



Home Office

User Guide to Firearm and Shotgun Certificate Statistics

Last updated: July 2016

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1 Introduction

Firearm and Shotgun Certificates in England and Wales, contains a times series of official statistics on certificates issued by the police under the Firearms Acts 1968 to 1997. The release presents information on the number of certificates granted and refused for new and renewal applications, certificates revoked, registered firearm dealers, visitors' permits, European firearm passes (EFP) and Article 7 Authorities issued. Following user feedback and recent data requests, the release also contains new 'experimental statistics'¹ on the number of people who hold a firearm and/or a shotgun certificate broken down by age and gender; and a breakdown of firearm and shotgun type.

Statistics in the release are presented on a financial-year basis and relate to the number of certificates and permits issued as at 31 March each year. However, the number of applications granted, refused, and revoked relate to information in the year to 31 March.

The release reports on licensed firearms only. No official estimate of illegally held firearms in England and Wales is available.

Devolved administration statistics on firearm and shotgun certificates

Scotland Annual statistics on the number of firearm and shotgun certificates granted, renewed and revoked by police forces in Scotland are published by the [Scottish Government](#). The figures are considered to be broadly comparable with those for England and Wales, due to the common legislation that governs the certification process.

Northern Ireland The Police Service of Northern Ireland lists its statistical outputs on the [Statistics](#) page of its website, but there are no series that are directly comparable to those for England and Wales.

Uses of the statistics

Uses made of the statistics on firearm and shotgun certificates are listed below using the standard categorisation for official statistics (as shown in the United Kingdom Statistics Authority (UKSA) monitoring brief 6/2010, [The Uses Made of Official Statistics](#)):

a) Informing the general public's choices:

- **about the state of the economy, society and the environment.** Figures on legally held firearms are used by the media in articles on law and order;
- **about the performance of government and public bodies.** Figures on levels and trends in firearm and shotgun certification are requested via parliamentary questions (PQs) and freedom of information (FOI) requests to gauge performance in general or specific areas.

b) Government policy making and monitoring:

Firearm and shotgun certificate statistics are used to monitor the performance and effectiveness of police forces, to monitor the performance and effectiveness of government policy, and to inform policy and operational decisions by ministers.

c) Resource allocation – typically by central and local government:

Policing statistics, including statistics on firearm and shotgun certificates, demonstrate the range, extent and quality of police activities, and contribute to overall cases for police funding.

¹ Experimental statistics are statistics that are in the testing phase and which have not been fully developed as yet.

d) Supporting third sector activity – lobbying:

Firearm and shotgun 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, the British Association of Shooting and Conservation (BASC) use these statistics to monitor the legal possession of a weapon; and to promote and protect sporting shooting in the United Kingdom.

User experiences

There have been occasional requests, (for example, PQs or FOI 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 the National Firearms Licensing Management System (NFLMS).

The Home Office conducted a user survey as part of the 2013/14 firearm and shotgun certificates in England and Wales statistical release to enable the department to assess how well it met users' needs and to potentially make improvements where possible.

There were 11 responses to the survey. Respondents represented a variety of users including the general public, private sector and various organisations. No respondent was dissatisfied with the commentary or user guide.

The common theme from the survey was an interest in the number of people who held a firearm and/or a shotgun certificate and a breakdown of firearm and shotgun type.

Following the survey, statisticians have now included information on the number of people who hold a firearm and/or a shotgun certificate broken down by age and gender; and a breakdown of firearm and shotgun type. These new figures are referred to as 'experimental statistics' as they are in the testing phase and not yet fully developed.

Acknowledgements

Firearm and Shotgun Certificates in England and Wales and the accompanying datasets are prepared by staff in the Chief Statistician's Unit, part of the Home Office Science Directorate.

We would like to thank firearms' licensing managers in the police forces of England and Wales for submitting and confirming their data.

2 Glossary

Article 7 Authority – Article 7 of the Weapons Directive requires any European Union (EU) resident wanting to purchase certain types of firearms, or ammunition for such firearms, outside their State of residence to have the prior authority of their own State.

European firearms pass (EFP) – The European firearms pass (EFP) is a passport for firearms for EU residents intending to take their firearm or shotgun to another EU state.

Experimental Statistics - Statistics which are published in order to involve users and stakeholders in their development and as a means to build in quality at an early stage.

Financial year – The 12 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 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, an air gun, or a weapon prohibited under section 5 of the Firearms Act 1968.

