

Public trust and confidence in the Private Security Industry and the Security Industry Authority

On behalf on the SIA August 2022



Contents

1	Background, Methodology & Executive Summary
2	Section 1: Do the public have trust and confidence in those working in private security roles?
3	Section 2: What are the enablers and barriers to trust in private security?
4	Section 3: How is regulation of the security industry viewed and understood?
5	Section 4: How do the public view careers in private security?
6	Recommendations and final thoughts







Background and research objectives

The SIA exists to create a better private security industry. One which is regulated and protects people, property and premises, operating a vast range of services across several sectors, and in many different ways.

The SIA's role as regulator is to help the private security industry achieve this; by working closely with the industry, they ensure that security companies are accountable, well-run, and meet their legal obligations. These activities should contribute significantly to ensuring trust and confidence in both the private security industry as a whole, and the SIA as a regulator.

Prior to commencing this research programme, much of the research that the SIA had conducted has been inward-looking or directed at its service users. Earlier this year the SIA identified a need to increase understanding of public trust and confidence in the private security industry, and to develop techniques for measuring the public trust and confidence in it.

There have been studies on public trust and confidence in other sectors, but the wider literature on the public's trust and confidence in the private security industry is fairly limited. Accordingly, this research aims to understand the wider perspective of the public.

The findings in this report represent findings from the initial *baseline wave*. The insights will feed into the development of the SIA's corporate strategic planning and stakeholder engagement activity, informing the SIA's strategy, activities, and tactics in supporting improved trust in the industry.

As a baseline, the view is to continue to track metrics from this study in the future. This will allow the SIA to measure and monitor whether the activities and initiatives the SIA carry out have an impact on public trust and confidence in private security.

To ensure the report follows a logical structure that is easy to navigate, we have broken down the core research requirement into four more specific key research questions, each with sub-questions underneath – see the breakdown on page 5. This framework also forms the structure of the report, with a section for each of the four strands.





This report is structured around four overarching research questions

This report is structured around four overarching research questions. Each of these key research questions is answered by addressing a series of subquestions covered within each section.

How can the SIA increase public trust and confidence in the security industry in the UK?



Do the public have trust and confidence in those working in private security roles?

When people think about the private security industry, what are they thinking about? What is their understanding and what associations do they make?

What are overall levels of trust and confidence and how does this compare to other professions?

What about trust and confidence in specific roles within the private security industry?

Do the public see private security as necessary? And do they feel protected?



What are the enablers and barriers to trust in private security?

How do the public feel about their interactions with private security professionals? How does this vary by security roles?

What traits/characteristics do people associate with private security professionals and why?

What themes emerge as the key barriers to trust? And what do the public think would improve trust?



How is regulation of the private security industry viewed and understood?

Do the public understand the public/private distinction? What are levels of awareness more generally?

Do the public feel comfortable with private security roles being carried out in the private sector?

Do the public believe the private security industry is regulated? And what are attitudes towards regulation?

Are people aware of the SIA and how do they feel about SIA's role as industry regulator?



How do the public view careers in private security?

How positive or negative are the public about careers in the private security industry?

How are careers in the private security industry viewed, relative to other sectors and professions?

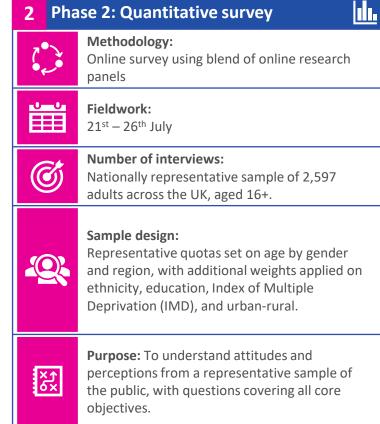
What are perceptions towards prospects, progression, and pay for those working in the private security industry?



Methodology (1 of 2)

The programme comprised 3 research phases. The primary qualitative phase was exploratory and helped us to perfect the quantitative questionnaire. The final follow-up qualitative phase was to complement and explore further the quantitative data.









Methodology (2 of 2)

The boxes below detail the reporting conventions used throughout this report.

1 Quantitative and Qualitative symbols



2 Significance testing





As detailed in the previous slide, this programme used both qualitative and quantitative methodologies. To aid both navigation of the report and interpretation of the findings, the insights from each methodology are signified with the following symbols:



Quantitative:

Analysis based on the quantitative survey (phase 2) will be accompanied by the following symbol throughout the report.



Qualitative:

Analysis based on the qualitative components (phases 1 and 3) will be accompanied by the following symbol throughout the report.

Throughout the quantitative elements of this report, results are discussed in terms of differences between sub-groups and the result for the total (average for all respondents). Differences are considered to be significant at the 95% confidence level, meaning that there is only a 5% possibility that the difference occurred by chance rather than by being a real difference. This is a commonly accepted level of confidence.

Please be aware that the size of the sample affects the percentage difference required for significant changes. The bigger the sample size, the smaller the difference required to be statistically different. Significant differences between a sub-group and the total are shown with the use of the below arrows. Up means that the sub-group is significantly higher than the total, and down means it is significantly lower.

- Tignificantly higher at 95% level of confidence
- Significantly lower at 95% level of confidence

The data used in this report are rounded up or down to the nearest whole percentage. For this reason, tables or charts may occasionally add up to 99% or 101%. Results that do differ in this way should not have a sum-total deviance that is larger than around 1 to 2%.

4 A note on wording



The security sector is broad and varied with a number of roles including cash and valuables in transit, door supervision, security guarding, key holding, and public space surveillance.

For overall metrics such as trust and competence, the survey asked respondents to consider 'security officers/guards (e.g., door supervisors, and retail guards)'. This was for simplicity and to ensure a relatively focussed task for respondents. However, other parts of the survey provided respondents with opportunities to give feedback on more specific roles.







Executive summary (1/2)



1. Do the public have trust and confidence in those working in private security roles?

Door supervisors and security guards are the roles the public most closely associate with private security: The public tends to think about two roles when it comes to security - security guarding (80%) and door supervision (73%) – an observation consistent with the discussion in the focus groups. Meanwhile, around half cite the unregulated roles of event stewarding (49%) and sporting event stewarding (49%) – these roles are not 'top-of-mind' but are also not usually seen as distinct from other, regulated roles.

Most people trust security officers/guards: There is certainly no evidence of a 'crisis of trust' in individuals working in the sector. Security officers/guards are trusted by 6 in 10 UK adults (59%), with just 12% saying they actively distrust people working in these roles. However, trust appears lower when you compare security officers/guards to other professions. For example, trust is lower for security officers/guards than it is for police officers (69%) and police community support officers (70%).

Most also believe security officers/guards are competent and act with integrity: 63% are confident that security officers/guards carry out their duties competently and effectively, and 58% are confident they act with integrity and do the right thing. In line with overall trust, only small minorities are not confident (10% and 12% respectively), but security officers/guards are relatively low-ranking when compared to other professions.

Levels of trust compare positively for young people and ethnic minorities: There is remarkably little difference across demographic groups when it comes to trust in security officers/guards. Crucially, more of those in ethnic minority and younger groups trust security officers/guards than say they trust police officers. In focus groups, those working in security are often compared positively in terms of being 'normal' and 'relatable' amongst these groups.

There is more recognition of value when the absence of private security is considered: A majority of the public say those working in public-facing security roles make people feel safe and are felt to be necessary in a range of settings. In the focus groups, when the prospect of security being absent was raised, this idea left people feeling concerned and uneasy. This framing encouraged people to recognise the value and necessity of security, including amongst those who were initially more critical.



2. What are the enablers and barriers to trust in private security?

Personal experience is the biggest driver of trust: By far the most significant factor that drives overall trust and confidence in private security professionals is personal experience or interactions with those working in the sector. Unsurprisingly, individuals who have had positive experiences with those in security roles are much more likely to have greater levels of trust.

Recognition that 'good' experiences can go unnoticed: There was a recognition amongst focus group participants that so-called 'good' experiences can often go unnoticed. For example, a friendly conversation with a security officer/guard is less likely to remain in the public's memory than an argument.

Although personal experience is key, other factors also play their part: Personal experience is undoubtedly the core barrier to trust, but other factors do play a role. Secondary barriers include negative news stories, perceived lack of training and professionalism (including 'laziness'), the notion that a role in security often represents a 'stop-gap' job for many, and private companies putting profit first.

Associations with private security companies were typically negative: Those aware of private security companies in the focus groups were typically negative about them. Their views were typically informed by negative press stories or, on occasion, personal experience.

