

SECTION 1

1. Introduction

This document has been produced to provide a consistent approach to the control and management of weapons used in the production. Guidance is provided to meet the legal obligations and duties necessary to own, operate and control weapons in film & television production situations.

Firearms and bladed weapons are covered by separate legislation; this guidance seeks to provide compliance with all the relevant legislation.

This document does not cover the use of Pyrotechnics, Black-Powder (or Gunpowder) which are subject to licensing under the Explosives Act by the Local Authority as a separate matter.

2. Requirements

This guidance has been written to identify the simple scenario(s) and actions required for the general use of Weapons.

Definitions:

The **Executive Producer** is the person in overall control of production activity.

Weapons Note is a document created to confirm the need for weapons, their intended use including rehearsal, location of rehearsal and identifying their use in the production.

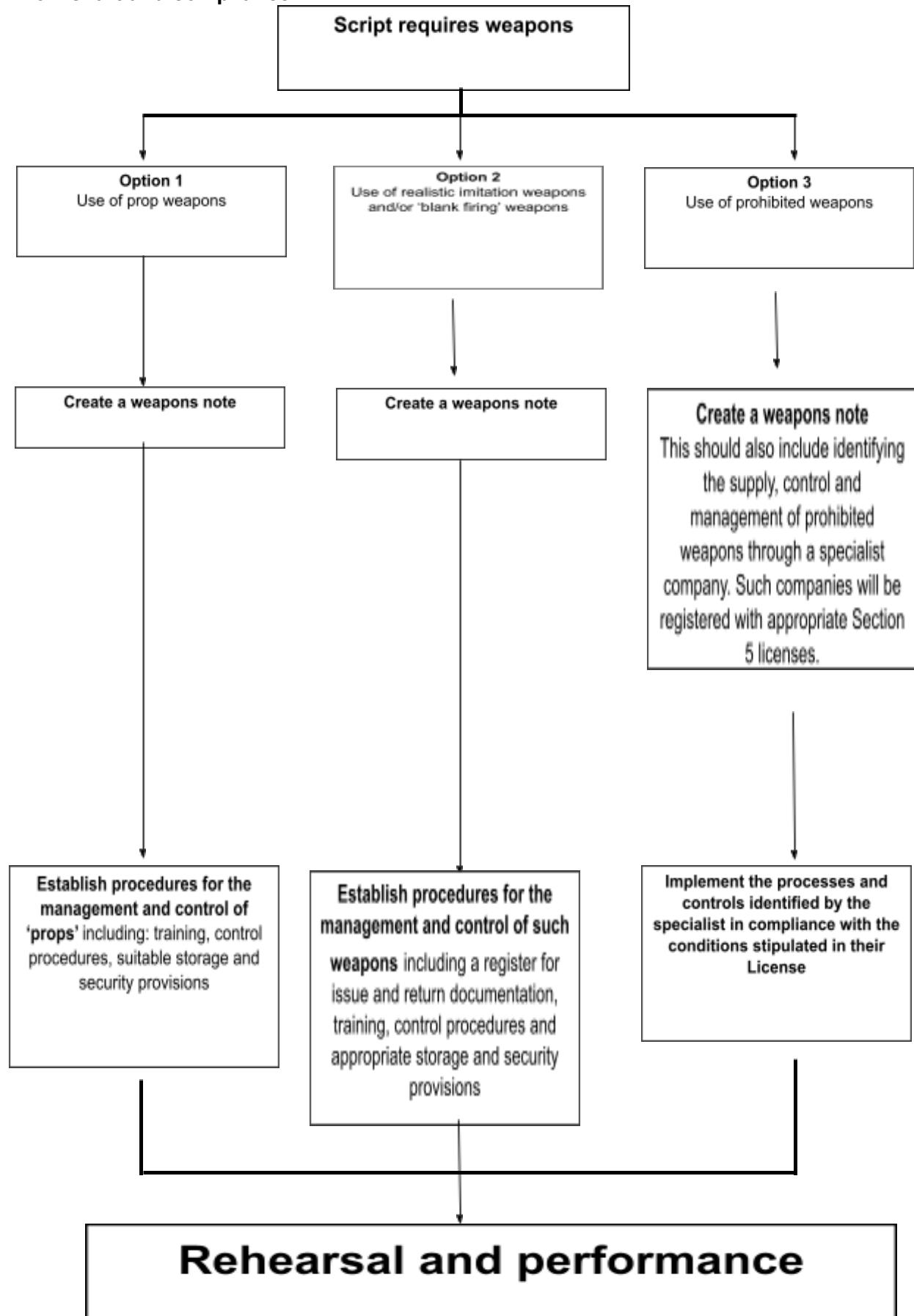
Designated person is the person or persons named or identified, in the Weapons Note as being responsible for the control of all weapons, within the production for the purpose of rehearsal and filming.

