



The UK does not have conscription today; the British armed forces are a professional volunteer service, and any return of a draft would require a new Act of Parliament — not an administrative change.

What the law is now

There is no legal requirement to serve in the UK armed forces; recruitment is voluntary and organised as a professional force. That is the settled position in recent parliamentary briefings and public guidance on defence policy.

How conscription could be reintroduced

Reintroducing a draft would need primary legislation passed by Parliament that creates the legal duty to serve, sets age and residency rules, defines exemptions, and establishes penalties. Current volunteer-force statutes do not automatically permit peacetime conscription; any change would be a deliberate legislative act rather than an executive decision.

Historical context that informs any new law

Conscription has only operated in two main periods: 1916–1920 and 1939–1960, with the last national-service discharge in **1963**. The National Archives holds the administrative records (recruitment, medical boards, demobilisation) that show how past schemes were run and what statutory language and procedures Parliament might revisit.

What a modern draft would likely include

If Parliament chose to legislate, a typical statute would specify **who is liable (age, citizenship, residency); exemptions (medical, essential civilian roles, family grounds); conscientious-objector procedures and alternative civilian service;** and **enforcement and penalties** for evasion. The Armed Forces Act and related defence statutes govern military discipline and offences today, but they do not create a peacetime draft — a separate Act would be required to impose compulsory service.



Current UK position What would change if a draft returned

Issue

Legal basis	Volunteer force; no conscription	New Act of Parliament would be required
Historical precedent	Conscription used 1916–1920; 1939–1960	Modern statute would borrow administrative lessons from past schemes
Conscientious objection	Handled historically by tribunals	Likely statutory route for alternative service
Enforcement	N/A (no draft)	Criminal/administrative penalties set in law

Sources:

Practical takeaway

- **Today:** no one in the UK can be compelled to serve in peacetime; the armed forces recruit volunteers only.
- **To change that:** Parliament must pass a new law; ministers cannot unilaterally impose conscription.
- **If proposed:** expect explicit statutory rules on scope, exemptions, conscientious objection, and penalties, informed by the administrative records from past schemes.