



Home Office

User Guide to Firearm and Shotgun Certificate Statistics

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1 Introduction

Statistics covered

Firearm and Shotgun Certificates in England and Wales presents information on certificates issued by the police under the Firearms Acts 1968 to 1997. It also provides information on the number of registered firearm dealers, visitors' permits and European Firearm Passes (EFP) issued.

Statistics in the release are presented on a financial year basis. This means the figures relate to the number of certificates and permits issued on 31 March each year, as well the numbers of applications received, granted or revoked over the 12 month periods to 31 March.

Quality and methodology

The statistical collections covered by this release are by-products of police administrative processes. They are all listed in the Annual Data Requirement (ADR) document (web link:

<http://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/20130102163729/http://www.homeoffice.gov.uk/science-research/research-statistics/police/annual-data-requirement-police/>)

This collection differs from most other ADR collections, in that the data are collected by means of a single download from a national database, the National Firearms Licensing Management System (NFLMS). This has been the case since 2007/8; before then the data were collected by means of statistical returns from each force.

While the published figures on firearm and shotgun certificates come from the NFLMS, these data originate from the police forces' certification records and as such the quality and reliability is good, except for the risk that not all records are submitted in time for the download. A drawback to the NFLMS system is that the numbers of certificates on issue on 31 March can only be extracted on that date. Any delays in the download (which have not so far happened) would mean that the figures would have to be published on numbers on issue on a date other than 31 March. Additionally, the figures are always subject to the inaccuracies inherent in any large recording system and are not necessarily accurate to the last digit. Any quality deficiencies for a particular year's data are listed in the 'Data quality and interpreting the figures' section of that year's main release.

Uses

Statistics on police officers, police staff, police community support officers, designated officers, traffic wardens and special constables are used for a variety of purposes, which are listed in general terms using the standard categorisation for official statistics (as shown in the UK Statistics Authority monitoring brief 6/2010, *The Uses Made of Official Statistics*, <http://www.statisticsauthority.gov.uk/assessment/monitoring/monitoring-reviews/index.html>). Specific uses over the period in question appear on the relevant topic pages in the main release.

Informing the general public's choices:

- a) **about the state of the economy, society and the environment** - figures on legally held firearms are sometimes used by the media in articles on law and order;
- b) **about the performance of government and public bodies** - figures on levels and trends in firearm and shotgun certification are requested via Parliamentary Questions and Freedom of Information cases to gauge performance in general or specific areas.

Government policy making and monitoring: certificate statistics are used to monitor the performance and effectiveness of police forces and government policy.

Resource allocation – typically by central and local government: All these statistics demonstrate the range, extent and quality of police activities, and contribute to overall cases for police funding.

Informing public marketing campaigns: Police workforce statistics are used to measure the effectiveness of recruitment campaigns by individual police forces or nationally. Firearm/shotgun certificate statistics are rarely used for marketing campaigns.

Supporting third sector activity – lobbying: Certificate statistics are used by lobby groups to protect the rights and civil liberties of citizens, and to support the value of legally held guns in the farming community, for example.

Facilitating academic research: Research into policing and criminology often use police statistics such as workforce and recorded crime, but rarely firearm certificates.

User experiences

The timing of the release has been brought forward in response to users' comments about timeliness, The extraction of data from the NFLMS has enabled the releases to be brought forward, and from 2012 it has been published within five months of the end of the data period.

There have been occasional requests, (for example, Parliamentary Questions or Freedom of Information requests), for extra detail to that published in the release. Figures such as the type of gun certificated have been provided following an additional data extract from NFLMS.

The Home Office is piloting a feedback form for some of its statistical releases. The pilot is being carried out on 'Alcohol and late night refreshment licensing, England and Wales, 2013/14', published on 14 November 2013 (link: <https://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/home-office/series/alcohol-and-drug-statistics>). If successful, the feedback form will be rolled out during 2014 to all policing statistics releases.