A **weapon** includes any object which is designed for the purpose of inflicting bodily harm such as firearms, crossbows, catapults or any sharp-edged instruments (swords and knives) used in a fight sequence or martial arts weapons (such as rice flails) and batons, battering rams, swords, spears and longbows. This guidance also covers articles such as replica weapons and props which are not designed specifically for the purpose of inflicting bodily harm but which may pose such a risk when used as a weapon.

Weapons expert or competent person is someone who has the necessary knowledge, experience and training to advise on the use of the weapon. This may include Armourers, Swordmasters; Fight Arrangers, Fight Directors, Stunt Coordinators or Martial Arts experts.

The flowchart below summarises the 3 most common scenarios or options available to a Producer.

Flow chart and compliance



As identified in the flowchart, there are 3 options to legally operate with weapons within the production for the purposes of rehearsal and filming. At all times, a 'Weapons Note' is required to identify and defend the need for the use of any and all weapons:

Option 1:

The production includes the use of 'prop' weapons as a visual piece only. The production will, under the guidance of, with the support of a Competent Person, establish procedures for the management and control of the props including: training; control procedures including suitable storage and security provisions; training for handling weapons by a designated person; the handling and use of weapons by actors; and the production of appropriate Risk Assessments.

Option2:

A Competent Person is required to establish: a Weapons Register; issue and return sheets; Control and Management Procedures; Training sheets (for handling weapons by a designated person and for the handling and use of the weapons by actors including the appropriate Risk Assessments). Records of training should be retained for a suitable period up to 12 months but no less than 3 months after the production closes.

Option 3:

A specialist (someone Registered as a Firearms Dealer or RFD holding a Section 5 Licence) supplies, manages, and monitors the use of weapons on behalf of the production, wherein the weapons are brought to the venue, used in controlled and defined circumstances, collected and stored securely at the venue or removed daily, all under the control of the specialist as the Competent Person. This is perhaps a simpler and more effective method allowing the production to delegate many of the responsibilities, and some liabilities, identified within the law.

Weapons Note

The Weapons Note, created to confirm and validate the need for the use of weapons, can be created as a Word or other text document but will **always** comprise the following information:

- The name of the production, the defined requirement or interpretation from the script, the scope of the use of the weapons including, by listing, all areas where they will be used (rehearsal room, performance area, or specific locations off site).
- The type of weapons to be used and how many, who and how many actors will handle weapons, and where appropriate how many shots may be fired.
- A Weapons Note will also clearly specify the need for any person under the age of 18 to carry or handle any weapon, the reason and context in relation to the script.
- It must identify the Designated Person who will manage and maintain the weapons and the process to control their issue, return and safe storage.

A sample Weapons Note is at Appendix 1.

NOTE: it is important that every individual who will handle a weapon is considered or potentially 'screened' and found to be mentally stable. The Armourer or other Competent Person issuing the weapon to an actor or other party retains the right to refuse issue and deny access to any weapons where in their opinion they feel an individual is not appropriate, safe or suited to be in control of such weapon.

Section 2**3. Responsibilities**

Responsibility for health and safety rests with the Competent Person during this production. The term **Executive Producer** is used to represent the employer, organisation or person in overall control of the production activity. It is the Executive Producer who has overall control of the production and who must make sure that there are arrangements to:

- Coordinate safety
- Direct action sequences safely
- Exchange information with others including the person in control of the weapon and other contractors, premises managers, freelancers and the self-employed.

