



Home Office

Licensing for the Sale of Knives

Government consultation

This consultation begins on Tuesday 16 December 2025

This consultation ends on Tuesday 24 February 2026

Summary

Topic	This consultation seeks views on our proposals to introduce a licensing system for sellers and importers of knives and bladed articles. The information gathered from this consultation will help inform evidence-based policy advice and future decisions by the Home Secretary and Ministers.
To	This is a consultation open to the public and targeted to directly affected parties, including the police, Crown Prosecution Service, community groups, businesses and organisations with a direct interest in the proposals.
Duration	10 weeks from 16 December 2025 to 24 February 2026.
Enquiries	Email: KnifeLicensingConsultation@homeoffice.gov.uk
How to respond	Submit by 24/02/2026 by: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Completing the online form here or using the link: Licensing for knife sales - GOV.UK• Email to: KnifeLicensingConsultation@homeoffice.gov.uk
Geographical scope	We are seeking views from across the UK. Where proposals deal with devolved matters and legislation is required, this will be agreed with the devolved administrations in accordance with the devolution settlements.
Additional ways to respond	If you are unable to use the online system, for example because you use specialist accessibility software which is not compatible with the system, you may download a PDF version of the online form and email it to the above contact details. Please also use the above contact details if you require information in another format, such as “easy read”, large print, Braille or audio. We may not be able to analyse responses not submitted in these provided formats.
Options Assessment	The Consultation Options Assessment has been published alongside this consultation paper. The Consultation Options Assessment details the policy with analysis.

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About

This consultation document and the consultation process has been underpinned by the Consultation Principles¹, as issued by the Cabinet Office.

If you are responding as a representative of a group, please provide a summary of the people and/or organisations that you represent. If possible, please provide a further summary on how you have reached the stipulated conclusions.

Information provided in response to this consultation may be published or disclosed in accordance with the access to information requests, such as the Freedom of Information Act 2000, and UK data protection legislation. You should note that this may include personal data, where required by law.

If you want the information that you provide to be treated as confidential, please be aware that, under the Freedom of Information Act, there is a statutory Code of Practice with which public authorities, such as the Home Office, must comply and which deals, amongst other things, with obligations of confidence.

In view of this it would be helpful if you could explain to us why you regard the information you have provided as confidential. If we receive a request for disclosure of the information we will take full account of your explanation, but we cannot give an assurance that confidentiality can be maintained in all circumstances. An automatic confidentiality disclaimer generated by your IT system will not, of itself, be regarded as binding on the Home Office.

The Home Office will process your personal data in accordance with the Data Protection Act and, in the majority of circumstances, this will mean that your personal data will not be disclosed to third parties.

Your opinions are valuable to us – and we thank you for taking the time to read and respond to this consultation.

¹ [Microsoft Word - Consultation Principles \(1\).docx](#)

1. Executive Summary

- 1.1. Knife crime devastates families and communities across the country, and that is why this Government has committed to aiming to halve knife crime in the next decade. As part of this commitment, we are driving an ambitious programme of work focusing on prevention and enforcement, as well as strengthening knife legislation. This includes banning weapons that have no place on our streets, targeting irresponsible sellers, giving the police more powers to deal with those supplying and owning weapons for violent purposes, intervening earlier to stop young people being drawn into crime, and bringing together experts through the Knife-Enabled Robbery Taskforce and Coalition.
- 1.2. Data² for the year ending June 2025 showed that knife enabled crime decreased by 5%, to 51,527 offences, compared with year ending June 2024. Police recorded 518 homicide offences in this period, with knives or sharp instruments used in 38% of these homicides. These results show progress, but we are not complacent and know there is much more to do.
- 1.3. Although there are restrictions on the sale of knives to individuals under the age of 18, we are concerned about cases where young people have still been able to purchase knives. Under 18s have been able to use adult's identification documents to purchase knives online and these knives have then been used for crimes, including homicide.
- 1.4. In October 2024, the then Home Secretary commissioned Commander Stephen Clayman, the National Police Chiefs' Council lead for knife crime, to conduct a review into the online sale and delivery of knives. Commander Clayman's Independent End-To-End Review of Online Knife Sales³ was published on 19 February 2025 and made a number of recommendations. The Government immediately accepted the recommendations on stronger age verification for online sales and delivery of knives and retailers reporting bulk purchases of knives online, and introduced legislation in the Crime and Policing Bill, currently going through Parliament.
- 1.5. One of the review's other recommendations concerned the introduction of a registration scheme for sellers of knives. The recommendation suggests conditions for the registration including details of the buyer to be recorded, retained and made available to law enforcement upon request. In addition, the review also recommended the introduction of import licensing to control the importation of knives from overseas.

