Sheriff Officer or Messenger-at-Arms

Sheriff officers enforce court orders from regional civil courts. Messengers-at-arms enforce the orders of the supreme civil court, the Court of Session.

They have the authority to enforce entry to premises and to enforce seizure of goods.

The Work

You could be:

- serving citations (orders compelling the defender to appear in court)
- making enquiries to find the defender so that the citation can be delivered in person
- serving papers on debtors: the Charge for Payment (demanding payment within a set time, usually 14 days) and then an Earnings Arrestment Order on the employer of a debtor who still fails to pay
- sending a report to the court, listing what has been done to recover the debt and including a statement of debt
- collecting outstanding commercial rates and council tax for the local authority
- repossessing goods and property
- dealing mostly with decrees (judgements) about money
- in domestic violence cases removing someone from the property
- in child custody disputes, perhaps finding the child to return to the parent who has been granted custody.

Pay

The figures below are only a guide. Actual pay rates may vary, depending on:

- where you work
- your level of experience
- the size of the company or organisation you work for
- the demand for the job.

Salaries for trainee sheriff officers are around £19,000 a year. Salaries for qualified sheriff officers and messengers-at-arms can range from around £26,000 to £40,000 a year.

Conditions

- You will spend a lot of your time travelling around.
- Messengers-at-arms can travel anywhere in Scotland to serve court documents and enforce court orders of the Court of Session.
- Sheriff officers work in particular local areas for which they have a 'commission' (applied for through the courts).
- You might sometimes have to work overtime, or in the evenings or at weekends.
- You will sometimes work alone, but in some cases you might have an assistant with you to act as witness or escort.

Getting In

- To become a sheriff officer you must be at least 20 years old and have a good general education. This is usually at least 5 subjects at National 4 or 5, including English and Maths. Many have Higher National qualifications. Relevant work experience may be accepted.
- You would gain employment with a sheriff officer and undergo a three-year traineeship (this is due to change to two years).
- You would then sit the Society of Messengers-at-Arms and Sheriff Officers exam, which tests practical and technical knowledge. You will be allowed three attempts to pass this exam.
- After passing the examination, you will apply to the Sheriff Principal of the sheriffdom of the geographical location in which you wish to practise. You are also required to provide two letters of reference of good character.
- To become a messenger-at-arms, you must have practised as a sheriff officer for at least two years (this is due to change to one year), and sit a further examination set by the Examination Board of the Society of Messengers-at-Arms and Sheriff Officers. You would then apply to the Court of Session.
- You usually need a driving licence and the use of a car for work.
- You will require a satisfactory criminal record check from Disclosure Scotland to show that you are suitable for this type of work. Contact Disclosure Scotland for details on the type you would need.

What Does It Take

You need to be:

- assertive and confident
- able to carry out unpopular decisions
- able to use your initiative and work alone
- able to deal with people from different backgrounds
- able to cope with people who are distressed or aggressive
- honest
- good with figures.

You should have:

- the ability to learn and understand the relevant laws
- good judgement
- tact, diplomacy and good negotiation skills
- personal integrity
- a reasonable level of physical fitness.

Training

- You would train on the job, working with a qualified officer and attending short courses. This normally takes a minimum of three years (this is due to change to two years).
- You would then take the professional examinations to become a sheriff officer.
- After a minimum of two more years' (this is due to change to one year) experience you can take a further

examination to qualify as a messenger-at-arms.
- Further training and development opportunities, provided by the Society of Messengers-at-Arms and Sheriff Officers, are available throughout your career.

Getting On

- Private firms employ sheriff officers but they operate under the control of the sheriff.
- You may be employed by a private firm and be commissioned to work for the courts.

More Information

Scotland is geographically divided into six sheriffdoms and 39 local sheriff court districts.

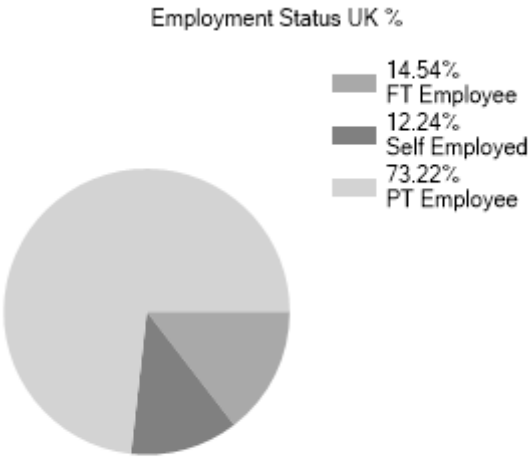
Contacts

Scottish Courts and Tribunals Service
Tel: 0131 444 3300
Email: enquiries@scotcourts.gov.uk
Website: www.scotcourts.gov.uk
Website (2): www.scotcourts.gov.uk/about-the-scottish-court-service/recruitment
X: @SCTScourtstribs

Skills for Justice
Tel: 0117 922 1155
Email: info@skillsforjustice.org.uk
Website: skillsforjustice.org.uk
X: @Skills_Justice

Society of Messengers-at-Arms and Sheriff Officers (SMASO)
Tel: 0131 292 0321
Email: admin@smaso.org.uk
Website: smaso.org.uk

Statistics



Past Unemployment - Scotland

No Claimant statistics available for Scotland.

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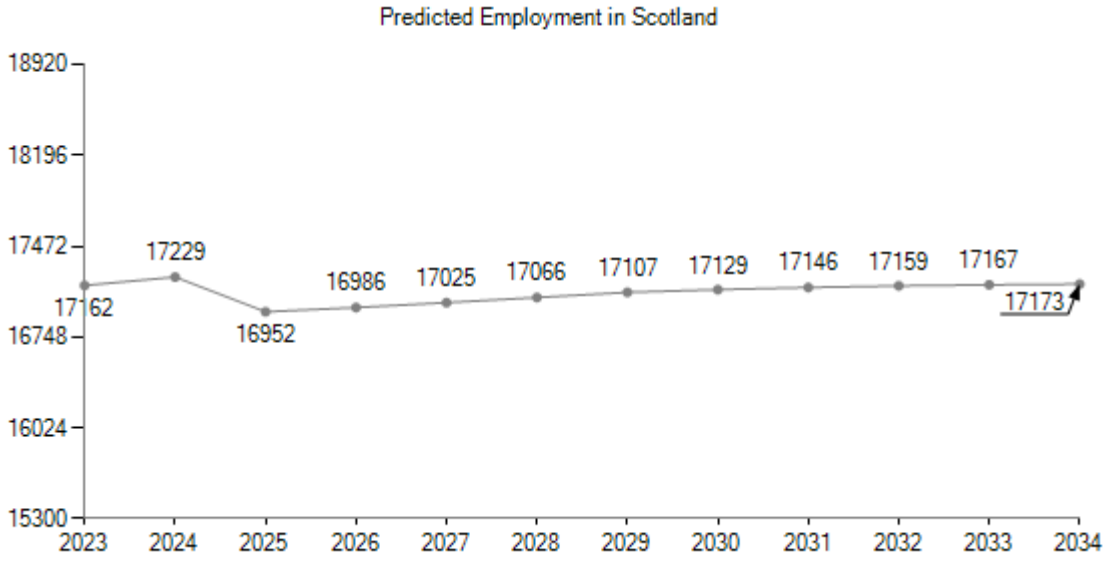

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