Industry insight – Armed forces and emergency services

In a nutshell

The armed forces and emergency services sectors continue to include some of the largest employers within the UK job market, despite cuts in public sector jobs. They recruit a wide variety of graduates each year.

Despite Ministry of Defence (MoD) budget cuts, the armed forces are still recruiting and there is a continued demand for skilled personnel, particularly in skill shortage areas such as medical services, logistics and engineering.

Recruitment in the emergency services varies according to individual services' needs. There are a wide range of roles that cover most academic disciplines.

What kind of work can I do?

The armed forces of the United Kingdom include the Army, the Royal Navy, (which includes the Royal Marines) and the Royal Air Force (RAF). Their prime task is to defend Britain, Britain's interests and Britain’s dependencies.

There is a variety of job types represented in the forces, including:

- air crew and air traffic control;
- combat, see armed forces operational officer;
- engineering - including civil, marine, electrical and mechanical, see armed forces technical officer;
- HR, legal and finance - including administration, solicitors, chaplains, teachers and trainers, see armed forces training and education officer;
- intelligence, IT and communications;
- logistics and support - including stores, catering and military police see armed forces logistics/support/administrative officer;
- medical - including doctors, dentists, nurses, biomedical scientists, physiotherapists, environmental health officers;
- music and ceremonial.
The emergency services also cover a wide range of careers. Roles can be found in:

- police force - including police officer, police community support officer and scenes of crime officer;
- ambulance service - including ambulance technician, paramedic and emergency care practitioner;
- fire and rescue service - including firefighter;
- coastguard.

Roles are also available in the emergency services in areas such as health and safety, HR, administration, finance, media and public relations.

Emergency planning is a growing sub-sector of emergency services. Emergency planning/management officers liaise with all services and co-ordinate their actions in the event of an emergency.

Lean management/project management are also becoming increasingly large areas of work as the economic climate is having a large impact across the public sector.

**What’s it like working in this sector?**

- Working conditions vary across the sector. You may work in a range of settings - outdoors, onboard a ship, or in a hospital, office, laboratory or warehouse.
- Depending on the role, working in this sector may involve long hours in challenging and often stressful and dangerous environments.
- In the armed forces, job rotation and relocation is expected every two to three years.
- More women are serving in a greater variety of posts than ever before, with women currently constituting 9.1% of armed forces personnel, according to the MoD. 96% of RAF jobs and 71% of both the Army and Royal Navy jobs are open to women.
- There has been a gradual increase in the numbers of female and black and minority ethnic (BME) firefighters and staff over recent years.
- Numbers of minority ethnic and female police officers have increased from 2010 to 2011, according to the Home Office.
- Most recent figures from the MoD show that there are almost 177,000 fully trained personnel in the armed forces.
- According to a UK National Statistics report, as of March 2011, fire and rescue services in England employed around 29,100 wholetime firefighter equivalents, and 12,100 retained firefighter units of 24-hour cover.
- Figures from a National Audit Office report show that there were around 17,600 qualified ambulance staff, including paramedics and ambulance technicians working for the NHS Ambulance Service in 2010.
There are wide ranging opportunities throughout the UK. There are also numerous opportunities abroad, in particular for the armed forces, who are deployed in various countries around the world.

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**Entry and progression**

**How do I find a job?**

The armed forces recruit year-round. To find vacancies, visit:

- [Army Careers](#);
- [Royal Air Force Careers](#);
- [Royal Navy Careers](#);
- Armed Forces University Liaison Officers (ULO) or your local Armed Forces Careers Office (AFCO);
- on-campus presentations and careers fairs, which are regularly attended by the armed forces. Careers services will have more information on these.

For job vacancies in the ambulance service, see:

- [College of Paramedics](#);
- [NHS Ambulance Service Trusts in England](#);
- [Northern Ireland Ambulance Service Health and Social Care Trust](#);
- [The Scottish Ambulance Service NHS Trust](#);
- [Welsh Ambulance Services NHS Trust](#);
- [NHS Jobs](#);
- [Paramedic Resource Centre](#) - for a list of private ambulance agencies.

