



Firearms Act 1968

1968 CHAPTER 27

PART IV

MISCELLANEOUS AND GENERAL

57 Interpretation.

- (1) [^{F1}In this Act, the expression “firearm” means—
- (a) a lethal barrelled weapon (see subsection (1B));
 - (b) a prohibited weapon;
 - (c) a relevant component part in relation to a lethal barrelled weapon or a prohibited weapon (see subsection (1D));
 - (d) an accessory to a lethal barrelled weapon or a prohibited weapon where the accessory is designed or adapted to diminish the noise or flash caused by firing the weapon;]

and so much of section 1 of this Act as excludes any description of firearm from the category of firearms to which that section applies shall be construed as also excluding component parts of, and accessories to, firearms of that description.

[^{F2}(1A)]

[^{F3}(1B) In subsection (1)(a), “lethal barrelled weapon” means a barrelled weapon of any description from which a shot, bullet or other missile, with kinetic energy of more than one joule at the muzzle of the weapon, can be discharged.

(1C) Subsection (1) is subject to section 57A (exception for airsoft guns).]

[^{F4}(1D) For the purposes of subsection (1)(c), each of the following items is a relevant component part in relation to a lethal barrelled weapon or a prohibited weapon—

- (a) a barrel, chamber or cylinder,
- (b) a frame, body or receiver,
- (c) a breech block, bolt or other mechanism for containing the pressure of discharge at the rear of a chamber,

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but only where the item is capable of being used as a part of a lethal barrelled weapon or a prohibited weapon.]

- (2) In this Act, the expression “ammunition” means ammunition for any firearm and includes grenades, bombs and other like missiles, whether capable of use with a firearm or not, and also includes prohibited ammunition.
- [^{F5}(2A) In this Act “self-loading” and “pump-action” in relation to any weapon mean respectively that it is designed or adapted (otherwise than as mentioned in section 5(1)(a)) so that it is automatically re-loaded or that it is so designed or adapted that it is re-loaded by the manual operation of the fore-end or forestock of the weapon.
- (2B) In this Act “revolver”, in relation to a smooth-bore gun, means a gun containing a series of chambers which revolve when the gun is fired.]
- (3) For purposes of sections 45, 46, 50, 51(4) and 52 of this Act, the offences under this Act relating specifically to air weapons are those under sections [^{F6}22(4), 22(5), 23(1)][^{F6}21A(1A)][^{F7}, 24(4) and 24ZA(1)] .
- (4) In this Act—
- “acquire” means hire, accept as a gift or borrow and “acquisition” shall be construed accordingly;
 - “air weapon” has the meaning assigned to it by section 1(3)(b) of this Act;
 - ^{F8} ...
 - “area” means a police area;
 - ^{F9} ...
 - [^{F10}“British Transport Police Force” means the constables appointed under section 53 of the British Transport Commission Act 1949;]
 - “certificate” (except in a context relating to the registration of firearms dealers) and “certificate under this Act” mean a firearm certificate or a shot gun certificate and—
 - (a) “firearm certificate” means a certificate granted by a chief officer of police under this Act in respect of any firearm or ammunition to which section 1 of this Act applies and includes a certificate granted in Northern Ireland under section 1 of the ^{M1}Firearms Act 1920 or under an enactment of the Parliament of Northern Ireland amending or substituted for that section; and
 - (b) “shot gun certificate” means a certificate granted by a chief officer of police under this Act and authorising a person to possess shot guns;
 - [^{F11}“civilian officer” means—
 - (a) as respects England and Wales—
 - (i) a person employed by a chief constable established under section 2 of the Police Reform and Social Responsibility Act 2011,
 - (ii) a person employed by the Commissioner of Police of the Metropolis, or
 - (iii) a person employed by the Corporation of the City of London who is under the direction and control of the Commissioner of Police for the City of London;
 - (b) as respects Scotland, a [^{F12}member of police staff within the meaning of the Police and Fire Reform (Scotland) Act 2012] ;]

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^{M2}["European weapons directive" means the directive of the Council of the European Communities No.91/477/EEC (directive on the control of the acquisition and possession of weapons);]

"firearms dealer" means a person who, by way of trade or business,

- (a) [^{F14}manufactures, sells, transfers, repairs, tests or proves firearms or ammunition to which section 1 of this Act applies or shot guns; or
- (b) [^{F15}sells or transfers][^{F15}manufactures, sells, transfers, repairs or tests] air weapons.]

