



Minor variations to premises licences and club premises certificates

Minor variations process

1. The Licensing Act 2003 has been amended by the insertion of sections relating to minor variations. Small variations that will not impact adversely on the licensing objectives are subject to a simplified 'minor variations' process. Under this process, the applicant is not required to advertise the variation in a newspaper or circular or copy it to responsible authorities. However, they must display it on a white notice which complies with the regulations. The notice must be displayed for a period of ten working days starting on the working day after the minor variation application was given to the licensing authority.
2. On receipt of an application for a minor variation, the licensing authority must consider whether the variation could impact adversely on the licensing objectives.
3. In considering the application, the licensing authority must consult relevant responsible authorities if there is any doubt about the impact of the variation on the licensing objectives and they need specialist advice, and take their views into account in reaching a decision. For instance, they may need to consult the environmental health officer on an application with possible public nuisance implications. But there is no requirement to consult all responsible authorities on each application and in many cases the licensing authority may be able to make a decision without consultation.
4. The licensing authority must also consider any relevant representations received from interested parties within the time limit referred to below. Representations are only relevant if they clearly relate to the likely effect of the grant of the variation on the promotion of at least one of the licensing objectives. In the case of minor variations, there is no right to a hearing (as for a full variation or new application), but licensing authorities must take any representations into account in arriving at a decision.
5. Interested parties have ten working days from the 'initial day', i.e., the day after the application is received by the licensing authority, to submit representations. The licensing authority must therefore wait until this period has elapsed before determining the application, but must do so at the latest within 15 working days, beginning on the first working day after the authority received the application, with effect either that:
 - the minor variation is granted; or,
 - the application is refused.

6. If the licensing authority fails to respond to the applicant within 15 working days (see section 193 of the Act for the definition of working day) the application will be treated as refused and the authority must return the fee to the applicant forthwith. However, the licensing authority and the applicant may agree instead that the undetermined application should be treated as a new application and that the fee originally submitted will be treated as a fee for the new application.
7. Where an application is refused and is then re-submitted through the full variation process, the full 28 days notification period will apply from the date the new application is received and applicants should advertise the application and copy it to all responsible authorities (in accordance with the regulations applicable to full variations).
8. Minor variations will generally fall into four categories: minor changes to the structure or layout of a premises; small adjustments to licensing hours; the removal of out of date, irrelevant or unenforceable conditions or addition of volunteered conditions; and the addition of certain licensable activities. **In all cases the overall test is whether the proposed variation could impact adversely on any of the four licensing objectives.**

Changes to structure/layout

9. Many small variations to layout will have no adverse impact on the licensing objectives. However, changes to layout should be referred to the full variation process if they could potentially have an adverse impact on the promotion of the licensing objectives, for example by:
 - increasing the capacity for drinking on the premises ;
 - affecting access between the public part of the premises and the rest of the premises or the street or public way, e.g. block emergency exits or routes to emergency exits;
 - impeding the effective operation of a noise reduction measure such as an acoustic lobby;
9. Licensing authorities will also need to consider the combined effect of a series of applications for successive small layout changes (for example, as part of a rolling refurbishment of a premises) which in themselves may not be significant, but which cumulatively may impact adversely on the licensing objectives. This emphasises the importance of having an up to date copy of the premises plan available.
10. An application to remove a licensable activity would normally be approved as a minor variation.
11. Variations to add the sale by retail or supply of alcohol to a licence are excluded from the minor variations process and must be treated as full variations in all cases.
12. The Act covers a wide range of other licensable activities and licensing authorities will need to consider each application on a case by case basis and in light of any licence conditions put forward by the applicant.
13. For example, the addition of live or recorded music to a licence may impact on the public nuisance objective, but this will depend on many factors. Licensing authorities will need to consider factors such as proximity to residential areas and any noise reduction conditions volunteered by the applicant. It is very much the

Government's intention that applications to vary a licence for live music should benefit from the minor variations process unless there is likely to be an adverse impact on the licensing objectives.

14. Similarly, in some circumstances, the addition of other types of regulated entertainment, such as the performance of plays or exhibition of films, to a licence may have no adverse impact on the licensing objectives.

Licensing hours

15. Variations to:

- extend licensing hours for the sale or supply of alcohol for consumption on or off the premises between the hours of 23.00 and 07.00; or
- to increase the amount of time on any day during which alcohol may be sold or supplied for consumption on or off the premises

are **excluded** from the minor variations process and must be treated as full variations in all cases. Applications to reduce licensing hours for the sale or supply of alcohol or to or move (without increasing) the licensed hours between 07.00 and 23.00 will normally be processed as minor variations.

Licensing conditions

Volunteered conditions

16. Applicants may volunteer conditions as part of the minor application process. These conditions may arise from their own risk assessment of the variation, or from informal discussions with responsible authorities or the licensing authority.
17. For instance, there may circumstances when the licence holder and a responsible authority such as the police or environmental health authority, agree that a new condition should be added to the licence. For example, that a nightclub adds the provision of late night refreshment to its licence to ensure a longer period of dispersal. Such a change would not normally impact adversely on the licensing objectives and could be expected to promote them by preventing crime and disorder or public nuisance. In these circumstances, the minor variation process may provide a less costly and onerous means of amending the licence than a review, with no risk to the licensing objectives. However, this route should only be used where the agreed variations are minor and the licensee and the responsible authority have come to a genuine agreement. The licensing authority should be alive to any attempts to pressure licensees into agreeing to new conditions where there is no evidence of a problem at the premises and, if there is any doubt, should discuss this with the relevant parties.

Amending or removing existing conditions

18. Licence or club certificate conditions will normally have been volunteered or imposed to mitigate any possible adverse impact on the licensing objectives. In most cases therefore, any application to remove or change the wording of a condition should be treated as a full variation.

19. However, there may be some circumstances when the minor variation process is appropriate. Premises may change over time and the circumstances that originally led to the condition being attached or volunteered may no longer apply. For example, there may be no need for door supervision if a bar has been converted into a restaurant. Equally some embedded conditions may no longer apply.
20. Changes in legislation may invalidate certain conditions. For instance, the recent Regulatory Reform (Fire Safety) Order 2005 annulled all fire safety related conditions imposed on licences purely for fire safety reasons. Although the conditions do not have to be removed from the licence, licensees and licensing authorities may agree that this is desirable to clarify the licensee's legal obligations.
21. There may also be cases where it is necessary to revise the wording of a condition that is unclear and/or unenforceable. This would be acceptable as a minor variation as long as the purpose of the condition and its intended effect remain unchanged. Such a change could be expected to promote the licensing objectives by making it easier for the licensee to understand and comply with the condition and easier for the licensing authority to enforce it.

Full variations process

22. Any other changes to the licence require an application to vary under section 34 of the Act.

Club Premises Certificates

23. The arrangements for applying for or seeking to vary club premises certificates are extremely similar to those for a premises licence. Clubs may also use the minor variation process to make small changes to their certificates as long as these could have no adverse impact on the licensing objectives.