



Home Office

Firearms licensing fees: Prohibited weapons, museums and approved shooting clubs

Government response to the consultation

June 2019

Government response

Introduction

1. The Home Office administers applications for licences to possess firearms that are prohibited under Section 5 of the Firearms Act 1968, for museum collections, and approved shooting clubs. These licences are distinct from police-issued certificates for civilian firearms, shotguns, and Registered Firearms Dealers (RFDs) dealing in civilian firearms and shotguns.
2. The Scottish Government administers applications for these types of licence from applicants based in Scotland. It does so under the same legislation as England and Wales. Firearms policy (except for policy on air weapons) is reserved. The police provide advice to the Home Office (or, in Scotland, the Scottish Government) on applications.

Background

3. The Government considers that, in line with the position set out in 'Managing Public Money', firearms licensing fees should, in general, recover the cost to the Home Office, the Scottish Government and the police of administering applications. Applications for Section 5 prohibited firearms licences do not currently attract a fee, and the process is therefore fully funded by the taxpayer. Fees for applications for museums with firearms collections and approved shooting clubs currently fall short of cost recovery.
4. The Government introduced measures, through the Policing and Crime Act 2017, to enable new fees for these licences to be set by the Home Secretary, through secondary legislation. The fees will apply in England, Wales and Scotland.
5. The Government consulted on proposed fees between 12 January and 9 March 2017. The consultation set out proposed fee levels for licences issued by the Home Office and Scottish Government based on the estimated costs to the Home Office and the police of administering firearms licences.

Summary of responses

6. The consultation set out the proposed fees based on estimated costs and sought views on the principle that fees should recover costs, whether there are any categories or types of licence holder where a lower fee is warranted, and invited any other comments on the proposals.
7. There were 4,949 responses to the consultation. 3,892 responses were received through the online survey and answered the consultation questions. There were 1,057 email and hard copy responses, which responded to the consultation in general terms.

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(Those who provided written responses may also have responded to the online survey).

8. In addition, there was considerable correspondence to the Department about the proposals, including 121 letters from MPs, which reflected their constituents' concerns that the proposed fees were too high. For the open questions, and correspondence received by email and post, we considered all the responses and identified the relative priority given to key themes.
9. 90% of online responses were from individuals, rather than on behalf of a business or organisation. The majority of online respondents were holders of firearms and/or shotgun certificates. 84% of respondents were from England, 10% from Scotland, and 3% from Wales.
10. Amongst respondents to the online survey, less than 15% agreed with the principle of full cost recovery. Almost all responses were opposed to the new fees. Many respondents argued that the fee levels must indicate high levels of inefficiency or that they were otherwise unfair or unrelated to costs.
11. A large proportion of the responses were particularly concerned about the proposed increases to fees for approved target shooting clubs. A large number of respondents set out arguments in favour of the social benefits provided by shooting clubs in particular - for example, in training young shooters in safe shooting, and in providing opportunities for the disabled and elderly. Respondents commonly argued that cost recovery is inappropriate and that shooting should be subsidised as a sport or for its social benefits, or because licensing supports public safety.
12. Amongst respondents to the online survey, 61% thought that some categories or types of licence holder merited lower fees. Most of these respondents proposed approved shooting clubs, either specifically or by implication. Respondents frequently named categories of persons, rather than licence holders, such as young people, disabled people or pensioners. Again, many respondents made the case that shooting clubs are socially beneficial in providing activities for a wide range of groups in society, including those who might not participate in other sports.
13. Other categories of licence holder proposed as meriting lower fees included museums and Olympic shooters.

Conclusion

14. The consultation generated a significant number of responses and a high level of interest. The Government would like to thank all those who took part. The results of the consultation and comments received across different sectors have been important in the consideration of the proposals.

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15. The consultation included a commitment to review the fees before implementation. The Home Office has reviewed its costs and discussed the proposals with representatives of fee payers in the light of the consultation responses.

