

Written evidence submitted by Axminster Tool Centre Ltd (OWB103)

This submission is sent from the Board of Directors.

Executive Summary

We are a major retailer of hand tools and fear this legislation will have a significant impact on our business, the business of our partners (retailers we sell to around the UK, who also resell to consumers) and our own consumers. We wholeheartedly support logical attempts to reduce knife crime and understand the overall aim of the legislation.

- Bladed woodworking tools are used in thousands of workshops (hobby and professional) across the UK, and are part of everyday life for our customers.
- The proposed legislation needs to be clearer on the definition of “bladed product”. We believe that many items would almost certainly be beyond use as a weapon.
- Delivery by carrier (e.g. Royal Mail or DPD) to our customers is a great convenience, and now an assumed method of procurement.
- Daily we are sending out hand tools across the UK, it is a substantial part of our business with around £4m in sales in the last 12 months.
- Daily we are sending hand tools to resellers/retailers across the UK, who in turn are selling to consumers in retail stores and online.

Introduction

We are based in Devon with over 300 employees, a very busy website (axminster.co.uk) and 8 retail stores. Our turnover is £45m p.a., we sell worldwide and remain a family owned business. Axminster is a larger retailer in the niche market of supplying tools for Woodworking, Engineering, Woodturning and Woodcarving.

We are writing to you to offer our views and on behalf of our partners (who are tool retailers) and to explain the impact on our customers (end users).

Axminster ship around 100,000 products each year that would fall under this proposed definition and are concerned this will become impossible to satisfy, with severe impact on our business and an inconvenience to our customer. As a guide our hand tool range is here: www.axminster.co.uk/hand-tools, this is not an exhaustive list.

Overall

We fear this proposed legislation (Offensive Weapons Bill HC Bill 232) and in particular Article 15 will effectively curb the Internet sales of many bladed hand tools and consumables that are used for Woodworking, Woodcarving and Woodturning.

These tools are used every day across the UK, for work and leisure, and every woodworking tool has an edge of some sort.

If we were unable to sell these only through our website it will cause great inconvenience to our consumers, who enjoy delivery to their home. This often reflects their rural location, age demographic and the ease of Internet buying.

Due to their high price, design and obscure blade pattern (in the main) we feel these would highly unlikely to be part of any knife crime or weapon usage.

Quite simply these tools are only available in specialist outlets, unlikely to be on the radar of any person with violent intent.

We have 2 issues that we urge be reviewed.

1. Review of "Bladed Product" definition

The proposed Act defines the above as:

(a) is or has a blade, and

(b) is capable of causing a serious injury to a person which involves cutting that person's skin.

This wide definition (we note the revision 18.07.18) can be interpreted to include some handsaws, planer blades (typically a 300mm [blade](#) without handle) and band saw blades for example. These items would be highly unlikely to be used in crime as difficult to carry, wield and to hide. See addendum 1 and 1.1 as typical examples of these products. These are significant products to our customers and are bought in volume by individuals.

The definition needs to be amended to exclude tools and edged items that would be very unlikely to be used as a weapon. Could Craft and Woodworking items be excluded like "*sporting purpose*" items? Could the definition be "bladed products with a handle" for example? The Metropolitan Police web page for [Operation Sceptre](#) shows only handled knives and swords it should be noted.

We fully accept handled items with a blade (e.g. knives with blades over 3") should be the subject of further restriction. We are seeking that all other items (e.g. hand saws, circular saw blades) are removed from the restriction.

2. Proposal for tightening of online ordering and delivery verification

We would happily accept increased controls preventing ordering and delivery of goods to those under 18. Currently we verify knife purchases in line with existing legislation. We are proposing increasing qualification to buy “bladed products” as below.

A.

(i) We propose further tightening of purchase to include mandatory picture and age verification before supply.

(ii) The enforcement of the above should carry heavy fines for businesses failing to uphold the law.

B.

(i) Delivery to home address must include receipt by the purchaser with photo ID, or by another person with ID proving over 18.

(ii) The enforcement of the above should carry heavy fines for businesses failing to uphold the law.

Note delivery for all "bladed products" to a *Verification location* (e.g. local shop) would inhibit purchases of bladed goods when ordered amongst other goods e.g. a mixed order of goods (a cordless saw with a spare blade, which could be a “bladed product” item).

Important: How are Imports to be controlled?

We must draw your attention to the fast increasing trade of goods across Europe with easy and fast delivery. We are targeted by European competitors every day with brands we sell, who will happily deliver at a price and speed very close to our own.

There is a need to ensure foreign imports are also controlled equally to UK legislation. Whilst section 18 refers to this how will the carriers know that a sharp edged product ordered on eBay, posted in China will comply?

We faced a recent clampdown (and as a result lost substantial business) on Amazon on carving knives, only to find foreign companies utterly ignoring the restrictions placed by Amazon UK and listing products we could not. How will this legislation cope with this please?

Notes

It is important you understand that we represent many of our resellers too (B2B partners), who use web sales of hand tools amongst their most profitable endeavours. This legislation would change their outlook, especially in view of the move away from retail stores.

Like ourselves they do not have stores in many towns, therefore we cannot follow the decision by B+Q to remove knives from online offering. We do not have the widespread retail store network they enjoy.

Conclusion

Please could we count on you to lobby for the items included in this change to be amended? We seek greater clarity of the “Bladed Product” definition and exactly which items would be included. We seek for Craft and Woodworking tools to be excluded, we seek tougher age verification with tough penalties for those who do not comply. Finally we need to ensure foreign competitors do not undermine this legislation.



Addendum 1

Left to right: Bandsaw blade, hand saw and Japanese hand saw, ruler shown only for clarity.

Addendum 1.1
Close up of bandsaw blade

