GO FORTH AND PROSPER

Shahzad Ali *explains how to get into and advance in the security industry*

This year has been truly devastating for the security industry, with statistics revealing security workers saw the highest number of deaths in the UK per 100,000 from COVID-19 in 2020. Security workers risk their lives every day to ensure the public is kept safe. However, their jobs and livelihoods have not been protected during the pandemic. In particular, those working in the nightlife industry have faced a tough time, with reports revealing that as much as 85 percent of the industry's staff are considering leaving after a tough year. It comes as no surprise that there is an outcry for recruitment to this sector, especially as it's so vital to life returning to 'normal' once again.

Public places are now functioning at their normal capacities again, triggering a 400 percent rise in demand for security guards since March. However, with the pandemic forcing workers out due to a lack of physical and financial protection, many have already left and joined other industries, with no plans to return. But now is the best time to join the security industry. There are plenty of job opportunities for hardworking, well-trained individuals.

Unemployment played a large part in the nations lowered quality of life through the pandemic. At one point, nearly 5 million jobs were furloughed. But now that opportunities are on the rise, there is, and will always be, a need for those who work in the security industry. It's an industry constantly evolving to change with the times. There will always be people, possessions or physical assets to protect.

Regardless of its high demand, there are benefits to working in this sector. It is an extremely rewarding occupation, which allows workers to help others and no working day is the same. Plus, the industry is one of few that offers complete flexibility. Many security firms give you the ability to choose casual or full-time positions, so there's something for everyone — whether you're looking to support your family or earn extra money at weekends.

A career in the security industry can be versatile, too. While some individuals may thrive in public-facing roles, such as in bars, nightclubs and shopping centres, others may prefer to protect from behind the scenes doing jobs such as CCTV surveillance. For ambitious employees who prioritise jobs with good career advancement, there is plenty of opportunity for excelling your role once you get your foot in the door and have the correct training to thrive in the industry and beyond.

Before you can start a long and fruitful career in the security industry in the UK, it is imperative to obtain your SIA-approved license and get the right one for what you want to do. At the very least, this license allows individuals to work legally in the UK. Licenses are provided by the regulator of the UK's private security industry, the Security Industry Authority and will be needed if the work you plan on doing is to be part of a 'contract for services' and involves a 'licensable activity'.

Section 3 of The Private Security Industry Act 2001 states that it is a criminal offence for individuals to engage in licensable conduct unless they have one themselves. Sectors that require one include Cash and Valuables in Transit, Close Protection, Door Supervision, Public Space Surveillance (CCTV), Security Guard and Vehicle Immobilisers (just Northern Ireland). Although, recently, there have been instances where untrained industry staff are undertaking roles in the licensable activity, resulting in hefty fines and repercussions for the security firm and workers.

This could be down to the shortage of security staff available following COVID-19 closures and Brexit, among other things, which has caused complications with the efficiency of some firms when checking licenses before sub-contracting staff out. Regardless, it is the job of both worker and organisation to ensure that the correct training and licenses are held before beginning a job that requires one. By completing the correct training, staff will learn all the skills needed for the industry sector they wish to join, which will be beneficial for many years to come. Plus, despite some places offering employment opportunities to those who haven't followed the correct processes, it's always best to ensure you have the correct skills and qualifications, as you could find yourself stuck for career progression later down the line.

In October 2021 the SIA's legislation is set to change, as it introduces new, updated qualifications for all sectors, except close protection and vehicle immobilisation, as well as first aid training for door supervisors or security guards. Anyone holding a currently valid license will have to undertake top-up training or the new qualifications to work in the industry. So, if you're looking for a job in any of the roles that are classed as 'licensable activity', find yourself an approved and trusted trainer, complete your courses and ensure that all your qualifications are always up to date. It's for the safety of you and the public, after all.

As we already know, your training acts as the building blocks for a long and fruitful career in the security industry. But it won't come easy, and it won't be cheap. For CCTV courses the duration is three days, with costs of a minimum of £180 for training, plus £190 for an SIA licence fee, whereas in the case of Close Protection courses you will need to train for 14 days, pay a minimum of £1,200 and a £190 SIA licence fee. The type, length and level of training is all relative to the line of work that you plan to continue with into your career.

THERE ARE PLENTY OF JOB OPPORTUNITIES FOR HARDWORKING, WELL-TRAINED INDIVIDUALS

The business of security isn't for the faint-hearted; so make sure you listen to your trainers, take in all the advice from experienced industry superiors and absorb all the relevant information you get. Remember, these exams test your theoretical knowledge and ensure that you are ready to begin your career in the industry and have the skills needed to protect civilians daily.

After all, with private security staff considered key workers during the COVID-19 pandemic, workers must be as knowledgeable as possible about health and safety regulations, how to deal with conflict, public protection and all the other important roles they're expected to play in the safety of others. The key to success is to be prepared to graft, prove yourself and continue to expand on your knowledge as you move forward in your career, as no one day is the same.

After you have completed your security training, the world is your oyster when it comes to applying for positions within the industry. However, you must choose the right company for you. Do your research into the types of firms you'd like to work for, what work and contracts they offer, the salary, insurance policies and feedback from previous and existing staff.

It's important you are protected and respected within your new security roles due to the nature of the job meaning you are likely to be faced with trauma at some point. It's been reported that 40 percent of workers suffered from PTSD in 2020, so it's important to look into the well-being services provided by your employer as the job relies on your mental as well as physical strength. By ensuring your mental health is in check, you're more likely to experience higher levels of productivity, too.

But it's not all negative, as the beauty of the security industry is that once you have stepped onto the ladder and gained the appropriate qualifications, your options are so diverse. Whether you choose to stick

Visitors attending events where physical protection has been integrated seamlessly are far more likely to feel reassured and relaxed

in your field and climb the ranks that way or look for other work in the security sector and beyond, it will without doubt be a long and fruitful career.

Consider how you brand yourself, network and build your reputation as a trained professional from the start, as you want to come across as approachable, helpful, conscientious and vigilant to future employers. It's about your attitude to work, not just the skills you have on paper in this industry. For example, a security guard could progress into a supervisor role, followed by senior or chief security officer and then undertake higher training qualifications to become a first-line manager or trainer and perhaps even consider opening your own security company.

TRAINING ACTS AS THE BUILDING BLOCKS FOR A LONG CAREER IN THE SECURITY INDUSTRY

Security professionals don't always stick in the private security industry either, as the skills needed are transferable to other industries, such as the police force. According to internal data gathered by Get Licensed, 13 percent become security consultants, 17 percent become security managers, 10 percent become police officers and 13 percent correctional officers. This only accounts for 50 percent of security guards' career choices.

To summarise, it's important to weigh up all the risks and the benefits when considering a career in the private security industry. Are you someone prepared to take on the challenge of working hard to gain relevant qualifications, stick at a job where you might encounter unpleasant things and remain mentally and physically prepared for whatever the day throws at you? If the answer is no, then it probably isn't for you.

According to a recent survey that looked into what influenced people to select security as a career, 84 percent of respondents indicated that the challenges they faced within security roles were a significant attraction when applying. Meanwhile, 63 percent referred to the possibilities for progression – which drew them to the industry – and 74 percent said they intend to remain in the industry for as long as they are working.

With life slowly returning to normal, there is a growing demand for hard-working and conscientious employees to start now and build their careers. All you have to do is be prepared to put the graft in, work your way up and be ready to take on any challenge with a clear and level head ●

Shahzad Ali is the CEO of security training and staffing platform Get Licensed, with over 20 years' experience in the industry. Get Licensed has helped over 300,000 job-seekers get licensed and find work.

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