

APPROVAL OF RIFLE AND MUZZLE-LOADING PISTOL CLUBS

This leaflet is about the approval of rifle, miniature rifle and muzzle-loading pistol clubs by the Home Secretary and the Secretary of State for Scotland. It explains what approval means and how clubs can apply for it. It also explains the criteria and conditions which they must meet in order to obtain approval and remain approved. **It supersedes all other government leaflets on the subject.**

Approved clubs

Under section 44 of the Firearms (Amendment) Act 1997, a person wishing to possess a rifle or muzzle-loading pistol solely for target shooting must be a member of an approved rifle club or, as the case may be, approved muzzle-loading pistol club. Section 44(1)(b) requires an approved club to be specified on the firearm certificate. The certificate does not have to list all clubs of which the holder is a member.

Any rifle, miniature rifle or muzzle-loading pistol club can apply to the relevant Secretary of State (i.e. the Home Secretary for clubs in England and Wales or the Secretary of State for Scotland for clubs in Scotland) for approval. Approval is granted under section 15(1) of the Firearms (Amendment) Act 1988 (as amended by section 45 of the Firearms (Amendment) Act 1997).

When the Secretary of State has approved a club under the Act, members of that club can possess firearms and ammunition without holding a personal firearm certificate "when engaged as a member of the club in connection with target shooting" (Section 15(1) of the 1988 Act as amended by section 45 of the 1997 Act).

Approval also allows the police to grant a free firearm certificate to a responsible officer of the club to enable him or her to purchase and acquire firearms and ammunition for members to use for target shooting. Club members may not purchase or acquire firearms or ammunition unless they have been granted a personal firearm certificate by the police.

How to apply for approval

Fill in Form 124 which you can get from the police or one of the national shooting organisations listed at the end of this leaflet. If your club has, or intends to have, its own store for firearms, send your completed form to the chief officer of police for the area in which they will be stored. If your club has no storage facilities, send the completed form to the chief officer of police for the area in which the club principally operates.

The police will forward your application to either:

- Home Office, Public Order Unit, Firearms Section, 5th Floor, SE, Fry Building, 2 Marsham Street, London SW1P 4DF
- Scottish Government, General Enquiries, St Andrew's House, Regent Road, Edinburgh, EH1 3DG.

If the Secretary of State decides to grant approval, the club will have to pay a fee, currently £84, either to the Home Office or to the Scottish Government. When they receive the fee they will notify the secretary of the club that approval has been given.

Criteria for approval

Clubs will not be granted approval unless they meet the criteria set out below. These criteria translate into conditions of the approval, if granted. **Approved clubs which fail to meet these conditions can expect approval to be withdrawn.**

The criteria are:

- the club is a genuine target shooting club with a written constitution;
- the principal officers of the club are responsible people who can be entrusted with the proper administration of the club;
- the club has at least 10 members at the time of application and at all times whilst approved unless, exceptionally, the Secretary of State determines that there are special circumstances which justify a lesser number;
- members are of good character;
- the club must appoint a member to act as a liaison officer with the police, and the chief officer of police must have confidence that this person is providing the police with such information as they require to ensure that the activities of the club and its members are conducted properly and safely and give no cause for concern;
- the club will maintain a register of the attendance of all members together with details for each visit of the firearms which they used and the competitions, if any, in which they took part;
- the club will inform the police of any holder of a firearm certificate who has ceased to be a member for whatever reason;
- the club will inform the police if any member who holds a firearm certificate has not shot with the club for a period of 12 months;
- the club will inform the police of any application for membership, giving the applicant's name and address, and of the outcome of any application;