Door supervision is the least trusted role: Most still say they trust those working in these roles (63%), but distrust at 14% is around double that of any other role in security. Lower trust in door supervisors is typically driven by personal experience, with the majority of those with negative experiences reporting instances where door supervisors displayed bullying, rude, or aggressive behaviour.

There is a desire for more friendly, approachable, and honest security personnel: Arrogant, abrupt, and rough are the three key undesirable traits associated with security officers/guards. Participants in the focus groups emphasised the importance of honesty, integrity, approachability, and empathy when asked to build a hypothetical code of conduct. Being friendly and approachable was a particularly prominent theme and also emerges as a key priority in the survey findings.





Executive summary (2/2)



3. How is regulation of the private security industry viewed and understood?

Most think the balance between public and private security is about right: Close to half of the public think the balance of security conducted by the police and the private sector is about right (46%), but a non-trivial minority do think more security work should be done by the police in the public sector (28%).

Most believe the private security industry is probably regulated, but they aren't certain: People presume that the private security industry is probably regulated, but most don't know for sure. Asked if each role is regulated, a substantial number answer 'probably' rather than 'definitely'.

Awareness of the SIA is low: 28% say they have some awareness of the SIA, which ranks relatively low down the list when compared to other regulators but higher than the Youth Justice Board (19%), the Gangmaster and Labour Abuse Authority (18%) and the Sports Ground Safety Authority (15%).

Most believe all roles should be regulated: The vast majority also believe each of the private security roles should be regulated. Again, although slightly lower than other roles, this is also the case for event stewards (63%) and sporting event stewards (66%).

But a belief that the sector is regulated is no 'silver bullet' to furthering public trust: Although the public support regulation, it is by no means a 'silver bullet' that will lead to greater levels of trust. Those who had had negative experiences with private security professionals suggested that the fact regulation did not prevent their negative experience was indicative that regulation was inadequate.

The voluntary nature of the Approved Contractor Scheme (ACS) raises questions about its effectiveness: No focus group participants had previously heard of the Approved Contractor Scheme (ACS) before taking part in the research. However, when explored in the groups, most focused in on the word 'voluntary' and said this would limit the effectiveness of the scheme.

There is an emphasis on 'emotional intelligence' for training and recruitment: The public expects that most in private security roles will get training and believe this to be important. However, many of the traits that the public thinks are important such as being approachable, friendly and empathetic are signs of 'emotional intelligence'. These qualities were typically described as harder to teach, and instead required particular focus at the recruitment stage.



4. How do the public view careers in private security?

7 in 10 say a career in security is a career to be proud of: Private security performs slightly better ranking-wise when it comes to being a career 'to be proud of', coming in the middle of the pack when compared to other professions. 7 in 10 (69%) say a it's a career to be proud of, higher than in other professions in sectors such as retail/groceries (63%), catering (60%), and warehouse/logistics (60%).

Those in private security help others and protect the public: Those positive about a career in private security in the focus groups described it as a varied role, with the opportunity to help others and protect the public. However, there was a view that some individuals did not always live up to the responsibility that the role demands.

But negatives emerge about pay and the notion of a 'first choice career': The components of a career in private security about which respondents are less positive include being less likely to view it as a first-choice career (19% actively disagree), being paid well (20% actively disagree) and young people aspiring to work in private security (30% actively disagree).

Additional career negatives also emerged in the focus groups: Other prominent criticisms include the notion that there were not a lot of opportunities for progression in certain roles, the role often being quite 'boring' or 'humdrum', roles roles often not having very social hours or being a very social role (a lot of lone working), and individuals working in the role not always being well respected.



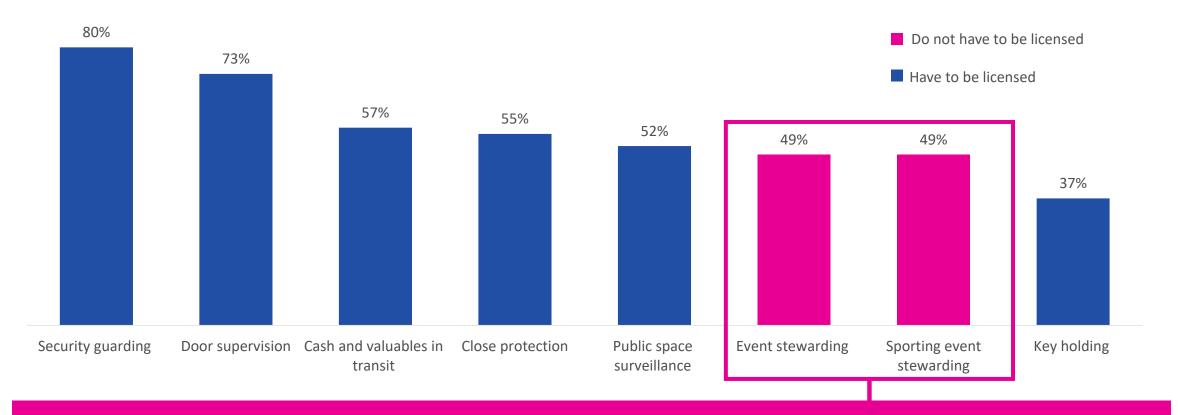


Section 1: Do the public have trust and confidence in those working in private security roles?

The public tend to think about two roles when it comes to private security – security guarding and door supervision



% of respondents associated each role with the security sector



Relatively high numbers think about stewarding roles despite these positions being unregulated, but they are not necessarily 'top-of-mind'.



Door supervisors and retail security guards were also the most commonly discussed roles in the focus groups



When respondents were asked about awareness of the private security industry, public-facing roles of door supervision and retail security guards were typically "top-of-mind". When prompted to expand on the list of possible roles in private security, however, awareness of other positions was relatively high, and in discussions participants were able to note a wide variety of the different positions after some thought.

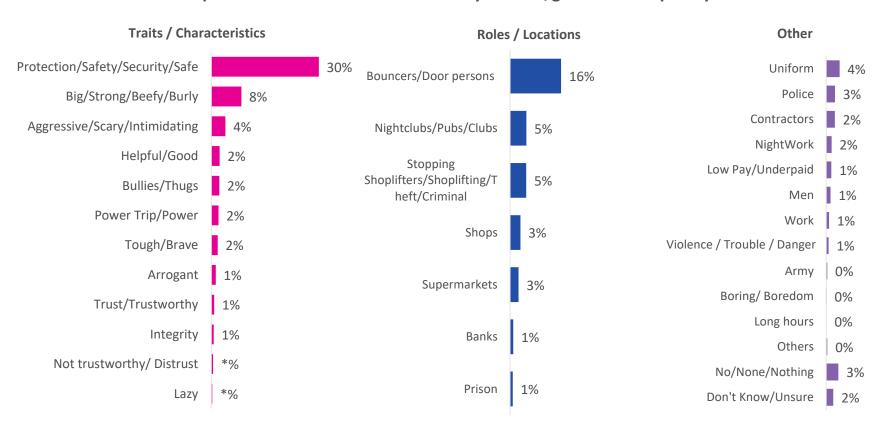
Most commonly spontaneously mentioned Least commonly spontaneously mentioned **Door supervisors** Retail security guards **Events stewards** Close protection Usually the first Most regularly noticed Initial fieldwork was Mentioned in initial mentioned by retail security in their conducted during festival groups when respondents were asked to think of respondents, driven by local Tesco or Sainsbury's season, so festival both stereotypes of security was top of mind 'private' security Others were aware of doormen, or personal for many them in shopping malls Linked to images of experiences Most saw their roles as to wealth, bodyguards, and Many had not had ensure crowd control, as celebrities. Often viewed in a interactions with them, well as to deter groups negative light, described so had a neutral Neutral viewpoints, due as 'surly' or 'aggressive' from bringing drugs, to respondents never viewpoint alcohol, or weapons into Most used the term having used close Of those who had had venues 'bouncer' or 'doorman' to protection interactions, the majority describe them viewed them positively



Encouragingly, the strongest top-of-mind association with security guards/officers is protection/safety/security. The word 'bouncers' still comes out fairly prominently, as does being aggressive/scary/intimidating



Top-of-mind associations with security officers/guards – Grouped by theme





During the initial round of qual, we used the term 'private security'

throughout the conversation. This led respondents to have a much more negative view than framing them simply as 'security' as was used in the final qual phase.

Initial associations of private security included:

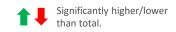
Aggressive; assertive; rude; arrogant; forceful; impatient; burly; God-complex.

Whereas associations in the second phase of research were much more neutral, or positive:

Safe; helpful; protect; at ease; responsibility; defence; confidence; assurance.

