

Guidance note on the licensing and training of slaughtermen

*This guidance is out of date and has been withdrawn.
Current guidance is available elsewhere on GOV.UK.*

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Introduction

1. This Note is for everyone involved with the slaughtering or killing of farm animals or poultry, whether or not in a licensed slaughterhouse. It explains the procedures for licensing slaughtermen and gives guidance on the skills and knowledge that applicants for licences will be expected to demonstrate. Regulation EU 1099/2009 introduces new arrangements for slaughter licences from 1 January 2013. Further information on how this will affect existing licence holders will be issued in advance of that date.
2. This Note is a guide: it does not replace the Regulations, nor does it cover every circumstance or eventuality which may arise. Questions arising from this Note should be directed to an Official Veterinarian (OV) of the Food Standards Agency Operations Group (FSA), a Veterinary Officer (VO) of Animal Health, or to the Agriculture Departments.
3. The Agriculture Departments welcome any suggestions on the contents of this Note or for improving the efficiency of the procedures it covers.

Slaughter Licences

General requirements

4. The Welfare of Animals (Slaughter or Killing) Regulations 1995 (S1 No 1995/731) as amended, contain the general requirements that:

"no person shall engage in the movement, lashing, restraint, stunning, slaughter or killing of any animal, unless he has the knowledge and skill necessary to perform those tasks humanely and efficiently."

and, in carrying out these operations,

"no person shall cause any avoidable excitement, pain or suffering to any animal."

Operations which require a licence

5. The Regulations require anyone carrying out the following operations to have a provisional or a registered licence:

- the restraint of an animal for the purposes of stunning, slaughtering or killing
- the stunning, slaughter or killing of animals
- the pithing of stunned animals
- the assessment of effective stunning or killing
- the shackling or hoisting of stunned animals
- the bleeding of animals which are not dead

Exemptions

6. A licence is **not** required for the following operations:
 - Emergency slaughter or killing, where the animal must be killed immediately

- Slaughter or killing by the owner of an animal for his private consumption (when slaughter takes place elsewhere than in a slaughterhouse or knacker's yard)
 - Slaughter or killing for a non-commercial purpose ("commercial" is defined in the Regulations)
 - Killing by using a free bullet in the field
 - Neck dislocation or decapitation of poultry on agricultural premises where the birds were reared
 - Operation of automatic equipment (where the operator does not carry out any task which would otherwise require a licence)
 - Shackling birds before stunning
 - Slaughter or killing under the direction of a veterinary surgeon
7. A licence is not required to kill animals for the purposes of disease control, or to kill farmed fox or mink, or to kill surplus chicks or embryos in hatchery waste: however, these operations must be carried out in accordance with the specific requirements of the Regulations.

Provisional Licence

8. If you are a trainee slaughterman you must obtain a Provisional Licence. The minimum age at which you may hold a licence is 18.
9. Provisional Licences are valid for up to three months and state the species, the type of equipment and the operations for which you are licensed. While you have a Provisional Licence you must work only in the presence, and under the direction of the holder of a full licence covering the same species, operations and equipment or a veterinary surgeon.

Certificate of Competence

10. A Certificate may be issued by an authorised veterinary surgeon (OVS or VO) only after assessment of your competence in carrying out the operations for which you are seeking a certificate, your understanding of relevant statutory requirements (including Codes of Practice) and how they work to protect the welfare of animals. The second part of this Note gives examples of the requirements of the Regulations and of the skills and knowledge you may be asked to demonstrate. You will be assessed only on those species, operations or equipment for which you have applied.

11. Your assessment will not be a formal examination. Usually, your practical skills will be observed during normal working conditions. Your knowledge and understanding may be assessed in one session or over a period of time.

12. If you work at a licensed slaughterhouse, your assessment will usually be carried out by the OV at that slaughterhouse. If you work in any other premises you should apply to the local Animal Health Divisional Office (AHDO) and you will be assessed by a VO. In some cases it may be possible for an OV to arrange for your assessment to be carried out at a licensed slaughterhouse.

13. If you are involved in religious slaughter activities using the Jewish method a licence granted by the Rabbinical Commission in England and Wales or

the Chief Rabbi in Scotland will be accepted as your certificate of competence.

Registered Licence

14. A Registered Licence will be issued once a certificate of competence has been obtained and the appropriate fee has been paid. It is a permanent licence and is valid throughout Great Britain. Your licence will cover the operations, equipment or species listed on your Certificate of Competence.

