

Proposed New Licensing Scheme for the Sale and Importation of Knives and Bladed Articles

Consultation Status

The Government published a consultation on 16 December 2025 seeking views on a proposed licensing scheme for the selling and importation of knives and bladed articles in England and Wales. The proposals are under review and subject to change based on feedback.

Consultation Period

The consultation will run from **16 December 2025 until 24 February 2026**. Responses can be submitted online or by email to the Home Office (KnifeLicensingConsultation@homeoffice.gov.uk) during this period. The consultation seeks views from retailers, importers, enforcement bodies and the public.

Why Licensing is being Introduced

Knife crime remains a significant concern in the UK, with knives being involved in 38% of homicides in the year ending June 2025. Despite existing laws prohibiting sales to under-18's, loopholes (e.g. fraudulent online purchases) allow young people to access knives. The Government aims to halve knife crime over the next decade and is proposing a licensing system for sellers and importers of knives and bladed articles to strengthen accountability and enforcement.

Current Regulation on who can sell and import Knives and Bladed Articles

England and Wales: No licensing for knife sellers; anyone can sell or import knives.

Scotland: Scottish Knife Dealers Licensing Scheme is in place for sales of non-domestic knives.

Enforcement currently relies on proactive searches and intelligence, making it hard to track sellers and imports.

Proposed Licensing System

Scope

The Government's proposed licensing system will apply to all sellers (businesses and private individuals, including those who sell via social media) and importers of knives and bladed articles. Second-hand and peer-to-peer sellers will also be included to close gaps exploited for illegal sales. Face-to-face shops (e.g. shops and markets) and online sales will also be caught by the proposed new scheme.

Relevant items

There is more than one definition of knives and bladed articles in play, but it is likely that the following definition provided by Section 141A Criminal Justice Act 1998 will apply:

- (a) any knife, knife blade or razor blade;
- (b) any axe, and
- (c) any other article which has a blade or which is sharply pointed and which is made or adapted for use for causing injury to the person.

Items falling within the meaning of this provision include:

- any knife, regardless of its size or design, including any tools that could be commonly described as knives;
- cutlery knives, including butter knives, and
- knives that can be used for hobbies and trades.

The following items are explicitly excluded:

- Razor blades permanently enclosed in a cartridge or housing where less than 2mm is exposed (includes manual and electric shavers); and
- Folding pocket-knives if the cutting edge of its blade does not exceed 3 inches.

Key Features

1. Licences for All Sellers of Knives and Bladed Articles

Both businesses and private sellers will be required to hold a licence, which will help to regulate online sales.

2. Premises Licence Requirement

Each retail store selling knives will have to hold a licence, similarly to alcohol licensing. This will provide for targeted enforcement as a single store's licence can be revoked without affecting the business's entire chain of stores. This requirement will also help to ensure local compliance and accountability.

3. Designated Licence Holder

Businesses will be required to appoint a Designated Person (like a Designated Premises Supervisor in alcohol licensing). Suitability checks will be conducted on this individual, including whether they have a criminal record or have committed any prior breaches. The

responsibilities of the Designated Person will include:

- Acting as a primary contact for the police;
- Ensuring compliance with the conditions of the premises licence; and
- Overseeing staff training and age-verification policies.

4. Licence Conditions

The Government has listed the following as proposed conditions to be applied through licensing:

- Mandatory age-verification policies (e.g. "Challenge 25");
- Secure display and packaging of knives to prevent theft and misuse;
- Regular staff training on legal obligations and safe handling;
- Record and retain buyer details for law enforcement access;
- Prohibit marketing practices like "mystery boxes" or discounted add-ons;
- Mandatory reporting of bulk or suspicious purchases; and
- Marketing material displaying age-verification requirements.

Administration

The proposed licensing scheme will be administered by the police, who will leverage their existing experience from firearms licensing. Licences will be valid for three years and will be renewable by applying to the police and paying a set fee. The licensing scheme is to be a full cost recovery model, funded by licence fees.

Enforcement

Selling knives without a licence will be a criminal offence and breaches of licence conditions can lead to the licence being revoked. Both the police and Trading Standards will enforce compliance regarding the licensing of sales and Border Force inspections will support the enforcement of import licensing.

Uncertainties

Application Process

Applicants will need to apply to the police for a licence and pay the required fee, but the consultation does not yet confirm the exact application process.

Review on people and premises selling knives

The consultation has proposed imposing checks on both people and premises to determine their "appropriateness" to store and sell knives. It is unclear what the basis of these checks will be and how "appropriateness" will be determined.

Sufficient Resources to Administer the Proposed Scheme

With recent funding cuts made to several police forces, we question whether the police will have sufficient resources to administer the scheme.

Store layout plans

While not explicitly stated, given the emphasis on secure display and packaging, it seems likely that retailers may need to demonstrate compliance possibly by submitting a store layout plan showing where knives will be displayed and how they will be secured.

Impact on retailers

Retailers will be impacted in the following ways:

- **Operational changes:** each store must apply for and maintain a licence;

- **Designated licence holder:** each business must appoint a designated licence holder – the consultation is unclear on this point but we assume that there will be a designated licence holder per premises in a similar way to alcohol licensing;
- **Policy implementation:** businesses must implement robust age verification and secure display polices;
- **Compliance costs:** licence fees; renewal costs; training; administrative overhead.

Benefits

The proposed licensing scheme proposes the following benefits to retailers:

- Clear legal framework;
- Reduced risk of enforcement action; and
- Enhanced reputation for responsible retailing.

Please do not hesitate to contact us if you would like to discuss further.



ROBERT BOTKAI

Senior Partner
+44 (0)20 7593 5004
rbotkai@wslaw.co.uk



Libbi Cohen

Trainee Solicitor
+44 (0)20 7593 5176
lcohen@wslaw.co.uk