

MAKING CERTIFICATE APPLICATIONS DIGITAL

Honorary solicitor **Laura Saunbury** considers the move towards making online applications compulsory and gives her top tips for how to navigate the police portal.



Laura Saunbury is a consultant solicitor with a leading London law firm and has 14 years experience as the Association's Honorary Solicitor and shotgun licensing advisor.

Many members who have renewed their shotgun certificate in the last two years will have done so online for the first time instead of submitting a paper application form in the post. Whilst it can be convenient for those who are tech savvy, it's not for everyone.

Until recently, there was generally an option to print out and submit a paper application for those who preferred the old-fashioned method. However, in the last month or two some police forces have started issuing letters to certificate holders advising it will shortly become compulsory to submit your application online via your local police website, and that paper application forms sent in by post will generally be rejected, unless special prior permission has been obtained. This will apparently only be granted where you can satisfy your local firearms licensing department that you have a disability which would put you at

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a disadvantage in trying to complete the application online. If you are going to make such a request it would probably be wise to do it either by telephone or sending in a written letter, since an email request might undermine your point that you have difficulty with technology.

The police letters we have seen expressly state that not having your own computer does not excuse you from this new process. They suggest the application could be submitted using a smart phone, with the help of a trusted friend or family member, or using a public computer, for example at your local library.

It may be technically possible to complete the application on your phone or tablet but I wouldn't recommend it. Doing it on a small screen increases the risk of errors which you may not spot. Do not assume the police will be understanding if you make mistakes while struggling with the online process. They have a

tendency to presume that any inaccuracy or lack of detail on your application form is a deliberate attempt to conceal information from the police or to mislead them.

Not everyone knows how to use a computer, and even if you do, you will want to assess the security implications of using a computer in a library or other public location. How private is the position of the computer? Is there a risk that you could be overlooked whilst entering your personal information and gun details, or that your data could be accessed by other users of that computer? The answers to these questions may give you a basis for explaining to the police why you do not consider it appropriate to use the public computer in your local library or other similar location.

You may not have any relatives you can turn to for help with the application. Bear in mind, the police do not generally encourage certificate holders to share with others the fact that you are a gun owner. You should only ask a friend or neighbour if you are confident you can trust them to be suitably discreet and not discuss your gun ownership with anyone else. 🐦

TIPS FOR A STRESS FREE ONLINE APPLICATION

If you are completing your application online, follow these pointers for making the process as smooth as possible

- You will need to submit the completed medical form signed by your GP at the same time as your application form. Obtain this early from your doctor, ideally via email, and check it carefully for accuracy, so you have it ready to upload
- Before starting the online application check off all of your guns in your cabinet against the details recorded on your certificate. Errors, for example, with serial numbers, do sometimes find their way onto certificates. This is an ideal time to bring any such discrepancies to police attention.
- Have to hand all other information you will need, including your digital photo ready on your computer, details of any speeding offences or other convictions, plus the full name, address, date and place of birth of your referee. You may get timed out if you pause the application for more than a minute or so.
- When completed, you should be able to review the application and download a copy of it to save or email to yourself. As an additional precaution, you may wish to take a screenshot of each page as you go along, in case you have difficulty downloading a copy at the end. Keeping a copy of the completed application you submitted is wise in case the police later challenge you on any of the details you provided.

