

Ronan's Law: Will bring in new laws to strengthen the rules for online retailers selling knives

11 March 2025  Rachel Lyne

The Government has an ambitious mission to halve knife crime over the coming decade and a key part of that plan is tackling what it sees as an issue with the control of online sales of knives to young people.

Ronan's Law, named in honour of Ronan McCabe a teenager who died as a result of a knife crime, will bring into law new rules that will seek to tighten up the controls for the online sale of knives. The Government is expected to set out the details of these new rules when it lays the Crime and Policing Bill before parliament this Spring.

What can retailers expect from Ronan's Law?

2-step age verification

All online retailers will be required to have in place a robust 2-step age verification system requiring customers to provide photo ID both at the point of sale and on delivery of the product.

At the point of sale, the retailer will be required to have in place systems that ensure checks are carried out to prove that the customer is over 18. Although we are yet to see the details of the Bill or any supporting guidance, retailers can expect that any system they implement will have to request and store photo ID, proof of address and possibly even a current photo/video of the customer. The retailers age verification systems will have to be robust so as to avoid customers circumventing the 2-stage process by using software that encrypts personal data.

The second step in the age verification process is of course to ensure that the person who has placed the order is the person receiving the order on delivery. Ronan's Law will require all delivery companies to also implement systems that ensure their drivers carry out the required ID checks at the delivery address.

Reporting suspicious activity reporting

Online retailers will be required to establish internal systems for identifying and reporting suspicious activity, such as attempts to circumvent age verification systems or unusual buying patterns such as bulk purchases of knives. They will be required to report these incidents to the police to prevent potential misuse of knives and illegal re-sale to those under 18.

Registration scheme

The Government has confirmed that they will launch a consultation, later this year, to consider whether a registration scheme for online retailers selling knives is necessary. We will update you with details of that consultation once its launched.

Stricter enforcement

We understand that the penalties for failure to implement the necessary controls to comply with Ronan's Law will be significant. The Government has said that individuals, those processing the sale itself and/or the most senior individuals within a company, could face a prison sentence of up to 2 years, an increase from the current maximum 6-month prison sentence.

We need to see the details of the Bill to properly understand how the enforcement regime will operate but it is clear that the Government's intention is for Ronan's Law to be the responsibility of all individuals working at a retailer not just the corporate entity.

What can retailers do to prepare for these changes?

It is important to await the details of Ronan's Law, which are due to be laid before parliament this spring, before taking too many steps in preparing for the changes. However, there are proactive steps a retailer can begin to take now. The key areas to begin to review are:

- Are the age verification systems you already operate for the sale of age restricted products fit for purpose or will they require significant investment and development to meet the obligations of Ronan's Law
- How easy will it be for your systems to identify orders containing knives to ensure they are labelled and identifiable for the delivery companies to complete the 2nd step in the age verification checks
- What agreements/arrangements are in place between you and your delivery contractor to ensure they have in place robust systems to ensure they carry out age verification checks at the point of delivery.
- It may be necessary to update training for all employees particularly given the potential for individuals to be held criminally liable if a sale is made to a young person.

We will update retailers on the progress of Ronan's Law and any guidance that is published during the coming months.

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