

Recommended Salary Scales for Organists

1 January 2024 – 31 December 2024

In the 2022–2023 revision of this guide, the SFO recognised significant changes to the working conditions of organists since the COVID-19 outbreak, mainly resulting from the widespread adoption of streaming systems to broadcast services. Historically high levels of inflation remain an additional challenge in calculating appropriate salary scales. These conditions affect churches as much as they affect organists, and the SFO has sought to offer advice that is sustainable and practical for both parties. The information below constitutes the SFO’s recommendations for best practice; rather than dictating exact procedures and amounts, it should form a starting point from which organists and churches can enter into dialogue and consider their unique circumstances.

Level of adjustment

After careful consideration, the SFO Committee agreed that the 2022–2023 Organists’ Recommended Salary Scales should be increased by 11.2% from 1st January 2024, reflecting the same increase in the Retail Price Index across the period from January 2022 to October 2023. Any recommendation below RPI figures will only necessitate salary lags requiring an even larger increase in future: in respect of promoting transparency and sustainability, the SFO recommends spreading the load of these high inflationary levels through smaller increases over a longer period.

The new scales are endorsed by The Church of Scotland through its Mission and Discipleship Council. It is intended that these scales should remain in force until 31st December 2024, at which time they will be reviewed. The 2024 scales are shown below with the 2022–2023 scales shown for reference.

Streaming of services

Musicians’ recorded performances are protected as property rights by statute, and consent for broadcasting these performances is not often given within existing contracts. The Musicians’ Union, with endorsement from the Royal College of Organists, published guidance on per-service additional fees for streamed worship, but it is the opinion of the SFO that these rates are too high to represent a sustainable solution for many churches on a weekly basis. It is, however, crucial that the intellectual property rights of organists are protected and respected; the SFO therefore recommends that churches obtain written consent from organists prior to any streaming.

Streaming can enable participation in worship from those unable to attend services in person. Where this is the intention, the SFO suggests the broadcast could be made available for one week or until the next service (whichever is sooner), with no increased fee for organists—although it is essential that consent is obtained, and it would be wholly reasonable to discuss an additional fee in respect of this. For broadcasts remaining available over longer periods (e.g. special services) the SFO recommends organists are paid additional fees of 50% for audio recording, or 100% for video recordings.

Salary	<i>2022–2023 rate for reference</i>	Extra service or deputy fee	<i>2022–2023 rate for reference</i>	Wedding fee
A: Churches without choirs				
£2,004–3,124	<i>£1,802–2,809</i>	£77	<i>£69</i>	£115
B: Churches with choirs making an occasional contribution to worship				
£3,124–4,892	<i>£2,809–4,399</i>	£77–94	<i>£69–85</i>	£115–141
C: Churches with choirs making a substantial individual contribution to worship				
£4,892–6,542	<i>£4,399–5,883</i>	£94–124	<i>£85–111</i>	£141–186
D: Churches with competent choirs singing full choral services				
£6,542–9,783	<i>£5,883–8,798</i>	£124–136	<i>£111–122</i>	£186–203
E: Churches employing a professional director of music with extensive responsibilities				
£9,783 minimum	<i>£8,798 minimum</i>	£136 minimum	<i>£122 minimum</i>	£203 minimum

Notes

1. To enhance transparency, and encourage conversation between organists and employers, the SFO instituted in 2022 two major changes from the advice given in previous years:

- a. Funerals are brought under the same classification as ‘extra services’.
- b. With the vast majority of weddings now being recorded – either professionally or by guests – the former system of additional recording fees is no longer practical. These new fees are set at 150% of the previous rates, and there should **not** be any additional uplift for recording.

2. The SFO seeks to promote a culture of professionalism with the publication of this document, believing ‘the labourer is worthy of their hire’. As such, the salary bandings take into consideration the training, skill and preparation necessary for an organist to fulfil their duties. Churches and organists alike should ensure the levels of competency offered and requested are appropriate to the style of worship, and can build mutual respect by fully considering the responsibilities of both parties.

3. These guidelines are not mandatory. They exist to provide a basis from which organists and churches can agree solutions appropriate to their individual circumstances. The SFO encourages open dialogue and negotiation between parties in these matters.

4. These salary scales are endorsed by the Mission and Discipleship Council of The Church of Scotland, although are applicable to other denominations.

5. This document does not constitute formal legal advice. The current Church of Contract pro-forma contract for organists is available at <https://www.churchofscotland.org.uk/worship/music-for-worship/church-organists>. The SFO encourages parties to seek advice from a solicitor or professional adviser on any matters regarding taxation or individual contracts.

6. This document will be reviewed before the end of 2024, with revised guidance produced for 2025.