

Uniformed and Security Services

Are you attracted to the idea of being part of a team and doing an important job? Or what about working abroad and challenging yourself mentally and physically? A career in the uniformed and security services can not only offer these opportunities, but you can receive quality training and, in some cases, learn a trade or new skill too.

This career sector contains services that are concerned with security across a broad spectrum, from the country's defence to civil order and protection of private businesses and individuals, to dealing with emergencies at sea or on land.

What areas can I work in?

This career area consists of four sectors:

- **armed services**, whose main purpose is to defend the United Kingdom, its Overseas Territories (like Gibraltar), its people and interests
- **emergency services**, which includes coastguard and firefighting services
- **police and security work**, which includes the investigation of criminal activities, public safety and surveillance, border security and customs and revenue services
- **prison work** involving custodial work and the rehabilitation of prisoners.

To see the routes to getting into each of these sectors, take a look at our [Career Pathway](#).

What kind of companies can I work for?

Armed services

- Army
- Royal Air Force
- Royal Navy
- Royal Marines.

Emergency Services

- Maritime and Coastguard Agency (MCA), a UK government agency
- Scottish Fire and Rescue Service (SFRS)
- Ministry of Defence (MoD).

Police and Security Work

- Police Scotland
- private security firms
- local authorities
- airports
- retail stores and supermarkets

- Border Force
- UK Visas and Immigration
- Scottish Police Authority (SPA)
- government departments such as Security Service (MI5), Secret Intelligence Service (MI6) or GCHQ (Government Communications Headquarters).

Prison Work

- Scottish Prison Service (SPS).

What's the job market like?

Generally the job prospects are good, although entry can be very competitive. It can help if you are able to move around the country in many jobs.

The **armed services** are a major UK employer, with 181,890 UK Forces personnel as of 1st April 2025. 60% of these serve in the army, whilst the rest are equally split between the Royal Marines/Navy and the Royal Air Force. ⁵

The **Scottish Fire and Rescue Services** employed 7,512 staff in uniformed and non-uniformed roles as of the end of March 2024. They have 356 community fire stations across Scotland. Entry is very competitive. ³

There are very few jobs for Coastguards. In the year ending 31 March 2024 the **Maritime and Coastguard Agency (MCA)** had 1,268 employees (38.6% female). They were supported by 3,100 volunteer Coastguard Rescue Officers based across the country. ⁴

As of 31 March 2025, there were 16,553 full time equivalent police officers in Scotland. This is an increase of 197 from the previous year. **Police Scotland** have recruitment intakes at various times throughout the year. ¹

The **Scottish Prison Service (SPS)** has 17 establishments comprising of 14 prisons directly operated by SPS and two community custody units. There is also one prison under private contract. As of 31 March 2024 it directly employed 4,962 staff in a variety of roles. ²

There is a growing private security industry in Scotland, providing CCTV surveillance, security patrols and other guarding services as well as private investigation and intelligence services. This sector includes door supervisors and stewards.

Border Force UK employ around 10,000 staff in frontline roles. They work in 140 ports and airports in the UK and overseas. ⁶

Facts and figures

- The RAF offers around 57 different careers for both men and women. There are jobs in aircrew, air and space operations, cyberspace, chaplaincy, engineering, ground combat and security, intelligence, legal, logistics, medical services, music, and people operations. ⁷
- As of 1st April 2024, the UK Regular Forces employed 16,220 women, and accounted for 11.7% of the total trained and untrained strength. ⁸
- HM Coastguard responded to more than 39,129 incidents in 2022-23. ⁴

- In the Scottish Fire and Rescue Service, only 6.4% of wholetime firefighters are female.³

Want to find out more?

For detailed information about the Army, phone 0345 600 8080 or visit the [Army website](#).

You can also find information on careers in the armed services at the [Ministry of Defence website](#).

For detailed information about the Royal Navy and Royal Marines, visit the [Royal Navy Career website](#).

For careers in the Royal Air Force, phone 0345 605 5555 and visit the [Royal Airforce website](#).

For government security careers, see websites for [Security Service \(MI5\)](#), [Secret Intelligence Service \(MI6\)](#) or [GCHQ](#) (Government Communications Headquarters).

Sources

¹ [Scottish Government Police Officer Quarterly Strength Statistics Scotland](#) (March 2025)

² [Scottish Prison Service Annual Report and Accounts](#) (2023-2024)

³ [Scottish Fire Service Fire Safety and Organisational Statistics](#) (2023-2024)

⁴ [Maritime and Coastguard Agency Annual Report and Accounts](#) (2023-2024)

⁵ [Quarterly Service Personnel Statistics](#) (Gov.uk) (April 2025)

⁶ [Home Office website](#) (June 2025)

⁷ [Royal Air Force website](#) (June 2025)

⁸ [UK Defence Personnel Statistics](#) (August 2024)