This highlights the importance of the framing of language used to discuss security when speaking with the public.

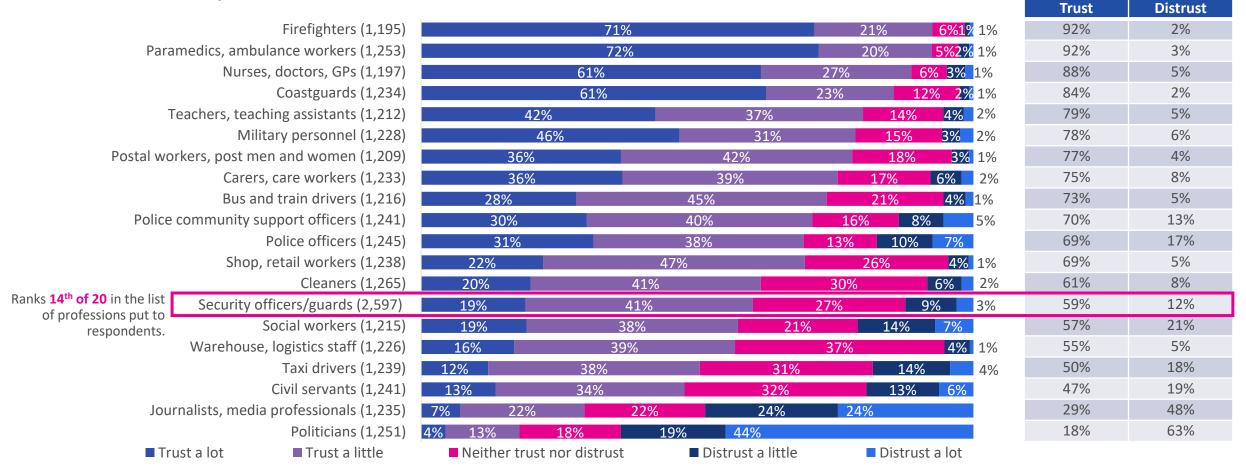




Security officers/guards are trusted by 6 in 10 UK adults, but security roles rank relatively low down when compared to other professions



Levels of trust in professions

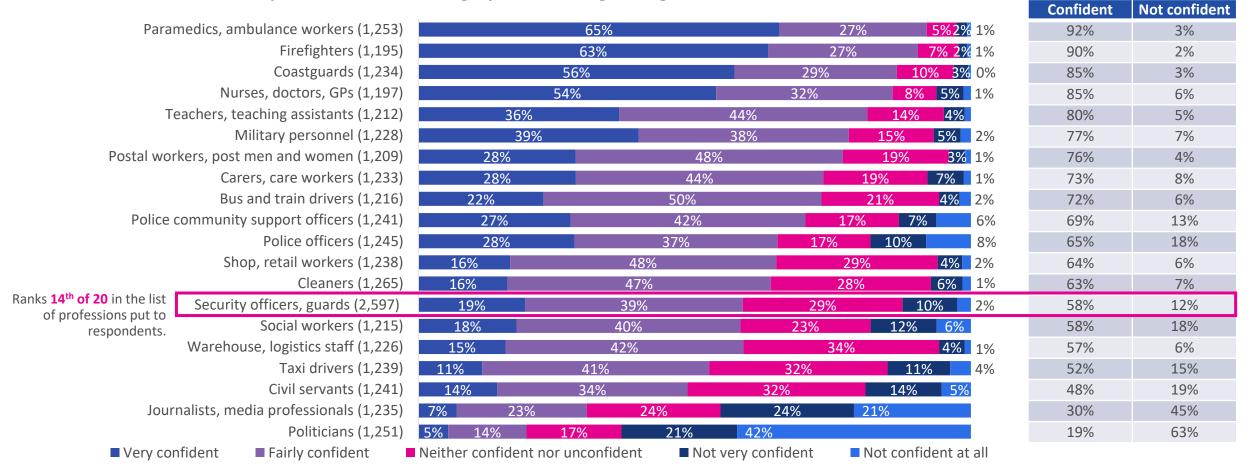




We see similar results when looking at metrics for 'act with integrity and do the right thing'



Confidence that those in professions act with integrity and do the right thing





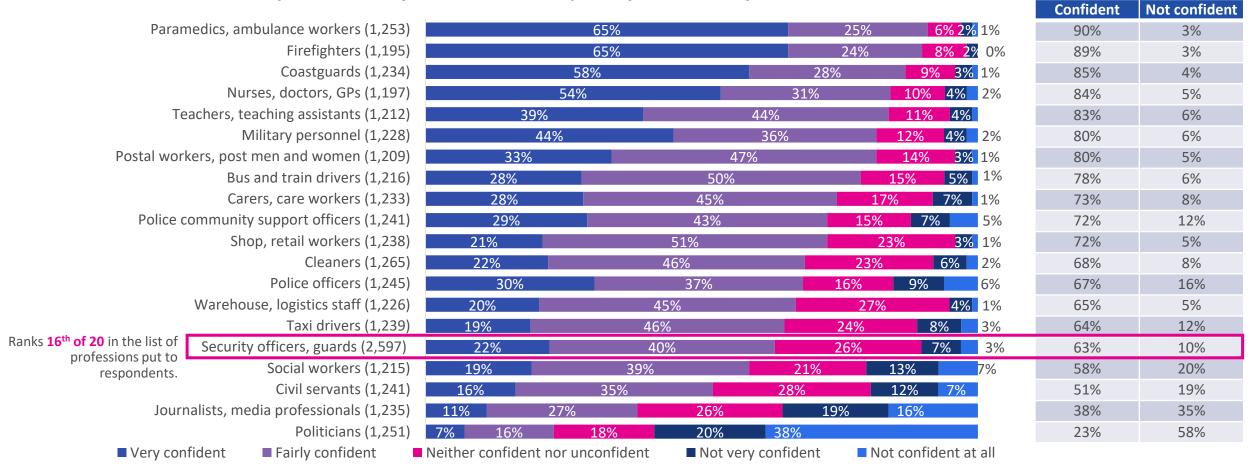


16

The same pattern is observed with the metric 'carry out their duties competently and effectively'



Confidence that those in professions carry out their duties competently and effectively

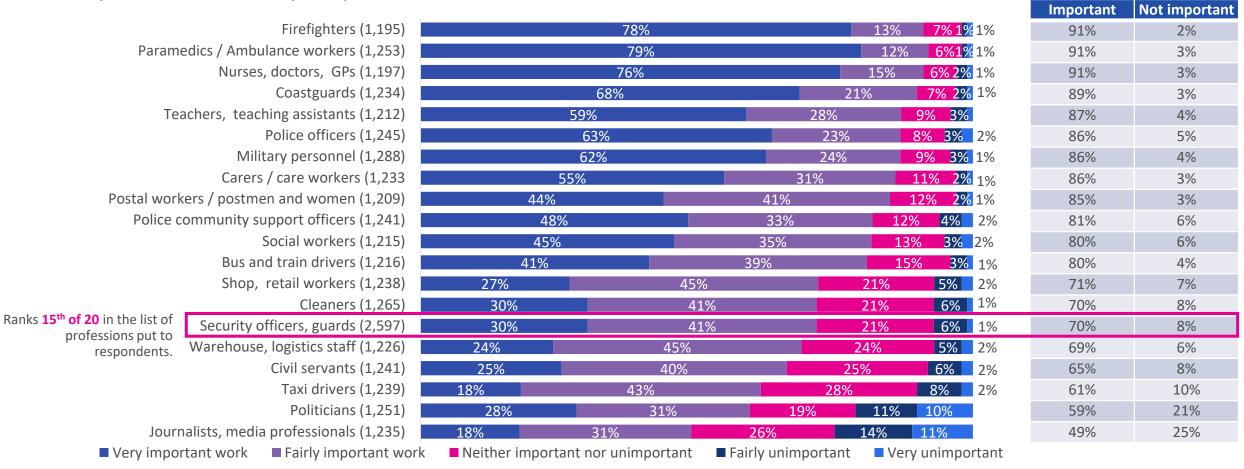




Although still relatively low ranking, 7 in 10 describe the work of security officers/guards as important



Importance of work done by each profession





There is remarkably little difference across demographic groups when it comes to trust in security officers/guards – and more ethnic minorities and young people trust security officers/guards than say they trust police officers



