

FIREARMS

APPROVAL OF RIFLE AND MUZZLE LOADING PISTOL CLUBS.

This leaflet is about the approval of full bore rifle, small bore rifle and muzzle loading pistol clubs by the Home Secretary and the Scottish Ministers.

It explains what approval means and how clubs can apply for it. It also explains the criteria and conditions clubs must meet in order to obtain and maintain approval. 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. There is no requirement to list all the clubs of which the holder is a member.

Any full bore rifle, small bore rifle or muzzle loading pistol club can apply to the Home Secretary (for clubs in England and Wales) or the Scottish Ministers (for clubs in Scotland) for approval. Approval is granted under section 15 of the Firearms (Amendment) Act 1988 as amended by section 45 of the Firearms (Amendment) Act 1997.

When a club has been granted approval by the Secretary of State or Scottish Ministers, members of the 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]. It should be noted that section 15(1) specifies a rifle and ammunition and section 15(11) states that any reference to a rifle can be substituted by reference to a muzzle loading pistol. Thus the Secretary of State may grant his approval to a rifle club, a muzzle loading pistol club or a rifle and muzzle loading pistol club. He cannot grant approval in respect of any other classes of firearm.

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 obtain 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 the 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.

When the police are satisfied that your club meets or will meet the criteria set out in the next section of this leaflet, they will forward your application to either:

The Home Office, Firearms Section, SC1, SE Quarter, 5th Floor, Fry Building, 2 Marsham Street, London, SW1P 4DF; or, for clubs in Scotland

The Scottish Executive, Justice Department, Police Division, 1 West Rear, St Andrew's House, Regent Road, Edinburgh, EH1 3DG.

If the Secretary of State or Scottish Ministers decide to grant approval, the club will be required to pay a fee, currently £84, either to the Home Office or the Scottish Executive. When the fee has been received and brought to account, the secretary of the club will be advised that approval has been granted.

Criteria for Approval

Clubs will only be granted approval if they have satisfied the police that they meet or will meet the criteria set out below. Once granted, these criteria translate into conditions of the approval. **Approved clubs which cease 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 (see note 1).
- The principal officers of the club are responsible people who can be entrusted with the proper administration of the club (see note 2).
- The club has at least ten 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 (see note 3).
- 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 (see note 4).
- 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 (see note 5).
- The club will inform the police of any holder of a firearm certificate who has ceased to be a member for whatever reason (see note 6).
- The club will inform the police of any member who holds a firearm certificate and has not shot with the club for a period of twelve months (see note 6).
- The club will inform the police of any application for membership, giving the applicant's name and address and the outcome of the application (see note 7).
- 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 (see note 8).
- 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. This section applies to persons who have served a term of imprisonment.

- The club has regular use of ranges suitable for the safe use of the categories of firearm in respect of which approval is being sought or given as the case may be. Adequate financial arrangements must be in place to meet any injury or damage claim (see note 9).
- The security arrangements for the storage and transport of club firearms and ammunition are satisfactory (see note 10).
- The club does not run a day or temporary membership scheme (see note 11).
- The club does not have more than twelve guest days a year. Guest members must be either members of a recognised outside organisation or be known personally to at least one full member of the club (see note 12).
- 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 at least 48 hours in advance to the police firearms licensing department for the area in which the guest day is to take place.
- Everyone who applies for membership must be sponsored by at least one full club member.
- Before becoming a full member, individuals must undergo 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 (see note 13).
- 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, a full member of the club or a coach with a qualification recognised by the Great Britain Target Shooting Federation and/or governing bodies (see note 14).
- The probationary period may be waived, at the clubs discretion, for someone who is already a full member of another club 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 (see note 15).

- 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 (see note 16).
- There is nothing else that would make the club unsuitable for approval.

Any approval granted will reflect the above conditions although, in certain circumstance, the Secretary of State may waive one or more of the conditions or attach further specific conditions to a particular 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 merely 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 they should decide between them what information should be supplied and with what frequency. They should also set up a system so that they can contact each other as necessary.
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 ensure that shooters do not have target firearms on their certificates that they do not use regularly. For this reason it is 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 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 six 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 twelve 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 range. The police should be informed within one month of cessation of membership. The "period of twelve 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 applications is submitted formally 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 with calibres greater than .22 rimfire are regarded as full bore rifles. Clubs seeking approval in order to use such rifles will therefore need to have access to a suitable range. The National Rifle Association or the National Small Bore Rifle Association are able to provide advice on the construction and use of ranges and can arrange inspections to assess what weapons are safe to use on particular ranges.
10. The security arrangements for storing or transporting 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. The National Associations are able to give advice on safety training courses for probationary members.
15. 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.
16. 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, for a university club at the beginning of the academic year.

17. 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 rifle
- Small bore rifle
- Muzzle loading pistols

As explained earlier in this leaflet, the Secretary of State may only grant his approval for the three categories listed above.

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

Exceptionally, the Secretary of State or Scottish Ministers may allow some variation of the criteria or conditions of approval. In order to do this, he/they must be satisfied that it would be reasonable to do so in the exceptional circumstances obtaining.

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 is granted for six years. At the end of this period, the club may apply, on form 124, for renewal of the approval. A fee, currently £84, is payable on renewal.

Cadet Corps and School Clubs

Cadet Corps require the Secretary of State's approval under section 54(5)(b) of the Firearms Act 1968 as amended by section 28 of the Armed Forces Act 1996. All the Corps are currently approved so there is no need for individual schools' cadet corps units to apply in their own right.

The information in this leaflet does not apply to school rifle clubs, which are subject to a different set of criteria. For further information contact the Home Office or the Scottish Executive at the addresses given earlier in this leaflet.

Further Advice

For further advice on any of the information in this leaflet, please contact the Home Office, the Scottish Executive or your local police firearms licensing department.

Addresses of National Shooting Organisations

The British Shooting Sports Council
PO Box 11
Bexhill-on-Sea
East Sussex
TN40 1ZZ

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

The National Small Bore Rifle Association
Lord Roberts Centre
Brookwood
Woking
Surrey
GU24 0NP

The Muzzle Loaders Association of Great Britain
The Old Barn
Wasperton
Warwick
CV35 8EB