

Firearms – Possession without certificate

Possession, purchase or acquisition of a firearm without a certificate

Firearms Act 1968 (section 1(1)(a))

Possession, purchase or acquisition of ammunition without a certificate

Firearms Act 1968 (section 1(1)(b))

Possession, purchase or acquisition of a shotgun without a certificate

Firearms Act 1968 (section 2(1))

Triable either way

Maximum: 5 years' custody, or 7 years for the section 1(1) offence where it is aggravated within the meaning of section 4(4) of the Act (shortened shotgun or converted firearm)

Offence range: [To come]

<p>STEP ONE Determining the offence category</p>

The court should determine the offence category with reference **only** to the factors listed in the tables below. In order to determine the category the court should assess **culpability** and **harm**.

The court should weigh all the factors set out below in determining the offender's culpability.

Where there are characteristics present which fall under different levels of culpability, the court should balance these characteristics to reach a fair assessment of the offender's culpability.

<p>Culpability demonstrated by one or more of the following:</p>
<p>A - High culpability:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Shotgun which has been shortened within the meaning of section 4(4) • Firearm which has been converted within the meaning of section 4(4) • Firearm – loaded • Firearm discharged, other than for lawful purpose • Firearm used to threaten or cause fear • Firearm used for other criminal purpose • Firearm intended for use in criminal activity or to transfer to possession of criminal associate
<p>B - Medium culpability:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Firearm – unloaded with compatible ammunition • Ammunition (where not at culpability C) • Firearm produced (where not at culpability A) • Held on behalf of another without coercion, intimidation or exploitation • Intended for use including for self-protection (where not at culpability B)
<p>C - Lower culpability:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Firearm – unloaded and without ammunition • Component part of firearm • Very small quantity of ammunition • Firearm not used or used for lawful purpose only • No intention to use or intention to use for lawful purpose only • Firearm/ammunition held on behalf of another as a result of pressure, coercion, intimidation • Firearm/ammunition held on behalf of another as a result of naivety/exploitation

<p>Harm</p> <p>The court should consider the factors set out below to determine the level of harm that has been caused or was risked.</p> <p>Where there are characteristics present which fall under different levels of harm, the court should balance these characteristics to reach a fair assessment of the harm.</p>	
<p>Category 1</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Offence committed at a school or other place where vulnerable people are likely to be present • Offence committed in circumstances where there is a risk of serious disorder • Serious alarm/distress • Presence of children
<p>Category 2</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Offence committed in public place not falling into category 1 • Firearm in open view • Presence of others • Some alarm/distress
<p>Category 3</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Firearm or ammunition not in view • Firearm or ammunition stored securely • Possession of very short duration • No/minimal alarm/distress

STEP TWO			
Starting point and category range			
Having determined the category at step one, the court should use the corresponding starting point to reach a sentence within the category range below. The starting point applies to all offenders irrespective of plea or previous convictions.			
Where the offence is aggravated under section 4(4) (i.e. the weapon is a converted firearm or shortened shotgun), the maximum penalty is seven years and it may be appropriate to go above the top of the category range.			
Harm	Culpability		
	A	B	C
Category 1	Starting point	Starting point	Starting point
	Category range	Category range	Category range
Category 2	Starting point	Starting point	Starting point
	Category range	Category range	Category range
Category 3	Starting point	Starting point	Starting point
	Category range	Category range	Category range

The table below contains a **non-exhaustive** list of additional factual elements providing the context of the offence and factors relating to the offender. Identify whether any combination of these, or other relevant factors, should result in an upward or downward adjustment from the sentence arrived at so far. In particular, relevant recent convictions are likely to result in an upward adjustment. In some cases, having considered these factors, it may be appropriate to move outside the identified category range.

Factors increasing seriousness

Statutory aggravating factors:

- Previous convictions, having regard to a) the **nature** of the offence to which the conviction relates and its **relevance** to the current offence; and b) the **time** that has elapsed since the conviction
- Offence committed whilst on bail

Other aggravating factors:

1. Offender prohibited from possessing weapon because of previous conviction (where not charged separately)
2. Offence was committed as part of a group

3. Offender has contact with criminal associates, including through the purchase or supply of drugs
4. Commission of offence whilst under the influence of alcohol or drugs
5. Attempts to conceal/dispose of evidence
6. Failure to comply with current court orders
7. Offence committed on licence or post sentence supervision
8. Offences taken into consideration
9. Significant degree of planning/premeditation
10. Registered firearms dealer
11. Attempt to involve or implicate others in possession
12. Firearm/ammunition kept as part of a stockpile of weapons
13. Possession continued after certificate refused or revoked
14. Poor record of firearms licensing compliance

Factors reducing seriousness or reflecting personal mitigation

1. No previous convictions **or** no relevant/recent convictions
2. Good character and/or exemplary conduct
3. Serious medical condition requiring urgent, intensive or long-term treatment
4. Age and/or lack of maturity where it affects the responsibility of the offender
5. Mental disorder or learning disability
6. Sole or primary carer for dependent relatives
7. Co-operation with the police
8. Firearm incomplete (except where component part taken into account at step 1) or incapable of being discharged
9. Little or no planning or came into possession involuntarily
10. Voluntary surrender of firearm/ammunition
11. No knowledge or suspicion of presence of firearm/ammunition
12. Genuine misunderstanding about terms or validity of certificate
13. Steps taken to obtain certificate
14. Certificate not obtained/renewed due to genuine oversight
15. Good record of firearms licensing compliance

STEP THREE

Consider any factors which indicate a reduction for assistance to the prosecution

The court should take into account sections 73 and 74 of the Serious Organised Crime and Police Act 2005 (assistance by defendants: reduction or review of sentence) and any other rule of law by virtue of which an offender may receive a

discounted sentence in consequence of assistance given (or offered) to the prosecutor or investigator.

STEP FOUR

Reduction for guilty pleas

The court should take account of any reduction for a guilty plea in accordance with section 144 of the Criminal Justice Act 2003 and the *Guilty Plea* guideline.

Where a **mandatory minimum sentence** has been imposed under section 51A of the Firearms Act 1968, the court must ensure that any reduction for a guilty plea does not reduce the sentence to less than the mandatory minimum.

STEP FIVE

Totality principle

If sentencing an offender for more than one offence, or where the offender is already serving a sentence, consider whether the total sentence is just and proportionate to the overall offending behaviour in accordance with the *Offences Taken into Consideration and Totality* guideline.

STEP SIX

Ancillary orders

In all cases the court should consider whether to make ancillary orders.

Forfeiture and destruction of firearms and cancellation of certificate

The court should consider ordering forfeiture or disposal of any firearm or ammunition and the cancellation of any firearms certificate. Section 52 Firearms Act 1968 provides for the forfeiture and disposal of firearms and the cancellation of firearms and shotgun certificates where a person is convicted of one or more offence under the Firearms Act 1968 (other than an offence relating to an air weapon) and is given a custodial sentence or a community order containing a requirement not to possess, use or carry a firearm. The court may order the forfeiture or disposal of air weapons under paragraphs 7 and 8 Part II to Schedule Six Firearms Act 1968.

Serious Crime Prevention Order

The court may consider the criteria in section 19 of the Serious Crime Act 2007 for the imposition of a Serious Crime Prevention Order.

STEP SEVEN

Reasons

Section 174 of the Criminal Justice Act 2003 imposes a duty to give reasons for, and explain the effect of, the sentence.

STEP EIGHT

Consideration for time spent on bail

The court must consider whether to give credit for time spent on bail in accordance with section 240A of the Criminal Justice Act 2003.