² [Crime in England and Wales - Office for National Statistics](#)

³ [Independent end-to-end review of online knife sales - GOV.UK -
https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/independent-end-to-end-review-of-online-knife-sales](#)

1.6. We are clear that change is needed in relation to preventing underage sales, illegal sales of prohibited offensive weapons and sales to those who intend to use these items for violence. This consultation therefore explores the introduction of a licensing system for those who want to sell knives and other bladed articles, which will cover importers, businesses and private sellers.

2. Background

- 2.1. There have been legislative controls with age restrictions on the sales of knives since 1996 when it became an offence to sell knives to under 16s. This was amended in 2006 when the law in England and Wales was changed to make it an offence to sell a knife to a person under 18. The law applies to both sales of knives in shops and online and is enforced by the police and trading standards officers. Measures around age verification and delivery of bladed articles to domestic premises were strengthened in the Offensive Weapons Act 2019.
- 2.2. There is already a licensing scheme in operation in Scotland, the Scottish Knife Dealers Licensing scheme⁴, which applies to businesses and regulates the sales of non-domestic knives. However, elsewhere in the UK, anyone can sell or import a knife, be it a business or a private seller. This means that both Trading Standards and the police do not know exactly who is selling or importing knives in their local area. It means law enforcement has to rely on proactive searches or intelligence to identify sellers and where knives have come from in investigations.
- 2.3. The Independent End-to-End Review of Online Knife Sales outlined concerns about the online system for selling knives, particularly with age verification at the point of sale and delivery. This may facilitate fraudulent sales through online platforms and social media by individuals who then sell to others, often without verifying age, and in some cases for violent purposes.
- 2.4. Two categories of online sellers were identified in the Independent Review: retailers and peer-to-peer sellers. Retailers usually host online shops⁵ with the ability to buy knives through their own platform, offering the chance to view and purchase knives using their own implemented systems and processes. Peer-to-peer includes what is described in the report as 'grey market' sellers, whose activity may be legal or illegal, but often involves the reselling of knives via social media and sales platforms. This leads to the opportunity for children to obtain knives without any form of age verification or screening at all.
- 2.5. The Independent Review found that knives used in violent offences could be traced back to both retailers and peer-to-peer sellers, but the 'grey market' often fails to offer the accountability required of retailers operating as registered businesses. The social media platforms used by 'grey market' sellers also provide a level of anonymity and the possibility of inadvertent advertising to children.

⁴ Knife dealers licence (Scotland) - GOV.UK - <https://www.gov.uk/find-licences/knife-dealers-licence-scotland>

⁵ Some may have both an online and shopfront presence

- 2.6. The review recommended that conditions applied through registration or licensing should be:
- i) Mandatory reporting of suspicious or bulk purchases.
 - ii) Details of buyer to be recorded, retained and made available to UK law enforcement upon request.
 - iii) All marketing material to display clear age verification livery.
 - iv) Registrants will agree to Police and Trading Standards inspection and test purchasing.
 - v) New criminal offences of selling, offering to sell and marketing knives without registration (triable either way).
 - vi) Unregistered selling of knives is treated more seriously than possession offences.
 - vii) Retailers will be prohibited from the sale of 'mystery boxes' 'mystery knives' and 'reduced priced add-ons'.
 - viii) Registered retailer must not be a prohibited person (to be defined).
 - ix) People and premises will be subject to checks for appropriateness to store and sell knives.
 - x) Extends to any business selling relevant bladed items

2.7. The review also recommended introducing an 'import licensing scheme to prohibit unlicensed importation of knives and prohibited weapons' as any stronger regulation on the UK market alone may push sellers abroad and as such importation regulations for knives may need to be addressed in tandem.

3. Proposals

- 3.1. Following the recommendations made in the Independent Review of Online Sales of Knives, we propose introducing registration through a licensing scheme for sales of knives and bladed articles. We propose this would apply to both business and private sellers selling knives and bladed articles. We seek views on whether businesses which sell knives and bladed articles should be required to hold a licence and whether, as we are proposing, this should apply to both businesses and private sellers.
- 3.2. Alongside the sellers licensing, we also propose introducing licences for the importation of knives and bladed articles. As outlined in Commander Clayman's review, any regulation on the UK market could encourage people to look to buy from sellers based abroad and therefore import licensing would be important in preventing circumvention of sellers licensing.
- 3.3. These proposals would not only introduce controls on who can and cannot sell and import knives, but they would also make it easier for the police and Trading Standards to identify where knives have come from and check sellers' compliance with knife legislation.
- 3.4. This consultation seeks views from retailers, importers and the public on how to achieve this. We are keen to hear as many views as possible, considering the additional burden this could place on the public, businesses and importers, and we are keen on working with interested parties to get this right and minimise disruption and cost.