Figures for other countries

Annual statistics on the number of firearm and shotgun certificates granted, renewed and revoked by police forces in Scotland are published on the Scottish Government's website: <http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Topics/Statistics/Browse/Crime-Justice/PubFirearmCertificates> .

The figures are considered to be broadly comparable with those for England and Wales, because of the common legislation that governs the certification process.

Similar statistics for the Police Service of Northern Ireland are not published; however, data can be provided through a Freedom of Information request: <http://www.psni.police.uk/directory/aboutus/publications.htm> .

Acknowledgements

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Finally, we would also like to thank those colleagues in the Communications Development Section (CDS) of the Home Office Science Group who assist in preparing the web pages.

Where are the latest published figures?

Forthcoming publications are pre-announced via the UK Statistics Authority (UKSA) website:
<http://www.statistics.gov.uk/hub/index.html>

Copies of *Firearm and Shotgun Certificates in England and Wales* and other Home Office statistical releases are available from the Home Office pages of the GOV.UK web site:
<https://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/home-office/about/statistics>

Feedback and enquiries

We welcome feedback on *Firearm and Shotgun Certificates in England and Wales*. If you have any comments, suggestions or enquiries, please email them to policestats@homeoffice.gsi.gov.uk or write to:

Home Office Statistics, 5th Floor, Peel Building, 2 Marsham Street, London, SW1P 4DF.

<p><i>Firearm and Shotgun Certificates in England and Wales</i> is designated as 'National Statistics', a subset of official statistics that has been granted accreditation by the UK Statistics Authority. National Statistics are produced to high professional standards set out in the Code of Practice and undergo regular quality assurance reviews to ensure that they meet customer needs. They are produced free from political interference.</p>
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2 Glossary

Financial year – the twelve months ending on 31 March.

Firearm – According to the Firearms Act 1968, a **firearm** means a lethal barrelled weapon of any description from which any shot, bullet or other missile can be discharged. It includes any prohibited weapon, any component part of such a weapon and any accessory to such a weapon designed or adapted to diminish the noise or flash caused by the firing of the weapon. It is – with certain statutory exceptions – an offence to possess, purchase, or acquire any firearm or ammunition to which section 1 of the Firearms Act 1968 applies without holding a firearm certificate. Section 1 of the 1968 Act applies to all firearms except a shotgun or an air gun.

Government Office Region (GOR) – the Government Office Regions have been the primary classification for the presentation of regional statistics, although the regional government offices were closed in 2011. There are nine GORs in England: North East; North West; Yorkshire and the Humber; East Midlands; West Midlands; East of England; London; South East; and South West. In this report analysis by region also includes separate analysis for Wales.

Population figures – some of the tables and graphs in this release use population figures to calculate the total number of police officers per 100,000 population. The population figures used for the 31 March 2013 statistics are mid-2011 population estimates based on the 2011 Census, provided by the Office for National Statistics.

Shotgun – defined as a smooth-bore gun (not being an air gun) which: (i) has a barrel not less than 24 inches in length and does not have any barrel with a bore exceeding 2 inches in diameter; (ii) either has no magazine or has a non-detachable magazine incapable of holding more than 2 cartridges; and (iii) is not a revolver gun. Other smooth-bore guns may require a firearm certificate. It is – with certain statutory exceptions – an offence for a person to possess, purchase, or acquire any shotgun without holding a shotgun certificate.

3 Conventions used in firearm and shotgun certificate statistics

Rounding

Data are mainly provided unrounded in the data tables of *Firearm and Shotgun Certificates, England and Wales*. This is to promote transparency and allow users to exploit the data further.

However, caution should be taken when comparing small differences between time periods; while care is taken in collecting and collating all the information obtained, the figures are subject to the inaccuracies inherent in any large recording system and are not necessarily accurate to the last digit.

If data are published in a table in a rounded form, the footnotes to that table explain the reasons for doing this.

