



Is a close protection role the right one for me?

What is the work like?

Close protection officers (CPOs), formerly known as bodyguards, protect clients (known as principals) from deliberate attack, accidents or unwanted attention. They are responsible for assessing security measures and providing discreet surveillance. Their work includes:

- protecting the principal from threats of physical violence
- checking out premises, such as hotels, restaurants and theatres, before the principal arrives
- installing surveillance equipment, such as covert cameras
- surveying the layout of venues, noting potential hazards and exposure to risks
- accompanying the principal on business and social trips
- driving the principal to and from venues.

Threats to principals could come from a range of sources including terrorist organizations, political opponents, stalkers or over-enthusiastic fans. Their principals may also face acute dangers, such as kidnapping attempts. CPOs are often contracted to work for people in the public eye, including:

- royal families
- foreign dignitaries
- diplomats and politicians
- high-profile business people operating in potentially hostile places
- legal professionals, such as barristers
- sports, music, film and TV celebrities, and their families.

Specialist duties may include residential security, making sure the principal's premises are secure. Some CPOs may train to be chauffeurs, specialising in defensive and evasive driving.

Although much of a CPO's time can involve periods of inactivity, they must be constantly alert and ready to respond to a threatening situation. To achieve this, they liaise constantly with other security professionals. They may work in teams, using specialist communication equipment to maintain contact.

Hours and environment

CPOs work around their principal's schedule, which will vary depending on the length of contract and their principal's work and leisure activities. Offering 24-hour protection means that this is rarely a weekday nine-to-five job. It can involve early starts, potentially lots of travelling, maybe abroad, and late nights accompanying principals to functions.

CPOs work both indoors and at outdoor venues, such as rallies, political meetings, conferences and premieres. Public outings, such as shopping trips,



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can be arranged at short notice. Some work in very hostile countries, where risks are high.

Travelling for long durations in cars, trains and aeroplanes is normal. Frequently, principals ask for a CPO they trust to accompany them on international trips. A CPO on a film set or music tour could be away from home for 18 months or more.

Close protection officers need a driving licence.

Salary and other benefits

These figures are only a guide, as actual rates of pay may vary, depending on the employer and where people live.

- Daily rates for CPOs in low risk areas are usually between £100 and £185, plus expenses. Earnings may be around £25,000 a year.
- Daily rates for CPOs in high risk areas are usually between £400 and £600 plus expenses. Earnings may be around £60,000 a year.
- An established CPO may earn between £35,000 and £60,000 a year.

Many CPOs are recruited for short to long-term contracts by agencies. Some work for a number of agencies. Most are paid an agreed daily rate, from £130 up to £500, dependent upon experience, the type of contract and risks involved.

Skills and personal qualities

A close protection officer should:

- be physically fit, with good vision and hearing
- have excellent observation skills to spot potentially dangerous situations
- have quick reactions and show initiative
- be able to work on their own and in a team
- have good communication, negotiation and interpersonal skills
- have the ability to remain calm when under pressure
- be discreet, respecting principal confidentiality
- have the ability to integrate with their principal's lifestyle.

Interests

It is important to:

- enjoy working with people from diverse backgrounds
- have an interest in the security industry.



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Getting in

Demand for close protection officers is stable, this is a large and specialised area of employment. There are vacancies particularly at entry level. Reputation and experience are important.

As well as relevant experience, a basic knowledge of languages, like French and Spanish, can be an advantage. Young people can gain some useful and relevant experience by joining the Territorial Army or volunteering as a police special.

Most close protection agencies are London based. However, most have contract work available around the UK, as well as overseas. Female CPOs are increasingly in demand to accompany and protect celebrities.

Entry routes

All CPOs working in England and Wales are required by law to have a Security Industry Authority (SIA) licence. To apply for a frontline close protection licence, applicants must be aged 18 years or over and have already successfully passed the Level 3 SIA-approved qualifications:

- Edexcel BTEC (specialist short course) in close protection operations

Courses cover practical skills and knowledge training, including competencies in a range of areas, such as threat and risk assessment, surveillance awareness, search procedures and conflict management skills.

People with previous close protection training may be exempt from all or part of the training. They may take a 24-hour refresher course. However, all applicants need to pass a knowledge test and practical skills assessment.

Visit the SIA website for a full list of training providers. Course timetables and fees may vary, so check with individual training providers.

To obtain a frontline close protection licence, CPOs must also:

- provide evidence that they have a valid and SIA-recognised first aid certificate, such as First Aid at Work three-day course (HSE approved) or Edexcel/IHCD (Institute of Health Care Development) Level 2 First Person on Scene (FPOS) Intermediate Award
- undergo checks through the Criminal Records Bureau
- provide proof of age and identity
- have the right to work and remain in the UK.

If applicants have a criminal record, it does not necessarily mean that they will not be issued with a licence. The SIA takes into account how relevant, serious and recent the offences are.