Licensing for Knife Sellers

- 3.5. We believe that licensing of both businesses and private sellers would have the most impact. The regulation of private sales of knives would include sales made via anonymous social media accounts that are of particular concern to the police and highlighted in the review, and also second-hand sellers.
- 3.6. We are concerned that if we do not regulate second hand sales this may provide a gap in the law for unscrupulous individuals to buy knives in bulk and then sell them to those under 18 or for criminal purposes.

Administration and fees

- 3.7. We propose that the best body to administer the licensing system for knife and bladed article sellers is the police. The police have the relevant experience of running the firearms licensing scheme for Registered Firearms Dealers and can carry out the relevant suitability checks.
- 3.8. The police would review the application and conduct suitability checks on the individual before making a decision on whether to grant the licence.

- 3.9. Where the seller is a larger business, or not just an individual seller, we propose the business would need to have a designated licence holder, similar to an alcohol designated premises supervisor⁶ (DPS). The designated licence holder would act as the primary contact for the police and would be responsible for obtaining and maintaining a licence.
- 3.10. The applicant will need to pay a fee for a licence, and we are proposing that the licensing system for knives and bladed articles be self-funding and on a full cost recovery basis, being funded through the fees payable by licence holders. The licence will need to be renewed periodically which will incur a renewal fee.
- 3.11. Conditions would be attached to a licence and where these conditions are not met an individual may have their licence revoked.

Suitability checks

- 3.12. Commander Clayman's review recommended 'people and premises will be subject to checks for appropriateness to store and sell knives' and refers to checks conducted on firearms dealers. Therefore, we propose the police should conduct suitability checks on the applicant in order to make a decision on whether to grant a licence.
- 3.13. Suitability checks would include the police conducting background checks on the individual such as whether they have a criminal record and whether they have any other intelligence on the individual which is relevant. This includes evidence of dishonesty.
- 3.14. In making their decision in future years, the police may also want to consider whether the applicant has previously held a knife seller's licence which had been breached and the reasons for this.
- 3.15. For all of these checks, consideration should be given to the seriousness of the offence/incident, whether it is an isolated incident, and the length of time since the incident took place. A single incident would not necessarily be an automatic refusal of a licence, as it would depend on a range of factors and the seriousness.
- 3.16. In terms of the larger businesses who we suggest would need to have a designated licence holder, these suitability checks may be adapted to ensure they are appropriate. These larger businesses typically have policies in place in the public domain to ensure sales are made within the law.

⁶ Alcohol licensing - GOV.UK - <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/alcohol-licensing#designated-premises-supervisors>

Duration and renewals

- 3.17. We are proposing that licences for knife and bladed article sellers mirror the length of the registration period for firearms dealers and are valid for three years. However, we are seeking views on whether the duration of the licence could be longer – see question 7.
- 3.18. The licence holder would therefore need to renew the licence every three years by applying to the police again and paying a renewal fee. We seek views on how long a seller's licence should be valid before it needs to be renewed.

Enforcement and revocation

- 3.19. We are exploring who would be best placed to enforce a licensing scheme, but this is likely to be the police with support from Trading Standards who will continue to enforce existing sales of knives legislation and are likely to have better knowledge of local sellers of knives.
- 3.20. It would be a criminal offence to sell a knife or bladed article without the relevant licence to do so. Where a seller is found to be selling without a licence, they may be subject to enforcement action.
- 3.21. Enforcement action may also be taken where a licensed seller is found to be breaching the conditions of their licence.
- 3.22. We propose that there should be certain circumstances where the police are able to revoke a licence. These circumstances may include if a seller has:
- (i) committed a breach of the criminal law relating to bladed articles or offensive weapons;
 - (ii) committed any other criminal offence; or,
 - (iii) failed to meet any of the conditions of the licence.
- 3.23. Revocation would not be automatic, and it would depend on the severity of the breach or offence committed and other factors such as whether it was the first breach of the licence.

Face-to-Face Knife Sellers

- 3.24. Face-to-face sellers includes physical shops and those that don't have a fixed location, including market or car boot sellers.
- 3.25. For larger businesses which have multiple stores we are advocating a model where there would be a requirement for each individual store in the retail chain to hold a licence. This is similar to alcohol licensing and allows for revocation of a licence for an individual store that is found to be in breach of the licence conditions rather than revoking a licence for a whole business. We believe that licensing each store would be a more effective measure to encourage local compliance.

Conditions

- 3.26. For face-to-face sellers there may be additional conditions as part of their licence.
- 3.27. We are proposing that it should be a condition of the licence that retailers who carry out face-to-face sales will need to apply policies for age-restricted sales, such as 'Challenge 25' to ensure age verification checks take place, so that knives will only be sold where the retailer is satisfied that the customer is 18 or over. This will also include proof of age checks for in-store sales, on collection, or at the point of delivery.
- 3.28. The conditions could require sellers to ensure knives are displayed and packaged securely to minimise risk. This would include physical retailers taking practical and proportionate steps to restrict accessibility and avoid immediate use, to reduce the possibility of injury, and to prevent theft. This might involve using approaches that require intervention from a member of staff to release the knife from a secure display, or positioning displays in secure locations within the store.
- 3.29. The conditions might also require that all staff who sell, or who supervise or approve the sale of knives should be provided with training by their employer, with that training being refreshed on a regular basis.

