Sector profile: recruitment and retention in the security guarding sector

November 2022

Introduction

This document draws on recent research conducted in a survey and research we have conducted in the past. It also uses data from the SIA licensing system. It provides a 'snapshot' of the security guarding sector as it is now and considers employment issues within the sector.

Summary

Responses from our survey suggest that some companies within the sector have found it difficult to recruit and retain security guards. Business demand is increasing post-pandemic but pay is not rising at a rate that helps to attract and retain staff.

Responses to our survey indicated that barriers to recruitment and retention are:

- low pay
- licensing, training, and vetting requirements
- work patterns (unsociable hours)
- lack of flexibility, which is a barrier to attracting those with caring responsibilities (particularly women) to the industry
- overcapacity and saturation of employment within local areas means fewer people are applying for jobs
- reduction in candidate pool due to Brexit (reduction of local job seekers) and the effects of the pandemic (as people have moved towards more flexible, safer, reliable roles)
- high levels of verbal and physical violence in the workplace
- roles viewed as a stop gap job rather than a career
- lack of career pathways and progression opportunities

Working in the security guarding sector

A snapshot survey we conducted in 2022 indicates that pay rates are usually the National Living Wage, which is currently £9.50 per hour for those over 23 years old. There has been some increase in pay rates since 2007, when our research indicated pay rates for security guards were between £5 and £8 per hour. This is mainly due to the rise in the minimum wage over the last few years, although some feedback we received suggested that the pay increase may also be due to an expansion of the role and guards taking on new responsibilities.

Survey findings also indicate that:

- security guards normally work 12-hour shifts
- some security guards view the work as a 'stop-gap' – a convenient source of income while they look for other work or pursue other career options

Survey findings show that security guards are also tasked with:

- facilities management
- cleaning
- health and safety crowd management
- customer service tasks such as handling complaints, providing advice and other basic customer service functions
- other site-based functions, such as alarm system monitoring, vehicle weighing, covering pools and other roles that used to be performed by staff located at the site

Cost of entry into the security guarding sector

In 2020, the SIA licence fee was reduced back to its original (2004) level of £190. Taking inflation into account, the licence application fee is now cheaper in real terms than it was in 2004. If the licence application fee had increased each year in line with inflation it would now be more than £300.

Open-source research we conducted this year (2022) indicated that the cost of the security guarding licence-linked training course is generally between £180 – £200. In 2021 we introduced a requirement for first aid training, which has added around £40 to the cost of training.

Costs to security guarding companies

Security guarding companies we spoke to indicated that costs relating to the recruitment and deployment of security guards have increased. They listed costs such as:

- vetting
- uniform costs
- basic training and upskilling training – the cost per capita to train a new employee has increased in line with pay inflation rates but due to high staff turnover the absolute cost for training has increased significantly
- higher insurance premiums
- equipment costs, which have increased as technology advances (lone worker systems, scheduling software, phone and data costs)
- the cost to recruit, which has increased (outsourcing recruitment to find and manage candidates, high staff turnover)

Demand for security guards

Over the past 2 years demand for security guarding has fluctuated due to the Covid-19 pandemic and economic downturn. Some security guarding companies we spoke to indicated that their customers have returned to approximately 70% of pre-pandemic levels and that generally business is slowly increasing. Some companies we spoke to have seen several clients demand a decrease in manned security guarding due to the automation of security services.

Security guarding licences and licence applications

In August 2022 there were 64,226 active security guarding licences. Reports generated from our licensing system show that the number of active security guarding licences is lower than 5 to 10 years ago – see appendix 1.

Similarly, the number of security guarding licence applications in the last financial year (1 April 2021 to 31 March 2022) is lower than it has been in the last 10 years – see appendix 2.

It is important to note that whilst security guard licence applications have fallen, the number of door supervisor licence applications remains higher. It is worth nothing that licence integration rules allow an individual to work as a security guard with a door supervisor licence, but not the other way around. As a result, some security guards complete a door supervisor licence-linked qualification and apply for a door supervision licence to work as a security guard.

Recruitment of security guards

Some security guarding companies have reported that they find it difficult to recruit security guards. The perception of those we have spoken to is that there is a 50/50 split between experienced guards and those who are new to the industry. The challenge is retaining staff due to the pressure and the risks in the role. Attracting new staff with low pay, increased training costs, vetting difficulties and other factors make the industry unattractive to younger people.

Some security guards found alternative work during the pandemic and 10-15% of staff in the companies we spoke to have not returned to the sector for this reason.