The Executive Producer should make sure that, if they do not believe that they are competent in terms of weapon handling, storage and control, then a Competent Person such as an Armourer/RFD and/or stunt coordinator is appointed as a competent person who:

- Is competent and holds the necessary licences
- Is provided with adequate information about the sequence to be performed
- Has provided a written assessment of the risks and identified the controls needed
- Has agreed to specify and/or supply the protective measures identified in the risk assessment.

The production H&S manager should make sure that:

- The controls identified in the risk assessment are put in place and communicated to those who may be affected
- There is cooperation and communication with the owners or operators of the premises being used
- There are adequate arrangements for emergencies

The person in control of a weapon/firearm (the Competent Person) is responsible for:

- The safe use of the firearm - they should provide, to the H&S manager, an assessment of the risks and controls for the safe use of the weapons
- Making sure anyone using a firearm is not legally **prohibited** from doing so for example Section 21 Possession of a firearm by persons previously convicted of crime
- The competence of the people who will handle the weapon, e.g. ensuring appropriate training is provided to actors
- Notifying the H&S manager, 1st AD and production department about the danger areas and safe distances required for the sequence so that no one is at risk from discharge, either accidental or intentional
- Clear communication about the sequence and the safe arrangement of people and equipment, i.e. providing the briefing to all who may be affected
- Making sure that the protective measures identified are fit for purpose and implemented, e.g. screens, protective clothing and ear defenders

The production should also make sure that the person directing the action:

- Is competent
- Has assessed the risks of the sequence to be performed, and agreed any controls needed with the competent person and the actors
- The risk to people involved
- Has scheduled time for rehearsals and safety briefings
- Has reassessed the hazards and risks if any changes are proposed.

4. Competence

The person in control of weapons in the production must be sufficiently competent (having sufficient skills, experience and knowledge). The level of expertise required will depend on the weapon(s) to be used and the circumstances of that use. Advice may be sought from:

- An armourer

- A sword-master
- A fight director
- The props master

This list is not exhaustive.

Individuals should be assessed by the person responsible for the safe use and operation of the weapons in the production to ensure they have the competence needed for the particular weapon and its use in the production. It is important to remember that the supplier of the weapon may not necessarily be competent in the use of the weapon.

Armourers and Registered Firearms Dealers (RFDs)

An armourer will be engaged where a firearm that requires a licence or certificate is to be held or used by someone who is not working within the privileges of their own licence, such as an actor. The armourer must be competent and experienced in such work.

NOTE: Holding licences or shotgun and firearm certificates does not qualify a person to be an armourer or allow them to be the competent person for the production.

The privileges of each licence will determine the limits on the firearm's storage, transportation and use. The holders are only allowed to operate within their privileges of licence, e.g. at a shooting club or as part of an organised event.

Actors

The experience, skills and competence of the actors using the weapons must be considered. The production team must seek the advice of the relevant Competent Person to make sure that adequate information, instruction and training are given to all those involved with, or affected by, the use of the weapon. All production personnel **must** follow the instructions.

Hazards

The following hazards are associated with the use of firearms and weapons within a production:

- flying objects e.g. the projectile (arrow, bolt etc) and incidental flying objects such as spent cases ejected from automatic and semi-automatic firearms. Spent cases may be hot and can travel several metres
- blast and impact injury caused by burning gases, unburned propellant, wadding and debris discharged from the barrel and any other hazards caused by the discharge of blank ammunition. Unintentional discharge of weapons and contact injury or wounding with weapons such as swords and lances caused by: inexperience of users (artists, extras etc), fatigue
- environment - use in difficult circumstances i.e. when negotiating a complex set and scenery or when subject to awkward and restrictive movement such as in a confined area
- noise levels from discharging blank ammunition is often in excess of 100 dB (A)
- burns, smoke
- laser sights
- costumes that may restrict movement

- sharp edges/splinters created during the intended destruction of wooden weapon handles during combat scenes

Blank ammunition

Blank ammunition is dangerous and can inflict serious injury as the wadding and debris can cover considerable distances. There is a lethal risk from the pieces of brass crimping or the wadding from an open-ended cartridge being projected/ejected. The armourer, supplier or stunt coordinator will advise on suitability of ammunition.