Trust in security officers/guards across demographic groups Trust in police officers across demographic groups Total 59% Total 69% Male 60% Male 66% Gender Female 58% Female 72% 64% 16-34 62% 16-34 35-54 59% 35-54 69% Age 55+ 74% White White 71% 59% **Ethnicity** Ethnic minority 56% 63% Ethnic minority Degree or equivalent 59% Degree or equivalent 71% Education Non degree 60% Non degree 68% None / other None / other 69% 58% 71% Heterosexual or straight 60% Heterosexual or straight Sexuality 50% Gay, lesbian, bisexual, other Gay, lesbian, bisexual, other 51%

With disability

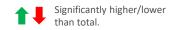
Without disability



Disability

With disability

Without disability



73%

55%

58%

60%

The importance attributed to security officers/guards depends on their role, where they are based, and what they are protecting



More important

Less important

Those based at busy nightclubs are important when it comes to ensuring the safety **Door supervision** of those in the area; this was particularly prominent amongst women who felt reassured by their presence (despite some negative experiences). Security guarding (other Including in hospitals or airports, were seen to act as a strong deterrent for potential public areas) antisocial activities. Those in shops were thought to be less important, as they are seen as protecting Security guarding (retail) goods (i.e., not people) but their presence was still appreciated to act as a deterrent for potential antisocial behaviour which may have otherwise occurred. • Not visible to many, but still considered important as they are known to be close by **CCTV** operators and able to be at the scene rapidly to help with any incidents. Cash and valuables in Not seen protecting people, but note that it is important that the guard is well trained to avoid any incidents with opportunistic thieves. transit Property/site/machinery • Thought to be a necessity for insurance, rather than to keep people safe. guarding • Not a huge understanding of the role, but many were keyholders for their workplaces **Key holding** themselves, so didn't understand why a security officer/guard would need to do this.

Public-facing

- Public-facing roles are the most important
- This importance is categorised based on propensity to cause injury or loss of life to the public; events are seen as the more dangerous, so the most important ones for guards to protect.

Not public-facing

- Generally speaking, those roles which aren't public facing were not thought to protect the public, and so were seen as less important.
- Some also went as far as to suggest that guarding sites was a 'waste of time' and a job which should be done by cameras, and insurance.



There is a lack of understanding as to the role of private security in general, and what 'keep the public safe' means in practice, driving some discussion on the level of importance



The lack of understanding as to what a security officer/guard is expected to do in order to keep the public safe leads respondents to sway between thinking that they are important, or not, or effective, or not. In essence, the public need to know what the requirements and expectations of security officers/guards are in each role, in order to assess their relevance in society. Generally speaking, there are two contrasting opinions, but respondents do not tend to have just one, but rather change their minds during conversations.

Security officers/guards are there to <u>deter crime</u>, but <u>should not</u> put their lives at risk to prevent it from happening

Security officers/guards are there to <u>prevent</u> crime and <u>should</u> put their lives at risk to stop it from happening

- View them as a deterrent to crime, there to stop opportunists, rather than to address dangerous situations when they come up.
- Believe the core part of their role is to reassure the public, control crowds, deescalate situations, and be helpful and friendly when needed by the public.
- Should be in contact with the police when crimes occur, and ensure that help is called for when needed.
- Recognise that most aren't trained in armed combat or carry weapons, so should not be expected to become physical.

"They aren't expected to put their lives at risk for us. They shouldn't have to be in that sort of danger in their roles. They're there to deter and de-escalate situations, they aren't the army!"

If understood that this is their role, they are generally seen as less important, with mixed views on their efficacy.

- View them as there to prevent crime from happening, no matter the cost.
- Believe the core part of their role is to protect by putting themselves between the dangerous situation and the public they are protecting.
- See them as trained in combat situations, so expect them to know how to physically detain and prevent an attack happening, and to be willing to do this as part of their role.
- See them as a private alternative to the police, with similar skills and powers.

"Yeah but they have to be willing to react in an emergency, they can't just run away like the rest of us would! They need to go to the issue and tackle it head on."

If understood that this is their role, they are generally seen as more important but less effective in reality.

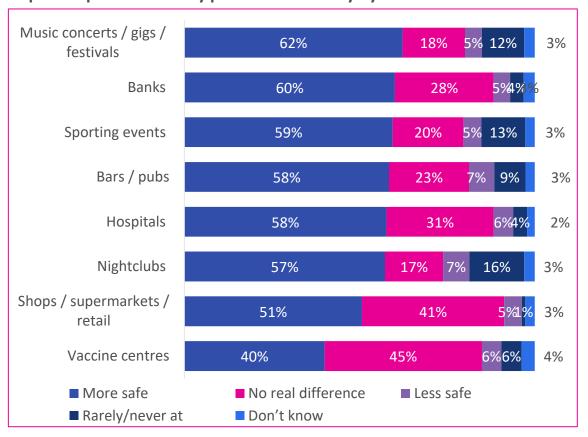




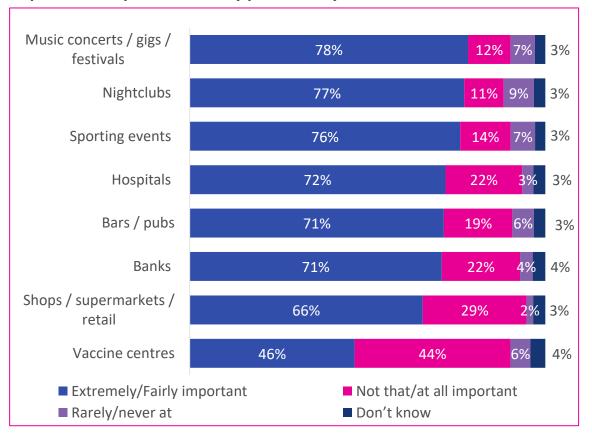
A comfortable majority of the public think a private security presence is both important and makes them feel safer in a range of settings



Impact of private security presence on safety by location



Importance of private security presence by location





Focus groups likewise found that most see security as necessary; when the prospect of security being absent is raised, this idea leaves people feeling concerned and uneasy



During focus groups, respondents were shown a range of images and asked if the security in each scenario was necessary, and how safe respondents would feel if they were not there. Almost overwhelmingly, respondents stated that they would feel less safe in an environment without private security. It is interesting to note that the initial belief was that in most cases guards were unnecessary, a viewpoint mostly driven by the idea that they are there to deter not combat crime, but on reflection, this role too was seen as important in keeping the public safe.

Outside bars and nightclubs

- Female respondents in particular would notice their absence and feel less safe
- Men would feel as if disagreements with others may escalate further without private security
- Both groups noted that places with no security may attract the 'wrong sorts'

"They look like they're doing a whole lot of nothing, but then I suppose if they weren't there, things may get quite scary."

Cash in transit

- It was assumed that private security could be the only type of person to undertake this role
- Those who were not licensed were perceived as being more likely to take advantage of the situation

"It'd have to be someone with a licence, else you'd get anyone apply and steal the money and go."

At festivals/ events

- As with door supervisors, security at festivals and events weren't seen to actively stop crime happening, but their presence meant that it was less likely to happen
- Without security acting as a deterrent to people potentially wanting to cause harm to others, most admitted that crime rates would be much higher

"If they didn't do [the bag check] I'm not sure I'd even go to the festival. I need to know the people there aren't carrying anything dangerous."

CCTV

- Responses were caveated with the fact that those watching CCTV must be doing so in real-time and reacting to events as they happen
- Believed that guards leaving their posts to intervene meant that they were able to prevent situations across a wide area with minimal resource
- CCTV operatives are believed not to deter crime due to their lack of visibility, but to help situations deescalate when they occur

"I like to know that if something happened, then they'd watch it all, know where it was, and be there within seconds."





Section 2: What are the enablers and barriers to trust in private security?

Personal experience is the biggest driver of trust – by far the most significant factor that drives overall perceptions of individuals working in the sector



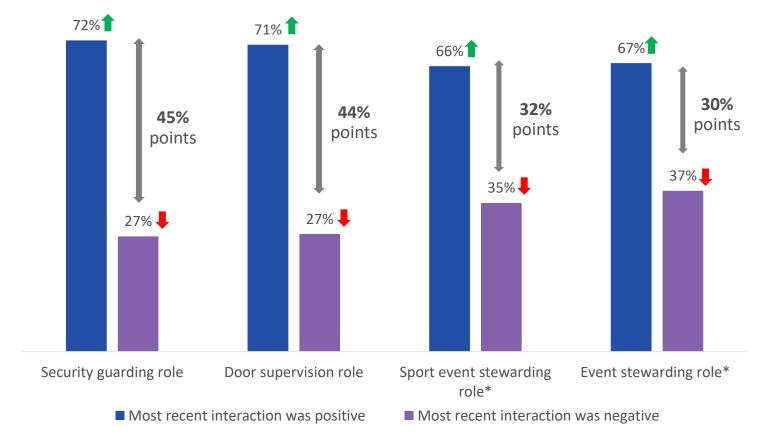
By far the most significant factor that drives overall trust and confidence in private security professionals is whether recent personal interactions with those working in the sector were positive or negative.