Changing a Registered Licence

15. If you have a Registered Licence and wish to slaughter species other than those for which you are licensed or to use equipment and/or undertake operations other than those specified on your licence, you must apply for a Provisional Licence for the new species, operation or equipment. Your competence will be assessed before a new certificate of competence is issued.

Suspension, revocation or prosecution

16. Registered Licences may be suspended or revoked if the holder is no longer considered a fit and proper person to hold a licence, or is no longer competent to carry out the operations covered by the licence, or has failed to comply with any condition of the licence, or has been convicted of an offence under any animal welfare legislation. Whether suspension, revocation or prosecution is appropriate will depend upon the circumstances of each case.

Appeals

17. If applicants are refused a Provisional Licence, a Certificate of Competence, a Registered Licence or a modification to a Registered Licence, they may make written or oral representations to the authorised veterinary surgeon (OV or VO) or to the Minister (a senior Defra official will be appointed to deal with the appeal on behalf of the Minister). Alternatively they can exercise the right to be heard by an independent person appointed by the Minister. This procedure applies also to the suspension or revocation of licences. If you wish to appeal to the Minister, you should write to the Head of the Animal Welfare Team, Defra, Area 8B, 9 Millbank, c/o Nobel House, 17 Smith Square, London, SW1P 3JR.

Charges

18. **Provisional Licence:** free of charge.

19. **Certificate of Competence (in slaughterhouse):** if you work in a licensed slaughterhouse you should discuss with your employer and the OV whether it is possible to carry out your assessment without making special arrangements. In most cases it should be possible to arrange for your assessment to be carried out by the OV during normal working hours. If this is not possible special arrangements may have to be made and a charge may be made.

20. **Certificate of Competence (other):** Applicants who do not work in slaughterhouses are responsible for making reasonable arrangements for a VO to witness slaughter and carry out the assessment. The standard fee

for such an assessment is £117.80 per hour for a visit by a VO. This is payable in advance and is not refundable if you are unsuccessful.

21. In some circumstances up to five experienced applicants may be assessed at the same time for a single fee and this possibility should be discussed with the OVS or VO.

22. **Registered Licence:** £26.00 for the issue and registration of a licence; £7.00 for registering changes to a Registered Licence or providing a replacement licence.

How to apply

23. To apply for a **Provisional Licence or Certificate of Competence:**

- if you work in a licensed slaughterhouse please download, print and complete application form WAS 1 (FSA) (PDF) and hand it to the OV,
- If you **do not** work in a licensed slaughterhouse please download, print and complete application form WAS 1 (AH) (PDF) and send it to the local Animal Health Office. If you are applying for a Certificate of Competence through Animal Health, you should first check whether the standard charge applies and enclose a cheque for the correct sum (made payable to "Defra")

24. To **apply for a Registered Licence** please download, print and complete application form WAS 1 (FSA) (PDF). Alternatively you can obtain a copy of the form from the FSA at the address below. You must enclose your certificate (a Certificate of Competence, or a Rabbinical Licence), the registration fee and two passport style photographs with your name written on the reverse of each. The registration fee can be paid using a cheque made payable to the "Food Standards Agency". Alternatively you can pay over the telephone (see number below) using a debit card. Send your application to:

Food Standards Agency (Registered Licences)

Kingspool

Peasholme Green

York, YO1 7PR

Tel: 01904 455450 (enquiries only)

Tel: 01904 455395 (debit card payments only)

Please mark your envelope "Registered Licence".

Guidance on competencies to be shown by slaughtermen Training

25. The Welfare of Animals (Slaughter or Killing) Regulations 1995 contain general requirements (paragraph 1 of this Note) and specific requirements in respect of various operations. Slaughtermen must, therefore, have adequate knowledge of these Regulations, any Welfare Codes made under them and of any revisions of the legislation or Codes which may be made from time to time. The Agriculture Departments will publicise any changes affecting matters covered by this Note.