Vacancies in the fire and rescue service can be found at:

- airport authorities, such as [British Airports Authority (BAA)](#);
- [Fire Service](#);
- [Royal Air Force Careers](#).

Police recruitment is via the individual forces:

- in England and Wales, see the [Association of Police Authorities (APA)](#);
- in Scotland, see the [Scottish Police Services Authority](#);
- in Northern Ireland, see the [Police Service of Northern Ireland](#);
- [British Transport Police](#);
- [Civil Nuclear Constabulary](#).
Coastguard vacancies are normally advertised on an ad-hoc basis, check the [Maritime and Coastguard Agency](#) and local and national press.

Emergency planning officers should check the following for jobs:

- [Emergency Planning Society](#);
- [Business Continuity Institute](#);
- [Environment Agency (EA)](#);
- [Local Government Careers](#);
- local and national press.

### What skills do I need?

The majority of jobs in the armed forces and emergency services sector are open to graduates of all disciplines, although in some posts a specific degree subject is required.

The skills and entry requirements employers look for vary and depend on the nature of the job. For example, in the case of the ambulance service excellent driving skills are required, with between one and two years’ driving experience.

Generally, the skills that employers in this sector desire include:

- effective communication skills including tact and diplomacy;
- a sense of personal responsibility, integrity and resilience;
- ability to lead, motivate and take orders;
- initiative, self-motivation and flexibility;
- the ability to be calm, quick-thinking and decisive in difficult circumstances;
- good physical and mental fitness combined with a robust mental outlook;
- teamworking skills and the ability to work independently;
- the ability to relate to people from a wide range of socio-economic backgrounds, races, religions and cultures;
- problem-solving skills.

### Where can I find work experience?

Pre-entry experience is not essential, although it is advantageous to have experience working with individuals or groups in the community. Training with cadet forces, [University Officers Training Corps (UOTC)](#), [University Royal Navy Units (URNUs)](#), [University Air Squadrons (UAS)](#) or the [Territorial Army (TA)](#) help with entry into the armed forces.
Useful pre-entry experience can be picked up in a variety of settings and may include:

- experience of dealing with the public, e.g. sports coaching, working with local youth groups or helping vulnerable people;
- completing first aid courses;
- voluntary experience in organisations such as St John Ambulance, the St Andrew’s Ambulance Association; British Red Cross and the Royal National Lifeboat Institution (RNLI);
- volunteering as a community first responder with local ambulance services or as a special constable in the police.

Is postgraduate study useful?

- Most positions do not require postgraduate qualifications.
- Teacher training can be advantageous for the post of training officer in the armed forces, though a Postgraduate Certificate in Education (PGCE) is not a pre-requisite.
- Further study is supported in general once you are employed in the sector.

How can my career develop?

- Career progression in the armed forces is clearly defined, with a formal hierarchy for progression through the ranks. Each position has specific requirements and a set salary level.
- Career development in the fire service typically runs from firefighter, crew manager, watch manager, up to station manager.
- Within the NHS, promotion opportunities are generally expanding. After two years as a fully qualified and experienced paramedic, you might be promoted to emergency services team leader.
- The role of paramedic has developed to include roles in new clinical areas. For example, paramedics may work alongside doctors and nurses as emergency care practitioners (ECPs) based in health centres, GPs' surgeries, minor injuries units, hospital accident and emergency departments and community hospitals. Opportunities also exist in some locations for specialist work with motorcycle, rapid response car or air ambulance (helicopter) units.
- The High Potential Development Scheme (HPDS) for England, Wales and Northern Ireland, and the Accelerated Careers Development Programme (ACDP) in Scotland are available to new and serving police officers and are designed to develop the future leaders of the police force.
Typical employers

Big players

There are three armed forces employers - the Army, the Royal Air Force (RAF) and the Royal Navy, which includes the Royal Marines. Officers might also work at the headquarters of the Ministry of Defence (MoD) or they could be deployed on United Nations (UN) operations or as part of a North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO) force.

The armed forces currently need about 18,000 new recruits every year, including graduate officers.