Unsurprisingly, those who have had positive experiences with those in private security roles are much more likely to have greater levels of trust.

The gap between those whose most recent experience was positive and those whose most recent experience was negative is highest for security guarding and door supervision roles at 45 and 44 percentage points respectively.

A breakdown of each role by whether the most recent interaction was a positive or negative experience is provided on page 32.

% who trust security guards/officers by whether most recent experience was positive/negative



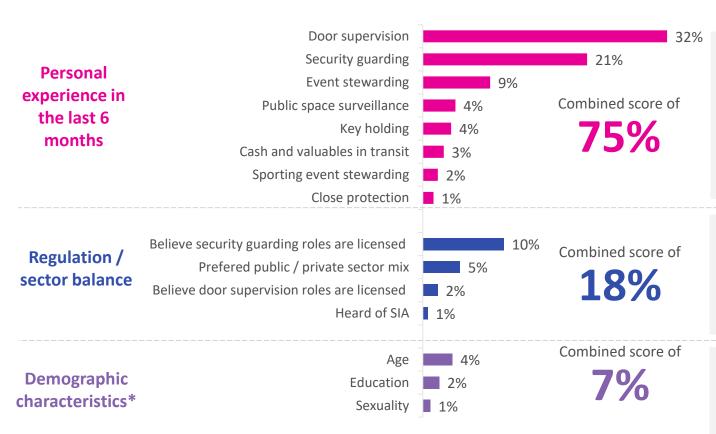




Key driver analysis confirms that personal experience – particularly experience with door supervisors – is key to driving wider trust in the profession



Relative importance scores in driving overall trust in security officers/guards (e.g., door supervisors, and retail guards)*



Personal experience accounts for 75% of the overall variance explained by the regression model, much more important than awareness of regulation or demographic characteristics. Prior experience with door supervisors was the most important driver of trust (32%), followed by experience with those in security guarding roles (21%), and event stewarding roles (9%). Personal experience with other roles tends to matter much less, all 4% or below.

Believing roles are regulated does have a small impact on overall trust in the sector, but the effect is fairly limited. A belief that security guarding roles are licensed, for example, has a relative importance score of 10%. Thinking more security work should be done in the public sector also matters a little (5%). Awareness of SIA, however, has essentially no impact on overall trust (1%).

Demographics matter much less, with just three variables statistically significant. Young people are more likely to trust security officers/guards (4%). Those with higher levels of qualifications are less likely (2%). LGBTQIA+ groups are less likely to trust security guards / Officers (1%).



^{*}Relative importance scores illustrate the percentage of variance explained by the model broken down by each variable. A higher score indicates more predictive power of the variable in question. In other words, a higher score means the variable is more important in explaining overall levels of trust in trust in security officers/guards (our overall trust metric).

26

Many cite negative personal experiences with private security, particularly door supervisors; however, there is a recognition that 'good' experiences can go unnoticed



A majority of respondents had had a negative experience with a private security professional in their time, either recently or a while ago. These experiences, however, do tend to stick and respondents are unlikely to forget them. Negative experiences range from being potentially extremely dangerous for the person involved, or a passive observation. However, they all lead to participants doubting the positive role of private security in the UK. Some participant examples included:

- Door supervisors escalating arguments leading to physical violence;
- Door supervisors ejecting women who had been spiked through wrongly assuming they were drunk;
- Security guards not being found on site when needed;
- Retail guards not noticing shoplifting;
- Retail guards unable to stand up to antisocial behaviour;
- Event stewards not checking bags thoroughly, allowing drugs and alcohol to be smuggled onto premises;
- Guards not paying attention when they are supposed to be observing a situation (e.g., on their phones).

"We have security guards at the college where I work and you never know where they are. You can never find them! They're usually in their cars having a fag. We had one bloke wander onto campus looking really dodgy and no one could find the security guards, so I had to go out and confront him myself!"

Though most could not remember a positive experience that they had had, there was a recognition that positive experiences with the security industry were either likely to go unnoticed, or not have the same level of impact as a negative experience. For example, a friendly conversation with a security guard is less likely to remain in the public's memory than an argument.

This was also the case with news stories, where positive news about private security is rarely reported compared with negative stories.

"A good day for security is when nothing happens. You don't even know they're there."

"You never really hear about things they're doing right, so it's difficult to know the impact that they have. Only things that go wrong are reported."



Although personal experience is key in driving perceptions of the private security industry, other factors are also important



Most respondents evaluate their perceptions of private security through their own personal experiences, but secondary drivers can lead either to positive or negative perceptions. The media can play an important role, and stories such as news of the Manchester Arena bombing, or of the Liverpool Hospital guard, often have an impact.

Negative perceptions are also driven by a belief that training is lacking, or even non-existent. Many who think this also see those working in private security as doing so as a 'stop-gap job', and don't view it as a career.

The regulation does play some role. Many trust public sector roles more (e.g., the police, nurses, etc.) because of their high knowledge of the stringent regulations that professionals in these positions must adhere to.

	Drivers of perceptions (positive and negative) towards the security industry				
	Core driver	Primary drivers	Secondary drivers	Not considered	
Negative perceptions	Personal experience	 Aggressive interactions Perceptions of guard being 'lazy' or doing an inefficient job 	 Negative news stories Knowledge of SIA regulation* Perceived lack of training and professionalism (e.g., a stop-gap) Private capacity putting profit first 	The ACS scheme, or how employers themselves are regulated	
Positive perceptions		 Friendly interactions (e.g., smiles or conversations) Perceptions of how the guard appears in the job (e.g., passionate) 	 Knowledge of SIA regulation* Knowledge of training Positive news stories Effective outcomes of interactions 		





Contracted security is generally seen as being able to meet capacity for large-scale or continuous requirements; in-house is seen as friendlier and more invested



There are some core differences in perceptions* between in-house and contracted private security companies, split between where they may best be used, what their core skills are, and what their limitations may be. Generally speaking, both types of security were viewed as necessary in different situations, with neither being seen as more competent than the other. Trust, however, is driven by ongoing relationships with individuals, so those interacting more with in-house security teams were more likely to trust them.

	In-house security teams	Contracted security teams
Best used for	 Locations with an ongoing need for a security role (e.g., bars and nightclubs) Locations where the security should have an interest in the success of the company (e.g., workplaces) Locations where the public would benefit from an ongoing relationship with the security teams (e.g., workplaces, bars, hospitals) 	 One-off, or irregular events (e.g., festivals or music gigs) Locations with large-scale, complex, and ever changing needs (e.g., large retail chains, international companies) Companies where site changes are often necessary (e.g., construction site protection) Commercial properties (e.g., site protection)
Core skills	 An in-depth knowledge of the company they are guarding, and its specific needs Part of the company itself, and so more likely to engage with the role and take the position seriously The public they are protecting more likely to trust them to keep them safe, as they develop an ongoing relationships 	 Expert in logistics and delivering quickly and at scale More likely to have employers which invest in their training and ensure that they have the licensing that they need Can drive down costs for employers if they use contractors
Limitations	 Unable to scale up quickly if needed More costly for businesses 	 Some concerns around workers' rights (e.g., zero hours contracts and no rights regarding holiday pay or pensions) Some concerns around care for the role, and a belief that these guards may not have an interest in the company they are protecting

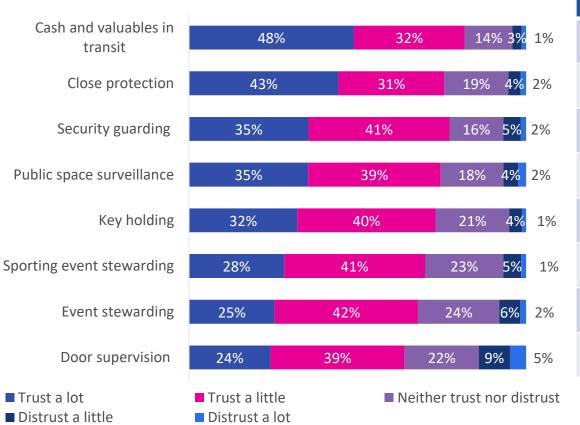




Door supervisor is the role that stands out as having lower levels of trust



Trust in specific security roles



Trust	Distrust
81%	4%
74%	5%
77%	7%
74%	7%
72%	5%
69%	7%
67%	8%
63%	14%

Confidence that people in each specific security role tend to 'act with integrity and do the right thing' and that they tend to 'carry out their duties competently and effectively' following a similar pattern to trust levels, with door supervision being where sentiment is poorer.