Handgun – Handgun refers to the length of the firearms. Any firearm which either has a barrel less than 30cm in length or is less than 60cm in length overall is generally prohibited. The intention is to prohibit particularly dangerous firearms which are easy to conceal. However, the police may issue firearm certificates enabling the possession of certain handguns of historic interest, muzzle-loading handguns or handguns for the humane killing of animals.

Muzzle-loading handgun – The ammunition is loaded via the muzzle of the firearm, that is, from the open end of the gun's barrel. They are not quick to load and therefore don't pose the same threat as some other types of guns.

Population figures – The number of firearm and shotgun certificates per 100,000 population as at 31 March in Tables 2 and 4 respectively is calculated using the most recent Office for National Statistics' mid-year population estimates for England and Wales. However, ONS' latest mid-year population estimates (i.e. for 2015) were only published on 23 June 2016, a week before the publication of the *Firearm and Shotgun Certificates in England and Wales 2015/16* (published on 30 June 2016). So the ONS' mid-2014 population estimates were used.

Region – The nine regions in England are: North East; North West; Yorkshire and the Humber; East Midlands; West Midlands; East of England; London; South East; South West. Tables in *Firearm and Shotgun Certificates in England and Wales* also include a total for the police forces in Wales.

Rifle – A rifle has spiral grooves in the barrel and bullets are used as ammunition.

Shotgun – 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. Shotgun pellets are used as ammunition.

Section 1 shotgun contains a magazine holding more than two rounds.

Section 2 shotgun contains a magazine holding no more than two rounds.

Sound moderator – is mainly a separate accessory which diminishes the noise caused by a firing weapon.

Visitors' permit – Visitors' permits allow visitors to England and Wales to possess a firearm, shotgun or ammunition without holding a firearm or shotgun certificate. Permits are in force for a period not exceeding 12 months. Scottish forces issue their own permits.

3 Legislation and regulations

Introduction

The *Firearm and Shotgun Certificates in England and Wales* statistical release presents information on certificates issued by the police on registered firearms dealers, visitors' permits and European firearms passes under the Firearms Acts 1968 to 1997. The [Guide on Firearms Licensing Law](#) provides consolidated guidance on firearms licensing legislation. This guide is not intended to be a definitive statement of the law, but a cohesive explanation of the often complex area of firearms licensing.

Firearm and shotgun licensing

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 they live unless they are otherwise exempt. Persons sentenced to a period of three years or more are prohibited from possessing firearms for life. Those sentenced to three months or more but less than three years are subject to a five-year prohibition. This applies to those with custodial or suspended sentences.

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

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 two 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 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 are 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.

Shotgun certificates

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 two 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. The certificate specifies the description of the shotguns including, if known, the identification numbers of the guns.

Firearm and shotgun certificates – renewal cycle

[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 from three years to five 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.

Registered firearms dealers

Section 13 of the [1988 Act](#) increased the registration period for dealers from one to three years. The grounds for refusal of new applications for registration were extended and placed a requirement for registered firearms dealers to maintain a register of all transactions which must be retained for up to five years from the date of the last transaction.

Section 31 of the [Violent Crime Reduction Act 2006](#) required businesses that sell air weapons to register with the police as firearms dealers. The section was brought into place in two 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

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 people (section 17 of the [1988 Act](#)).

European firearms passes and Article 7 Authorities

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 two 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.

4 Quality and methodology

Data coverage

The main data measures for both firearm and shotgun certificates are:

- certificates on issue were collected in 1971. They were then recollected in 1983 and every year since;
- new and renewal applications which have been collected every year since 1983; and
- the number of firearms and shotguns covered by certificates on issue which have been collected every year since 1995.

Following user feedback from the most recent survey, new information is now collected, for the first time, on:

- the number of people who hold a firearm and/or a shotgun certificate broken down by age and gender; and
- a breakdown of firearm and shotgun types.

Data collection and preparatory work

The statistics in the *Firearm and Shotgun Certificates in England and Wales* is a by-product of police administrative processes, and forms part of the statutory [Annual Data Requirement](#) (ADR) between the Home Office and police forces. The ADR is a list of all mandatory data requests made to police forces in England and Wales under the Home Secretary's statutory powers. Key stages of the data collection process are listed in *Appendix A*.

