienced plumbers; good plumbers are always in demand. It is certainly a job with a future and can lead to you eventually running your own business or branching out into consulting or even teaching.

Q – Are female plumbers in demand?

A – In domestic plumbing, female plumbers are often preferred by elderly people or lone mothers. With today's light-weight materials, it is easier for female plumbers to tackle a whole range of plumbing jobs, including work carried out on construction sites.

Q – What is the earning potential of the average plumber?

A – On qualifying with a full NVQ Level 3 qualification and in full time employment you can expect to be earning around £18k a year, this could rise up to around £25k after five or more year's experience. A self-employed tradesperson can earn between £30 -£40K a year **BUT** out of this will come tax, insurance, parking, petrol, tools and Gas Safe registration (if working on gas) etc. If working in London the rates of pay will be higher but the overheads are more expensive (congestion charge, parking etc).

Please note: Plumbers work hard for the money they earn. The hours can be long, call outs can mean you working at unsociable hours and it's not unusual to find yourself working more than 5 days a week (especially if self-employed).

Q – Are there any organisations I can join that will help my career?

A – Plumbing students can apply for Trainee membership of the **Chartered Institute of Plumbing and Heating Engineering**. For just £22 per year or a two year membership for just £30 they can enjoy the same advantages of membership as qualified plumbers, except they cannot use the logo or vote at AGM's. It also shows prospective employers that you have a professional attitude. Members receive the bi-monthly P&HE Magazine which is full of industry news, updates on regulations and technical articles.

For more information on joining the Chartered Institute of Plumbing and Heating Engineering, please contact Lesley Challis on 01708 463108 or email lesleyc@ciphe.org.uk, or Jill Gerrard on 01708 463107 or email jillg@ciphe.org.uk and ask for a Trainee membership pack.

Useful Contacts:

SummitSkills Ltd

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