

Private Investigator

Private investigators (PIs) carry out confidential checks and investigations for clients. Clients can be private individuals, businesses, solicitors, insurance companies and government departments.

The Work

You could be:

- tracing individuals – missing persons, a lost relative, a witness to a crime, someone who owes money or someone who has been left money in a will
- investigating fraud, such as insurance or personal injury claims
- following someone by car or on foot without being spotted and collecting evidence of their activities
- taking statements from witnesses and gathering video, photographic, audio and electronic evidence
- going undercover, assuming a different role in order to get close to a suspect
- attending court hearings and giving evidence
- recovering debt
- running background or pre-employment checks on individuals
- finding information and writing reports for clients.

You must make sure that:

- you work within the law
- the evidence you gather is admissible in court
- none of your clients have illegal or unethical motives.

Pay

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

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

Rates of pay vary, depending on the caseload you carry, the hours you work and the results you achieve. If you work freelance you may not have a regular income and you must buy your own equipment such as car, binoculars, camera and video equipment.

Many freelance investigators charge between £45 and £100 an hour, or between £100 and £800 set fee for a job, depending on the type of work being carried out, plus all expenses. Private investigators earnings range from around £15,500 to £30,000 a year and in corporate work might earn £50,000 or more a year.

Conditions

- You would be based in an office, but you would spend a lot of time out and about.

- Hours would be very irregular, including nights and weekends.
- The work can be routine and boring at times - you may have to do a lot of sitting about, watching and waiting for something to happen, perhaps in an unheated car or outside in bad weather.
- You might spend a lot of time reading through paperwork and online content for research purposes.
- Most of your work would be local, but you might sometimes have to travel, and stay away from home for a few days.
- You may have to confront people who are aggressive or even violent.
- Self-employment is common.

Getting In

- A good general education is useful. Some entrants have Highers, a Higher National Certificate (HNC), Higher National Diploma (HND) or a degree.
- This is often a second career. Previous experience in police, law or security work, or in the armed services is very useful.
- It helps to have a basic knowledge of law, for example on trespass, assault and data protection.
- You must have a driving licence.
- You would require a satisfactory PVG (Protecting Vulnerable Groups) check to show you are suitable for this type of work. Contact Disclosure Scotland for details.
- It is a good idea to become a member of a professional body, such as the Association of British Investigators (ABI) and get some relevant training.
- It helps if you are prepared to work on a freelance basis to build up relevant experience.
- Licensing for this industry is being introduced at some point in the future, so anyone working in the UK private investigation industry will require a licence from the Security Industry Authority (SIA). See the 'More Information' section below.

There are job opportunities with solicitors, banks, insurance companies, corporate bodies, offshore corporations, public bodies such as social security offices and individual clients.

What Does It Take

You need to have:

- integrity and honesty
- patience, perseverance and a high level of concentration
- good observation skills and an eye for detail
- a practical, methodical and logical approach
- a good memory, to write accurate reports and make positive identifications
- an awareness of possible danger
- good communication skills, both spoken and written
- good business skills.

You need to be able to:

- use your initiative
- get on with members of the public

- work discreetly and alone
- meet deadlines
- deliver difficult news or findings with tact and empathy.

Training

- Training is usually on the job.
- The Academy of Professional Investigation (API) offers two courses: the IQ Level 3 Certificate in Principles of Professional Private Investigation (RQF), which is for complete beginners; and the IQ Level 3 Award for Professional Investigators (QCF) (which is the expected qualification for SIA Licence).
- The Institute of Professional Investigators (IPI) offers a Foundation course in Professional Investigating (an online course), as well as the QCF.
- The ABI has the ABI Academy offers the QCF by distance learning or a five day course.

Getting On

- You could be self-employed or work for an agency, where you might either be paid a salary or, more likely, work freelance.
- Reliable agencies are approved by the ABI or IPI. You should beware of agencies which might expect employees to do illegal work.
- You may be able to become a supervisor with an agency.
- You might choose to specialise – for instance in corporate work or insurance work, domestic disputes, commercial piracy (copying licensed products such as music and film), computer fraud, equestrian or other matters.
- If you set up your own agency, you should be aware that it takes time to build up a client base. There is a high failure rate amongst self-employed private investigators.
- With experience, you can become a member of the ABI or the IPI.