Licensing for Knife Importers

- 3.30. Many knives and other bladed articles are imported from overseas, either on a wholesale basis to UK based retailers or as direct sales to members of the public. It is also possible that any regulation of knife sales on the UK market could encourage sellers to move abroad. We are consulting on regulating this route, so that only legal products are being imported and are only imported in a way that complies with knife and offensive weapons legislation. We are considering four different options, which we are seeking views on.

Option 1 – Authorised Importer Scheme.

- 3.31. One approach would be to legislate so that all imports of bladed products are required to be done via a UK-based authorised importer. Anyone wanting to import a bladed article, whether that is a seller or an individual importing for personal use, would be able to import a bladed article through an authorised importer.
- 3.32. This would have the advantage of having a relatively small number of authorised importers which would make monitoring and enforcement easier for the police and Border Force.

Option 2 – Import Licensing Only for Retailers but Not Private Individuals.

- 3.33. Another option would be to allow any retailer to apply for an import licence. This would exclude private sellers who under this proposal would be unable to import knives or bladed articles.
- 3.34. This scheme would allow for overseas sellers to apply for an import licence as well as UK-based sellers.

Option 3 – Licensing for all Importers - Retailers and Private Individuals.

- 3.35. We have considered whether any seller, including private sellers, should be able to apply for a licence and therefore still be able to import items directly from overseas.

Option 4 - Combined import / sellers' licence.

- 3.36. We are proposing that for businesses which import directly and sell to the public, there should be a combined import and sellers' licence.
- 3.37. A combined licence would minimise the financial and administrative burden on sellers as they would only be required to apply for one licence.

Conditions

- 3.38. Obtaining and retaining an importers licence would be subject to the individual complying with conditions similar to those set out for sellers' licences.

Enforcement

- 3.39. It would be a criminal offence to import any knife or bladed article without an import licence. Where imports are found to be made without a licence, the individual or business importing the knife or bladed article may be subject to enforcement action.
- 3.40. The enforcement of import licences would be supported by Border Force who routinely carry out inspections of post and parcels imported into the UK.

4. Questionnaire

Size and scope of the market

As part of this consultation, the Government wants to develop an estimate of the size and scope of the market.

<p>1. Do you sell knives or other bladed articles?</p> <p>YES/NO (delete as appropriate)</p>
<p>2. If you answered yes above, do you consider yourself to be (tick all that apply):</p> <p>Online seller Face-to-face seller Private/second-hand seller Importer Other (please explain)</p>
<p>3. If you sell knives or bladed articles how large is your business</p> <p>Small (1-10 employees) Medium (11-50 employees) Large (over 51 employees)</p>

Licensing for Knife Sellers

The Government have proposed all sellers, including retailers and private sellers, should hold a licence.

<p>4. Should businesses which sell knives and bladed articles be required to hold a licence?</p> <p>YES/NO (delete as appropriate)</p>

5. Should private sellers who sell knives and bladed articles be required to hold a licence?

YES/NO (delete as appropriate)

[Licence Duration](#)

The Government have proposed a licence should be valid for 3 years before needing to be renewed.

6. How long do you think a seller's or importer's licence should be valid for before it needs to be renewed?

3 years
5 years
10 years
Other

[Licensing for Knife Importers](#)

The Government have proposed four options for who should be able to obtain a licence and therefore import knives and bladed articles.

7. Who should be required to hold a licence to import knives and bladed articles?

UK-based authorised importer
Retailers, not including private individuals
Anyone – including private sellers and individuals importing items for personal use
Other

Impacts

As part of this consultation, the Government want to develop an understanding of the expected impact of this legislation on sellers and importers.

8. Do you anticipate that this measure will impact your business/business operations?

YES/NO (delete as appropriate)

Please give reasons (max. 250 words)

General

If you have any other thoughts on the proposals, please use this answer box.

9. Have you got any other comments?

YES/NO (delete as appropriate)

Please give reasons (max. 250 words)

About you: Respondent's Information

Please use this section to tell us about yourself. Providing this information is voluntary. Please be assured that responses will be treated as personal data by the Home Office in compliance with Government guidance on holding personal information.

- 1. Full name**
- 2. Company name/organisation, if applicable**
- 3. Job title or capacity in which you are responding to this consultation exercise (for example, member of the public or chairman of a representative body), if applicable**
- 4. Contact details:**
 - **Email address or;**
 - **Main address including postcode**

Thank you for your response.