Some of these alternative jobs are:

- online retail (warehouse fulfilment)
- delivery driver
- third-party logistics
- other driving roles
- police
- surveillance agencies

- supermarkets

Respondents indicated that such roles are more attractive because they offer one or more of the following:

- higher pay rates
- better benefits
- sociable hours
- work life balance
- lower risk to self and family within the role
- flexibility in working from home or a hybrid role
- more attractive working culture
- less pressure or stress
- career progression

When asked what measures would help address the problem of recruitment and retention in security guarding the following were identified:

- an increase in salary, especially to retain experienced staff
- being able to provide a career path to show an individual the possibilities of further advancement
- better public perception of the private security industry, especially security officers – understanding that today's responsibilities and roles are well beyond what they used to be
- flexibility of working hours and shifts to attract a more diverse workforce
- more accessible licence-linked training
- clients to pay higher rates to reflect the risks of security guarding roles
- less restrictive vetting and recruitment processes

## Survey findings and data used to produce this sector profile

We have collated information from several different sources, including:

- desk-based research, SIA, 2022
- covid impact survey, SIA, 2021
- 'Future scoping of the private security industry' research, SIA/IFF, 2019
- 'Industry skills profiling' research, SIA/IFF, 2018
- 'Impact of regulation' research, SIA, 2007
- reports generated from our licensing system, 2022

Appendix 1

Active security guarding licences by date

Active Licences - SG by Date
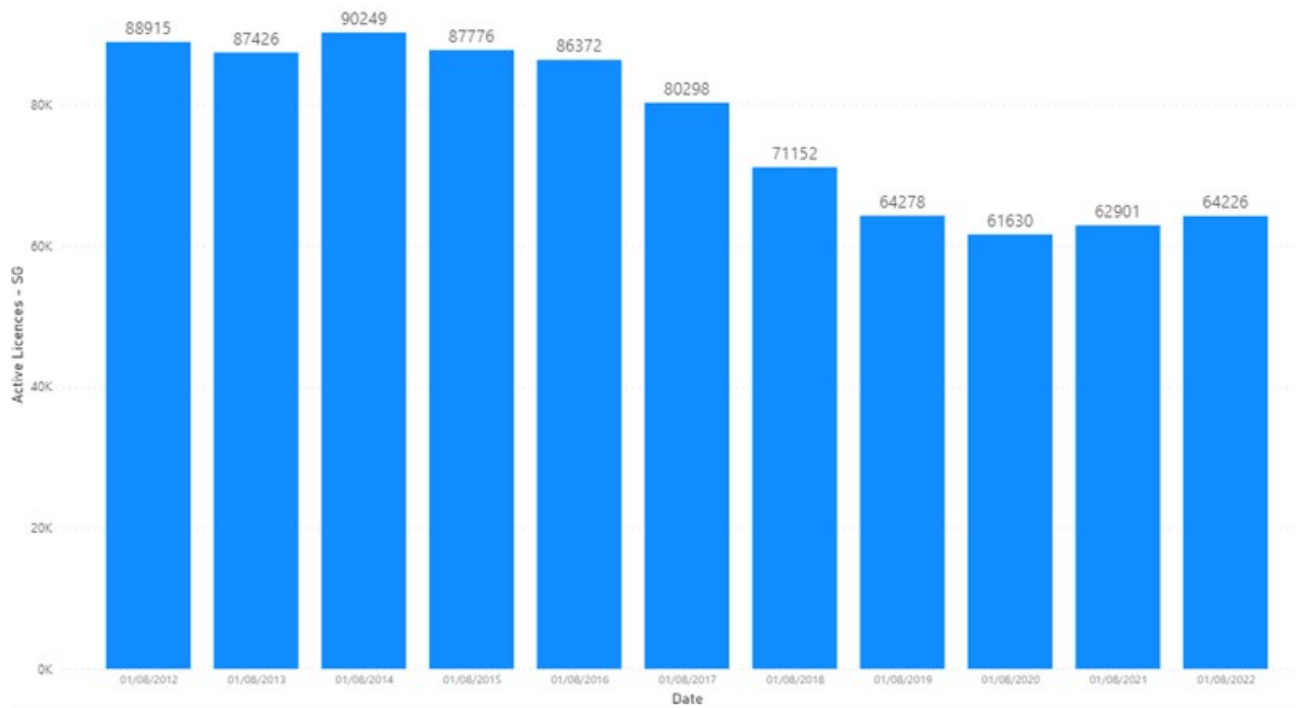
Appendix 2

Total security guarding paid applications by financial year

The lighter colour indicates the SIA licence 'lean' year created from the introduction of licensing, so every third year has a lower number of licence applications due to the three-year duration of the SIA licence.

Total SG Paid Applications by Financial Year

Financial Year	Paid Applications
2011-12	42K
2012-13	38K
2013-14	26K
2014-15	38K
2015-16	37K
2016-17	16K
2017-18	26K
2018-19	26K
2019-20	13K
2020-21	29K
2021-22	23K