



Border Force

National Dog Programme

Our Detector Dogs

Our national programme of detector dogs is a vital asset in securing the UK border from smugglers and illegal immigrants. Detector dogs have been working at the border since 1978. Initially they were used solely to detect drugs, but since then we have developed our understanding of what they can do and how to get the best results from them.

Today, we have 74 highly-trained dogs based around the UK. They are multi-skilled and have been trained to search for a variety of items such as drugs, products of animal origin, firearms, tobacco, cash and smuggled people.

We use detector dogs wherever people or goods enter or leave the UK. Their acute sense of smell and hunting instincts makes them an essential tool in our efforts to combat and deter smugglers and those seeking to avoid border controls.

INTERNATIONAL PARTNERSHIPS

We are committed to being a world leader in the training and management of detector dogs. This has resulted in our national program becoming globally recognised as a leader in producing and maintaining high-quality detector dog teams. In the past, we have had requests, which we have fulfilled, to provide assistance with the training of detector dogs, and the development of new programmes.

HOW MANY TEAMS DO YOU HAVE AND WHERE ARE THEY BASED?

Our detector dogs work at sea ports, airports, international rails stations and postal depots across the UK and regularly search people, baggage, vehicles, ships, small craft and freight.

Although much of their working life is spent in the same locations, they are a flexible resource that can be deployed anywhere in the UK. We also support other departments' operations upon request for searching premises and major train stations.

The dogs usually work an eight or ten hour shift and are exercised by either the handlers or the kennel assistant for at least two hours every day. The kennels are purpose-built and provide a high standard of accommodation. We operate a system of one handler per dog. The dogs are transported from their kennels to work or exercise area in purpose-built vans.

WHAT BREEDS DO WE USE AND WHERE DO WE GET THEM FROM?

Gun dog breeds are ideal for detection work as they have a natural instinct to hunt and retrieve, which is adapted to search for particular scents. The most common breeds are: English Springer Spaniels, Cocker Spaniels, Labradors and Beagles.

Over time, we have built up a network of contacts who supply us with suitable animals. We also assess gift dogs from the public and often attend animal welfare establishments such

as Battersea Dogs Home where we have accepted and trained a number of successful detector dogs. All dogs accepted into the programme have a comprehensive health check by a qualified vet.

HOW ARE THE DOGS TRAINED?

Dogs that are to be teamed with experienced handlers are trained in-house either by our highly experienced regional dog Inspectors or by suitably qualified and experienced dog handlers or team leaders.

Newly recruited handlers and their dogs are currently trained by the Metropolitan Police at their training school in Kent. It takes about eight weeks to train a new dog and handler on a course. The dogs that we select for training will usually be between 12 months and 24 months old. The dogs are introduced to the handler on day two.

The dogs are trained to play and search for a tennis ball, which gradually has a scent, like tobacco or drugs introduced. This allows the dog to focus for that particular type of scent. After passing out at the school the team then have up to five weeks further on the job training at the work place where they will be based. Dog and handler teams are constantly assessed by our regional dog inspectors who are responsible for the assurance of our detector dog programme.

HOW ARE THE HANDLERS RECRUITED?

Handlers are normally recruited from within the Home Office. They will undergo mandatory officer training before they undertake basic dog handler training. Both officer and basic dog handler training are a pass/fail courses and so the recruitment process includes an interview to assess the applicant's suitability to the duties.

WHAT GOODS ARE THE DOGS TRAINED TO DETECT?

- Class A Drugs: Cocaine, Heroin, Amphetamines
- Tobacco: Cigarettes, Hand-Rolling Tobacco
- Cash: Sterling, Euros, Dollars
- Product of Animal Origin (POAO): Meat, Fish, Honey, Dairy Products
- Firearms
- People

Our detector dogs sometimes identify other unusual things that they are not trained to, but which are of interest. In the past, our dogs have indicated on CS spray, caviar, sea horses, and scorpions and banned Chinese medicines.

WHEN DO THEY RETIRE?

Dogs are usually retired at aged eight. We recognise that the dogs have provided us with a long and loyal service and we are dedicated to ensuring that they go to a good home and have a long, healthy retirement. It is normally the handler who takes the dog home, but in the unlikely event that this doesn't happen we have a central list of suitable owners who are prepared to give the dogs a good home.