- no application for full or probationary membership will be granted unless the applicant has informed the club of whether he or she has ever had an application for a firearm or shotgun certificate refused by the police, or had a certificate revoked;
- members, prospective members and guests must sign a declaration that they are not prohibited from possessing a firearm or ammunition by virtue of section 21 of the Firearms Act 1968 (which applies to persons who have served a term of imprisonment);
- the club has regular use of ranges with safety certificates for the categories of firearm in respect of which approval is being sought or given, as the case may be;
- the security arrangements for the storage of club firearms and ammunition are satisfactory;
- the club does not run a day or temporary membership scheme;
- the club does not have more than 12 guest days a year. Guest members must be either members of a recognised outside organisation or people who are known personally to at least one full member of the club;
- guests must be supervised on a one-to-one basis at all times when handling firearms and ammunition by either a full club member or someone who is a coach with a qualification recognised by the UK or national Sports Council. The club secretary must notify each guest day to the police firearms licensing department of the area in which the guest day is to take place at least 48 hours in advance;
- anyone who applies for membership must be sponsored by at least one full club member;
- before becoming a full member, individuals must have a probationary period of at least three months during which time they must attend and shoot regularly. The probationary member must be given a course in the safe handling and use of firearms on a one-to-one basis by someone who is either a full member of the club or who is a coach with a qualification recognised by the Great Britain Target Shooting Federation and governing bodies;
- until a probationary member has satisfactorily completed a course in the safe handling and use of firearms, he/she must be supervised at all times when in possession of firearms or ammunition by either the range officer, or a full member of the club, or someone who is a coach with a qualification recognised by the Great Britain Target Shooting Federation and/or governing bodies;
- the probationary period may be waived, at the club's discretion, for someone who is already a full member of another club which has been approved by the Secretary of State in respect of the same type or types of firearm; or holds a

firearm certificate; or has handled firearms in the course of his/her duty in the police or the armed services, and has a statement from his/her existing or former senior/commanding officer saying that he/she is fully trained in handling the type of firearms in respect of which the club has obtained approval and is able to use them safely without supervision;

- the club never has more probationary members than full members unless the Secretary of State determines that there are special circumstances which justify a greater number of probationary members; and
- there is nothing else that would make the club unsuitable for approval.

If approval is granted, the approval will be subject to a set of standard conditions which will reflect the approval criteria listed above. In certain cases, the Secretary of State may attach further specific conditions to a club's approval.

Notes on the criteria

1. The club must be a genuine rifle and/or muzzle-loading pistol club set up for the purpose of target shooting. The constitution of the club should implement the conditions of approval.
2. Club officers should be people who are not disqualified from owning a firearm.
3. Clubs should make their own arrangements for assessing whether members or prospective members are of good character. Police firearms licensing departments should not be asked to disclose whether or not someone has a criminal record. Prospective members should not be required to apply for a firearm or shotgun certificate as a means of determining 'good character'. The police will not normally grant a certificate because somebody is a probationary member of a club.
4. The liaison officer should normally be a member of the club committee. He or she should establish contact with the local police firearms licensing officer and decide between them what information should be supplied and with what frequency. They should also set up a system so that the liaison officer can contact the firearms licensing officer as necessary and vice versa.
5. The attendance register should be kept for all shooting members of the club although its principal use will be in relation to those members who hold firearm certificates. This is to comply with Lord Cullen's recommendation that shooters should not have firearms on their certificates which are not used regularly. For this reason, it will be necessary to record in the register the description of the firearm(s) used as given in the member's firearm certificate. All visiting shooters should be logged in the same way. In the case of competition shoots between clubs, the responsibility for recording the attendance of a team member will lie with the club that the shooter represents. In the case of open competitions, the organising club will record details of competitors. Clubs should retain their attendance records for a minimum of 6 years.

6. Notifying the police when a firearm certificate holder's membership has ceased (including probationary membership), or when such a person has not shot with the club for a period of 12 months, will allow the chief officer of police for the force which issued the firearm certificate to check whether that individual is still using his or her firearm(s) regularly at another club or approved range. The police should be informed within one month of cessation of membership. The "period of 12 months" should be calculated separately for each individual member.

7. Casual membership enquiries need not be reported - only those which reach the stage of a formal application. The police should be advised when an application is submitted formally to the club and of its outcome.

8. Whether a prospective member has ever had an application for a firearm or shotgun certificate refused, or had a certificate revoked, could form the basis of a question on the club's membership application form. There are many reasons for refusal/revocation and not all will count against an individual. Clubs will therefore need to ascertain why the certificate was refused/revoked in order to make an informed decision.

9. There are three categories of approval: full-bore rifle, small-bore rifle and muzzle-loading pistol. Rifles chambered for pistol ammunition above .22 rim-fire calibre are regarded as full-bore rifles. Clubs seeking approval in order to use such rifles will therefore need to have access to a range with a suitable safety certificate. The National Associations are able to provide advice on the construction and use of ranges. Clubs which are affiliated to the National Rifle Association or the National Small-bore Rifle Association will be able to obtain a safety certificate for their ranges from the Ministry of Defence.