Review of costs

16. New and revised data on costs was used, which resulted in a significantly lower estimate of costs. In particular:

- fewer staff were involved in processing applications;
- the estimates of the annual volume of applications were revised; and
- a more detailed analysis of overheads enabled the removal of some costs that are not attributable to the licensing process.

17. Additionally, following discussions with representatives of fee payers, the Home Office has agreed that it is reasonable to not recover certain costs:

- The costs of the new online licensing system: while applicants derive benefits from the system, it is also intended to improve the Home Office internal procedures in, for example, data protection and structured information storage and handling.
- The costs incurred by the Home Office licensing team on work that is not directly related to handling applications, such as responding to enquiries from potential applicants and existing licence holders.

18. The review led to fees that are approximately 58% lower than those proposed in the consultation. However, the fees will still recover the direct cost of administering licence applications.

Museums

19. One of the key issues raised by fee-payers' representatives was the potential impact of the proposed fees on museums with firearms collections. In particular, many of these are small regimental museums with very limited budgets. Given fee payers' representations, and that qualifying museums are publicly-funded and for the public benefit, the Government has opted to maintain the current fee level of £200 for the first grant and renewal of a museum licence. This will be a discount of £463 and £402 on these fees as re-calculated following the consultation (£663 and £602 respectively), which will be borne by the wider taxpayer. In addition, museums that hold museum firearms licences will not be subject to any fee payable to the Home Office or Scottish Government in respect of section 5 dealer licences. (A very small number of museum firearms licence holders, currently seven, possess dealer licences to enable them to sell or loan prohibited weapons).

Dealers

20. Dealers who make an application to the police to be a registered firearms dealer (RFD) as part of their Section 5 application will be subject to a discount from their fee

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equal to the amount of their fee to the police (currently £200). This will avoid double payment. As the dates for RFD and Section 5 renewal are synchronised after grant, the discount will ordinarily apply to renewal applications. For some first-time applications, the discount will not apply because the applicant is already an RFD.

21. Subject to Parliamentary approval, the Government will implement fees as set out below. More details of the review of costs, the options considered, and how the fees were calculated is set out in the Impact Assessment accompanying this Government response. The Government will review the fees regularly to ensure that they continue to reflect costs.

Licence type	Fee
Museum first time	£200
Museum renewal	£200
Museum variation A	£110
Museum variation C	£36
Club first time	£444
Club renewal	£372
Club variation A	£300
Club variation B	£206
Club variation C	£36
Dealer first time (see paragraph 20)	£796*
Dealer renewal (see paragraph 20)	£747*
Dealer variation A	£425
Dealer variation B	£206
Dealer variation C	£36
Carrier first time	£569
Carrier renewal	£540
Carrier variation A	£361
Carrier variation B	£206
Carrier variation C	£36
PMSC first time	£616
PMSC renewal	£565
PMSC variation A	£361
PMSC variation B	£206
PMSC variation C	£49
PMSC variation D	£316
Additional Guard	£48
DSEI	£389
Olympic shooter	£206
Trophy of War	£206

22. The different fee levels for variation applications relate to the expected degree of scrutiny required:

Variation A: significant Government scrutiny and a police visit will be required, for example new premises at which firearms will be stored or a significant new area of business.

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- Variation B:** some Government scrutiny and a police check but no visit, for example a change to the named authority holder.
- Variation C:** an administrative change, such as a name change. This is different to a change of the named authority holder where additional checks are necessary.
- Variation D:** applicable to PMSCs only – the authorising of new guards, which requires police checks. There is a charge for each new guard.

Next steps

23. The Government intends to introduce the measures via statutory instrument. The fees will apply in England, Wales and Scotland.

Consultation principles

24. The principles that government departments and other public bodies should adopt for engaging stakeholders when developing policy and legislation are set out in the consultation principles.

www.gov.uk/government/publications/consultation-principles-guidance



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