



SMC Response to Controls on Firearms: Home Office Consultation Paper

Introduction

The Scottish Museums Council (SMC) is the membership organisation and representative body for Scotland's non-national museums. Our aim is to improve museum and gallery provision in Scotland for both local people and visitors. We have over 200 members who in turn manage over 360 museums. The members include all 32 Scottish local authorities, universities, regimental and independent museums, ranging in size from small voluntary trusts to large metropolitan services, attracting in excess of 1 million visitors each year.

A National Audit of Scotland's museums and galleries was undertaken in 2001, which provides a valuable snapshot of the composition and significance of many of the country's collections. When surveyed as to the types of objects they hold, over 60 museums identified firearms in their care. Currently in Scotland, as in England and Wales, the possession of firearms, their parts and ammunition is regulated by the Firearms Acts 1968-97 and so the updating of this legislation could have repercussions for a number of our members. We therefore welcome the opportunity to comment on this consultation paper.

Of the six sections making up the document, Part 1: 'Firearms' and Part 2: 'Unlicensed Guns' are the most clearly relevant and the comments below take into account the views of a sample group of SMC members contacted.

Part 1: Firearms

Scottish regimental, local authority and independent museums have historically and quite legally, held unique and important gun collections. Many of those requiring licensing have worked, with the support of their local police constabulary, to provide secure arrangements for the long term storage and display of these items, though not all may be aware that licensing arrangements consist of three separate categories. Movement of types of gun between these categories, or the introduction of a new system based on the 'type of gun, relative experience and trustworthiness of applicants' would therefore need clear explanation of new criteria if not to cause confusion.

Similarly, the suggestion that onus be shifted on to those applying to hold a shot gun licence to show that they have 'good reason' for doing so, rather than, as currently, being placed on the police to show that they do not – could create

uncertainty. Would this apply to museums holding existing shotgun licences? What would the criteria consist of in proving 'good reason'?

Part 2: Unlicensed Guns

- Imitation and Deactivated Firearms

Members' responses indicate that a high level of care is taken in the stewardship of these objects. Whether readily convertible or not, imitation guns are in some instances being treated (i.e. displayed, stored or made accessible) as if they were firearms. There was general agreement that more stringent controls in licensing or sale of imitations and licensing of deactivated firearms are unnecessary.

- Antiques

It was generally agreed that further controls on antique firearms would be likely only to penalise or create unnecessary bureaucracy to museums, which have a clear reason for and genuine stake in the safe, long-term preservation of these items. Regulatory changes were felt to be unnecessary.

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