The collection differs from most other ADR collections, in that the data are collected by means of a single snapshot from a national database, the National Firearms Licensing Management System (NFLMS). This has been the case since the financial year ending March 2008; before then data were collected by means of statistical returns from each force. The data on NFLMS has been inputted by individual police forces. The figures are subject to the inaccuracies inherent in any large recording system and are not necessarily accurate to the last digit.

In May 2013, the Association of Chief Police Officers' Firearms and Explosive Licensing Working Group invited Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary (HMIC) to inspect firearms licensing. In July 2013, the Home Secretary gave approval for HMIC to examine how well police forces had responded to concerns raised about firearms licensing in previous reports on the subject. On 15 September 2015, HMIC published their report '[Targeting the risk](#)' which sets out the findings from their inspection. Home Office statisticians reviewed the findings and recommendations of the HMIC report to understand the impact on any of the published National Statistics. The HMIC report recommended that within six months, the Home Office should capture and publish the average time taken by each force for the grant and renewal of firearm certificate applications, as part of the annual publication of firearm and shotgun certificates in England and Wales. The Home Office Chief Statistician is not convinced that this type of performance data should be included in the national publication.

Data quality and interpreting the figures

The statistics in the release for the years up to and including 2005/06 were compiled by each police force in England and Wales and submitted via an annual aggregate return to the Home Office. Due to the transition from in-force data collection systems to NFLMS during 2006, robust data for all measures relating to the 2006/07 financial year, and numbers of weapons and persons covered by certificates for 2007/08, are not available. Available figures for 2007/08 onwards have been extracted from NFLMS by the Home Office and are subject to the inaccuracies inherent in any large-scale recording system.

As NFLMS is a live operational system, the number of firearm and shotgun certificates on issue can continually change and therefore there may be small differences when checking the data as at 31 March retrospectively. In addition, due to being a live database, data might change during the day on which the information is being extracted. However, any differences or changes will be minor.

To ensure valid data are entered, NFLMS uses some internal validation rules at the point of entry. For example, some fields will only accept a numerical value or a date format and will not allow any other format to be input. To help ensure that correct figures are published for each release, Home Office statisticians undertake a variance check exercise to identify figures which seem unusually large compared with figures for the previous year. In some instances, forces supply revised figures in light of this. Comparisons with national trends and with other police forces are also made as part of the quality assurance process.

In addition, for each release, Home Office statisticians ask forces to confirm headline figures. Forces can cross-check the information on their local systems against what was extracted from the NFLMS. In some instances, forces supply revised figures.

On 1 January 1995, the renewal cycle for both firearm and shotgun certificates changed from three to five years. Moving from a three year to a five year renewal cycle has significantly affected the trend resulting in year on year rises followed by year on year falls in the number of renewal applications. The high and low trend makes any meaningful times series analysis difficult to conduct.

As with the firearm and shotgun certificate renewals, moving from a one year to a three year registration period for firearms dealers has also affected the registration cycle trend resulting in year on year rises followed by year on year falls in the number of registration applications. Therefore it is not appropriate to compare year on year changes for registration applications.

In line with the Quality Assurance of Administrative Data (QAAD) guidance, Home Office statisticians reviewed the statistics on Firearm and Shotgun Certificates in England and Wales and is detailed in *Appendix B*.

National Firearms Licensing Management System (NFLMS)

Statistics contained in the *Firearm and Shotgun Certificates in England and Wales* release are extracted from the NFLMS which is a database containing individual records of all people 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 and shotgun certificate holders and registered firearms dealers and is used by all police forces in England and Wales. Police staff from each force make changes to the database on a continuous basis. It is a live operational system that allows police forces to interrogate the data.

NFLMS updates the Police National Computer (PNC) 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.

A new record is added to the NFLMS each time a new application is made, or in the case of renewals and revoked licences, an existing record on the database is amended.

NFLMS has a configuration parameter which allows forces to set the number of days prior to the expiry of a certificate at which NFLMS will warn them that they need to send a renewal reminder to the certificate holder. This parameter is set locally, by the force, usually between 56 and 112 days (8–16 weeks). NFLMS has a further configuration parameter which allows forces to set the number of days at which, having already sent a reminder to renew, and no renewal application having been received, they wish to send a second reminder letter to the certificate holder.

On or around 31 March of each year, Home Office statisticians liaise with the NFLMS database manager to arrange the data extraction. Additionally, Home Office statisticians are in contact with the NFLMS database manager regarding data issues throughout the data confirmation/validation stages.