The following demographic groups are significantly more likely than average (14%) to distrust door supervision:

- Non-binary/prefer to self-describe: 28%
- Income £60K+: 21%

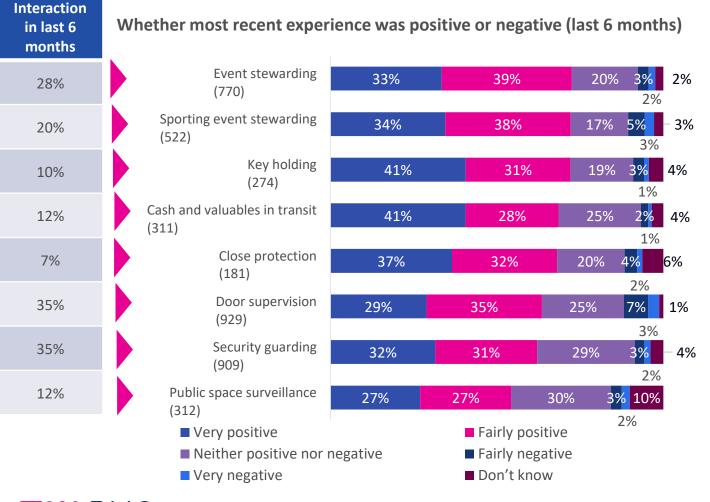
Those in the following regions are more likely than average (14%) to distrust door supervision:

- Northern Ireland: 25%
- North West: 20%



Unsurprisingly this is also where interactions are most negative – though most still have positive experiences





Positive	Negative
73%	5%
72%	8%
72%	5%
69%	3%
68%	5%
64%	11%
62%	5%
54%	6%

Encouragingly, more than half are positive about all their most recent interactions with individuals in every private security role. Unsurprisingly, some roles lend themselves to more passive interactions - 30% say their experience with a person(s) working in public space surveillance, for example, was neither positive nor negative.

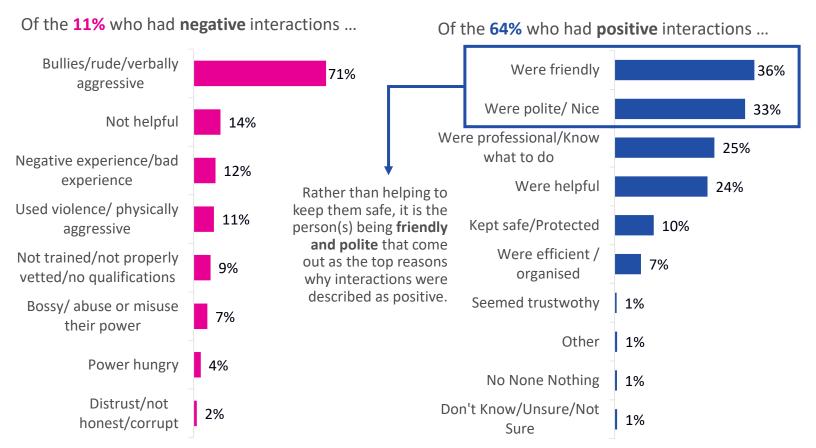
Door supervision stands out as the role where a relatively high percentage of the public has interactions with the role (35%) in the last 6 months and where a relatively high proportion of interactions were negative (11%).

Those citing negative interactions with door supervisors typically mention bullying and verbal aggression. Those with positive experiences discuss how they were friendly and polite.



Why interaction with door supervisor(s) was negative

Why interaction with door supervisor(s) was positive





Qualitative respondents echoed this sentiment, though their perceptions of door supervisors were either from personal experiences, or from the reputation that they have, with some mentioning the old stereotype of the aggressive 'bouncer', potentially clouding their views.

As with the quantitative results, most negative perceptions were about their personality and how they had been curtly dealt with, and had felt that the door supervisors had been unnecessarily rude and aggressive, rather than helpful.

"They [door supervisors] tend to be a bit burly usually, a bit aggressive. Sometimes pretty rude."

"Some of them have got a bit of a God-complex.
They get off by being rude and aggressive. I think
they apply for the role because they have an
excuse to be like that."

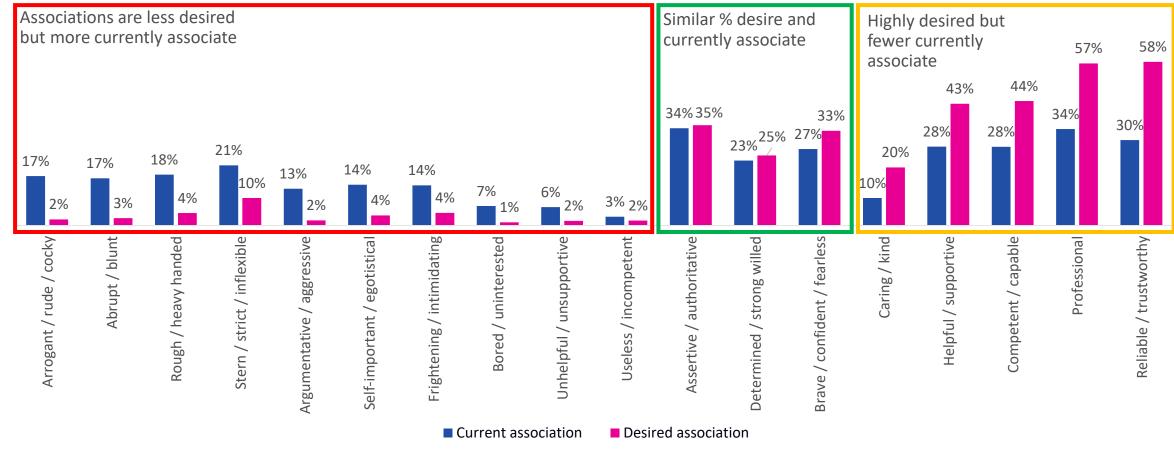




Arrogant, abrupt, and rough are the three key traits where the gap between the current association and the desired association is greatest for security officers/guards



Personality traits: Sorted by gap between current and desired associations





People focus on honesty, integrity, approachability, and empathy when asked to build a hypothetical code of conduct



During groups, respondents were asked to design a hypothetical code of conduct that they would like to see private security professionals adhere to throughout their working careers. Though participants believed that if security professionals followed the code, the industry as a whole would improve, they were clear that if it were to succeed, it must be enforced by hiring companies.

Less mentioned Most mentioned	Approachable/ Friendly	 The most important attribute to many; the public want private security professionals to help them feel safe by being there to answer their queries and concerns in a friendly and approachable manner
	Honesty/ Integrity	 Considered fundamental in any role, an honest employee is imperative due to the value of what they are there to protect (both people and property); they must be able to be easily trusted to do the role well
	 Able to understand why a certain issue has arisen, and see the point of view from the alleged aggressor (e.g someone may be scared and so is being aggressive; or that teenagers may be bored and so are acting out) a of aggression to be able to alleviate or address the issue 	
	Fair/ Non-discriminatory/ Ethical	 Some groups felt that some had more negative experiences with security officers/guards than others (e.g., BME groups, men) due to discrimination; they would like a code of conduct to ensure this doesn't happen
	Conscientious/ Observant	 May had poor experiences of 'lazy' security guards, and so wanted to see more being conscientious at work Observant qualities were considered important for the role, if they were to notice and act on small issues before they escalated and caused problems
	Calm/ Able to diffuse situations	 An ability to diffuse rather than escalate an issue was seen as important; groups want security professionals who can stop an issue escalate, rather than deal with an issue which has already occurred

Not mentioned: Although many want security guards to *'look the part'* and appear *'burly'* and *'tough'*, they do not actually want officers/guards to act like this. They prefer guards to be approachable and friendly to help them feel safe, rather than to look imposing to deter others.

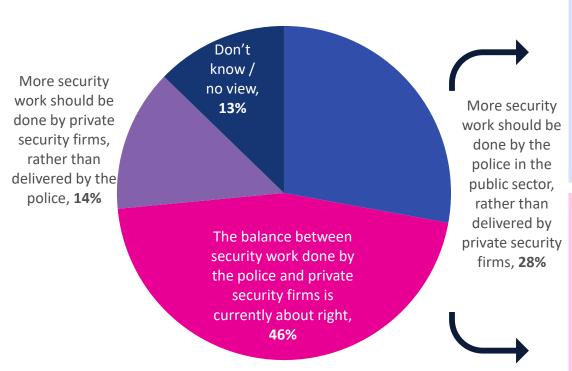




Understanding of the private-public security distinction is strong – and most think the balance between police and the private sector is actually about right



Balance between security work done by police and private security



Differences by age	16 to 34	35 to 54	55+
More police	37%	26%	22% 👢
Balance between police and private security firms is about right	44%	48%	45%
More private security firms	7% 👢	12%	20% 👚

Younger groups are more likely to think more work should be done by the police rather than private security, whereas older groups are more likely to believe the opposite.