Most ambulance staff work for The National Health Service (NHS). Other employers include the armed forces, overseas health departments and oil and gas exploration companies. There is also the option of working for private ambulance agencies for occasions such as sporting fixtures, major events or on film and TV sets.

Fire service recruitment is undertaken by individual fire and rescue services. Opportunities also exist with a small number of other employers, such as airport authorities, which maintain fire brigades at airports, the RAF and, less commonly, large industrial companies.

Some fire brigades have carried out graduate recruitment schemes in the past and may do so again in the future.

Police force recruitment information can be found through the Police Recruitment site as well as individual police force sites. Other police employers include the British Transport Police, the Civil Nuclear Constabulary and the Ministry of Defence Police (MDP).

Coastguards are employed by the Maritime and Coastguard Agency and are based within Marine Offices or Maritime Rescue Co-ordination Centres around the UK’s coastline.

Opportunities for emergency planning officers exist in a range of organisations, including local authorities, fire and rescue services, British Red Cross, police forces, the NHS and government bodies such as the Environment Agency (EA).

Small to medium-sized enterprises (SMEs)

SMEs are organisations with less than 250 employees and an annual turnover of no more than £26 million. Working for a smaller company can be rewarding because you are more likely to forge a path for yourself within the company, although opportunities to try other departments may be limited.

SMEs are unlikely to use the testing and assessment techniques of larger companies, or follow lengthy recruitment procedures. SMEs are more likely to advertise their vacancies
through the local press, university careers service bulletins, local graduate vacancy listings, jobcentres, and word of mouth, rather than rely on their reputation and a presence at graduate recruitment fairs.

Careers services should have listings of jobs with small firms; see also the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills (BIS).

The majority of opportunities within the armed forces and emergency services sector are with large employers. Opportunities with SMEs in this sector are mainly found within private ambulance and fire services or in consultancies as an emergency planner.

**Self-employment**

Self-employment is becoming an increasingly popular option, particularly for ambulance and fire service staff, although this is still largely part time. Examples include working on a freelance basis for a private ambulance agency or fire service or setting up a private training company or consultancy.

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**Opportunities abroad**

**Armed forces**

Many armed forces officers work in the UK, but there are also opportunities for prolonged periods abroad or on board ship. The armed forces are deployed at various locations around the world, in over 80 countries. They play a vital role in peacekeeping and humanitarian aid overseas. Representation ranges from single or small groups of military advisers to full operational deployments. The frequency and length of a posting depend on job and rank, varying from 4-6 months for an operational detachment to up to four years for a staff posting at a senior level.

The armed forces take part in exercises overseas, for example, jungle training courses in Belize and training and advising other armies, such as in Sierra Leone. The armed forces are currently involved in international security assistance in Afghanistan as well reconstruction and nation-building tasks there.

A number of exchange schemes operate with the US Army and there are also liaison and diplomatic posts in major US cities. Exercises with US Army personnel take place regularly at bases across America.

**Emergency services**

There are opportunities for police officers to work abroad and there are numerous exchange visits with countries all around the world. Depending upon the role, some investigations also take officers abroad.
Overseas work or travel is less common in the ambulance and fire and rescue services, although opportunities do exist.

At present, British police officers are working in Iraq, Georgia, Kosovo and Afghanistan via the Stabilisation Unit.

Voluntary organisations such as Voluntary Service Overseas (VSO) and the British Red Cross employ a wide range of ambulance staff and firefighters, as do the armed forces and also large companies and private healthcare companies who operate abroad. Most of the vacancies with VSO and the Red Cross are in Africa or South America.

Paramedics can also find work in the Gulf states, America, Canada and Commonwealth countries.

**Will my qualifications be recognised?**

UK paramedics can find work abroad, mainly in the European Union (EU) countries, where EU directives mean that any professional who has undertaken a qualification of more than three years’ duration is automatically entitled to apply for vacancies in member states. For non-EU countries you would need to find out the requirements of the country you would like to work in, in order to be able to practise.