NFLMS managers communicate with police force representatives from each region on a regular basis to discuss any issues they may be having with NFLMS. The managers also run user training sessions and forces are provided with an online user guide on the NFLMS.

Revisions to previously published data

Data for the latest financial year (and previous years) may be revised in due course. However, revisions are less likely as it is extracted from a live database at a particular point in time (snap shot). It is standard practice across all Home Office statistical releases to incorporate revisions for previous years' data in the latest release. Substantial revisions to figures presented in earlier editions of *Firearm and Shotgun Certificates in England and Wales* are described in the 'revisions analysis' section of the release.

The Home Office corrects and revises data in accordance with its [statement of compliance with the Code of Practice for Official Statistics](#)

Conventions used in firearm and shotgun certificate statistics

Rounding

Data are mainly provided unrounded in the accompanying 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 exercised when comparing small differences between time periods as figures are not necessarily accurate to the last digit.

Use of symbols

The following symbol has been used in the accompanying data tables:

- .. Not available.
- Rounds to less than 10.

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

5 Additional Information

Where are the latest published figures?

Forthcoming publications are pre-announced on the statistics release calendar on the GOV.UK website: <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/announcements>

The Firearm and Shotgun Certificate Statistics statistical releases can be found at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/firearm-certificates-in-england-and-wales>

Other sources of information

Other statistics relating to firearms published by the Home Office and the Office for National Statistics are:

Police use of firearms

The Home Office publishes annual figures for each police force in England and Wales on: numbers of police firearms' operations involving armed response vehicles; the numbers of authorised firearms officers; and the numbers of incidents in which police firearms were discharged. These statistics are Official Statistics and can be found on the [Police use of firearm statistics](#) pages of GOV.UK.

Police use of Taser

The Home Office publishes figures for each police force in England and Wales on Police use of Taser. These statistics are Official Statistics and can be found on the [Police use of Taser statistics](#) pages of GOV.UK.

Focus on: violent crime and sexual offences

The ONS publishes annual statistics on crimes involving the use of a firearm in England and Wales in [Focus on: violent crime and sexual offences](#).

Feedback and enquiries

If you would like to make an enquiry or have any general feedback about the *Firearm and Shotgun Certificates in England and Wales* statistical release, please email the Chief Statistician's Unit at: CSU.Statistics@homeoffice.gsi.gov.uk or write to: Chief Statistician's Unit, 1st Floor, Peel Building, 2 Marsham Street, London, SW1P 4DF.

Firearm and Shotgun Certificates in England and Wales 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.

The Chief Statistician, as Head of Profession, reports to the National Statistician with respect to all professional statistical matters and oversees all Home Office National Statistics products with respect to the Code, being responsible for their timing, content and methodology.

This collection of statistics is currently undergoing a routine assessment by the UK Statistics Authority

APPENDIX A:

KEY STAGES IN THE PRODUCTION OF 'FIREARM AND SHOTGUN CERTIFICATES'

A. PREPARATORY WORK

Annual Data Requirement (ADR) (during the 12 months prior to the data period): there should be sufficient justification for other National and Official Statistics on the ADR to retain being on the ADR. The Home Secretary approves the retention of each release on the ADR.

Agree and pre-announce provisional date of publication of statistical bulletin on [GOV.UK statistical release calendar](#) (around 3-6 months prior to publication).

Review and update project plan for new financial year (around 6-9 months prior to publication):

- include all the milestones in this framework, plus deadlines and measures of criticality (e.g. a traffic light system);
- timings to fit in with staffing levels, pressures and the relative priorities of each series; and
- timings also to fit in with National Statistics pre-announced months of publication.

B. DATA INPUT AND QUALITY ASSURANCE

Forces input case records to the National Firearms Licensing Management System:

- Home Office Technology (HOT) deal with force queries with inputting data;
- policy team deal with all queries about guidance, definitions and firearms licensing legislation;
- statistical output team deal with all other queries about [release practices](#) and the [code of practice for official statistics](#).

Validation and variation checks are conducted; these are a combination of automated error checks, and analytical checks. For example, where there are large percentage or numerical changes when compared with the previous year, Home Office statisticians will investigate and query these with the respective force during the data confirmation exercise outlined in the section below.

Production of complete validated dataset according to required standards.

C. PREPARATION FOR PUBLICATION

In the preparatory stages of the publication, Home Office statisticians liaise with the NFLMS database manager to extract data as at 31 March (or working day as near as possible) from NFLMS.