10. The security arrangements for storing firearms must be satisfactory to the local chief officer of police acting through the force firearms licensing department.

11. The ban on day or temporary membership is to stop casual shooters being able to come in off the street and shoot. It should not be confused with properly organised guest days, competition shoots between clubs or competitions open to individuals who are not members of that club.

12. Examples of recognised outside organisations whose members may be guest members of approved rifle and muzzle-loading pistol clubs are scouts and guides, schools, Rotary clubs and Women's Institutes. The duty to notify the police of guest days is laid on the club secretary. This may be delegated to the appointed liaison officer.

13. A probationary period of three months is a minimum. It is open to clubs to set a longer probationary period should they wish, or to extend the probationary period for an individual if they deem this necessary. The club may end a probationer's membership at any time.

14. Recognised coaching qualifications for the purposes of the Home Office and Scottish Government criteria for approved clubs are:

Great Britain Target Shooting Federation - Coach Educator, National Coach, Regional Coach, County Coach, Club Coach;

National Rifle Association - Club Instructor, Cadet Adult Instructor, Range Conducting Officer; Range Conducting Officer Assessor;

National Smallbore Rifle Association - Range Conducting Officer, Club Instructor (Rifle, Pistol or Airgun) NSRA Club Coach, NSRA County Coach and;

The Muzzle Loaders Association of Great Britain - Approved Instructor.

15. The National Associations are able to give advice on safety training courses for probationary members.

16. Although the probationary period may be waived in certain cases, the individual concerned has no right to insist on this. It is for the club to decide whether or not the probationary period should be waived for specific persons.

17. The Secretary of State may, in exceptional circumstances, allow a club to have more probationary members than full members. This may be appropriate, for example, in a university club at the beginning of the academic year.

18. Clubs can have non-shooting categories of membership such as associate, family, social or honorary. Such members are not covered by section 15 of the Firearms (Amendment) Act 1988 (as amended) and must not have access to firearms and ammunition except as participants in a guest day.

Extent of approval

The approval will only cover target shooting with the type or types of firearm listed in the approval. There are three possible categories:

- full-bore rifles
- small-bore rifles
- muzzle-loading pistols

(NB: Rifles chambered for pistol ammunition above .22 rim-fire calibre are regarded as full-bore rifles.)

The decision about which categories will be listed in the approval will mainly depend on whether suitable ranges are available.

Variations in the terms of the criteria for approval

It is possible that, exceptionally, the Home Secretary or Secretary of State for Scotland may allow some variation of the criteria, or the conditions of approval. He must be satisfied that it would be reasonable to do so in the exceptional circumstances which come to his notice.

Extending or renewing club approval

Applications for club approval to be extended to cover additional categories of firearm should be made on Form 124. No fee is payable for such applications.

Approval lasts for six years. Applications for renewal should be made on Form 124. A fee, currently £84, is payable on renewal.

Cadet corps and school clubs

The Secretary of State approves cadet corps for the possession of firearms and ammunition under section 54(5)(b) of the Firearms Act 1968 (as amended by section 28 of the Armed Forces Act 1996). The information contained in this leaflet does not apply to cadet corps, nor does it apply to school rifle clubs. You further information contact the Home Office or the Scottish Government at the addresses given earlier in this leaflet.

Miniature rifle ranges and shooting galleries

A person operating a miniature rifle range or shooting gallery at which either miniature rifles not exceeding 5.84mm (.23") calibre or air weapons are used may possess, purchase or acquire such miniature rifles and their ammunition without holding a firearm certificate. Anyone may use these rifles and ammunition at a range or gallery of this type without a firearm certificate. No club approval is necessary.

Further advice

If you would like further advice on any of the information in this leaflet, please contact the Home Office, the Scottish Government or your local police.

Addresses of national shooting organisations

The British Shooting Sports Council
PO Box 53608
London
SE24 9YN

The National Rifle Association
Bisley Camp
Brookwood
Woking
Surrey
GU24 0PB

The National Smallbore Rifle Association
Lord Roberts Centre
Bisley Camp
Brookwood
Woking
Surrey
GU24 0NP

The Muzzle Loaders Association of Great Britain
PO Box 304
Sevenoaks
Kent
TN14 6WB