"imitation firearm" means any thing which has the appearance of being a firearm (other than such a weapon as is mentioned in section 5(1)(b) of this Act) whether or not it is capable of discharging any shot, bullet or other missile;

[^{F16}"member of a police force" means—

- (a) as respects England and Wales, a constable who is a member of a police force or a special constable appointed under section 27 of the Police Act 1996;
- (b) as respects Scotland, a constable within the meaning of section 99 of the Police and Fire Reform (Scotland) Act 2012 (2012 asp 8);

"member of the British Transport Police Force" includes a special constable appointed under section 25 of the Railways and Transport Safety Act 2003;]

^{F17}
.....

"premises" includes any land;

"prescribed" means prescribed by rules made by the Secretary of State under section 53 of this Act;

"prohibited weapon" and "prohibited ammunition" have the meanings assigned to them by section 5(2) of this Act;

"public place" includes any [^{F18}highway][^{F18}road within the meaning of the Roads (Scotland) Act 1984] and any other premises or place to which at the material time the public have or are permitted to have access, whether on payment or otherwise;

"registered", in relation to a firearms dealer, means registered either—

- (a) in Great Britain, under section 33 of this Act, or
- (b) ^{M3}in Northern Ireland, under section 8 of the Firearms Act 1920 or any enactment of the Parliament of Northern Ireland amending or substituted for that section,

and references to "the register", "registration" and a "certificate of registration" shall be construed accordingly, except in section 40;

[^{F19}"rifle" includes carbine;]

"shot gun" has the meaning assigned to it by section 1(3)(a) of this Act and, in sections 3(1) and 45(2) of this Act and in the definition of "firearms dealer", includes any component part of a shot gun and any accessory to a shot gun designed or adapted to diminish the noise or flash caused by firing the gun;

"slaughtering instrument" means a firearm which is specially designed or adapted for the instantaneous slaughter of animals or for the instantaneous stunning of animals with a view to slaughtering them; and

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“transfer” includes let on hire, give, lend and part with possession, and “transferee” and “transferor” shall be construed accordingly.

^{F20}(4A)

(5) The definitions in subsections (1) to (3) above apply to the provisions of this Act except where the context otherwise requires.

(6) For purposes of this Act—

- (a) the length of the barrel of a firearm shall be measured from the muzzle to the point at which the charge is exploded on firing; and
- (b) a shot gun or an air weapon shall be deemed to be loaded if there is ammunition in the chamber or barrel or in any magazine or other device which is in such a position that the ammunition can be fed into the chamber or barrel by the manual or automatic operation of some part of the gun or weapon.