Agree and pre-announce finalised day of publication (around one to three months before publication).

Data confirmation exercise. All police forces are sent their own headline figures that will appear in the publication and asked to provide written confirmation. This is to further reduce the risk of incorrect figures being published, and supports the Home Office in any disagreement with a police force over the figures published for that force. The data confirmation exercise also allows forces to explain any large changes if they know the reasons. Revised data may be submitted by police force if necessary.

Receipt and input of revised data to NFLMS where appropriate following data confirmation exercise. HOT also provides support during data validation and variance checks stage if needed.

Produce dataset for use in publication.

Prepare draft of tables, charts and commentary and circulate to nominated people for quality assurance (this group appears on the pre-release access list) (two to four weeks before publication).

Statistics news release and pre-release access produced.

The commentary, tables, charts and statistics news release are circulated 24 hours before publication to a nominated list of people (including ministers and press office) as shown on pre-release access list. Meet with Home Office colleagues on 24-hour list to discuss content and handling issues.

Publication

D. FOLLOW-UP WORK

Wash-up meeting on process of publication. Agree actions for next year, and lessons to be learned.

Published dataset to be used for PQs, FOIs and other enquiries (until the next publication).

Appendix B

Administrative data quality assurance toolkit

Quality management actions

To ensure the processes on firearms and shotgun certificates statistics are of a sufficient quality, statisticians in the Home Office have assessed the release against the quality management actions framework as set out in the UK Statistics Authority toolkit. This is detailed as follows:

Investigate

Operational circumstances in which figures are produced

The data contained in the release are extracted from the NFLMS which is a database containing individual records of all people 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 and shotgun certificate holders and registered firearms dealers and is used by all police forces in England and Wales. Police staff from each force make changes to the database on a continuous basis. The database is a live operational system that allows police forces to interrogate the data.

Checks undertaken

Quality assurance checks are carried out by the data suppliers (police forces) as they make changes to data inputted on the database on a regular basis to amend any mistakes and updates to records.

To aid the input of correct data, the NFLMS uses some internal validation rules. For example, some fields will only accept a numerical value or date entry, to ensure the correct format of data is inputted. As the data 'snapshot' is extracted from a live operational database, it is not possible for forces to check/sign-off data entered onto the system prior to it being extracted. However, we do know that forces perform data quality checks in some instances by checking a random sample of records.

Sources of bias

Firearms and shotgun certificates which expire will be listed as such on NFLMS and will therefore not be included in the published statistics. However, as detailed in HMIC's report, ['Targeting the risk'](#), there are some instances where forces have allowed licence holders to retain their weapons upon expiring. This has resulted in an undercount in the number of firearms and shotgun certificates and the number of firearms and shotguns. In addition, the report also identified that some weapons surrendered to the police in advance of their license expiring had not had their licences cancelled by forces. Therefore, this has resulted in an overcount in the number of firearms and shotgun certificates and the number of firearms and shotguns. However, as detailed in the report, while this issue affected 7 out of 11 forces investigated, it only concerned 22 records across all forces.

The HMIC report identified that one force (out of the 11 investigated) issued temporary permits but did not enter details of the temporary permit onto the certificate holder's record on the NFLMS. This means that there will be an undercount in the number of temporary permits.

When data is transferred from NFLMS to the PNC, it must be in a specified format and complete. If this is not the case, an error notification is sent from PNC to NFLMS. The force is then expected to correct the licensing record accordingly. The HMIC report flagged that some forces did not have an adequate process to deal with these notifications which meant that certificates were issued despite error messages being outstanding. However, this issue has not affected the published figures as the raw figures are extracted from the NFLMS and not the PNC. In addition to this the NFLMS database manager will contact police forces at the point of entry if they spot any data issues.

Coverage issues

Following feedback from the 2013/14 user survey, Home Office Statisticians liaised with the NFLMS database manager to ascertain whether meaningful and robust figures on the number of people who hold firearm and/or shotgun certificates can be provided. As a result, figures on the number of people who hold a firearm and/or

shotgun certificate broken down by age and gender were published for the first time in the 2015/16 statistical release.

Manage

Prior to 31 March of each year, Home Office statisticians liaise with the NFLMS database manager to arrange the data extraction for information as at 31 March. The NFLMS database manager then provides data extracts for each force in an Excel format.