26. The Regulations place responsibilities on the slaughterman, the slaughterhouse operator and any other person who deals with animals, and on the enforcement agencies. In practice, the humane death of each animal can be ensured only by the slaughterman.
27. The Regulations do not specify how a Provisional Licence holder should be trained. It is recognised that training may, for example, be work-based ("on-the-job"), or within a formal training course or as a private arrangement between a provisional licence holder and a veterinary surgeon. However, as the competence of the slaughterman is based to a greater extent on practical skills, practical experience is essential and on-the-job training is likely to be most effective.
28. Much of the information in the following sections is based on the current requirements laid down in the stunning and slaughter unit(s) of the Scottish and National Vocational Qualifications (S/NVQ) at level 2 in Meat Processing awarded by the Meat Training Council and the Scottish Vocational Education Council. Prospective slaughtermen may choose to follow a competence-based training programme and gain S/NVQs (or units towards them) or their equivalent. If they wish, experienced and competent slaughtermen may be able to gain S/NVQs without further training by undertaking the S/NVQ assessment.
29. The previous award of an S/NVQ will not remove the need for competence to be assessed for licensing purposes, although S/NVQs, units, or equivalent standards, will provide important evidence to the OV or VO of practical competence. Prior success in such qualifications cannot be guaranteed to lead to the issue of a Registered Licence as other factors must be taken into account.
30. Where a candidate for certification of unit 10 of the S/NVQ in Meat at Level 2 is also seeking a licence to slaughter, the Official Veterinarian should participate with the assessor in the assessment of occupational competence in the operations for which the licence is sought and will, if satisfied, issue the Certificate of Competence for registration of a slaughter licence.
31. A slaughterman's competence and knowledge is assessed to determine whether or not they have the necessary level of competence, knowledge, skill and understanding of the importance of animal welfare to allow a registered licence to be issued. Even if an applicant for a licence is "competent" to do the work, there may be other reasons why a person should not be considered suitable to be a licensed slaughterman. A licensed slaughterman must also be "fit and proper" to undertake this work.
32. You will be assessed only on those matters that are appropriate to the operations, species and equipment for which you have applied.
33. The following paragraphs summarise some of the relevant legislation and areas of competence to be met by prospective slaughtermen. However,

the legislation mentioned is only provided by way of example. Candidates must consider all of the legislation and any current Welfare Codes. These notes are not a substitute for the law or for any Welfare Codes.

Restraint on animals before stunning, slaughter or killing

34. Animals must be restrained in an appropriate manner in such a way as to spare them any avoidable pain, suffering, agitation, injury or contusions.
35. Bovine animals must be restrained in a stunning pen or restraining pen. Animals' legs must not be tied, and animals must not be suspended before stunning or killing. Poultry may be suspended for slaughter provided that appropriate measures are taken to ensure that, at the point of being stunned, they are in a sufficiently relaxed state for stunning to be carried out effectively and without undue delay. Poultry must not be suspended for longer than the stipulated times or unless certain conditions are met.
36. Electrical stunning equipment must not be used as a means of restraint, immobilisation or to make animals move.
37. The slaughterman will demonstrate that:
 - i. he has an adequate understanding of what constitutes "an appropriate manner of restraint" for the species of animals to be handled and when to apply restraint
 - ii. he has the necessary knowledge and skill to restrain the animals without causing them avoidable excitement, pain or suffering, including (where appropriate) the restraint of animals for slaughter by religious methods
 - iii. he is aware of the appropriate procedures for handling poultry before stunning or killing
 - iv. he is aware of the action to be taken in the event of an emergency

Stunning or killing by electrical or mechanical means

General

38. Any equipment or instrument used for stunning or killing must be used so as to facilitate effective stunning or killing.
39. Animals which are stunned or killed by mechanical or electrical means applied to the head must be presented in such a position that the equipment can be applied and operated easily, accurately and for the appropriate time.
40. Animals must not be placed in stunning pens unless the operator who is to stun them is ready to do so as soon as the animal is placed in the pen. Animals must not be placed in head restraints until the slaughterman is ready to stun them. Stunning must not be carried out unless it is possible to bleed or pith the animals without delay.
41. The slaughterman will demonstrate that:

- i. he is aware of the need to check for hold-ups on the bleeding line before stunning an animal
- ii. he is aware of the permitted methods of stunning animals (namely captive bolt pistol, concussion or electronarcosis)
- iii. he has the practical knowledge and skill to undertake the method of stunning or killing to be covered by the licence
- iv. he is aware of the appropriate use of stunning equipment
- v. he is aware of the correct presentation of the animal for mechanical or electrical stunning
- vi. he has the skill to ensure that the animal is presented so that the equipment can be applied and operated easily, accurately and for the appropriate time
- vii. he is aware of the signs of an effective stun
- viii. he is aware of the signs of recovery
- ix. if the animal shows signs of recovery he has the knowledge and ability to take the necessary action to ensure that the animal is re-stunned or, if appropriate, killed without delay
- x. his awareness of the welfare requirements of animals is such that animal welfare will not be compromised