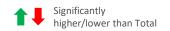


In focus groups, though there was no obvious demographic difference between perceptions, most also agreed that the balance was about right, between the police and private security forces. However, some distinctions were mentioned.

Some pointed out that cuts in the police were significantly impacting how safe they felt when out and about, and wanted to see either more police or more private security fill this gap; one respondent mentioned already noticing more private security patrolling areas where previously the police would have been and noted that companies are now taking security into their own hands.

Another mentioned that private security was sometimes more relatable than the police, with more 'normal' people working in these roles.



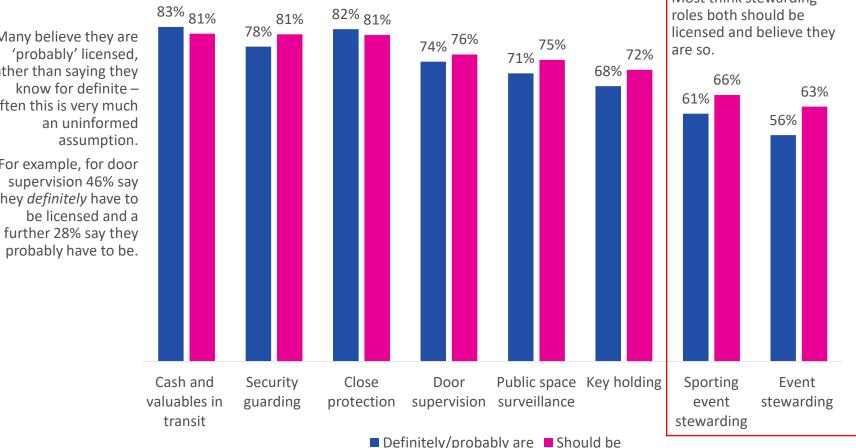


The vast majority believe all security roles - including event and sport stewards — both are and should be regulated



Perceptions towards licensing of security roles

Many believe they are 'probably' licensed, rather than saying they know for definite often this is very much an uninformed assumption. For example, for door supervision 46% say they definitely have to





Most think stewarding

Qualitative respondents too felt that all roles should be regulated.

There were, however, questions raised as to the level of regulation each role needed. Door supervisors, stewards, and keyholders, for example, were thought to need less regulation than close protection, CCTV guards, and cash in transit roles. Some felt that the regulation for the 'entry' roles (e.g., door supervisors) might hinder people from applying to work there in the first place.

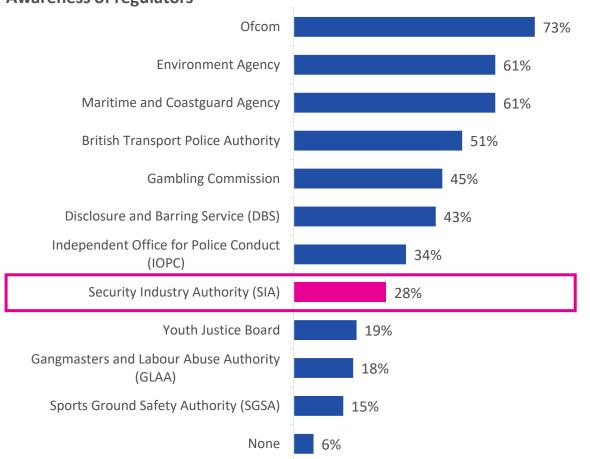
"They all need a licence, but some should probably go through more training than others. Close protection, or cash in transit, for example, will need different skills to door supervision."



People presume that the private security industry is *probably* regulated, but most don't know for sure and awareness of the SIA is low



Awareness of regulators





Focus groups too showed a very low awareness of the SIA, with a very small minority of respondents having heard of them.

Of those who had heard of them, this was usually due to a personal link (e.g., a friend or family member working in security, or they had thought about applying for a role in security themselves).

Most were not surprised there was a regulator responsible, with them having assumed that, like most industries, a regulatory body was responsible.

"I've never heard of the SIA but I guessed they were regulated because of those yellow badges they all wear."

"It doesn't surprise me that they're regulated, I always assumed that they would be, but I never really gave it that much thought. But no, it doesn't surprise me at all."



Although the public support regulation, it's by no means a 'silver bullet' that will lead to greater levels of trust and confidence



In general, the public reacted positively when they became aware of the SIA and the work that it does to regulate those working in the private security industry. However, a minority of participants, particularly those who had had significant negative experiences with security professionals, saw regulation negatively, as their negative experiences were indicative of regulation being ineffective.

Regulation as a positive

Most respondents viewed the regulation of the industry as a positive when they found out about it, with their core criticism centered around the fact that more people didn't know about it; they believed that this information should be more public-facing and that a comms campaign to educate the public about the SIA would be beneficial. In particular, they liked the fact that the SIA:

- Ensured all professionals were licensed;
- Ensured all professionals had training before beginning their role;
- Ensured accountability for any errors.

"Yeah it's quite reassuring that it's not just in the employers hands, and that they [security professionals] need to go through training to even be able to start the work."

"It's good, but more people need to be aware of this. It needs to be communicated to the public."

Regulation as a negative

Those who had had impactful negative experiences with security professionals saw regulation as a negative. They believed it was:

- Ineffective;
- Insufficient;
- A waste of government funds.

Others were also negative about the link to the Home Office, with many not trusting central government departments, and especially critical of core ministers working in the Home Office role.

"It actually concerns me more knowing they're regulated and they're still that bad. What is the regulator doing? It's obviously not very effective." "Going by personal experiences, I can't imagine that they're regulated that closely, or are that afraid of the regulator."



The public expect that most in private security roles will get training, although the need for 'emotional intelligence' means the roles require careful recruitment



When looking at the desired code of conduct that the public would like private security professionals to have, some of these traits they believe could be learned during training courses, but many cannot. Some state that there are certain personality types not suited to a role in private security, and employers need to ensure that these personality types are not recruited in the first place; they believe training can have a more limited impact here.

Most mentioned Have a friendly disposition and able to make Approachable/ Friendly anyone feel welcome Desired skills: Code of conduct Honesty/Integrity Are an honest employee Can put themselves in others' shoes and treat **Empathetic** them accordingly Fair/ Non-discriminatory/ Does not exhibit any racist/sexist behaviours, and Ethical treats everyone equally Less mentioned • Able to spot a situation from afar, *before* it has **Conscientious/Observant** had a chance to unfurl Calm/ Able to diffuse Able to diffuse a potentially dangerous situation situations before it gets to that stage

Can be harder to teach / train for

The most desired skills the public want from private security professionals are seen as more difficult to teach in training. These skills, while they can be enhanced through training (e.g., through unconscious bias training), need to already be present in the employee. Participants suggested that employers need to build in better personality testing at the recruitment stage if they are to avoid hiring the wrong people for the role.

Easier to teach

Skills to monitor and ensure situations do not escalate can be taught in training.

"Using skills like that [patience and understanding] to diffuse a situation is really clever, it's obviously something they've learned in training."





The voluntary nature of the ACS raises questions about the effectiveness of the scheme



- No respondent had previously heard of the Approved Contractor Scheme (ACS) before taking part in the research.
- When shown a definition of the ACS (see below), most respondents stated that theoretically, it is a good idea for the SIA to standardise the quality of companies operating in private security through a scheme such as the ACS.
- However, the voluntary nature of the scheme raises some serious concerns among respondents; most did not believe that the scheme could ever be effective if it is to remain voluntary.
- There was a lot of support amongst respondents for the SIA to make the scheme mandatory for companies working in the private security industry.
- Additionally, some respondents felt that the public should be made more aware of the ACS; they noted that the power of the scheme lies in public knowledge of it, as if the public is aware the security company protecting them are good quality, they are more likely to feel safe.

"If we decided to go and form a security company and pitch to the local Tesco, they'd laugh at us and rightly so. Because we aren't ACS accredited. So it's encouraging to have."

"It's a great thing in theory, but the cynic in me thinks it probably isn't as effective as it could be, because it's voluntary. Most companies I imagine would go for the cheapest provider, and I wouldn't have thought the cheapest provider would be ACS accredited."