To help ensure that correct figures are published for each release, Home Office statisticians undertake a variance check exercise to identify figures which seem unusually large compared with figures for the previous year. They then query these with forces and, in some instances, forces supply revised figures in light of this. Additionally, comparisons with national trends and with other police forces are also made as part of the quality assurance process.

In addition, for each release, Home Office statisticians also ask forces to confirm headline figures to ensure correct figures are published. Forces can cross check the information on their local systems against what was extracted from the NFLMS. In some instances, forces supply revised figures.

Communicate

NFLMS managers communicate with police force representatives from each region on a regular basis to discuss any issues they may be having using NFLMS. They also carry out user training sessions and forces are provided with an online user guide on the NFLMS.

Additionally, Home Office statisticians are in contact with the NFLMS database manager regarding data issues throughout the data confirmation/validation stages (see bullets below).

A description of the data collection processes for users are detailed in the appendix of this user guide.

In contact with police forces when the data confirmation process is occurring. Includes being involved in discussions with forces about their data and suggesting possible errors that require amending.

Making our users aware of limitations with the figures due to the data being provided to us in a snapshot format from a constantly changing live database.

NFLMS database manager leads on the provision of training for its users and a user guide is also available to help them when inputting data.

Assurance level

Using the quality assurance matrix in the UK Statistics Authority toolkit we have assessed the levels of assurance for the four practice areas as follows:

Operational context and data collection

Level of assurance: BASIC

The data collection processes have been provided in a flowchart in this document. The user guide also outlines the data collections stages and operational context of the data.

Variance checks and a data confirmation exercise is undertaken with forces to minimise risks around data quality. Identify the inaccuracies of the data with regards to taking a snapshot from a live database and how this impacts on the quality.

If figures on the number of people who own firearms/shotguns are included in the release, full and complete description of the changes will be provided.

Communication with data supply partners

Level or assurance: BASIC

Prior to the 31 March of each year, Home Office statisticians liaise with the NFLMS database manager to arrange the data extraction for information as at 31 March. The NFLMS database manager then provides data extracts for each force in an Excel format.

To help ensure that correct figures are published for each release, Home Office statisticians undertake a variance checks exercise to identify figures which seem unusually large compared with figures for the previous year. They then query these with forces and, in some instances, forces supply revised figures in light of this. Additionally, comparisons with national trends and with other police forces are also made as part of the quality assurance process.

Home Office statisticians also ask forces to confirm headline figures to ensure correct figures are published. Forces can cross check the information on their local systems against what was extracted from the NFLMS. In some instances, forces supply revised figures.

As part of the 2013/14 release, a user feedback survey was provided in the release to help assess users needs and make improvements where possible. Eleven responses were received from the general public, private sector and various organisations. No respondents expressed any dissatisfaction with the commentary or the user guide. Reporting on the number of people who held firearm/shotguns certificates and a breakdown of firearm and shotgun types were suggestions for improvement. The Home Office officials assessed the scope for inclusion of these figures with the NFLMS administrator. Information on the number of people and breakdown of firearm and shotgun types have now been included in the statistical release.

QA principals, standards and checks applied by data suppliers

Level of assurance: BASIC

We are aware of the NFLMS database manager liaising with police forces when they are inputting data and contacting them when errors have been spotted.

To aid the input of correct data, the NFLMS uses some internal validation rules. For example, some fields will only accept a numerical value or date entry, to ensure the correct format of data is inputted. As the data 'snapshot' is extracted from a live operational database, it is not possible for forces to check/sign-off data entered onto the system prior to it being extracted. However, we do know that forces do undertake data quality checks in some instances by checking a random sample of records.

Producers QA investigations and documentation

Level of assurance: BASIC

To help ensure that correct figures are published for each release, Home Office statisticians undertake a variance checks exercise to identify figures which seem unusually large compared with figures for the previous year. They then query these with forces and, in some instances, forces supply revised figures in light of this. Additionally, comparisons with national trends and with other police forces are also made as part of the quality assurance process.

Home Office statisticians also ask forces to confirm headline figures to ensure correct figures are published. Forces can cross check the information on their local systems against what was extracted from the NFLMS. In some instances, forces supply revised figures.

The figures are subject to the inaccuracies inherent in any large recording system and are not necessarily accurate to the last digit.