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**Future trends**

**Legislation and policy**

- Government legislation and funding policy will continue to play a major role in shaping the direction of the armed forces and emergency services sector.
- Following the spending review in October 2010 cuts have been scheduled by 2015 for the police and armed forces. Police funding will be cut by 4% a year while current spending in defence will be reduced by 7%. The RAF and Royal Navy will lose 5,000 jobs and the Army will lose 7,000. The Ministry of Defence will also have job cuts and will lose around 25,000 civilian staff. This will all have implications on future recruitment.
- A result of cuts in personnel may be an increase in consultancy opportunities.
- There is an increasing emphasis on partnership working throughout the sector. In the armed forces for example, the trend towards joint and multinational operations will see personnel working more closely alongside coalition allies and representatives from civilian government and non-governmental organisations.
Impact of science and technology

Advances in science and technology are changing the way the sector operates. Examples include:

- Hi-tech communications and information systems enabling police officers to spend more time engaging with people and less time tied up with paperwork.
- Cutting-edge science and technology used in organised crime and terrorism activity, for example in surveillance operations.
- Digitisation of the battlefield and Network Enabled Capability (NEC), which is expected to enable more efficient sharing and exploitation of information within the armed forces, MoD and coalition partners.
- Additional investment in new control room technology and ambulance vehicles to help further improve response times to urgent calls.

Science and technology will continue to play a key role and the need for graduates with specialist IT, communications and science skills is expected to increase.

Effect of demographic changes

- The challenges facing health services across the Western world, such as an ageing population and an increase in long-term medical conditions, are placing demands on ambulance services.
- Equal opportunities and sex discrimination legislation have removed some barriers for service by women in the armed forces and recruiters are seeing increased interest from females, particularly in professional roles such as doctor, dentist and engineers.
- The effect of immigration is impacting on the police service both directly, e.g. with increased need for translation services and indirectly, e.g. tensions between old and new communities.

Other developments

A Public Services Diploma is available which gives students a way into a range of careers in the public sector, including central and local government, the health service, the armed forces, the emergency services, the justice system and voluntary organisations.
Jargon buster

- **AAP** - authorised professional practice.
- **ACPO** - Association of Chief Police Officers - leads and co-ordinates the direction and development of the police service in England, Wales and Northern Ireland.
- **Agenda for Change** - the single pay system in operation in the NHS, it applies to all directly employed NHS staff except doctors, dentists and very senior managers.
- **APA** - Association of Police Authorities - represents police authorities in England, Wales and Northern Ireland, nationally and locally.
- **CBRN** - Chemical, Biological, Radiological, Nuclear - the UK Police CBRN Centre co-ordinates planned national multi-agency responses to terrorist attacks.
- **College of Policing** - new body to increase professionalism in policing and provide expertise and functions in areas such as AAP and workforce strategy.
- **DESG** - Defence Engineering and Science Group - engineers and scientists working within the Ministry of Defence (MoD) to equip and support the UK armed forces with state-of-the-art technology.
- **DSTL** - Defence Science and Technology Laboratory - supplies scientific and technical research and advice to the MoD and other government departments.
- **DTUS** - Defence Technical Undergraduate Scheme - MoD sponsorship scheme for students who will be joining the armed forces as engineering officers (or logistics officers for the British Army) after university.
- **HART** - Hazardous Area Response Team - specially recruited and trained ambulance staff who respond to major incidents involving hazardous materials or hostile environments.
- **HCPC** - Health and Care Professions Council (formerly the Health Professions Council (HPC)) - body to which paramedics in the UK are currently registered.
- **Network Enabled Capability (NEC)** - the MoD’s intent to achieve enhanced military effect through the better use of information and communication systems.
- **NHS Confederation** - membership body representing all organisations providing and commissioning NHS services.
- **NPIA** - National Policing Improvement Agency (NPIA) - being phased out in 2012 and replaced by successor bodies such as the Home Office and new College of Policing and Police ICT Company.
- **Police ICT Company** - new police-owned organisation for efficient delivery of IT.
- **Workforce Modernisation** - a remodelling of the workforce and working processes, which aims to increase productivity.

Written by AGCAS editors, August 2012

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