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 GCHG (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 Forces** are a major UK employer, with 183,410 UK Forces personnel as of 1st April 2026. 60% of these serve in the army, whilst the rest are equally split between the Royal Marines/Navy and the Royal Air Force. [1]

The **Scottish Fire and Rescue Service** employed 7,556 staff in uniformed and non-uniformed roles as of 2025. This is an increase of 44 on the previous year. They have 356 community fire stations across Scotland. Entry is very competitive. [2]

There are very few jobs for Coastguards. In the year ending 31 March 2025 the **Maritime and Coastguard Agency (MCA)** had 1,230 employees (37% female). They were supported by 3,500 volunteer Coastguard Rescue Officers based across the country. [3]

As of 31 March 2026, there were 16,430 police officers in Scotland. This is a decrease of 123 from the previous year. **Police Scotland** have recruitment intakes at various times throughout the year. [4]

The **Scottish Prison Service (SPS)** has 17 establishments comprising of 15 prisons and 2 community custody units. Of these 17 establishments, 16 are directly operated by SPS and one is operated by a private sector operator. As of 31 March 2025 SPS directly employed 5,113 staff in a variety of roles. [5]

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 June 2025, the UK Regular Forces employed 16,300 women, and accounted for 11.9% of the total trained and untrained strength. [8]

- HM Coastguard responded to more than 39,147 incidents in 2024-25, an increase of 18 on the previous year. [3]
- In the Scottish Fire and Rescue Service, only 6.4% of wholetime firefighters are female. [2]

Want to find out more?

For detailed information about the Army, phone 0345 600 8080 or visit the Army 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] Quarterly Service Personnel Statistics, UK Government (April 2026)

[2] Scottish Fire Service Fire Safety and Organisational Statistics (2024-2025)

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

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

[5] Scottish Prison Service Annual Report and Accounts (2024-2025)

[6] Home Office Workforce Diversity Statistics (March 2026)

[7] Royal Air Force website (June 2026)

[8] UK armed forces biannual diversity statistics: April 2025, UK Government (June 2025)