"It'd be good if we knew about it, then we could choose to go to places that only hired ACS companies to do their security. We could make more informed decisions, and maybe they'd be more likely to do it [the accreditation] too."



Definition shown to respondents:

The Approved Contractor Scheme (ACS) is a voluntary quality assurance scheme.

All companies who are approved have been checked by the SIA, and meet the highest industry standards.

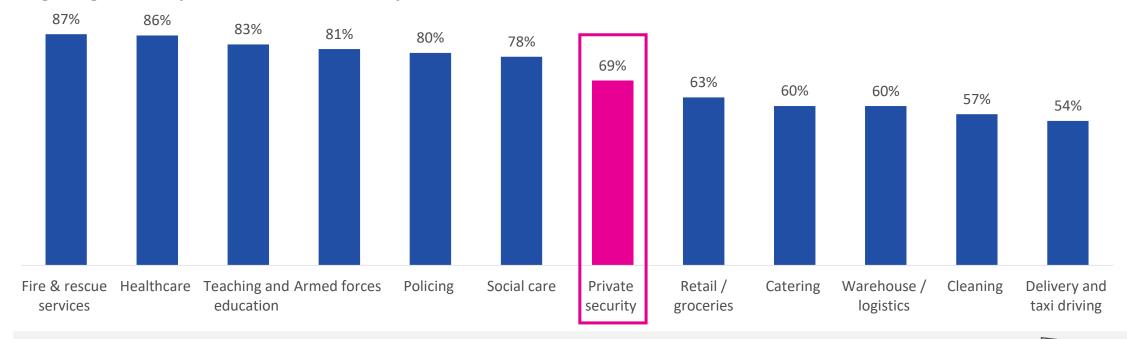




Private security performs relatively well when it comes to being a career 'to be proud of' – but is still only mid-ranking when compared with other careers



% agreeing that each profession is a career 'to be proud of'





In focus groups, most respondents spoke positively about a career in private security but this was usually done hypothetically or with caveats, suggesting that there is an element of social desirability when responding to questions. For example, of those who agreed that private security was a career to be proud of, this was usually for those who were thought of as 'unintelligent', or only for those who were working in a managerial position within private security. Door supervisors, or those doing it as a 'stop-gap' job, were not included in their assessment.

"Yeah I'd say you can be proud of a career in private security. It's stable isn't it? So if maybe you didn't finish education, or you aren't that intelligent, it's a good career choice."



But negatives emerge about pay and the notion of a 'first choice career'



Perceptions towards careers in private security

A career in private security is dangerous and high risk 58% 25% Those working in private security are given the 51% 24% 13% training needed for their careers A career in private security offers opportunities for 48% 13% 27% progression Most people in private security feel a strong sense of 46% 29% 11% accomplishment Private security is a good first choice career 40% 31% 19% A career in private security is generally paid well 36% 28% 20% Young people often aspire to work in private security 32% 26% 30% ■ Neither, nor Agree Disagree



Qualitative research too found that many respondents see private security as a potentially dangerous role to work in.

In addition, opportunities for training and progression were less understood, also mirroring quantitative results. Many did not think that young people saw private security as a 'first choice' career because the different elements of the work involved (e.g., managerial positions, responsibilities, growth) were not well communicated to them, with career advisors instead recommending a career in the police.



"I studied criminology at university, and it was never even mentioned as an option. There was a lot of focus on the undergrads to go into the police, and a lot of information on how to do that, but we were never told about this as an alternative."





Those who are positive about a career in private security are so only if the career were for others, not for themselves



When asked about a career in private security, most agree it is a career to be proud of, with good progression opportunities, and good opportunities. However, this is not the case when asked to consider a career for themselves or their loved ones. It seems that private security is only a position for 'others'; when the thought of working in private security becomes personal.

A career for others

When respondents were asked what a career would be like in private security, most were quick to agree that it was:

- A career to be proud of;
- A career with some room for progression;
- A varied role;
- A role which helps others;
- A role which protects the public;
- A well-valued position.

The above, however, conflicts with their ideas of what the sorts of people who currently work in private security are like. This suggests that, as a role in society, private security is seen as valuable but is not currently represented by individuals as well as it could be. Perceptions currently lie in the people working in security, rather than the industry itself.

A career for themselves

However, an almost unanimous majority of respondents had not considered a career in private security. For the one participant who had, this was quickly discounted due to difficulties finding work with social hours close to their home. Other reasons for not considering a role in security were:

- Other career preferences;
- Not a lot of progression;
- Not considered an interesting career;
- Low paid;
- Not very social hours or a very social role (a lot of lone working);
- Quite 'boring' or 'humdrum';
- Potentially dangerous;
- Not always well respected.

The future of the security industry

For many, private security was thought of as a growth industry, as austerity measures have led to cuts in public security. There was a belief that, as the police become fewer and fewer, private security will be asked to fill the gaps, and soon private companies will be patrolling the country.

This group appeared excited by the potential for the industry to grow and saw management, ownership, and strategic positions within security as particularly exciting.



"It's a growth industry, isn't it? It's going to get bigger and bigger, and if you can get in now, maybe set up a company and be good at your job, I think it's got a load of potential. Soon they'll be doing the job of the police. They already are, in some places."





Findings and final thoughts



Key learnings and findings (2/2)

- Shout about your successes: This is an uphill battle and negative stories will always more easily gain wider traction in the media. However, this should not stop the SIA from shouting about industry success stories and recognising the work of individuals working to keep the public, property and premises safe. This will help counter the negative stories associated with the sector and specific companies that currently typically dominate public discourse.
- Emphasise the expertise in the sector: The public tends to focus on 'capacity' as a key strength of the private security sector, but they do not talk much about the unique expertise on offer. Help the industry move away from an image of companies who simply fill the gaps by encouraging them to showcase the value they bring and the unique expertise they offer this is something that the public has little appreciation for.
- Focus on friendly: A key learning from the research is the considerable emphasis the public place on wanting security officers/guards to be friendly, helpful and approachable. Being trustworthy and competent are of course important, but this is an area where there is considerable scope to increase trust and confidence by thinking about the implications for standards and training.
- Be careful about how the Approved Contractor Scheme is framed: The focus in the description on the word 'voluntary' attracted criticism in the focus groups. Ensure that the framing of this does not detract from the minimum SIA accreditation standard. Consider avoiding the word 'voluntary' where possible and instead frame it as an additional standard, but reiterating that without an SIA licence no individual can legally work in the security industry.
- Encourage the sector to showcase the opportunity that an SIA career can bring: The public has a fairly limited understanding of the roles within the security sector. Showcase the variety of responsibilities in lower-level roles, where there are progression opportunities, and the wide range of roles and avenues people can take. Case studies should also showcase people who started their career in security, highlighting how it can be a 'first-choice' career route for young people.



Key learnings and findings (1/2)

- Set realistic expectations: Increasing trust and confidence in the short term, for any sector or profession, is a difficult task. Certain elements and events will always be outside your control and perceptions of the public are often ingrained and hard to shift in the short term. Set long-term goals aligned with your strategic plan backed up with concrete actions and next steps.
- Remember that day-to-day experiences are key: Increasing knowledge of regulation might help further public trust to some extent but is not a 'silver bullet' and has the potential to detract from public trust and confidence when things go wrong. What the SIA can do to ensure people's interactions and experiences with private security is positive will make the biggest difference, and be the key to unlocking greater levels of trust in the sector.
- Door supervision is where resources should be focused: If the question is about where might resources be focused to increase trust and confidence, the most obvious area is around the conduct of those working in door supervision roles. This is where the rate of negative experiences is notably higher than other private security roles, with most of those who report a negative experience citing issues around bullying, and rude and verbally aggressive behaviour.
- Recognise the strengths the sector has in engaging with all groups across society: The police might have higher levels of trust in general, but they have issues around trust in certain groups including ethnic minorities and young people. Security professions being viewed as more down-to-earth, normal and relatable is a key strength.
- Show the public what goes on 'behind the scenes': The public recognises that 'positive' experiences are often passive and go unnoticed. Communications should focus on revealing what those working in security do 'behind the scenes' to help keep people and their property safe. Given that the understanding of what people do in private security roles was often limited, part of this should be helping to explain the wide array of responsibilities and what is expected of private security personnel in different situations.
- Use 'loss aversion' framing to encourage the public to recognise the value of security: Framing communications about what life would be like in the absence of private security will help to encourage greater recognition of the sector. In the focus groups, this exercise immediately made people feel uneasy and encouraged people to recognise the valuable work those working in security roles do.