Precautionary measures

The following precautionary measures are some of the controls that can be put in place to manage the risks associated with the use of weapons on a production; the degree of controls required is relative to the level of risk associated with the use of weapons.

- Clear safety zones - suitable marking and rigorous policing of exclusion zones to ensure unauthorised personnel cannot enter the danger areas. These areas reflect intended lines of fire or throw and potentially hazardous areas created by resultant debris (cartridge cases, wadding etc)
- All weapons and ammunition must be accounted for at all times and kept secure
- The security of firearms is the responsibility of the appointed person. They are to make sure:
 - Firearms / weapons, except when in actual use, are secured appropriately
 - Ammunition and firearms travel in separate, locked containers. This includes blank ammunition and replicas
 - Firearms, ammunition and weapons are safe and secure at all times (particularly when on location)
- The production should assess which employees are likely to be exposed to noise levels above the lower exposure action value as defined in the Control of Noise at Work Regulations 2005 and take such measures as are necessary to meet the requirements of those Regulations. These will include suitable ear protection for actors, crew and other personnel
- Firearms are to be pointed at persons **only** when strictly necessary and the Competent Person in control of the weapon has confirmed that the necessary risk control measures are in place and that there has been adequate rehearsal
- The Competent Person must be able to observe at all times the use of the weapon and monitor the action to ensure that their instructions are being followed
- Where the risk assessment identifies the need for a protective clear screen for actors or others in a potentially dangerous area, the material used must be fit for purpose. Eye protection alone will not normally be adequate. Information on the type and extent of the dangers created by the weapons in use should be provided to all those likely to be affected
- Comprehensive training in the use of the weapons is to be provided to those using them
- All weapons should be blunted unless there is a specific action sequence requiring a cutting action. Points can be visually realistic while still being blunt. Wooden, plastic or rubber weapons can be hazardous if used in a stabbing or lunging mode and soft-tipped weapons will often be a safer and equally acceptable alternative
- Replica swords should be manufactured in such a way that they are correctly balanced when in use. They should be of sound construction. In

fight scenes, weapon blades should be of the same material, e.g. a steel sword should be used only against a steel sword, not one of aluminium.

- Weapons with retractable parts should operate smoothly and be appropriately lubricated
- Costumes/garments should fit the individual actor correctly to ensure that the wearer can move around properly and that any weapon/firearm can be used safely. This should include headgear and any footwear. Items worn on the head should not restrict the actor's vision, including their peripheral vision
- Actors who may be carrying out physically strenuous action should 'warm up' beforehand
- Adequate time is to be allowed for rehearsal, and adequate rest time should be provided to reduce the risk of error due to fatigue

Faults and misfires

If any weapon develops a fault, it must be immediately withdrawn from use. It should not be used again until a Competent Person has declared it safe.

Condition of weapons

The Competent Person must make sure that all weapons are inspected before use, at regular periods such as during breaks and after use. The visual inspection should look for defects such as loosening of components or rivets etc and damage such as hairline cracks, indentation and chipping of blades etc.

Notification to the police

It may be advisable to discuss the use of weapons used in the production with the local Police force to gauge their understanding and to address any concerns they may have.

If a firearm or edged/bladed replica or deactivated weapon is to be used in, heard or seen in (or from) a public place, the production must make sure that the police have been fully informed and that a point of contact for them is nominated, e.g. the H&S manager. Keeping the police informed will prevent possible misunderstandings involving police armed response units and reduce the likelihood of public distress and possible breach of the peace.