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Training

Training is a combination of on-the-job training and specialist courses, arranged privately or through employers. CPOs often have specialist training in firearms tactics, unarmed combat and tactical driving. The SIA frontline close protection licence has to be renewed every three years. Currently refresher training or completion of a new qualification is not required to renew a licence.

Completion of a Level 3 SIA-approved close protection qualification will earn students credits towards a foundation degree in Security Management & Consultancy.

Getting on

There may be opportunities to progress and lead a team of CPOs on assignment. There are also opportunities to specialise in surveillance, driving or residential security. Highly experienced CPOs may move into risk assessment consultancy work. As well as frontline work there are also supervisory and managerial close protection roles. Some set up their own companies providing protection services to commercial clients.

Andy's Close Protection Career Case Profile

Andy has to stay on the alert for any threat, allowing his clients to live and work in safety. The job takes the Yorkshire-based bodyguard around the UK and beyond.

How would you outline your role?

I provide personal protection and security for people who are at risk of harm or unwanted attention. That most often means high-ranking corporate executives, but it could also include celebrities or people under threat for religious or political reasons.

What are your main responsibilities?

There are two main types of job. Residential security is a 24-hour operation at a place where the client lives or works. There I would act as part of a team, patrolling the building or the site perimeter, keeping the entrances secure or monitoring CCTV systems. The other type of job is personal escort. That means accompanying the client - or 'principal', as we call them - either constantly or during a one-off event. One main bodyguard stays at the side of the principal the whole time. Other members of the team follow in a set formation. Advance security teams travel ahead of personal escorts, to make sure routes are clear and venues secure.

What hours do you work?

Like most people in this industry, I'm self-employed and work on a contract basis. That means varied hours. A typical week-long contract might involve working shifts of 12 to 18 hours a day. Security is exempt from the European Working Time Directive.



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What is your working environment like?

I work in various locations, indoors and out. I can be working at a principal's home, or at a restaurant or an awards ceremony. That's the potentially glamorous side, but more often a shift can consist of simply standing outside a hotel room for 18 hours.

Who do you work with?

I have several clients who only require the services of me and a driver. It's more typical though, for bodyguards to work as part of a large team responsible to a team leader. I also have to spend time building relationships with specialist security providers and fellow bodyguards; lot of work is awarded on the basis of word-of-mouth recommendation.

What skills or qualities do you need?

You need total dedication and integrity. You obviously have to be physically fit, but mental fitness is just as important to enable you to work under pressure. You can't afford to have any huge personal burdens that might interfere with your work. Etiquette is vital too, including presenting yourself well and being polite. The chief executive of a multi-national operation doesn't want to be addressed as 'mate'!

Why did you choose this type of work?

I once spoke with a couple of BGs who were looking after a client and they explained about the rewards associated with this employment such as traveling business class to some of the world's most exotic destinations and staying in some of the finest hotels. Of the high wages and rewards given by the principal and the high standards of life they had achieved in such a short period of time becoming a BG, from then on I made it my goal to complete my Close Protection training course and reap the rewards and that's what I'm doing today reaping the rewards as an experienced BG and I have never looked back.

What training have you done?

I went through a 21-day Edexcel close protection course to gain my licence from the Security Industry Authority. That involved a lot of classroom learning, as well as practical drills. The final exercise was a fully-simulated operation in which the students had to tackle 'threats' posed to a principal. My training provider, Mercury Associates UK Ltd, offered a top up in Physical Intervention and brake away skills leading to a national qualification. I also have a first aid at work certificate, which is a legal requirement for work in this field in the UK.

Do you use any special tools or equipment?

When working in a team, all bodyguards use radios to keep in contact. In some situations we also wear protective gear such as ballistic (bullet-proof) vests. We carry first aid equipment too. Contrary to the usual stereotype of bodyguards, we don't have guns as it's illegal in the UK for civilians to carry



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firearms or other weapons. We do carry firearms when working overseas, when we are employed at royal, diplomatic and presidential levels.

What do you like about your job?

I like the opportunity to live a fast-paced life, travel a lot and get paid for it! I suppose one down side is the unpredictability of work flow; you might have three or four contracts one month, then nothing over the next months. But I don't really have any dislikes; I love the job and rewards.

What are the main challenges?

Physical threats and the risk of being injured are the key challenges. The deadlines can be demanding too; clients sometimes want the impossible.

How do you see your future?

With lots more experience I could aim to become a consultant to large corporations. It might also be possible to work up to a senior management position in a close protection company. A rolling contract protecting a celebrity is the goal that a lot of close protection officers strive for, but you'd need to be extremely dedicated to achieve that.

Andy's route

- Worked in construction after leaving school
- Worked as door supervisor
- Trained for a close protection licence and set up as a self-employed officer.

Andy's tips

- Knowledge of common foreign languages is very useful in this field.
- Sign up to day for a close protection course and change your life.
- Choose a training provider that will give you the most comprehensive introduction and prepare well by becoming physically and mentally fit.