Risk/Profile

		Public interest profile	
Level of risk of quality concerns	Low	Medium	High
Low	Statistics of lower quality concern and lower public interest [A1]	Statistics of low quality concern and medium public interest [A1/A2]	Statistics of low quality concern and higher public interest [A1/A2]
Medium	Statistics of medium quality concern and lower public interest [A1/A2]	Statistics of medium quality concern and medium public interest [A2]	Statistics of medium quality concern and higher public interest [A2/A3]
High	Statistics of higher quality concern and lower public interest [A1/A2/A3]	Statistics of higher quality concern and medium public interest [A3]	Statistics of higher quality concern and higher public interest [A3]

Using the risk and profile matrix for administrative data quality assurance and based on our own assessment as well as taking the quality management actions into account we have identified firearm and shotgun certificates to have a *low/medium* level of risk of quality concerns.

There are a limited number of Home Office officials with direct access to the NFLMS database which can affect ad hoc access when they are unavailable. The NFLMS data is limited because it is a live operational database and cannot be accessed for retrospective periods. Whilst the staff who currently have access are extremely knowledgeable and experienced, the Home Office statisticians are aware that business continuity and resilience need to be addressed, perhaps by obtaining direct access to systems themselves depending on logistics.

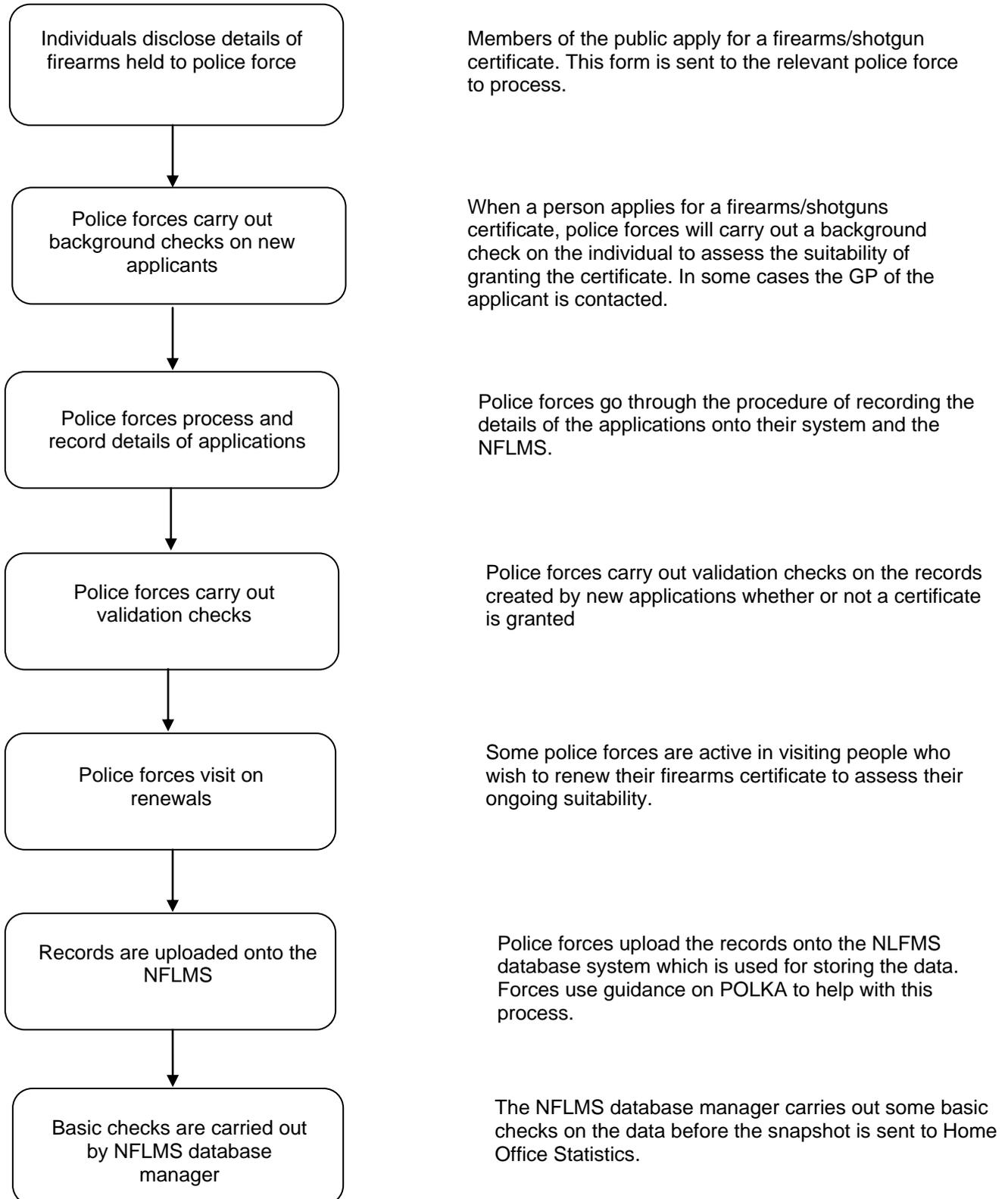
We are aware that forces audit arrangements on the accuracy of the data are varied across forces. However, Home Office statisticians do quality assure the data by undertaking variance checks and data confirmation exercises.