Percentages are rounded to the nearest per cent using the round-half-away-from-zero method. The round-half-away-from-zero method has been used, so that in the borderline case where the fraction of the percentage is exactly 0.5, the rounded figure is equal to $y + 0.5$ if y is positive, and $y - 0.5$ if y is negative. For example, 23.5% is rounded to 24%, and -23.5% is rounded to -24%. When rounding whole numbers the result is similar; e.g. when rounding to the nearest 100, 1,250 would be reported as 1,300.

Where data are rounded, they may not sum to the totals shown, or, in the case of percentages, to 100%, because they have been rounded independently.

Use of symbols

The following symbols have been used in the tables:

- nil or, for percentage changes, that the amount is not reported because the base number is less than 50;
- .. not available;
- * not applicable.

Revisions to data

Data for the latest full calendar year or financial year may be revised in due course. It is the authors' standard practice to incorporate revisions for previous years in the latest release. Corrections and revisions follow the Home Office corporate revisions policy: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/statement-of-compliance-with-code-of-practice-for-official-statistics>, page 6.

Because of the difficulties in extracting retrospective data from NFLMS (as described in the quality and methodology section of chapter 1), it is unlikely for revisions to past data to emerge. However, if revisions do occur they are reported in the relevant edition of the release.

4 Systems and regulations

National Firearms Licensing Management System (NFLMS)

The NFLMS is a register of all persons who have applied for, or have been granted, a certificate to possess or acquire a firearm or shotgun. It is a web-based national register of all firearm certificate holders. The NFLMS updates the Police National Computer with details of individuals who own firearms and/or shotguns and records details of anyone who has been refused a certificate or had one revoked. In addition, the NFLMS maintains information on people, companies and dealers that have requested firearm and/or shotgun certificates. It also holds information on weapons and their history.

The NFLMS is used by all police forces in England and Wales, and is a live operational system that allows police forces to interrogate the data. To produce statistics for this bulletin, data were extracted for the financial year (1 April 2012 – 31 March 2013) on 5 April 2013.

Due to the transition from in-force data collection systems to the NFLMS during 2006, robust data relating to 2006/07, and numbers of weapons and persons covered by certificates for 2007/08, are not available.

Firearm and shotgun certificates – introduction

All persons acquiring or in possession of a firearm or shotgun must have a certificate issued by the Chief Police Officer of the police force area in which the person lives, unless they are otherwise exempt. Persons sentenced to any form of custody for a period of 3 years or more are prohibited from possessing firearms for life. Those sentenced to 3 months or more but less than 3 years are subject to a 5-year prohibition from the date of their release.

Certain types of weapons (e.g. machine guns) are prohibited under section 5 of the 1968 Act as amended by section 1 of the 1988 Act; their possession can only be authorised by the Secretary of State after careful enquiries by the police.

Firearm certificates – regulations

Firearm certificates are issued for weapons covered by section 1 of the 1968 Firearms Act (as amended), including rifles, muzzle-loading revolvers and shotguns with magazines that are capable of holding more than 2 cartridges. The Chief Police Officer must be satisfied that an applicant has good reason for wanting a weapon, is fit to be entrusted with it, and that the public safety or the peace will not be endangered. The certificate lists the number, type and serial number of each weapon held and any conditions attached (a standard condition is that weapons and ammunition are held in a secure place when not in use).

The Firearms (Amendment) Act 1997 banned all firearms with a barrel less than 30 cm in length or with an overall length of less than 60 cm. Certain types of firearms remain exempt, including muzzle-loading guns, firearms used for the humane killing of animals, flare pistols and vintage pistols held as war trophies or collectors' items.

Section 39 of the Anti-Social Behaviour Act 2003 banned air weapons that use, or are designed or adapted for use with, a self-contained gas cartridge system. With effect from 20 January 2004, under section 5(3) of the 1968 Act, such weapons could not be purchased, acquired, manufactured, sold or transferred without the Secretary of State's authority. The offence of possession was brought into force separately under subsection 4 and came into effect on 30 April 2004. This made provision for existing owners to keep and continue to use their weapons, provided the weapons were added to a firearm certificate (new or variation). Existing owners who did not wish to apply for a certificate were able to hand their weapon into the police for disposal by 30 April 2004.