Specific requirements for stunning animals

Captive bolt pistol

42. Instruments must be positioned so as to ensure that the projectile enters the cerebral cortex. The correct strength of cartridge or other propellant must be used.
43. Cattle must not be shot in the back of the head. Where the presence of horns prevents stunning on the top or front of the head, sheep and goats may be shot in the back of the head. In such cases the shot must be placed immediately behind the base of the horns and aimed towards the mouth, and bleeding must commence within 15 seconds of shooting.
44. When using a captive bolt instrument, the operator must check to ensure that the bolt is retracted to its full extent after each shot. If it does not so retract, the instrument must not be used again until it has been repaired.
45. The slaughterman will demonstrate that:
 - i. he has the knowledge required to understand the importance of the correct positioning of the captive bolt
 - ii. he knows what the cerebral cortex is, where it is, and why the bolt must enter it
 - iii. he knows why cattle must not be stunned at the back of the head
 - iv. he knows the correct procedure for stunning horned sheep and goats
 - v. he knows which animals may be shot in the back of the head and is aware of the correct positioning of the gun and the need for bleeding without delay
 - vi. he has sufficient knowledge to understand which type and strength of cartridge should be used in the stunning equipment for different species or sizes of animal

- vii. he has sufficient knowledge of the captive bolt and appropriate maintenance procedures to ensure it is fit to be used

Concussion

46. This is only permitted using an instrument which administers a blow to the skull. The operator must ensure that the instrument is applied in the proper position and that the correct strength of cartridge or propellant is used to produce an effective stun by administering a non-penetrative blow without fracture of the skull.

47. Small batches of rabbits can be stunned manually.

48. The slaughterman will demonstrate that:

- i. he is aware of the types of animal for which concussion stunning is appropriate
- ii. he has the knowledge required to understand the importance of the correct positioning of the concussion stunner
- iii. he has sufficient knowledge to understand which type and strength of cartridge should be used in the stunning equipment for different species or sizes of animal
- iv. he has sufficient knowledge of the concussion stunner and appropriate maintenance procedures to ensure it is fit to be used
- v. if appropriate, he has sufficient knowledge and expertise to stun rabbits manually

Electronarcosis and electrocution

49. Electrodes must be so placed that they span the brain, enabling the current to pass through the brain. Measures must be taken to ensure that there is good electrical contact. The strength and duration of the current must render the animal unconscious until dead. Where animals are stunned individually, the apparatus must:

- a. incorporate a device which measures the impedance of the load and prevents operation of the apparatus if the minimum required current cannot be passed
- b. incorporate an audible or visible device indicating the length of time of its application to an animal
- c. be connected to a device indicating the voltage and the current under load, positioned so as to be clearly visible to the operator

50. The slaughterman will demonstrate that:

- i. he is aware of the position of the brain in the species to be covered by the licence, or the position of the brain and heart if the animal is to be killed by causing cardiac arrest
- ii. he can place the electrodes correctly
- iii. he is aware of the appropriate measures to ensure good electrical contact

- iv. he has a basic understanding of and ability to use the equipment correctly with the correct current for the animal concerned
- v. he knows the correct action to take if the stunner fails to deliver a current
- vi. he has sufficient knowledge of the equipment and appropriate maintenance procedures to ensure it is fit to be used
- vii. he knows the strength and duration of the current used to stun an animal immediately

Electronarcosis - waterbath stunners

51. Birds must not be stunned in a waterbath stunner unless the level of water is sufficient to ensure good contact with the birds' heads. It must be of adequate size and it must ensure that no bird receives pre-stun shocks. The electrode must extend the length of the waterbath and the strength and duration of the voltage and current used must render the bird unconscious until dead. When birds are killed in groups, the current must be strong enough to stun every bird.

52. In the event of any birds not being stunned effectively, a person must be available to slaughter or kill such birds without delay.

53. The slaughterman will demonstrate that:

- i. he is aware of the correct level of water for the size of birds being stunned such that there is good contact with the bird's head
- ii. he is aware of the measures necessary to prevent pre-stun shocks
- iii. he is aware of the need for sufficient current to be passed and for the appropriate time, so that the bird is rendered unconscious and remains so until dead
- iv. he is aware of the required voltage and amperage to ensure that birds are correctly and effectively stunned when presented in groups
- v. he is aware of correct procedures which must be followed to ensure that each bird is effectively stunned

Automatic neck cutters

54. No bird shall be slaughtered by means of automatic neck cutters unless, whenever the neck cutters are operated, a person is present who is able to ascertain whether or not the neck cutters have effectively severed at least one of the carotid arteries or the vessels from which they arise.