Section 3

5. Weapons Procedures & Controls

Storage

- When not in use, all weapons must be securely stored in a locked suitable container, in accordance with the recommendations of the Competent Person
- Ammunition (blanks) must be stored separately from the firearms
- Weapons must not be left unattended at any time
- Firearms must be kept unloaded at all times, other than immediately prior to their being used either in rehearsal or on set
- The Competent Person shall be solely responsible for supplying the appropriate blank ammunition for firearms
- No member of the production may arrange for pyrotechnics or firearms to be brought onto the premises without obtaining the prior approval of the Competent Person
- The storage of firearms, ammunition, other weapons and pyrotechnics must comply with any additional licensing requirements identified by the Local Authority

Firearms/weapons being used on the production

- No firearms/weapons will be used in the production unless the requirement for their use has been discussed and agreed with the Competent Person.
- Before any weapons or firearms are brought onsite a meeting will take place to assess whether the use of these items will require the following:
 - The presence of an Armourer to fire or supervise the firing of weapons
 - The handling of the weapons by members of the production without the presence of an Armourer
- The Competent Person remains responsible for all weapons that have Section 1 and 2 status i.e. all weapons that are covered by the terms and conditions of a Firearms Licence.
- Weapons that have been de-activated in accordance with the Firearms (Amendment) Act of 1988 (as amended), and weapons that have been made specifically for blanks and dummy or replica weapons, may be the responsibility of a designated person. Actors required to use firearms /weapons must be instructed before they use them. They will be given time to practice using the firearm / weapons in a secure area of the production site under the instruction of a Competent Person. No member of the production will be authorised to fire a weapon in rehearsal or performance unless they have completed their training to the satisfaction of the Competent Person. Where the Competent Person is present for the firing of a weapon during filming, they will be responsible for setting the firearm and, if required, will fire the weapon at the appropriate point.
- Where an actor is required to fire the weapon, the Competent Person will load and hand the firearm to the actor and after its use will immediately unload and check the working condition of the firearm
- During rehearsals, the venting direction of the firearm must be established and the person using the firearm must be made aware of this
- Venting must not be towards either the operator or other persons on set, and the discharge must be directed into a safe area away from the actors and crew. Firearms must never be aimed directly at any person in the studio
- Weapons, which are being used in the production where the Competent Person is not present, must be stored in a secure manner. Such weapons must be kept in a locked purpose-built cabinet and only taken to the set when required. Weapons must be returned to the cabinet/safe when they have been finished with on set.
- Under no circumstances must any person who is under the influence of alcohol or drugs or, is considered to be of an unsound mind have a weapon in their possession for any purpose.
- All those who have responsibility for the use of firearms and weapons including replicas, (Actors, Designated Persons and Competent Persons), in rehearsal or during filming to be made fully aware of the strict firearm control procedures in operation and the likely implications of loss should any such item not be returned at the end of the rehearsal or filming day.

Loss or suspected loss must be reported to the Competent Person immediately and the Police may be contacted. All relevant persons are likely to be delayed in the area until the

item has been recovered. The production may undertake searches for items that are considered to be stolen in such circumstances.

Tips for Cast using firearms.

- Use simulated or dummy weapons whenever possible
- Treat all guns as if they are loaded and deadly
- Unless you are actually performing or rehearsing, the property master must secure all firearms
- The property master or armourer should carefully train you in the safe use of any firearm you must handle. Be honest if you have no knowledge about guns. Do not overstate your qualifications
- Follow all instructions given by the qualified instructor
- Never engage in horseplay with any firearms or other weapons. Do not let others handle the gun for any reason
- All loading of firearms must be done by the property master, armourer or experienced persons working under their direct supervision
- Never point a firearm at anyone including yourself. Always cheat the shot by aiming to the right or left of the target character. If asked to point and shoot directly at a living target, consult with the property master or armourer for the prescribed safety procedures
- If you are the intended target of a gunshot, make sure that the person firing at you has followed all these safety procedures
- If you are required to wear exploding blood squibs, make sure there is a bulletproof vest or other solid protection between you and the blast packet
- Use protective shields for all off stage cast within close proximity to any shots fired
- Appropriate ear protection should be offered to the cast members and stage managers
- Check the firearm every time you take possession of it. Before each use, make sure the gun has been test-fired off stage and then ask to test fire it yourself. Watch the prop master check the cylinders and barrel to be sure no foreign object or dummy bullet has become lodged inside
- Blanks are extremely dangerous. Even though they do not fire bullets out of the gun barrel, they still have a powerful blast that can maim or kill
- Never attempt to adjust, modify or repair a firearm yourself. If a weapon jams or malfunctions, corrections shall be made only by a qualified person
- When a scene is completed, the property master shall unload the firearms. All weapons must be cleaned, checked and inventoried after each performance
- Live ammunition may not be brought onto set.