Shotgun certificates – regulations

Shotgun certificates, covered by section 2 of the 1968 Act and section 2 of the 1988 Act, permit the holder to possess any number of shotguns. These can include pump-action and self-loading weapons that have a magazine that is incapable of holding more than 2 cartridges, but excludes large magazine smooth-bore guns.

Apart from the general prohibitions applying to all types of firearm (see introduction above), applications may not be granted or renewed if a Chief Police Officer has reason to believe that the applicant is prohibited by the Firearms Acts from possessing a shotgun or if he/she is satisfied that the applicant does not have a good reason for possessing, purchasing or acquiring one. Nor may applications be granted or renewed unless the Chief Police Officer is satisfied that the applicant can be permitted to possess a shotgun without danger to the public safety or to the peace (section 3 of the 1988 Act). The certificate specifies the description of the shotguns including, if known, the identification numbers of the guns.

Firearm and shotgun certificates – renewal cycle

On 1 January 1995, the renewal cycle for both firearm and shotgun certificates changed from 3 to 5 years. Therefore it is not appropriate to directly compare year-on-year changes for renewals. So, for example, an individual who was issued a firearm certificate in 1994 would have needed to have renewed 3 years later, in 1997. For certificates issued in 1995, the renewal would not be due until the year 2000. Therefore it is not appropriate to directly compare year-on-year changes due to changes in the pattern of renewals in the late 1990s.

The Firearms (Period of Certificate) Order 1994 came into effect on 1 January 1995. The Order extends the life of all firearm and shotgun certificates granted or renewed after that date to 5 years. To alter the number and type of weapons held on a firearm certificate, an application for a variation must be made to the Chief Police Officer. The expiry date of a shotgun certificate can be aligned with the holder's firearm certificate (section 11 of the 1988 Act). In 1989, forces began recording the number of weapons for both firearm and shotgun certificates on their computer systems.

Firearms dealers

Section 13 of the 1988 Act increased the registration period for dealers from 1 to 3 years. The grounds for refusal of new applications for registration were extended and a register of transactions must be retained for at least 5 years.

Section 31 of the Violent Crime Reduction Act 2006 required businesses that sell air weapons to register with the police as dealers. The section was brought into place in 2 stages: businesses were able to apply for registration from 6 April 2007 and the offence of not being registered came into effect on 1 October 2007.

Visitors' permits – regulations

The conditions for exemptions from holding a firearm certificate were revised in sections 15 to 19 of the 1988 Act. Visitors' permits were introduced allowing the holder to possess a firearm or shotgun without holding a certificate. Permits are in force for a period not exceeding 12 months. Group applications may be made for up to 20 persons (section 17 of the 1988 Act).

Each EU state was required to amend its firearms legislation to meet the requirements of the 1991 EC Weapons Directive. In the UK these changes were made by means of the Firearms Acts (Amendment) Regulations 1992,

which made provision for the police to issue 2 new documents to British residents: the European Firearms Pass (EFP) and an Article 7 Authority.

The EFP is broadly speaking a passport for firearms. EU residents intending to take their firearm or shotgun to another EU state will need an EFP issued by their State of residence. There is only one criterion for the issue of an EFP to a British resident, that the applicant must possess a valid firearm or shotgun certificate. The EFP does not replace the certificate.

Article 7 of the Weapons Directive requires any EU resident wanting to purchase certain types of firearms, or ammunition for such firearms, outside his or her State of residence to have the prior authority of their own State. In England, Wales and Scotland this agreement is at the discretion of the local Chief Police Officer. Firearms cannot be brought into the UK if an individual does not hold an appropriate firearm certificate, even if Article 7 Authority has been granted.

The conditions for exemptions from holding a firearm certificate were revised in sections 15 to 19 of the 1988 Act. Visitors' permits were introduced allowing the holder to possess a firearm or shotgun without holding a certificate. Permits are in force for a period not exceeding 12 months. Group applications may be made for up to 20 persons (section 17 of the 1988 Act).