More Information

The Security Industry Authority (SIA) is working with the ABI and the IPI to develop national occupational standards for the industry. This will raise standards and prevent unsuitable or untrained people from working in the PI industry.

Contacts

Academy of Professional Investigation (API)

Tel: 01444 441111

Website: www.pi-academy.com

X: @piacademy

Facebook: www.facebook.com/piacademy

Association of British Investigators

Tel: 020 8191 7500

Email: secretariat@theabi.org.uk

Website: www.theabi.org.uk

Institute of Professional Investigators (IPI)

Tel: 0870 330 8622

Email: admin@ipi.org.uk
Website: www.ipi.org.uk
X: @IPInvestigators

Security Industry Authority (SIA)

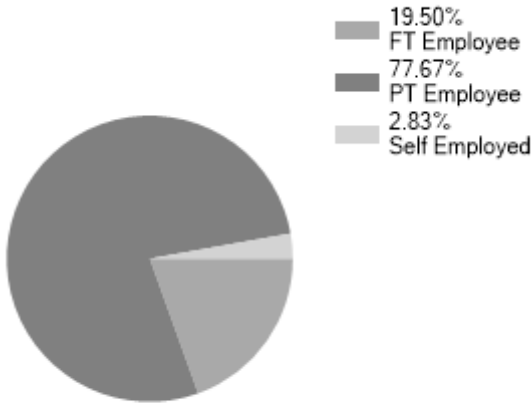
Website: www.gov.uk/government/organisations/security-industry-authority
X: @SIAuk
Facebook: www.facebook.com/thesiauk

World Association of Professional Investigators (WAPI)

Website: www.wapi.com

Statistics

Employment Status UK %

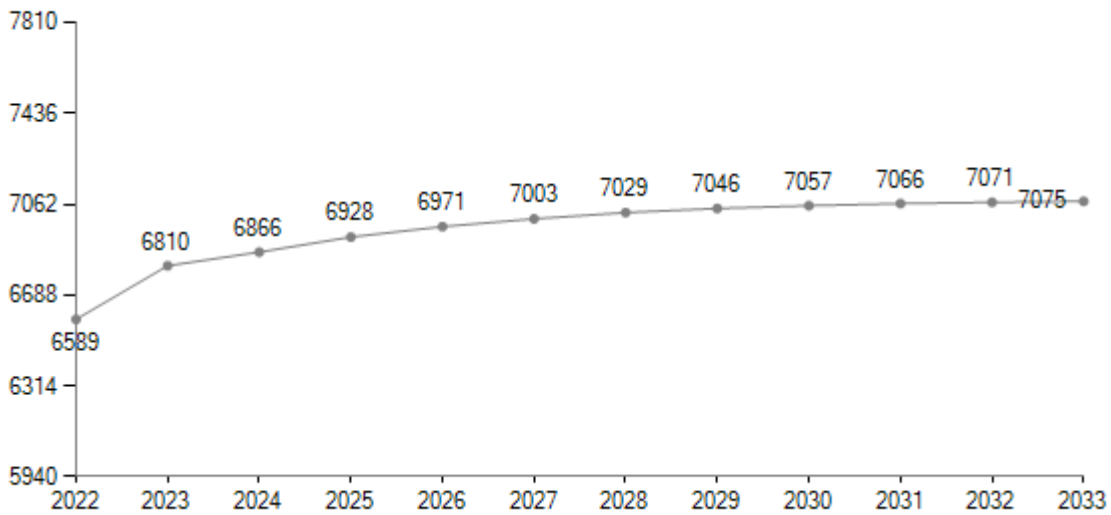


Past Unemployment - Scotland

No Claimant statistics available for Scotland.

LMI data powered by [LMI for All](#)

Predicted Employment in Scotland



LMI data powered by [Lightcast](#)