Section 4**6. Edged Weapons on Set**

Edged Weapons are included in many productions. It is, however, illegal to carry an edged weapon of any kind in any circumstance. The production should understand the implications of the use of any kind of weapon or dummy weapon in filming and should ask the question:

Do we really need edged weapons in our production?

If a weapon is needed to comply with the script, then the following information should help. However, if it is being used only as a costume accessory then it should be considered whether one is actually required.

Definition of an edged weapon

Any weapon with an edge or point, e.g. swords, spears, halberds, knives, daggers, pikestaffs, even a kitchen knife if it has an edge or point.

Banned illegal weapons

Swordsticks, Kung-Fu items, flick knives, spring-operated blades and a list of similar items are now banned. The Law states 'it is illegal to have in your possession any edged or pointed weapon in a public place'.

It should be noted that the person who will be prosecuted is the person actually handling the weapon. They could claim that they were under instruction to use or carry the weapon implicating the production.

Having decided that it is necessary to use weapons (Weapons Note)

The H&S manager must contact the Police force in whose area the weapons will be used, explaining the intention, how the use of weapons is necessary to the script, and reassuring them as to security. It is best to share this information in writing **and** receive confirmation in writing from the Police stating their agreement to allow the use of the items; this can be as simple as a reference number.

All weapons should be confined to the set and there must be strict security to prevent the general public having access to these areas. It may well be stating the obvious that the actors cannot carry weapons in any area where the general public are.

Nominated person

A person over 18 years of age and who is not directly involved with other aspects of the production should be nominated to be responsible for the weapons. This person should issue them, collect them back. No one from the production should take the weapons off site apart from the designated person.

Storage

All weapons should be secured in a locked area such as a container or cupboard.

Safety

All weapons should have both the edges and points ground off to remove any sharp edge or point. The Law does not define exactly what an edge or point is, nor does it identify the construction material; wooden or plastic swords with an edge or point could be deemed to be a weapon.

Insurance

It is highly unlikely that the production can insure against the risk of prosecution where the use of weapons is concerned. But the production must be adequately covered for any accident or injury involving weapons.

Risk assessment

There must be a specific assessment for each scene that a weapon is used and include all the times that weapons are involved, from transport, initial delivery, storage, rehearsals, through to filming. The risk assessment should also cover lockable storage and include the nominated persons.

Appendix 1.

Weapons Used in a Production	Sample Checklist for production of a Weapons Note
Production	Insert name of Production here
Executive Producer	Give full details of Production Company and full contact details
Dates of rehearsal	
Rehearsal location(s)	Give full location name and postcode
Responsible person during rehearsals	Give name and address and full contact details
Filming	
filming Location(s) and Date(s)	Give full location name and postcode
Justification(s) for using Weapons in this Production	For example, give script references/historical context/prior productions or productions detail.
Types of Weapons	Accurate and legal descriptions of types of weapons
List of weapons used in this Production	Full list of all Weapons used.
Weapons obtained and from whom	Give name(s) and address(es) and full contact details

Competent Person details	Give name(s) and address(es) and full contact details
Location of locked Weapons storage	
Security methods for Weapons storage	
List of persons who have access to Weapons Store	
Location of locked ammunition storage	
Security methods for ammunition storage	
List of persons who have access to Ammunition Store	
List of actors using Weapons	Names and roles

Details of training given to actors and by whom?	
Have Local Police been informed?	Give Details
Special precautions to be noted:	
What happens to the Weapons at end-of-the-run of Production?	
Notes:	
Prepared by:	Insert name, date and job title.
Amended by:	Insert name, date and job title.
Amended by:	Insert name, date and job title.