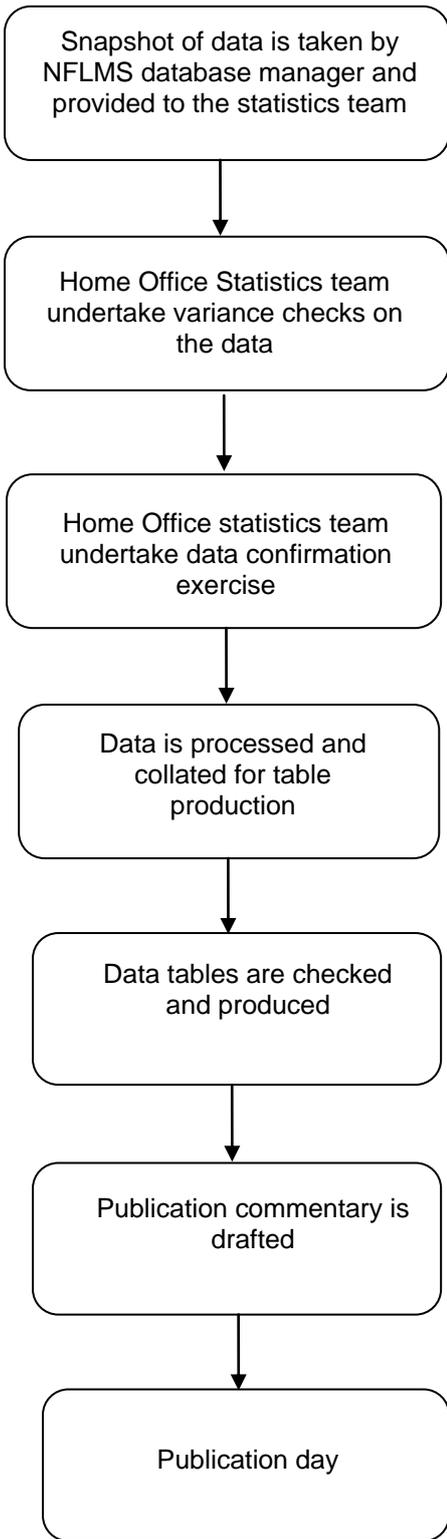
An HMIC investigation identified issues around some forces data capture which has resulted in possibilities of an over count of firearm/shotgun certificates and firearms/shotguns in some instances and an undercount of firearm/shotgun certificates and firearms/shotguns certificates in other instances. However, the scale of this issue in relation to the published figures is considered to be small (see above).

Again using the risk and profile matrix and based on our assessment we have identified firearm and shotgun certificates statistics as having a *low* public interest profile. The figures can be considered to be fairly neutral politically and are limited to a niche user base with limited media interest. However, on occasions the release can become of very *high* interest for ministers and the media due to rare events such as the shootings at Dunblane and Hungerford. Notwithstanding, the prevalence of such incidents is considered to be very minor.

Data collection process flowchart

To aid users understanding of the data collection process we have included a flowchart below. This outlines the steps taken from the very of the process, where an individual applies for a firearms or shotgun certificate, through to the final stage, publication.





A snapshot of the data is taken on March 31st by the NFLMS database manager and is sent to the Home Office Statistics team. This contains all the figures in which the published statistical tables are compiled on.

Home Office Statistics team undertake variance checks on the data for quality assurance purposes. . Forces are queried on large year on year changes and supply revised figures in some instances.

Home Office Statistics carry out data confirmation exercise with police forces in which forces are required to confirm headline figures to be published. Forces resupply figures in some instances.

The tables for the statistical release are created and quality assured.

The commentary for the statistical drafted.

Publication is released into the public domain.