

Specials Constabulary

Frequently Asked Questions

Recruitment Process

How long will the recruitment process take?

Every application is different depending on how quickly references and checks are completed, but it should generally take around 6 months. The recruitment process may take longer if you do not provide complete and accurate information on your application form.

Am I too old to apply?

Anyone over 18 years of age is welcome to apply to join the Special Constabulary. There is no upper age limit but you do need to be able to pass a medical and fitness test; this is for your own safety.

We welcome people of all ages as you can bring valuable life experiences, new skills and fresh ideas.

Is there a height restriction?

No, there is no minimum or maximum height.

Do I need any formal qualifications to become a Special Constable?

You don't need any formal qualification to join the Special Constabulary, but you do need plenty of common sense, resilience, patience, enthusiasm, commitment and self-motivation.

Do I need a driving licence?

You do not need a driving licence to become a Special Constable, although it is very helpful if you have one as you will need to be able to travel easily and quickly to the station to which you are posted and to Police & Fire HQ in Portishead for your training sessions.

Can you become a special constable if you wear glasses or contact lenses?

If you successfully reach the medical examination stage of recruitment, you will have to undergo an eye test. New recruits must have at least 6/12 vision in their right or left eye, or at least 6/6 vision in both eyes. Those who wear glasses, spectacles or contact lenses must have at least 6/36 vision in both eyes without wearing their glasses, spectacles or contact lenses.

Training

What training will I be given?

We will train you with the skills and knowledge to be an effective police officer and support you through the process of putting these into practice and building your confidence and experience.

The first stage of your training will be a mix of self-study and attending six weekend-long training sessions held at Police & Fire HQ over alternating weekends. After this you will be posted to a police station to work with an assigned tutor; to begin with you will mostly shadow your tutor or work alongside them. During this time you will complete Tier 1 of your SCLAP book (your learning portfolio) with examples of your work.

When you complete Tier 1, you will move on to Tier 2, attending some more training sessions at Police & Fire HQ and working with your tutor to complete the rest of your SCLAP book. During this time you will begin to take the lead when working with your tutor.

Finally, you will complete the short Tier 3 training programme. Tier 3 includes placements with specialist functions such as Road Policing and allows you to demonstrate that you are ready to work independently. At the end of Tier 3 you will be assessed and should then be awarded Independent Patrol Status.

What is Independent Patrol Status (IPS)?

Independent Patrol Status (IPS), or “qualified status” is given to officers who have successfully completed all their training and passed assessments to show that they have the knowledge, experience and skills to operate as an independent police officer. This allows the officer to solo-patrol.

The speed at which you achieve this will depend entirely on how many duty hours you are able to complete. Some officers achieve IPS in a little over a year, others take much longer. National guidelines say that 3-5 years would be a reasonable time period.

We expect all Special Constables to work towards and attain IPS.

Being a Special Constable

Does a Special Constable perform the same role as a PCSO?

No. A Special Constable is a police officer and holds the same powers and privileges as a regular police officer.

What does a Special Constable actually do?

Special Constables work alongside regular police officers preventing and detecting crime, providing a visible policing presence in communities and responding to incidents. In a single shift, these are just some of the tasks you might complete: attend a road traffic incident, respond to a domestic disturbance, keep people safe at the scene of a crime, and deal with anti-social behaviour.

Of course, there are also times when demand is lower and you will have a quiet shift. On these occasions, it helps if you are willing to pitch in with your team and carry out essential tasks that need doing around the station.

It is also worth knowing that there are some less fast-paced elements to the role such as writing up incident reports and booking detainees into custody – both of which can be quite time-consuming.

Although you are a volunteer, you are required to follow any reasonable order given to you by a more senior or experienced officer.

How many hours do I need to complete each month?

Special Constables are asked to commit to a minimum of 16 hours a month. Some Specials work many more than this and tend to work up to ten hours on a shift, in line with regular officers they are teamed up with. For your safety, we do not allow Specials to work full night-shifts; all Specials must end duties by 3am unless there are exceptional circumstances.

Will I get paid?

Special Constables do not get paid as they work on a voluntary basis. You will however be able to claim back travel and subsistence expenses for your duties.

Will I wear the same uniform as a police officer?

Special Constables wear identical uniform to regular police officers and are issued with all the same personal safety equipment and communications devices.

Will I carry a Taser?

No. Specials do not carry and are not permitted to operate Taser equipment.

Can Special Constables drive police vehicles?

Yes, Special Constables who have achieved independent patrol status and completed the relevant driver training courses are eligible to drive marked police vehicles. A small number of Specials will go on to complete specialist Response Driver Training or Roads Policing Training and be able to drive police vehicles in more challenging and higher risk situations.

If I am a Special can I fast track to become a regular officer?

Becoming a Special Constable is an excellent way to gain experience of being a police officer and to build your confidence, knowledge and skills, but it is not an entry route to the regular Constabulary.

What if I get injured in work?

You will receive assistance from the Constabulary in the instance of an injury.

Will I ever be on my own whilst on duty?

Yes, once you have achieved Independent Patrol Status, you may patrol alone.

Will I be arresting people?

Yes, you will stop, search and arrest people during your operational duties.

What on-going training will I receive?

For your own safety you will be required to complete officer safety and first aid refresher training every year. In addition there are opportunities to complete useful training on an ad hoc basis or if your posting requires it.

Will I be involved in more specialised policing?

Whilst the majority of Specials Constables are assigned to patrol or neighbourhood policing, some work alongside specialist policing teams such as Investigations, Digital Investigations Unit, Roads Policing Unit, and Ports Police. To be eligible for these specialist opportunities, you will need to achieve Independent Patrol Status and pass a selection process when vacancies arise.

You will be given specialist training to support you in these roles.