55. In the event of the neck cutters not being effective in severing one or more of the major blood vessels of the neck, a person must be available to ensure that the bird is slaughtered or killed immediately.

56. The slaughterman will demonstrate that:

- i. he is aware of whether or not the neck cutters are effectively severing at least one of the carotid arteries or the vessels from which they arise

- ii. he is aware of the appropriate actions to take if the neck cutters are not working effectively

Bleeding and pithing

57. When animals have been stunned, they must be bled or pithed without delay. It must be carried out in such a way as to bring about rapid, profuse and complete bleeding. In any event, the bleeding must be completed before the animal regains consciousness.

58. All animals which have been stunned must be bled by incising at least one of the carotid arteries or the vessels from which they arise. After incision of the blood vessels, no further dressing procedures nor any electrical stimulation may be performed on the animals before the bleeding has ended. Minimum times for bleeding of various species are stipulated before dressing can begin.

59. Where one person is responsible for the stunning, shackling, hoisting and bleeding of animals, that person must carry out those operations consecutively on one animal before carrying them out on another animal.

60. The slaughterman will demonstrate that:

1. he is aware that any animal which has been stunned before bleeding or pithing is bled or pithed without delay
2. he is aware of the correct procedure for pithing to be carried out, if necessary
3. he is aware of appropriate procedures to ensure rapid, profuse and complete bleeding
4. he knows where the carotid arteries and the blood vessels from which they arise are situated
5. he has the knowledge of the appropriate methods to sever the carotid artery and the blood vessels from which it arises competently, and the skill to do it efficiently
6. he is aware of appropriate procedures when carrying out the whole slaughter procedure single-handedly and adheres to them
7. he is aware of time constraints following bleeding, before any further procedures can be undertaken

Killing by exposure to gas mixtures

61. Only pigs, domestic fowl and turkeys may be killed by exposure to gas mixtures. Everyone engaged in killing by this method must be properly instructed in the method of operation of the chamber, the procedures for any necessary flushing of the chamber with atmospheric air and the procedures for any necessary evacuation of pigs/birds from the chamber. Pigs/birds must not enter the chamber if the gas concentrations depart from specified levels or ranges or if the warning signals have been activated or if there is a defect in the operation of the chamber

62. In addition, for domestic fowls and turkeys, birds removed from crates before entering the chamber must be handled without causing avoidable pain or suffering and no bird may be shackled before it is dead.

63. The slaughterman will demonstrate that:

- i. he is able to recognise when an animal/bird has been killed and is aware of the signs of recovery where an effective kill is not achieved and of the action to be taken

Guidance on the signs of an effective stun

Red meat animals

Recognising an effective stun by captive bolt or percussion stunner

64. If the stun is effective the animal:

- will collapse immediately with its body and muscles rigid
- will not attempt to stand up
- will have no normal rhythmic breathing
- will have a fixed eyeball position

Recognising an effective stun using electricity

65. An effective head only stun can be recognised by an animal showing signs associated with the first phase of an electroplectic fit. During the time that the electrodes are applied the:

- whole body of the animal will become rigid
- animal will cease breathing
- position of the eye will become fixed
- head becomes raised and the hind legs are flexed under the body
- forelegs may initially be flexed but then usually straighten out

66. This phase will usually last for about 15 - 20 seconds, after which reflexes, such as kicking, will begin and breathing recommences.

67. The initial signs demonstrated by animals subjected to an effective head-to-body stun with cardiac arrest are similar to those associated with an effective head-only stun.

Poultry

68. The most reliable indicator that a bird is properly stunned by the low voltage method is the electroplectic fit. The characteristics of this condition are:

- neck arched with head directed vertically
- open eyes
- wings held close to the body
- rigidly extended legs and constant rapid body tremors

69. The physical symptoms of the electroplectic fit are shorter lasting and less pronounced when cardiac arrest is induced at stunning. They are followed by:

- completely limp carcass
- no breathing (look for abdominal movements in the vent area)
- loss of nictitating membrane reflex (i.e. no movement of the third eyelid when the eye is touched)
- dilated pupil

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