Textual Amendments

- F1** Words in s. 57(1) substituted (31.1.2017 for specified purposes, 2.5.2017 in so far as not already in force) by [Policing and Crime Act 2017 \(c. 3\)](#), [ss. 125\(2\)](#), 183(1)(5)(e); S.I. 2017/399, reg. 4(b)
- F2** S. 57(1A) repealed (1.2.1998) by 1997 c. 64, s. 2(7), [Sch.](#); S.I. 1997/3114, art. 4, [Sch. Pt. II](#)
- F3** S. 57(1B)(1C) inserted (31.1.2017 for specified purposes, 2.5.2017 in so far as not already in force) by [Policing and Crime Act 2017 \(c. 3\)](#), [ss. 125\(3\)](#), 183(1)(5)(e); S.I. 2017/399, reg. 4(b)
- F4** S. 57(1D) inserted (31.1.2017 for specified purposes, 2.5.2017 in so far as not already in force) by [Policing and Crime Act 2017 \(c. 3\)](#), [ss. 125\(4\)](#), 183(1)(5)(e); S.I. 2017/399, reg. 4(b)
- F5** Ss. 57(2A)(2B) inserted by [Firearms \(Amendment\) Act 1988 \(c. 45, SIF 51:1\)](#), [s. 25\(2\)](#)
- F6** Words in s. 57(3) substituted (S.) (31.12.2016) by [Air Weapons and Licensing \(Scotland\) Act 2015 \(asp 10\)](#), s. 88(2), [sch. 2 para. 1\(8\)\(a\)](#); S.S.I. 2016/130, art. 3(c)
- F7** Words in s. 57(3) substituted (10.2.2011) by [Crime and Security Act 2010 \(c. 17\)](#), [ss. 46\(3\)](#), 59(1); S.I. 2011/144, art. 2
- F8** Words in s. 57(4) omitted (31.12.2020) by virtue of [The Law Enforcement and Security \(Amendment\) \(EU Exit\) Regulations 2019 \(S.I. 2019/742\)](#), regs. 1, [59\(11\)\(a\)\(i\)](#); 2020 c. 1, [Sch. 5 para. 1\(1\)](#)
- F9** Words in s. 57(4) omitted (31.12.2020) by virtue of [The Law Enforcement and Security \(Amendment\) \(EU Exit\) Regulations 2019 \(S.I. 2019/742\)](#), regs. 1, [59\(11\)\(a\)\(ii\)](#); 2020 c. 1, [Sch. 5 para. 1\(1\)](#)
- F10** Definition of “British Transport Police Force” in s. 57(4) inserted (14.12.2001) by 2001 c. 24, s. 101, [Sch. 7 para. 10](#)
- F11** Words in s. 57(4) substituted (S.) (16.1.2012) by [Police Reform and Social Responsibility Act 2011 \(c. 13\)](#), s. 157(1), [Sch. 16 para. 91](#); S.I. 2011/3019, art. 3, [Sch. 1 \(with Sch. 2 para. 22\)](#)
- F12** Words in s. 57(4) substituted (S.) (1.4.2013) by [The Police and Fire Reform \(Scotland\) Act 2012 \(Consequential Provisions and Modifications\) Order 2013 \(S.I. 2013/602\)](#), art. 1(2), [Sch. 2 para. 5\(4\)](#)
- F13** Words in s. 57(4) omitted (31.12.2020) by virtue of [The Law Enforcement and Security \(Amendment\) \(EU Exit\) Regulations 2019 \(S.I. 2019/742\)](#), regs. 1, [59\(11\)\(a\)\(iii\)](#); 2020 c. 1, [Sch. 5 para. 1\(1\)](#)
- F14** S. 57(4): words in definition of “firearms dealer” substituted (6.4.2007 for certain purposes and 1.10.2007 otherwise) by [Violent Crime Reduction Act 2006 \(c. 38\)](#), [ss. 31\(3\)](#), 66(2); S.I. 2007/858, [art. 2\(e\)](#); S.I. 2007/2180, [art. 4\(a\)](#)
- F15** Words in s. 57(4) substituted (S.) (31.12.2016) by [Air Weapons and Licensing \(Scotland\) Act 2015 \(asp 10\)](#), s. 88(2), [sch. 2 para. 1\(8\)\(b\)](#); S.S.I. 2016/130, art. 3(c)
- F16** Words in s. 57(4) inserted (31.1.2017 for specified purposes, 15.12.2017 in so far as not already in force) by [Policing and Crime Act 2017 \(c. 3\)](#), [ss. 39\(3\)](#), 183(1)(5)(e); S.I. 2017/1139, reg. 2(e) (as amended by S.I. 2017/1162, reg. 2)
- F17** Definition of “indictable offence” repealed by [Criminal Law Act 1977 \(c. 45\)](#), [Sch. 13](#)
- F18** Words “road (within the meaning of the Roads (Scotland) Act 1984)” substituted (S.) for “highway” by [Roads \(Scotland\) Act 1984 \(c. 54, SIF 108\)](#), s. 156(1), [Sch. 9 para. 62](#)

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- F19** Words inserted by Firearms (Amendment) Act 1988 (c. 45, SIF 51:1), **s. 25(3)**
F20 S. 57(4A) omitted (31.12.2020) by virtue of The Law Enforcement and Security (Amendment) (EU Exit) Regulations 2019 (S.I. 2019/742), regs. 1, **59(11)(b)**; 2020 c. 1, Sch. 5 para. 1(1)

Modifications etc. (not altering text)

- C1** S. 57 amended (1.7.2004) by Railways and Transport Safety Act 2003 (c. 20), ss. 73, 120(1), **Sch. 5 para. 4(1)(a)(2)(b)**; S.I. 2004/1572, **art. 3(ddd)(jjj)**

Marginal Citations

- M1** 1920 c. 43.
M2 OJ No. L256, 13.9.91, p.51.
M3 1920 c. 43.

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Changes and effects yet to be applied to the whole Act associated Parts and Chapters:

- Act amended by [1997 c. 5 s. 12\(2\)](#) (This amendment not applied to [legislation.gov.uk](#). S. 12 was repealed (17.12.1997) by 1997 c. 64, s. 2(7), Sch.; S.I. 1997/3114, art. 3, Sch. Pt. I)
- Blanket amendment words substituted by [S.I. 2011/1043 art. 34](#)

Whole provisions yet to be inserted into this Act (including any effects on those provisions):

- s. 3A inserted by [2023 c. 49 s. 2](#)
- s. 11(3A)-(4A) substituted for s. 11(4) by [2023 c. 49 s. 1\(2\)](#)
- s. 51(2A) added by [1997 c. 48 s. 62\(1\)Sch. 1 para. 3](#)