

Interim process for section 5 authorisation for maritime armed security applications – questions and answers

Q. I have an open individual trade control licence – does this cover me to act as a private security company (PSC)?

A. You must be in possession of all appropriate paperwork, which may include registering as a firearms dealer with your local police and applying for a section 5 authority to the Home Office.

Q. Do I have to meet all of the interim process criteria or can some elements be omitted?

A. All of the interim process criteria must be met before an application will be considered. If some parts are missing, your application will be declined.

Q. Should licences be made on behalf of an individual or business?

A. If you are working for a maritime protection company it will be for the company to submit an application for section 5 authority to the Home Office and include a copy of any draft contracts. At the same time, the company will also need to provide its counter-piracy plan, including a signed statement that the guidance has been followed to the Department for Transport.

If you are a self-employed individual, the same information as detailed above will need to be provided in the same way.

Q. Does the person (proposed authority holder) apply to their local police (home address) or place of business to register as a firearms dealer?

A. It is usual for applications to be made to the local police in which the business operates.

Q. Can I apply for all of my guards to be cleared to possess section 5 prohibited firearms?

A. No. The policy only applies to protection of UK-registered ships in the high-risk area, and only those guards who are required to protect UK-registered ships will receive clearance.

Q. What will happen if I request clearance for large numbers of my guards as I consider that they may be needed for UK ships at some time in the future?

A. Requests for clearance for large numbers of guards are likely to delay consideration of the application, and without sufficient evidence that the guards will be employed on UK-registered ships, they will be refused.

Q. Do all staff have to be resident of the UK and/or British Nationals?

A. Police need to conduct a number of checks on the company and the guards, and will decide on a case-by-case basis whether they are able to make the necessary enquiries.

Q. If the applicant is an authorised dealer in another country, would this have any bearing on the application?

A. No. The interim process criteria must be met in order for prohibited weapons to be taken on board UK-flagged vessels as the Firearms Act 1968 (as amended) applies to UK-flagged vessels on the high seas.

Q. Do we require an authority for each transit?

A. The section 5 authority granted by the Home Office will be valid for a specified period of time and will allow the company/authority holder to conduct their business as required during the lifetime of the authority without the need for multiple applications.

Q. What is the validity period of an authority?

A. The authority will be valid initially for up to one year. At the end of this time, the authority holder will need to re-apply for approval. No guarantee can be given as to the outcome of any application made.

Q. Will each guard working for the company be a section 5 authority holder?

A. No. The private security company or individual who has applied for authorisation will be the named holder of the authority. Each of the guards who has been checked by the Home Office and police will only be permitted to possess section 5 firearms on a UK ship while employed by the company, and their ability to do so will cease if their employment with the private security company ends.

Q. What should I do if I have been issued with a section 5 authority, but subsequently require clearance for a new guard?

A. Provide information showing that the guard is required to protect a UK-registered ship, by email to: firearms@homeoffice.gsi.gov.uk.

You will need to provide the guard's full name, date and place of birth, residential addresses for the past five years, copy of their passport and declaration of consent to the police checks. The guard will not be able to take possession of prohibited weapons until the private security company (PSC) is notified by the Home Office.

Q. Do I require authority from the UK if I am planning to provide protection to non-UK-flagged vessels?

A. No, you do not require authority from UK officials, but you will need to comply with the relevant firearms laws for the vessels you intend protecting.

Q. How long does the application process take?

A. Section 5 applications may take at least three months to process.

Q. Can I carry out training when assessing my staff?

A. No. The UK does not permit individuals to take possession of section 5 firearms for training purposes.

Q. I do not plan to purchase any section 5 firearms in the UK; do I need an authority to provide on-board protection to UK-flagged ships?

A. Yes you do as the Firearms Act applies to UK-flagged vessels on the high seas.

Q. Can we meet to discuss our application?

A. It is not our policy to meet with individual applicants, but firearms staff are able to discuss your application with you by telephone or in writing.